



# AUSTIN PEAY

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

SPRING 2026

*SCHOLAR. ATHLETE.  
TRAILBLAZER.*



*Austin Peay* #52  
*Victor*

AUSTIN PEAY



Hello everyone,

As the spring sun begins to warm up the Morgan University Plaza bricks, I'm struck by the energy defining Austin Peay today. With a record-high enrollment of 11,185 students, we're defying national trends and expanding what's possible on our campus. This growth is a testament to our "Experience Austin Peay" strategic plan in action, creating an environment where every Gov can thrive and turn potential into achievement.

As we prepare for our centennial in 2027, we've realized our future is built on a century of trailblazers. This past fall, Jzsade Davenport walked across the commencement stage wearing a stole to honor her grandfather, L.M. Ellis—the man who broke the color barrier in our basketball program 60 years ago. Jzsade is a pioneer in her own right, graduating from the nation's first federally registered teacher apprenticeship program. Her journey represents the academic experience we provide today, bridging our history with tomorrow's workforce needs.

Our current students are paying this spirit of excellence forward. The Class of 2025 made history by raising a record-breaking \$13,000 for their class gift, while our community helped GOVing Tuesday reach unprecedented heights with a 29% increase in support. These gifts impact our students' experiences, such as our partnership with the Millan Foundation to build the new Impact Center, which will provide fresh food and essential resources. These gifts ensure that we take care of our own.

We continue to lead the state in supporting those who serve our country. Austin Peay recently became the first Tennessee university to recognize military service and ranks as equivalent to college degrees for staff positions. This initiative strengthens our employees' experiences and honors the leadership qualities our veterans bring to the Clarksville region.

As we look toward our next 100 years, we pause to honor those who laid the foundation for our work, including President Emeritus Dr. Sherry Hoppe. Her bold leadership remains a guiding light for our university.

None of this could have happened without you, and we invite you to share your APSU story.

Whether you submit a nomination for our "Notable Peayple" initiative or sign up to be a Centennial Ambassador, we want you to be a part of this milestone. See Page 32 to learn how to share your story.

Together, we will celebrate a century of excellence while investing in the unlimited potential of the next 100 years.

Thank you for all that you do for our students!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Licari". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light gray background.

Dr. Mike Licari  
APSU President

#### **EDITOR**

Brian Dunn ('21)

#### **ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Ethan Steinquest ('17)

#### **GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Beth Rates ('17)

#### **PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Sean McCully ('18, '25)

Robyn Jacobs

Kate Galloway

Kaos Armstrong ('25)

Knox Rives

Jayla Willis ('25)

#### **PRODUCTION**

Jana Gilbert ('14, '22)

#### **ALUMNI, ENGAGEMENT AND PHILANTHROPY NEWS AND EVENTS**

Brad Averitt ('10, '17)

Emily Evans ('13)

Carrie Taylor ('17)

#### **SPORTS NEWS**

Casey Crigger ('19)

Preston Ludwick

#### **WRITERS**

Colby Wilson ('10)

Megan Simpson

#### **CHIEF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION OFFICER**

GINNA HOLLEMAN ('95)

To update your alumni information online, visit [www.alumni.apsu.edu/updateinfo](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/updateinfo)

For questions, email [alumni@apsu.edu](mailto:alumni@apsu.edu).

Austin Peay State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, genetic information, or any other legally protected class with respect to all employment, programs and activities sponsored by APSU. Policy 6:001 AP346/3-26/10M/ Pollock Printing/Nashville, TN

02

GOV NEWS

20

ALUMNI NEWS  
& EVENTS

34

SPORTS NEWS



08

Chandler Kirton



## APSU achieves record-high enrollment, defying national trends

Austin Peay State University has achieved its highest enrollment figures to date, with 11,185 registered students according to official enrollment data.

The numbers show that Austin Peay's total enrollment rose by 7.1% from the previous academic year, which represents an increasing number of students across demographics and programs. This success comes despite projections of a national decline in college enrollment starting in 2025, highlighting APSU's growing appeal to prospective students.

"Behind every enrollment number is a student with their own dreams and ambitions," APSU President Mike Licari said. "What excites me most about this continued growth is that students across Tennessee and beyond are trusting Austin Peay to help them achieve their goals. We take that responsibility seriously and remain committed to providing the support and opportunities they need to succeed."

Areas across the university are benefiting from the surge in enrollment. The College of Business is now APSU's

fastest-growing academic college with a 12.62% increase in students, driven by its Master of Business Administration program (the largest graduate program on campus) and its finance and management programs (both up more than 20%).

The College of Behavioral and Health Sciences has also seen significant enrollment increases in several programs, including social work (up 30% from last year), nursing (up more than 20% over two years), and psychological science and counseling (up more than



20% over two years).

“What sets Austin Peay apart is our culture of academic innovation and commitment to student success,” said Dr. Mitchell Cordova, APSU’s provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. “Our faculty and staff have embraced the challenge of rethinking how we deliver education, creating enriching academic experiences that are directly preparing our students for emerging workforce demands and their careers. Students recognize and value that difference.”



## Austin Peay announces Tennessee’s first military-to-degree equivalency for staff positions

Austin Peay State University has announced a major hiring initiative recognizing military service and ranks as equivalent to college degrees for most staff positions, becoming the state’s first higher education institution to offer this pathway to veterans.

The decision addresses a critical need in the Clarksville region, since thousands of soldiers stationed at Fort Campbell transition into civilian life each year. Veterans whose service duties align with a university job posting can now qualify based on their military pay grades, with equivalencies ranging from E-4 (associate degree) to O-7 or WO-5 (doctorate).

“Nearly 40% of Fort Campbell’s soldiers choose to call Clarksville home after their time in service, and we have a responsibility to ensure these veterans can build meaningful careers here,” said retired Maj. Gen. Walt Lord, Austin Peay’s vice president for Military and Veterans Affairs. “This initiative opens new doors for them and recognizes that military leadership experience is just as valuable as traditional academic credentials for many positions.”

The university also covered tuition benefits for service members and military spouses during the recent government shutdown, offering funding equivalent to the Military Tuition Assistance (TA) and My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) programs to eligible students for the Fall B semester.

“Austin Peay State University has always stood shoulder to shoulder with our military families,” said APSU President Mike Licari. “We will not allow our students’ educational progress to be derailed. Military spouses sacrifice alongside their service members, and we’re committed to ensuring they can continue building their futures.”



## Jordan Harmon named APSU's 15th athletic director

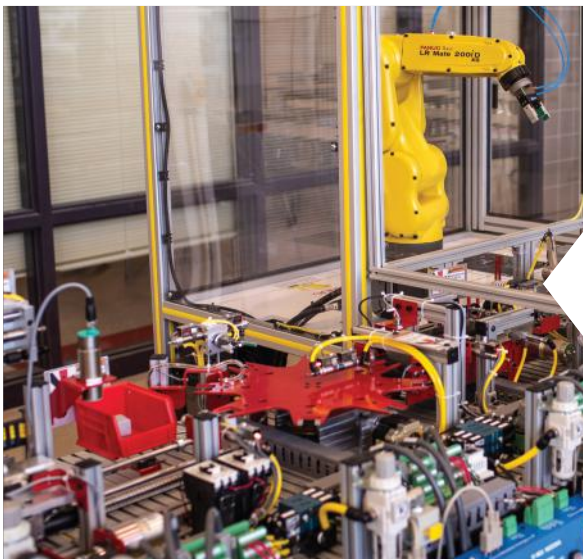
APSU President Dr. Mike Licari recently named two-time APSU graduate and former Governors baseball player Jordan Harmon as Austin Peay's 15th director of athletics.

Harmon had served as Austin Peay's interim director of athletics since August 2025, and his tenure was marked by continued investments in student-athlete development, facilities, and academic and wellness resources. He previously worked as the general manager for APSU Athletics and coordinated leadership in revenue sharing and name, image, and likeness management.

## Dr. Temple Grandin visits Austin Peay for book signing and lecture

World-renowned orator, author, professor and autism advocate Dr. Temple Grandin recently visited APSU for a community-wide book signing and forum discussion in the Music/Mass Communication Building.

Grandin's lecture capped off a month of events related to her visit, including a screening of the Emmy Award-winning biographical film *Temple Grandin* and a panel on her New York Times-bestselling book *Visual Thinking*.



## Mechatronics concentration attains full ABET accreditation

APSU's Department of Engineering Technology has achieved full accreditation for its mechatronics concentration without any citations, marking a significant milestone that addresses both employer demands and student recruitment needs.

The accreditation, awarded by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), represents the gold standard for engineering and engineering-related programs. Austin Peay is now one of three colleges across the state to offer nine or more ABET-accredited degree programs.



## **APSU achieves record-high \$14M in grant funding for FY25**

---

Austin Peay State University saw record-high external funding in fiscal year 2025, spending nearly \$14 million to support research and community service projects through almost 200 awarded grants – the largest active number in the university’s history.

At the fiscal year’s end, Austin Peay’s Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (OSRP) had a five-year grant portfolio of \$59 million, a 13.5% increase from the previous year and another record high.

“This milestone highlights the expanding impact of APSU’s research and service efforts, as well as the trust our partners place in our

faculty, staff and programs,” said Dr. Chad Brooks, APSU’s vice provost for research. “It also affirms APSU’s standing as one of Tennessee’s leading master’s-level research universities.”

APSU has continued this trend by securing major grants from the Tennessee Department of Education (\$1.025 million for the Grow Your Own Teacher Residency), the National Collegiate Athletic Association (\$100,000 to expand the laptop loaner program for student-athletes), and the National Science Foundation (\$150,000 to streamline APSU’s engineering pathways and help students choose the right program).

The National Science Foundation (NSF) grant is notable for making Dr. Emmabeth Vaughn, an assistant professor in the Department of Physics, Engineering and Astronomy, the first woman in APSU history with two active NSF projects. Vaughn is also working with Dr. Bobette Bouton in the Eriksson College of Education to conduct engineering empathy research.



## **Dr. Jennifer Thompson earns national recognition for APSU’s rad tech program**

---

Dr. Jennifer Thompson, professor and director of APSU’s radiologic science program, won the Most Effective Radiologic Science Educator award in the 2025 Minnies, a national campaign that has recognized excellence in radiology for 28 years.

APSU was also one of nine institutions nominated for Best Radiologic Sciences Program, placing the university among the nation’s leading providers of education in the field.

## How a college freshman raising her brother became one of Austin Peay's rising stars



If you see Citlali “Cici” Dominguez on the Austin Peay State University campus, she’ll likely be in motion.

She might be heading to the Kimbrough Building to lead a strategy meeting for the student-managed Larry W. Carroll Govs Fund or to her job as a resident assistant in Sevier Hall, balancing a 3.5 GPA with a full senior course load and multiple internships across Clarksville.

But four years ago, she was a freshman who’d just failed her first college class and lost her Tennessee HOPE Scholarship. She worked 40 hours a week as a server and was the primary caregiver for her 9-year-old brother. She was exhausted, overwhelmed, and considered dropping out.

Dominguez’s freshman year was far from typical. At 16, a difficult family situation prompted her to move out. By 18, she was attending APSU, renting an apartment, and serving as the primary caregiver for her younger brother, Brandon.

“That’s the only reason why I failed that first class in my freshman year,” Dominguez said. “Cause I was being a mother.”

Her parents, who immigrated from Mexico, had barely finished elementary school. As a first-generation college student, Dominguez was entering an unfamiliar world.

“Nobody in my family would ever talk about college,” she recalled. “So this is all new to me, like I’m navigating this blind ... [but] once I failed the class, it flipped a switch for me. I didn’t want to be OK. I wanted to be great.”

*“I didn’t want to be OK.  
I wanted to be great.”*



Her first step was an email to the financial aid office. Then she applied to be a resident assistant (RA), a position that provided free housing, a meal plan, and a stipend.

With her basic needs met, Dominguez's focus shifted from surviving to achieving. She describes the next events as a "trickle-down effect."

It started when Dave Dessauer, then a career coach in the College of Business, offered her an unpaid internship. That gave her the confidence to join the Govs Programming Council, or GPC, where she handled marketing.

She was also accepted into the Larry W. Carroll Govs Fund, a student-managed investment group.

"I didn't know I had an interest in finance and numbers until I got into Govs Fund," she said. "It was like a whole new world."

Dominguez became the Govs Fund's communications director and "revitalized" the organization's social media presence, according to her mentor, Stephanie Bilderback, an instructor in the College of Business.

Today, Dominguez balances her RA duties and Govs Fund leadership with three internships and has presented research at three national conferences.

"Austin Peay gave a lot of opportunity to the people that tried," she said. "They see somebody that wants to try, and they don't shut them down. They just push you forward instead."

Behind the 3.5 GPA and accomplishments is her primary motivation: her now-12-year-old brother, Brandon. She often brings him to campus for sporting events and discusses her classes with him, creating the path she never had.

"My family and my little brother have been my motor, been my why," Dominguez said.

As Dominguez approaches her May 2026 graduation, she's networking for her next move, guided by a philosophy from that first difficult year.

"I'm most proud of being OK with being a beginner," she said. "Being OK with not being the best at something the first time and building up to it."

# CHASING THE CAMPBELL TROPHY:

**Kirton makes APSU history as  
'Academic Heisman' finalist**





**C**handler Kirton was inspired by the athleticism of the Jaguars and the Steelers throughout his childhood in Jacksonville, Florida, and he started playing flag football in elementary school with dreams of becoming a powerhouse quarterback like Ben Roethlisberger.

Although he didn't make the team when he first tried out for tackle football in sixth grade, he refused to be discouraged and earned a spot the next year. His career as a student-athlete continued through college, where he recently broke APSU's record for most consecutive starts (47 games) and became the university's first finalist for the National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame's William V. Campbell Trophy (also known as the "Academic Heisman").

"Out of so many NCAA football players, to be in the final 16 and represent Austin Peay was a huge honor," said Kirton, an offensive lineman who will graduate in May with a Master of Business Administration. "I never thought I'd have the opportunity to go across the country and sit in the same room with people like Nick Saban, Urban Meyer, and Michael Vick."

The Campbell Trophy is awarded based on academic success, on-field performance, and exemplary leadership. Each of the 16 finalists received an \$18,000 postgraduate scholarship and was inducted into the 2025 NFF National Scholar-Athlete Class, presented by Fidelity Investments, during an awards dinner in Las Vegas.

Kirton was also a semifinalist for the 2024 Campbell Trophy and was named the United Athletic Conference Scholar-Athlete of the Year in 2024 and 2025, among other academic honors. He earned a 3.92 GPA when graduating with his bachelor's degree in management, has maintained a 4.0 GPA as an MBA student, and will be the first person in his family with a master's degree.

On the field, Kirton was a two-year team captain and four-year starter for the Governors, contributing to back-to-back conference championships in 2022 and 2023. He anchored an offensive line that ranked 12th in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) in total offense (451.1), 14th in passing offense (364.7), 15th in scoring offense (35.1), and 25th in rushing offense (186.4) during the 2025 season.

"To look back on everything I've been able to accomplish on the field, in the classroom, and in my community is amazing, and I'm so grateful for Austin Peay," Kirton said. "They gave me an opportunity when a lot of other schools didn't, and



I've really made Clarksville my home."

That opportunity was especially meaningful for Kirton, whose senior year of high school was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and a hamstring injury that sidelined him for most of the season.

"Going into my senior year, I didn't have any offers, and I was very nervous about whether I'd be able to get a spot on a football team," he said. "When APSU reached out, I committed the next day. I'd never even met the coaches in person or been to Tennessee, but I knew I was going to find a way to get there and play Division 1 football."

Kirton said trading the beaches of Florida for the mountains of Tennessee was a culture shock, but he quickly found his place as both a scholar and an athlete.

"I redshirted my first year, so I got a little playtime in about three games," he said. "It was great to have that experience, but I also realized, 'I'm not playing right now. What if I don't get

the opportunity, or maybe I get hurt?' I had to make sure I was on top of my academics."

APSU's coaching staff also encouraged Kirton and his teammates to prioritize their classwork, and after exploring his options across campus, he saw the management major as a natural fit.

"Management is really something I jumped into and fell in love with," he said, noting that he appreciated the program's transferable skills and dedicated professors. "I really like interacting with people - I want to be the best version of myself every day, build up the people around me, and give maximum effort in everything I do. That will take me far, no matter what comes my way."

Currently, Kirton is working as a field engineer with Hensel Phelps on the construction of a facility to enrich stable isotopes at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which will be the first of its kind in the U.S.

---

**“I want to be the best version of myself every day, build up the people around me, and give maximum effort in everything I do.”**

---

“I’m starting at the bottom of the totem pole, but as I work my way up into an operations engineer, I’ll be able to go into the business side and focus more on supply chain management,” he said. “A lot of the leadership traits and skills I learned at APSU are things I’ll be able to use in my everyday work.”

Kirton also developed as a leader through community service as part of APSU’s Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), whether by volunteering with nonprofit organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Loaves & Fishes or organizing fundraisers to support charitable causes.

“SAAC’s Jock N’ Roll event is how we were able to raise money for pediatric cancer through Turner’s Heroes, and we were also involved with Buddy Ball,” he said. “One time, we went to a nursing home and set up a theater room for the residents to make it feel more like home. We were only supposed to be there for an hour, but I ended up staying for about two-and-a-half.”

Kirton had previously volunteered in high school, but he said spending time with his fellow Govs encouraged him to be more involved. As he looks toward his future in Knoxville, making a difference for others through service and leadership remains his driving goal.

“Being around other people is what lets you make the most of your time, and that’s a big reason why I stayed at Austin Peay for five years,” he said. “The people around me, from the staff and administration to my teammates, made such a huge difference. APSU is taking me a lot further than any other place I could have gone.”





## SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM **FORGES CAREER PATHS, COMMUNITY BONDS**

When Austin Peay State University senior Joshua Martin began his summer internship, he wanted experience. Ten weeks later, he walked away with four job opportunities.

Martin's success was a standout moment in Austin Peay's inaugural Summer Internship Program, a transformative experience for students who spent their summer helping local businesses and advancing their careers.

The APSU Career Success Center and the Workforce Essentials program placed students in paid, 10-week internships in the Clarksville-Montgomery County area. The students said the experience was more than a summer job; it

was a direct pipeline to professional growth and employment.

### **A PIPELINE TO A PROFESSION**

"This internship opportunity allowed me to network with other organizations," said Martin, who interned at Trane Technologies. "We went on site visits every Friday, and I was able to develop four job opportunities post-graduation with Trane, CDE Lightband, Hankook and Nyrstar."

The program's unique structure, blending hands-on work at host organizations with weekly professional development workshops and site visits, was key to its success. That support

**“Show up every day open-minded and ready to learn new things...”**

allowed students to thrive and contribute significantly to their host organizations.



### **MAKING A REAL-WORLD IMPACT**

At Rossvie Farms, communication major and design intern Destiny Griffin accomplished what three firms hadn't: she designed a logo that Ross Creek Builders is considering for official use.

“It really gave me motivation to keep bettering my development professionally as well as personally,” Griffin said. “It showed that I’m just as valuable to a company as anyone else.”

Other interns made similar contributions across the community. Business major Teanna Albin developed welcome signage concepts for the Clarksville Area Chamber of Commerce, while communication major Tamar Williams coordinated outreach events serving hundreds of families at United Way of Greater Nashville.

At We Notarize Nationwide Notary Services and Solutions 21, students also created budgeting tools and developed leadership strategies that could have lasting organizational impact.

### **FROM CLASSROOM TO CAREER**

The hands-on work also provided career clarity. Finance major Kade Tjaarda earned his insurance agent license while interning at a local GEICO office, while Martin's experience at Trane affirmed his academic path.

“My internship helped confirm that this is truly something that I want to pursue,” the senior engineering technology major said, “and that I did not waste the last five years of my college career.”

The program proved valuable for students who discovered a different path. Sophie Sutton, a psychology major and research intern at Rossvie Farms, realized that a corporate environment wasn't for her, which clarified her goal to attend graduate school. Despite the placement not being a perfect fit, she praised the Career Success Center's staff for their support.

“I would 100% recommend this program,” Sutton said. “The Career Success Team was amazing and always checked up on me and other students.”

Every student echoed that sentiment: The program is a priceless opportunity.

“Show up every day open-minded and ready to learn new things,” Martin advised future interns. “This opportunity is yours, so make it how you want it.”

**“It showed that I’m just as valuable to a company as anyone else.”**





## HEALTH PROFESSIONS BUILDING

---

The 114,600-square-foot Health Professions Building represents the largest investment in healthcare education in Austin Peay's history. It serves as the home for the university's nursing, radiologic technology, medical laboratory science, health and human performance, psychological science and counseling, and social work programs. The facility is designed to encourage collaborative learning and houses state-of-the-art equipment, including cutting-edge X-ray technology and a fully functional diagnostic laboratory.



The Clarksville-Montgomery County Community Health Foundation committed \$3 million to the HPB before it was approved by the Tennessee General Assembly, and was instrumental in the project's success. Their generosity is recognized through the names of the building's first floor and courtyard. CMCCHF also contributed to naming the Bill Wyatt Enrichment Center in honor of Wyatt, who graduated from APSU in 1970 and has worked for decades to support community health initiatives.



Dr. Tim Leszczak, chair of the Department of Health and Human Performance, works with students using an Anatomage visualization tool. The table provides interactive, fully functional 3D renderings that show how the human body's musculature and skeletal system interact. It can also be used to help medical students simulate clinical procedures in a risk-free environment.



Dr. Shani Collins Woods, associate professor in the Department of Social Work, works in the program's dedicated suite within the Health Professions Building. The area is equipped with behavioral observation rooms, a simulated apartment that can be used for visitation scenarios, and control rooms where educators can monitor live student-led sessions with real clients.



Dr. LeAnn Wills, assistant professor in the Department of Psychological Science and Counseling, at left, with graduate student Kat Baranosky. Counseling students benefit from their own therapy, study, and conference rooms in the Health Professions Building, and the university's Psychological Science and Counseling Clinic has also moved into the facility.

These named spaces in the Health Professions Building reflect the generosity of donors who invested in Austin Peay's future. Their gifts create lasting legacies that inspire students daily while ensuring the university continues preparing healthcare professionals to serve beyond campus.

**The Clarksville-Montgomery County Community Health Foundation** provided significant support, recognized through the named first floor and courtyard. The foundation also contributed to naming the **Bill Wyatt Enrichment Center** in honor of Wyatt's longstanding community leadership.

**The Curtis G. Johnson Atrium**, the building's central gathering space, recognizes Johnson's advocacy for Austin Peay and higher education during his two decades of public service, including 20 years as a legislator in the Tennessee House of Representatives (2005 to 2025).

- **Colonel Debbie Elaine Tipton-Winters RN, MSN, MSS, U.S. Army (Retired) Study Room** - established by David & Debbie Winters.
- **CTT2 Jamaica St. George Classroom** - established by Chris & Jacqueline George in memory of their son Jamaica St. George.
- **De'Airon "Big D" Smith Social Work Family Meeting Room** - established by David & Shawana Smith in memory of their son De'Airon "Big D" Smith.
- **DeWald-Volpe Nursing Simulation Laboratory** - established by Dr. Ernest & Joan DeWald and Jennette Volpe.
- **Dr. Robert T. Crews Medical Laboratory Sciences Corridor** - established in memory of Dr. Robert T. Crews by his wife Hester Crews.
- **Dr. Wendy Araya Family Clinical Simulation Bed** - established by Dr. Wendy Araya.
- **In Dedication to Sandra K. Gilliam and JoAnn Workman Burchett** - nursing simulation bed established by Travis & Lori Burchett.
- **Lisa Dahin Ross Nursing Debriefing Room** - established in memory of Lisa Dahin Ross by her mother Ann R. Ross.
- **Maury Regional Health** - sponsored a Nursing Simulation Hub and MLS Student Collaboration Area as part of a five-year partnership.
- **Thaxton-Edington Radiologic Science Suite** - established by Brenda Edington and the late Dr. Mac Edington.
- **Wade Hadley Rudolph Nursing Debriefing Room** - established in memory of Wade Hadley Rudolph by Johnny & Janet Rudolph.



Chris and Jacqueline George with friends and family outside the CTT2 Jamaica St. George Classroom, named in memory of their son. Jamaica was born on April 8, 1996, joined the Navy on Jan. 26, 2015, and reported to the USS Arlington on Sept. 24, 2015. He was a kind and loving son, husband, brother, and friend, as well as an accomplished Sailor who was soon to receive his Information Warfare (IW) qualification.



Dr. Daniel McKelvey (at left) and Dr. Erica Adkins, assistant professors in the Department of Psychological Science and Counseling, are among the faculty for APSU's PsyD in counseling psychology. The program graduated its inaugural class in Fall 2025, and the resources in the Health Professions Building are ensuring its students have access to advanced practical learning opportunities.



The Health Professions Building gives radiologic science program students like junior Lily Gill (pictured) access to brand new, state-of-the-art X-ray equipment and a portable that allows for larger classes and technology opportunities. The goal is to keep pace with evolving healthcare technology while preparing students for in-demand jobs as radiologic scientists.



Jane Semler, a professor of Medical Laboratory Science (MLS), works with a student in the Health Professions Building. The facility's MLS laboratory is located near the nursing program's simulated patient care floor, providing opportunities for students from different disciplines to work together in realistic hospital settings.



Dr. Ervin “Buster” and Sandra K. Gilliam, along with Lori and Travis Burchett, visit the nursing simulation bed dedicated to Sandra K. Gilliam and JoAnn Workman Burchett. Sandra dedicated 40 years to surgical nursing in the Clarksville area after earning her LPN degree and trained many APSU nursing students during their surgical rotations. JoAnn earned her LPN degree in 1976 and served as a dedicated and beloved medical-surgical nurse, completing part of her RN before passing away from Kasabach-Merritt Syndrome in 1984.



As we approach Austin Peay State University's centennial in 2027, we're building momentum through extraordinary growth—made possible by your support.

The recent months have marked many milestones for our university. In September 2025, we celebrated the opening of the Health Professions Building, the largest academic building on our campus at 114,600 square feet. This state-of-the-art facility serves as the new home for the nursing, radiologic technology, medical laboratory science, health and human performance, psychological science and counseling, and social work programs. The building features numerous named spaces recognizing major donors and community leaders, including the Clarksville-Montgomery County Community Health Foundation Floor and Courtyard, the Curtis G. Johnson Atrium, and the Bill Wyatt Enrichment Center. These named spaces demonstrate the tangible impact of philanthropic investments while establishing lasting legacies that will serve generations of healthcare professionals.

We also honored Jack and Margie Turner's decades of transformational support by naming the Jack and Margie Turner Family Event Center at 416 College St. The Turners' involvement extends well beyond financial contributions, including active participation in the Red Coat Society, Tower Club, and sponsorship of many military-focused initiatives that strengthen our commitment to service members and their families.

In December 2025, the APSU Board of Trustees approved naming our expanded food pantry facility the Millan Foundation Impact Center. This partnership with the Millan Foundation—APSU's first privately-funded gift-in-place donation—will expand the pantry's capacity to serve 35% more students facing food insecurity. Unlike typical campus pantries, our facility provides fresh produce, meat, and eggs to students and their families, maintaining our commitment to complete nutrition and student success.

Before looking ahead to our centennial, I want to recognize Vonda St. Amant, a two-time APSU alumna and dedicated member of our team, who retired on Dec. 31, 2025 after 15 years of extraordinary service. Vonda's impact has been profound—from leading fundraising for the Health Professions Building to establishing more than 100 endowments and creating programs like Regaining Hope and The Legacy Society. Her legacy will benefit Governors for decades to come.

We also pause to remember members of our APSU family who passed away in recent months: President Emeritus **Sherry Hoppe**, longtime Public Relations and Marketing Director **Dennie Burke**, retired Education Professor **George Rawlins III**, History Professor Emeritus **Dr. Thomas Winn**, retired Mathematics Professor **Dr. Ron Gupton**, and generous supporters State Rep. **Jeff Burkhardt**, **Wayne Ard**, **Jim Charlet, Jr.** and **David Schuff**. Their service, leadership, and generosity remain woven into the fabric of our university.

We invite you to join our upcoming centennial celebration. Every event at APSU in 2027 will mark this milestone, including our crowdsourced "Notable APSU Alumni and Friends" initiative. We're seeking nominations for distinguished Governors across strategic categories—from business leaders and athletic legends to educators, volunteer champions and more. Help us identify outstanding Governors at [www.alumni.apsu.edu/notablepeayple](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/notablepeayple), and become a Centennial Ambassador to share your APSU story at [www.alumni.apsu.edu/centennialambassador](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/centennialambassador).

Through your generosity and engagement, we are not only celebrating our past but also building the future of Governor excellence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristopher R. Phillips". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "R".

Kristopher R. Phillips, MSL ('91, '21)  
APSU Vice President for Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy  
Executive Director of the APSU Foundation

## National Alumni Association Executive Board

### President

Gretchen Hancock ('14)  
gretchen.hancock1@gmail.com

### Vice President

Celeste Malone ('17, '19)  
celestedmalone@gmail.com

### President-Elect

Alexis Gatson ('06, '09, '16)  
alexisgatson08@gmail.com

### Past President

Victor Felts ('91)  
feltsv@apsu.edu

### Faculty Representative

Tracy Nichols ('92)  
nicholst@apsu.edu



The Austin Peay Division of Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy continues working intentionally to engage our alumni, friends, and campus community, and I'm thrilled to share the results.

Our Class of 2025 made history, raising a record-breaking \$13,000 through the Graduating Class Gift Campaign—surpassing the previous record of \$10,953.89 set by the Class of 2022. Since 2018, over 1,380 graduating students have contributed over \$65,000 to support future Govs.

GOVing Tuesday 2025 achieved unprecedented success, raising \$75,670.36—a 29% increase from 2024. All 17 campus projects were fully funded, bringing our four-year total to 58 completed projects and over \$203,000 raised since launching

this format in 2022. These grassroots initiatives demonstrate how collective giving creates meaningful impact across campus.

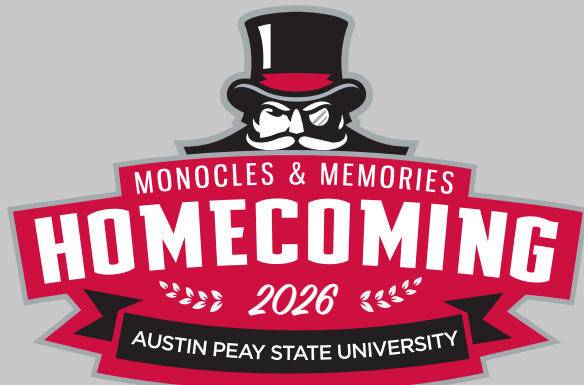
The Domino's Run for Govs 5K reached new heights in October 2025, with 426 participants raising \$15,367 for scholarships while fully funding the Valerie Hunter-Kelly Endowment. Mark your calendars for this year's race on Saturday, Oct. 10, 2026, at the Pace Alumni Center.

As we approach the university's centennial in 2027, we invite you to help us celebrate Gov excellence. Nominate outstanding alumni and supporters for the Governors Circle Alumni Awards and submit legendary Govs for the APSU Governors Military Hall of Fame. Visit [alumni.apsu.edu](http://alumni.apsu.edu) for nomination details, deadlines, and our complete calendar of upcoming events. Contact us at 931-221-7979 with questions, suggestions, or to form a new alumni chapter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad Averitt".

Brad Averitt ('10, '17)  
Associate Vice President of Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy



## SAVE THE DATE

## OCT. 2 - OCT. 3





AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY



CANDLELIGHT BALL

**2026 RECIPIENT OF THE SPIRIT OF AUSTIN PEAY AWARD | TODD HARVEY**



Todd Harvey received his affiliate broker license in 1985 while studying at UT Knoxville and earned his broker's license just two years later. As principal broker at Byers & Harvey, he is most passionate about buying and selling. Todd values family and honesty and seeks agents who share these values.

Beyond his work in real estate, Todd has dedicated himself to industry leadership and community service. He has served as Clarksville Association of Realtors (CAR) president three times, was inducted into the National Association of Realtors (NAR) RPAC Hall of Fame in 2021, and served as CAR director in 2023. His community involvement includes serving on the APSU Foundation and over 29 years of giving to APSU, six years with the IDB, recognition as 2024 Donor of the Year for the Austin Peay Governors, and building Habitat for Humanity's 5,000th house in Tennessee in 2022.

**2026 RECIPIENTS OF THE WENDELL H. GILBERT AWARD  
SHELIA ('71) AND MITCHELL ('72) ROSS**



Shelia and Mitchell Ross are lifelong champions of Austin Peay State University, each bringing decades of dedication to the institution and community.

Shelia graduated in 1971 with a bachelor of science in business education and immediately joined APSU's staff. Over 39 years, she served in the Public/Sports Information Office, as secretary to the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, events coordinator for the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts, and director of Alumni Relations until her retirement in 2010. As the first in her family to attend college, she remains an avid supporter of athletics and the creative arts.

Mitchell earned his bachelor of science in business administration in 1972 and his juris doctorate from the University of Memphis in 1975. A Montgomery County native, he has practiced law since 1975 and is currently partner at Mitchell Ross Rocconi, PLLC, specializing in real estate, business banking, and commercial law. He has held leadership positions in the Montgomery County Bar Association and the Tennessee Bar Association, and serves on the board of directors of Planters Bank, Inc.



## DOMINO'S PARTNERSHIP POWERS RECORD-BREAKING SUCCESS FOR RUN FOR GOVS

When Antonio Murgas secured title sponsorship for the Run for Gobs 5K, he invested in APSU's future. That investment paid off spectacularly in October 2025: 426 participants, \$15,367 raised for scholarships, and a fully funded Valerie Hunter-Kelly Endowment—the most successful race since the event's 2020 return.

"This partnership allows us to give back to the community that has supported our business across Clarksville," said Murgas, Domino's Pizza owner and 2025 Wendell H. Gilbert Award recipient. "Supporting APSU students through scholarships while bringing our community together for health and wellness perfectly aligns with our values. We're proud to fuel this campus tradition for the next three years."

Murgas' three-year commitment ensures continued growth.

The race brings together students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members on the certified USA Track & Field course at Emerald Hill, with every registration dollar supporting APSU Foundation scholarships.

"Antonio's title sponsorship has elevated every aspect of this event, from enhanced participant experiences to expanded community reach," said Kris Phillips, vice president for Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy. "Combined with honoring Valerie Hunter-Kelly's legacy through the 1K event, his investment is generating real, measurable impact."

The 2025 race achieved a particularly meaningful milestone by fully funding the Valerie Hunter-Kelly Endowment, ensuring permanent scholarship support for health and human performance students.



*The Domino's Run for Gobs 5K and Valerie Hunter-Kelly Run/Walk for the Gobs 1K returns at 8 a.m. on Saturday, Oct. 10, at the Pace Alumni Center on Emerald Hill.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS •

**Austin Peay Night at the Preds**  
*Monday, April 13*

**New Student Legacy Pinning**  
*Friday, Aug. 21*

**First Home Game of the Season!**  
**APSU vs. Gardner Webb**  
*Thursday, Aug. 27*

**Vanderbilt vs. APSU in Nashville**  
*Saturday, Sept. 5*

**APSU Homecoming Weekend**  
*Friday, Oct. 2 - Saturday, Oct. 3*

**Run for Gobs 5K**  
*Saturday, Oct. 10*

**Military Hall of Fame Celebration**  
*Friday, Nov. 13*



# AUSTIN PEAY GOVERNORS MILITARY HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2025

The Governors Military Hall of Fame, established in 2022, is housed in the William E. & Sadako S. Newton Military Family Resource Center, Tennessee’s largest military student center. It honors members of the APSU community, living or deceased, who have served in the military with records of extraordinary service and/or sacrifice to the nation, or who have demonstrated dedicated support and substantive contributions to the United States military and veterans.

“These four exceptional veterans represent the very best of what Austin Peay stands for — leaders who carry our values of service and excellence into their military careers,” Austin Peay President Mike Licari said. “Their remarkable service demonstrates the strong connection between our university and the military community. Whether as graduates who began their leadership journey here or as supporters who share our commitment to service, each of these inductees embodies the transformational impact that comes from dedication to both education and our nation’s security.”

Inductees into the APSU Governors Military Hall of Fame Class of 2025 were honored during a reception and induction dinner on Friday, Nov. 7, 2025 in the Morgan University Center ballroom. The Class of 2025 honorees were recognized at the Governors football game against Central Arkansas on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2025 at Fortera Stadium.

**The members of the fourth class of the Governors Military Hall of Fame include:**



**Colonel (Ret.) Ernest DeWald, U.S. Army Dental Corps**

Col. Ernest DeWald, DDS, served 22 years in the U.S. Army Dental Corps (1972-1994). A Georgetown University graduate, he served on the forensic dental team identifying 252 remains from the 1985 Gander disaster and created the first forensic dentistry identification format template. His most significant achievement was designing and directing Fort Campbell’s one-year general dentistry residency program, earning him the Legion of Merit. Post-retirement, he served on the National DMORT IV Team responding to Hurricane Katrina and 9/11. His APSU philanthropy includes fully endowing a nursing scholarship and funding the DeWald-Volpe Nursing Simulation Laboratory in the Health Professions Building.



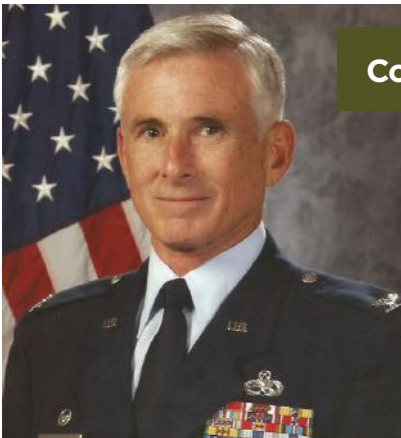
### Major (Ret.) Lance E. Richardson ('89)

Maj. Lance E. Richardson ('89) served 22 years in the U.S. Army, rising from enlisted Ranger to commissioned officer. Named the top Army ROTC cadet nationwide among 8,217 seniors, he earned honor graduate recognition at both Ranger School (1980) and Special Forces Qualification Course (1984). After commissioning, he deployed immediately to Desert Shield/Desert Storm as a platoon leader with the 101st Airborne Division and later commanded a rifle company in Bosnia. He earned a Master of Science in biology from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and taught at West Point for three years. Since retiring in 2004, he has served as laboratory program director at West Point. His decorations include Bronze Star, Combat Infantryman Badge, Ranger Tab, and Special Forces Tab.



### Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) James M. Walker Jr. ('81)

Lt. Col. James M. Walker Jr. ('81) received the prestigious George C. Marshall Award as the nation's outstanding ROTC cadet and was the first APSU cadet recognized as best in his Advanced Camp cycle. His 21-year career included serving as aide to President Ronald Reagan, aide-de-camp to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral William J. Crowe Jr., and operations briefer to Gen. Colin Powell during Operations Just Cause and Desert Shield. He later secured billions in funding managing the Army's Congressional Readiness portfolio. After his retirement in 2002, he became Alabama's first director of Homeland Security, managing over \$200 million in grants and earning five national awards for government innovation.



### Colonel (Ret.) William N. "Ted" Wootton

Col. William N. "Ted" Wootton served nearly 39 years in the Air Force, rising from enlisted avionics technician to senior officer. After 12 years enlisted, he was commissioned in 1981 and embarked on a 26-year officer career. He commanded maintenance operations for Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, processing over 2,600 aircraft without incident, and led the 100th Aircraft Generation Squadron during Operation Allied Force, flying 1,139 mishap-free sorties. His final assignment as director of aircraft maintenance at HQ Military Airlift Command oversaw policies for 1,028 aircraft at 58 worldwide locations. His decorations include Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star, and Meritorious Service Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters.

## Nomination Process

To learn about the APSU Governors Military Hall of Fame, past honorees, or to make a nomination visit [www.alumni.apsu.edu/govsmilitaryhalloffame](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/govsmilitaryhalloffame). Nominations for the APSU Governors Military Hall of Fame are accepted year-round; however, nominations for the Class of 2026 are due by June 1. For questions about the APSU Governors Military Hall of Fame reception and induction dinner, contact the Office of Alumni and Engagement at 931-221-7979 or [alumni@apsu.edu](mailto:alumni@apsu.edu).



## TURNING THE KEY TO STUDENT SUCCESS

### How a historic partnership with the Millan Foundation is building a permanent solution to campus food insecurity

Hunger never walks in the door alone.

For Austin Peay students and their families facing food insecurity, hunger is a barrier standing between them and their dreams. This fall, APSU and the Millan Foundation forged a partnership that's rewriting how the university addresses student hunger.

#### **A FOUNDATION BUILT ON SHARED PURPOSE**

In December 2025, the Austin Peay State University Board of Trustees approved the naming of the Millan Foundation Impact Center—APSU's first privately-funded gift-in-place partnership.

"At the Millan Foundation, our mission is to create a legacy of impact by partnering with good people and great organizations to broaden and strengthen their footprint," said Leo Millan, president of the Millan Foundation. "We work to remove obstacles so our partners can fully carry out their mission. This partnership with Austin Peay State University reflects our commitment to collaborative efforts that uplift local organizations. Together, we're turning the key to a brighter future for students and the Clarksville community."

The foundation's buildout commitment does exactly that by removing obstacles. Unlike typical campus food pantries that distribute only shelf-stable items, APSU's facility provides fresh produce, meat, and eggs to students and their families.

"The Millan Foundation's generous commitment is nothing short of remarkable," said Dr. Mike Licari, APSU president. "This partnership represents our values of community collaboration and shared purpose at Austin Peay—uniting with organizations that share our commitment to student success."

#### **THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE NEED**

During the 2024-25 academic year, the APSU Food Pantry served 505 new students through 3,889 visits. Each month, the pantry also feeds 312 additional family members, including infants who receive formula and diapers. This family-focused approach reflects a deeper understanding: 54% of visitors are first-generation students juggling coursework with childcare and household responsibilities.

#### **BUILDING FOR TOMORROW: THE TWO-PHASE APPROACH**

The Millan Foundation Impact Center represents the first

phase of a two-part vision for sustainable student support. The foundation's buildout of the expanded facility will transform the pantry's capacity immediately:

- **Monthly food distribution increases from 4,800 items to 6,500**—enabling the pantry to serve 35% more students
- **Storage capacity expands from 1,400 to 1,800 shelf-stable items**
- **Fresh food distribution doubles from 50 to 100 pounds monthly**

But infrastructure alone doesn't guarantee permanence. That's where phase two comes in: a permanent endowment to sustain the food pantry's operations for generations of students to come.

"We're fortunate to have partners like the Millan Foundation, who understand that true generosity isn't just about giving—it's about transforming lives and building futures," said Kris Phillips, vice president for Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy. "This partnership is about more than facilities and infrastructure—it's about hope, dignity, and opportunity for Austin Peay students."

### **AN INVITATION TO INVEST**

With the Millan Foundation's commitment secured, university leadership launched a campaign for the permanent endowment during APSU's Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week Breakfast on Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2025, followed by a ceremonial unlocking of the future Millan Foundation Impact Center—symbolizing new possibilities and a call to action for the APSU community.

The endowment will ensure students managing increasing rent and utility costs can still access nutritious meals, and infants receive formula and diapers while their parents complete degrees that will lift entire families.

The APSU Foundation set an example of this community commitment by making a donation to the food pantry in lieu of holiday gifts this year—a gesture honoring all donors while directly supporting students in need.

"This is our moment to establish permanent sustainability," Phillips said. "Every student who walks through our doors is one step closer to graduation, one step closer to launching their career, and one step closer to giving back to the community."

***"We work to remove obstacles so our partners can fully carry out their mission."***



When Brooklyn Brent, a member of the Govs Dining Culinary Council, won Sodexo's national "Let Them Cook" sweepstakes last fall, she could have directed the \$1,250 prize to any food-related charity in America. Instead, she chose to keep her gift close to home.

For Brooklyn, a regular volunteer at APSU's Food Pantry, the decision was simple. She directed her prize to the students who need it most—her fellow Govs.

Brooklyn was one of just 10 students nationwide to win the sweepstakes, which also included a \$575 Williams Sonoma gift card. But it's her choice to invest in her campus community that speaks volumes about the culture of care growing at Austin Peay.



## A PROFESSOR'S LEGACY: Dr. Susan Kupisch's Investment in Austin Peay

When Dr. Susan Kupisch reflects on her career at Austin Peay State University, she sees more than decades of teaching—she sees a second home that embraced her throughout a journey that took her to other campuses and positions but always brought her back to APSU. Her decision to join the Legacy Society by including the university in her estate plans—along with her establishment of the Dr. Susan J. Kupisch Psychology Endowment—ensures her impact will extend far beyond the classroom.

"I was inspired to include APSU in my estate planning because of the nurturing atmosphere and education provided to students, especially those without financial means," Dr. Kupisch explained. "I have witnessed the planned growth of the university and I am proud to have been part of its history."

Dr. Kupisch's connection to Austin Peay began in 1981 when she joined the Department of Psychology. Her dedication to the university was evident throughout her 14-year tenure, during which she served as chair of the psychology department from 1986-1990 and achieved the rank of full professor in 1989. She later expanded her leadership role as assistant vice president for Academic Affairs from 1994 and interim dean of the Graduate School from 1994 to 1995. In 1995, she left to become vice president for Academic Affairs at The Mississippi University of Women, but her connection to Austin Peay remained strong.

As a Legacy Society member, Dr. Kupisch represents a commitment to Austin Peay's future that extends beyond her lifetime. Though she graduated from another university and worked at other institutions throughout her career, she chose to direct her financial support to APSU through both her endowed scholarship and her estate plans.

"I am excited to see the continued growth of the campus and the quality of education offered at Austin Peay," she shared. "It strives for excellence and it shows."

Her planned giving complements the scholarship she has already established, which specifically supports returning students in psychology who are enrolled full-time and maintain a 3.0 GPA. Both graduate and undergraduate students are eligible for this renewable award, which prioritizes students who might not otherwise afford the opportunities an APSU education provides.

"APSU changes lives," Dr. Kupisch noted. "Within its rich academic environment, students are free to explore, discover and learn, while gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the world around them and prepare for the future. A scholarship often means the difference between maximizing one's potential and just making ends meet."

Dr. Kupisch hopes her example will inspire other faculty members and alumni to consider planned giving.

"Be a part of Austin Peay's future and be proud of your association with the university," she encourages. "What better way to set a legacy than to give others the opportunity to gain a fine education at Austin Peay, an education that will change their lives."

Her message for students who will benefit from her generosity—both through her current scholarship and her future estate gift—is equally direct:

"People care about you—people you may never really know. Many of us were once in your shoes, needing financial support to attend a university. Without those scholarships, many of us would not have been able to attend a school like APSU. When able, give forward to others by donating to APSU and its future students."

To learn more about joining the Legacy Society or establishing an endowment, contact the Division of Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy at 931-221-7127 or via email at [give@apsu.edu](mailto:give@apsu.edu).

# GOVS GATHERINGS

## ON THE MOVE: EXPANDING THE GOVS FOR LIFE EXPERIENCE



Last year, Goves For Life was truly on the move—traveling across the country to bring alumni together and strengthen Governor connections near and far. From city to city, Goves Gatherings created space for alumni to reconnect, socialize, and build lasting communities wherever life has taken them.

Throughout the year, we made stops in Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, Memphis, Nashville, Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta. And Goves—you showed up and showed out. We connected with hundreds of alumni from across the nation through meaningful, memorable experiences.

From mingling with prospective students at Be a Gov Tour gatherings to cheering on the Goves at the MTSU vs. APSU Tailgate, enjoying great meals in new cities, and watching the Nashville Predators together, each gathering left a lasting impact and strengthened our Goves For Life community.



***Scan the QR code to keep up with all Upcoming Goves Gatherings!***

**April 13: APSU Night at the Nashville Predators  
5:30 - 7 p.m. • 501 Broadway, Nashville, TN**



## AUSTIN PEAY GREAT HASSELL IS BUILDING A POWER IN HIS HOMETOWN



After retiring from the NBA, Trenton Hassell wanted to stay involved in the game. This can manifest in many ways in modern basketball, but Hassell had a different vision for giving back.

"We started with one team [Tennessee Sol], and each year we got better," Hassell recalled. The program's growth is a testament to its success and impact, drawing the attention of players and coaches. Local figures like Lauren Yarbrough and Beth Rates, both former Austin Peay players, joined the coaching staff, enhancing the program's credibility and reach.

Tennessee Sol was the start. For the past five seasons, Hassell has led the girls' basketball program at Clarksville Christian School, a Tennessee State Independent Athletic Association school that allows smaller private schools to coordinate into

leagues, to four consecutive TSIAA state championships and NACA Division III national championships. This led to the Austin Peay great receiving the National Christian School Association Coach of the Year award in 2026, given annually to the best Christian-schools coach in the nation.

For Hassell, coaching transcends basketball; it's a mission to instill life skills in his players.

"I want the girls that play for us to improve. I want them to know about hard work and commitment," he emphasized. Hassell is deeply hands-on, setting a high standard of excellence and personal investment. Through dedication, passion, and belief in his community, Trenton Hassell is growing basketball in Clarksville and creating a lasting legacy of empowerment and success for future generations.



# GOVing Tuesday 2025: Making an Impact, One Project at a Time



When Austin Peay State University wrapped up its fourth annual GOVing Tuesday campaign on Dec. 2, 2025 the results told a compelling story: \$75,670.36 raised—a 29% increase from 2024—and 17 fully funded projects spanning every corner of campus.

Since 2022, the campaign has raised more than \$203,000 for campus initiatives. This year's campaign continued that tradition, with alumni, friends, and community members rallying behind initiatives that ranged from cutting-edge technology to grassroots mentorship programs.

“GOVing Tuesday works because the ideas come directly from our faculty and staff—the people who know exactly what students and campus need to be successful,” said Kris Phillips, vice president of Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy. “It’s a grassroots approach to philanthropy at Austin Peay, and donors can see exactly where their dollars are going and the difference they’re making.”

The 2025 campaign showcased APSU’s commitment to innovation and student support. Projects ranged from an immersive virtual reality laboratory for engineering students and biofeedback machines for student-athletes to immediate-

need initiatives like the Govs Emergency Fund and laptop loans for military-affiliated students.

Community connection emerged as a prominent theme. Multiple projects reached beyond campus—mentoring local children through “Connecting the Big Govs with the Littlest Govs” and “Govs Guiding Govs,” supporting STEM education in rural Tennessee schools, and partnering with families through the Child Development Lab Initiative.

The campaign also funded practical campus improvements: culinary arts equipment, drum major stands for the Governors Own Marching Band, GIS operations center safety upgrades, and updated photo and video drones for university marketing.

Since launching the fundable project format in 2022, GOVing Tuesday has successfully funded 58 projects across campus. Each year, a committee of faculty, staff, alumni, and students carefully selects initiatives that will create meaningful impact for the APSU community.

For those who contributed to this year’s campaign, the message is clear: your support is already making a difference in the lives of Austin Peay students and programs.

## 2025 GOVing Tuesday Projects •

**Technology for Military Affiliated Students**  
*Military and Veterans Affairs*

**Athletics Bio Feedback Machine**  
*Athletics*

**Govs Guiding Govs**  
*University College*

**The Child Development Lab Initiative: Training Students, Supporting Families, Connecting Communities**  
*College of Behavioral and Health Sciences*

**Increasing STEM Education in Rural Schools**  
*Eriksson College of Education*

**Theatre Scrim**  
*College of Arts and Letters*

**Immersive Virtual Reality (VR) Laboratory for Visualizing and Learning 3D Engineering Systems**  
*College of STEM*

**Short Term Loan Calculators**  
*Felix G. Woodward Library*

**Govs Emergency Fund**

**University Photo/Video Drone Updates**  
*PR and Marketing*

**Culinary Arts Range**  
*University College*

**GOMB Drum Major Stands**  
*Governors Own Marching Band*

**GovsGoFar Passport Grant Program**  
*Academic Affairs*

**Connecting the Big Govs with the Littlest Govs—Campus Partnership for Early Learning**  
*Student Affairs*

**GIS Safety and Equipment Upgrades**  
*College of STEM*

**Business Govs Connect**  
*College of Business*

**Govs in Sync: Music Therapy That Builds Connection, Belonging, and Confidence!**  
*College of Arts and Letters*

# AP 100

---

In 2027, Austin Peay State University will celebrate 100 years of transforming lives and shaping futures. What began in 1927 as Austin Peay Normal School—a two-year teacher-training institution named for Tennessee’s visionary governor—has evolved into one of the state’s fastest-growing public universities, serving 11,185 students.

Our centennial celebration in 2027 will honor every member of the Governor family—past, present, and future. We’ll celebrate the students who have built their futures here, the faculty and staff who turn potential into achievement, the alumni who prove our impact every day, the community of Goves For Life who champion our mission and the future Governors who will shape the next century at APSU.

Every event at APSU in 2027 will mark this milestone year. A centerpiece of the celebration is the crowdsourced “Notable APSU Alumni and Friends” initiative, featuring distinguished Governors across a number of strategic categories. Throughout the year, Austin Peay will highlight these remarkable individuals—from business leaders and athletic legends to trailblazing women and university founders. The campaign continues celebrating STEM innovators, educators, health sciences professionals, military veterans, student affairs champions, and volunteer leaders. This year-long recognition creates community engagement

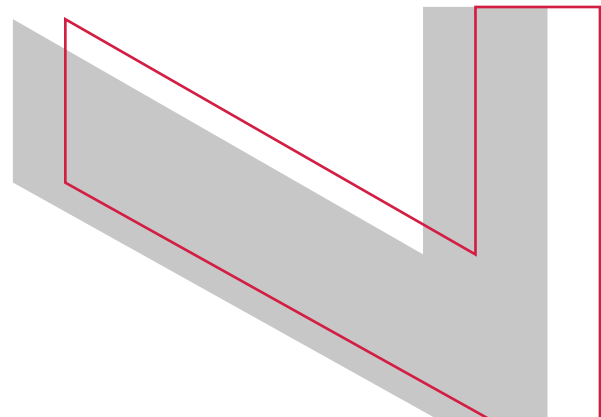
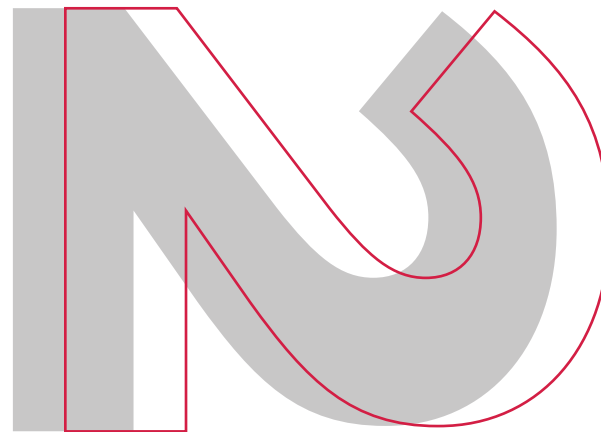
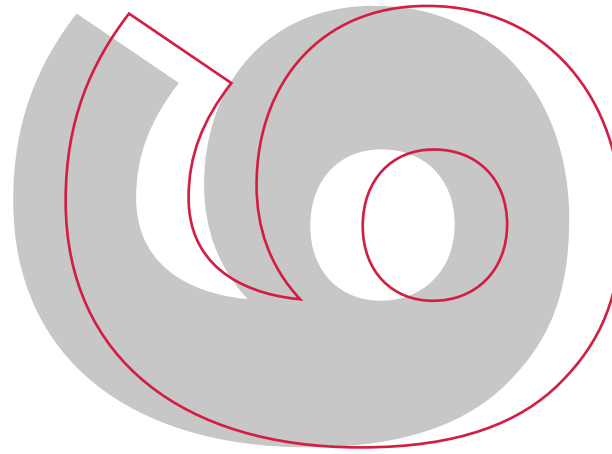
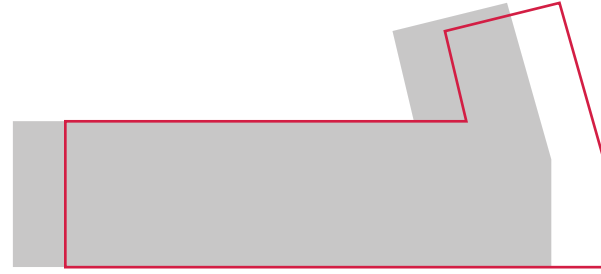
while showcasing a century of Governor excellence across every field and endeavor. Help us identify these outstanding Governors by submitting your nominations at [www.alumni.apsu.edu/notablepeayple](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/notablepeayple).

This milestone is more than a birthday for APSU. It marks a century of educational innovation on a campus that has been home to learning for generations. From its earliest days as Rural Academy in 1806 to today’s comprehensive university, this Clarksville institution has remained committed to one essential mission: providing transformational experiences for those seeking to improve their lives.

As we arrive at this pivotal moment, we invite alumni, friends, and community members to join us in shaping what comes next. This centennial celebration is about YOU—your triumphs, your transformations, your APSU story. We want to hear your favorite memories and moments that made your Governor experience unforgettable. **Become a Centennial Ambassador** to share your story and help us celebrate a century of Governor excellence at [www.alumni.apsu.edu/centennialambassador](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/centennialambassador) or email us at [alumni@apsu.edu](mailto:alumni@apsu.edu) to share your stories. Keep an eye out for our official APSU centennial celebration website. Together, we’ll celebrate a century of excellence while investing in unlimited potential for the next 100 years.



*est.*





## FROM CAMPUS TO THE DIAMOND: Gazdar and Bay Succeeding in Early MiLB Careers

Fewer than 11% of college baseball players are drafted by Major League Baseball teams. With only 0.5% to 2.1% reaching the majors, every day becomes a fight for a roster spot.

Former Austin Peay State University players Jon Jon Gazdar and John Bay are beating those odds with their respective organizations.

The St. Louis Cardinals selected Gazdar in the 11th round (321st overall) of the 2024 draft. After 19 games with Single-A Palm Beach, he earned a promotion to High-A Peoria in April 2025.

The 2024 Atlantic Sun Defensive Player of the Year and Brooks Wallace Award finalist embraced the professional mindset quickly.

“Being a pro in everything you do, and the way you do one thing is how you do everything,” Gazdar said, echoing advice he received upon entering the minors.

Gazdar led Peoria with 103 hits while posting a .984 fielding percentage.

“At Austin Peay, Roland [Fanning] was someone I worked with day in and day out, and the biggest thing I learned from him was consistency and to do the little things right,” he said.

His rapid ascent continued with a promotion to Double-A Springfield.

“The team in Springfield was extremely special. That team really knew how to win, and it reminds me of what it was like

to play for Austin Peay on that 2024 team,” Gazdar said.

Bay took a different path. The 2025 First Team All-ASUN selection went undrafted but signed with the New York Mets as a free agent. In 17 games with Single-A St. Lucie, he batted .333 with three home runs and 19 RBI, earning promotion to High-A Brooklyn.

Bay helped the Cyclones win the South Atlantic League Championship.

“It’s been pretty crazy. Going from being unsigned and not hearing my name in the draft to now sitting here in Arizona and continuing to play ball is awesome,” he said.

Baseball America’s 2025 MLB Draft Report Card named Bay as having the best pro debut of any Mets prospect, posting four home runs and a .253/.417/.458 slash line.

Bay credits his Austin Peay foundation for his success.

“It’s a mindset of I’m going to show up and protect the house,” he said. “The house can be the Mets organization; the house can be myself. I’m not going to let myself make excuses.”

Bay currently plays in the MLB Arizona Fall League and looks forward to his 2026 season with the Mets organization, while Gazdar is preparing for his first full professional season with the Cardinals.

Both players exemplify how Austin Peay prepares its athletes not just for the next level, but for success when they get there.



x *Jeff Faris*

**CONTRACT**

**EXTENDED**

After a historic 2025 season, Austin Peay State University has extended head football coach Jeff Faris' contract through 2030.

Faris said he looks forward to connecting with the community and making memories while moving the program forward.

"Jeff has the Austin Peay football program moving forward, and I am confident he will continue to build on this successful season," said Austin Peay President Dr. Mike Licari. "I am proud of the team culture he has built, which competes for championships while pursuing excellence in the classroom and being committed to our Clarksville community."

"Natalie, Jack, Eli, Cal, and I are extremely grateful and could not be more excited about our future at Austin Peay," Faris said. "Dr. Licari and our university leadership continue to double down on their commitment to our football program, and most importantly, their commitment to our student-athletes. Austin Peay continues to be aggressive and bold in this new era, and we are closing the gap in an effort to support our players like never before and to provide a student-athlete experience that is second to none."

Faris led the Governors to their first FBS victory since 1987, with a score of 34-14 in the season opener. Austin Peay also defeated No. 16 West Georgia 44-30 to secure the first season in program history with both an FBS win and a ranked-FCS victory.

During the 2025 season, the Governors' offense ranked fourth in the FCS and led the UAC in red zone offense (.935). Austin Peay ranked 13th nationally in total offense (451.1), 14th in passing offense (264.7), and 15th in scoring offense (35.1) – ranking second in the United Athletic Conference in all three categories. The Governors also ranked 25th in the FCS and third in the UAC in rushing offense (186.4).

The Governors posted a perfect 6-0 home record, marking the first undefeated home season since 1949, and achieved the fourth-best second-year turnaround in program history, improving to a 7-5 record.

"We are thrilled to extend Coach Faris as the leader of Austin Peay football," said Director of Athletics Jordan Harmon, then serving in an interim capacity. "Jeff has brought outstanding leadership, a relentless work ethic, and a clear vision for this program. His commitment to our student-athletes – both on and off the field – has elevated the standard of Govs football. We believe wholeheartedly in the direction he's leading this team, and we're excited for the future of Austin Peay under his continued guidance."

Under Faris, quarterback Chris Parson, a finalist for the 2025 Walter Payton Award, ranked fourth nationally in total offense (312.2) and points responsible for (222) – leading the UAC in both categories. Parson also ranked eighth nationally in passing yards (3,003), 10th in pass efficiency (160.8), 12th in rushing touchdowns (14), and 15th in passing touchdowns (23) – ranking second in the UAC in all four categories.

**“His commitment to our student-athletes – both on and off the field – has elevated the standard of Govs football.”**

# RED COAT SOCIETY INDUCTION CLASSES



Five distinguished supporters of Austin Peay State University athletics joined the Governors' Red Coat Society during halftime ceremonies at the men's basketball game against Florida Gulf Coast on Jan. 22 at F&M Bank Arena. The 2026 inductees are Cooper Beazley, Charles "Chuck" Cates, Barry Kulback, Maggie Kulback and Melessa Rye.

Established in 2004, the Governors' Red Coat Society serves as a hall of fame recognizing exceptional service to Austin Peay athletics. This 21st class brings the total membership to 63 inductees.

Barry and Maggie Kulback, who graduated from APSU in 1979 and 1977 respectively, have supported their alma mater with annual donations since 1982 and are longtime members of the Gobs Club and Monocle Society. Barry has also served as chair of the Fund Development Committee and vice chair of the APSU Foundation, while Maggie made history as Austin Peay's first female Student Government Association president.

The Kulbacks made a major gift during the 2010 Legacy Capital Campaign, leading the university to name the Kulback

Atrium in the Maynard Mathematics and Computer Science Building in their honor.

Dr. Cooper Beazley served as team physician for Austin Peay Athletics from 1986 until his retirement in 2024. He earned induction into the APSU Athletics Hall of Fame in 2013 and the Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor's Award of Excellence in Philanthropy in 2014.

Charles "Chuck" Cates played football for Austin Peay from 1955-57 and graduated in 1959. A longtime season ticket holder for both football and basketball, Cates has supported APSU Athletics through the Governors Club and Monocle Society for more than 20 consecutive years, helping fund student-athlete scholarships.

Melessa Rye joins her husband Len, inducted in 2008, and sister-in-law Patty, inducted in 2023, as the newest member of the Rye family in the Red Coat Society. As a devoted member of "The Gov Gang," she plays an essential role in ensuring Austin Peay's student-athletes, friends and families are well-fed at tailgates and other athletics events.



# HALL OF FAME



Savannah Amato



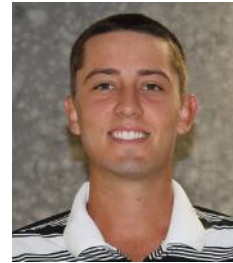
Natalia Ariza



James Green



Charles "Bud" Jenkins



Dustin Korte



Parker Phillips

## Austin Peay Athletics Announces 2026 Hall of Fame Class

Austin Peay Athletics inducted its 48th Hall of Fame Class during ceremonies held Feb. 13 and 14. This year's class includes track and field's Savannah Amato, soccer's Natalia Ariza, football's James Green, former director of facilities Charles "Bud" Jenkins, men's golf's Dustin Korte, and baseball's Parker Phillips.

The APSU Athletics Hall of Fame, which is displayed in the front lobby of the Winfield Dunn Center, inducted legendary director of athletics and coach David Aaron as its first member in 1977. This year's class of six inductees will bring the total number of individuals recognized to 151. The APSU Athletics Hall of Fame can be visited online at [LetsGoPeay.com/HOF](https://LetsGoPeay.com/HOF).

### FUTURE FOOTBALL MATCHUPS



VS.



SEPT. 18, 2027



SEPT. 14, 2030

# FOLLOWING A TRAILBLAZER'S FOOTSTEPS:

## L.M. Ellis's granddaughter Jzsade Davenport completes historic journey at APSU

**W**hen Jzsade Davenport walked across the stage at Austin Peay State University's commencement ceremony last fall, she was wearing more than just her cap and gown.

She wore a stole to honor her grandfather, L.M. Ellis — the man who broke the color barrier in Austin Peay basketball 60 years ago. Like her grandfather, Davenport is a trailblazer, graduating from the nation's first federally registered teacher apprenticeship program.

"When you sit back and think about it, in the grand scheme of things and what my grandfather has done for other African Americans who play sports — I want to tell everyone all the time," Davenport said, her voice filled with pride. "I felt like my best way to represent him while I walked across that stage was to wear my stole."

The word "trailblazer" carries special weight throughout the Ellis family. In 1962, L.M. Ellis became the first Black basketball player to play at Austin Peay and sign a scholarship with an Ohio Valley Conference school, paving the way for countless athletes. He was the first in his family to attend and graduate from college.

Davenport, 27, was the first of Ellis's grandchildren to graduate from Austin Peay — a milestone that held special significance for the basketball legend before his passing in June 2022.

"We had talked a lot about it before when I was going to Austin Peay, paying for classes," Davenport said. "He was trying to help support me and put forth what he could, because he did want to see a grandchild of his graduate from Austin Peay. I'm just glad that I get to be the one to do that for him and make him proud."

After an unsuccessful first attempt at college, Davenport found her passion while substitute teaching at Rossvie Elementary School.

"That made me realize that I loved teaching, and I wanted to do it on my own," she said of her time at Rossvie.



The Grow Your Own Teacher Residency offered Davenport a second chance. She attended another Tennessee public institution after high school, but it did not feel like home. She transferred to Austin Peay, but admitted she did not put her "best foot forward."

"When I came back, I really wanted to show what I could do," Davenport said.

At Byrns Darden Elementary, where she spent three years as a teacher resident, Davenport taught second, fourth and fifth grades while earning her degree through accelerated coursework.



“  
*I felt like my best way to represent him while I walked across that stage was to wear my stole.*  
”



“It’s really [about] teaching them those life skills that they need to take on to graduation or to middle school to high school to college even, if that’s where they decide to go,” she said. “That really warms my heart to see. And even if that’s teaching them how to properly tie their shoe or how to have a conversation or express themselves when they’re upset — that is the part of teaching I really enjoy doing.”

Today, Davenport is carrying forward her grandfather’s legacy and her own. She recently accepted a coaching position for West Creek High School’s cheer team, channeling her energy into the next generation. And somewhere, Ellis is surely standing up out of his seat, cheering for his granddaughter’s victory.



Congratulations to **Philip I. Anderson ('77)** on his 55+ year career in agriculture. From field salesman to certified crop advisor, he has served farmers across the state of Kentucky with dedication and expertise.



Congratulations to **Daniel J. Moore ('00)** as he celebrates 25 years with Watkins Uiberall, PLLC in Memphis, Tennessee.



**Dr. Kym Dukes ('83)** was awarded the Lifetime of Achievement Award at the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance's Elevating Excellence in Education Awards Dinner.



Congratulations to **Candy Johnson ('06)** for receiving the Ambassador Award for outstanding community service during the Chattanooga Hamilton County Branch NAACP's 36th Annual Ruby Hurley Image Awards.



We are grateful to **Vonda St. Amant ('83, '25)**, assistant vice president of philanthropy, for her 15 years of service Austin Peay and the Division of Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy. She will be missed!



Congratulations to **Donna Trogdon ('06)** on being named the first curriculum administrator for the Knoxville Police Department.



**Jay Albertia ('89, '91)** received the esteemed Sarah Ditmore Cooper Outstanding District Partner Award presented by the Clarksville Montgomery County School System.



**Jonell Nicholson ('12, '14, '22)**, academic advisor for the College of Business, is retiring after 17 years of service Austin Peay.



**Dan Russell ('94)** was recently promoted to senior partner, global head of assessment at RHR International.



Congratulations to **Brittaney Hitch ('16)** for her recent promotion to senior manager of contracts and bookings for the Nashville Predators.



**Dave Roszak ('94)** has been elected to the Iowa Agriculture Extension Council for Dallas County, Iowa.



**Michael Lankford ('16)** was sworn in as state representative for Tennessee House District 75 on Jan. 13.



**Marc Harris ('99)** was appointed to serve as director-at-large board member for the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) Nashville Chapter.



**Beth Rates ('17)**, former Austin Peay women's basketball player, was inducted into the Hancock County High School Athletics Hall of Fame as part of the Class of 2026 in Lewisport, Kentucky. She was recognized for embodying resiliency and excellence throughout her career.



Austin Peay State University mourns the loss of President Emeritus Dr. Sherry Hoppe, who served as the institution's first female president from 2001 to 2007. Under her leadership, Austin Peay eliminated a \$4 million federal debt and saw enrollment surge by 30%, making it the fastest-growing university in Tennessee for four consecutive years. Hoppe also oversaw the launch of APSU's first online courses, the construction or renovation of eight major buildings, the success of the university's first capital campaign, and the return of scholarship football after a decade-long hiatus.



**Jason Koontz ('19)** was recently made director of preconstruction at HC Concrete Construction Group.



**Karlos Clegg's ('22, '25)** FUSE Dance Company hosted "The Playlist" dance showcase at Clement Auditorium. Karlos is a dedicated creative who has fostered a space for talented dancers across Clarksville.



**Jaylan Downes ('22)** made his red carpet debut for *Whiskey Run* (2025). The movie is now available to stream on Prime Video.



**Jennifer Snook ('22)** has made inspiring social work contributions to Dickson County Jail's mental health program after 20 years of active military service.



**JJ Gibson ('24)** debuted his original musical, *A Brief\* History\* of Manmade\* Spacefaring\* Objects\* (\*Mostly)*, in the Mike and Sarah Gotcher Theatre.



**Sabrina Reece ('24, '25)** was named advisor for the Psi Chi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Psi at Jacksonville State University.

**Sondra C. Harris ('91)**

7/8/25

**Kade Charles Rochelle ('22, '25)**

7/12/25

**Lawrence Richard Carman ('97)**

7/16/25

**Glen Newton Pafford ('83, '05)**

7/19/25

**Jodie Ann Chavez ('84)**

7/21/25

**Mary Penelope Darnell**

7/24/25

**Joseph Samuel Winters ('70)**

7/24/25

**Gage Dean Chester**

7/26/25

**David Samuel Head ('02)**

7/29/25

**Jackie Lee Winders ('63)**

8/15/25

**Sarah Bush Bardwell ('51)**

8/17/25

**Malik Charles Taylor ('20)**

8/20/25

**David Richard Farris Sr.**

9/1/25

**Donald Barry Clardy ('69, '70)**

9/4/25

**Linda Joyce Myers ('72)**

9/5/25

**Nicole Ann Witt ('18)**

9/7/25

**Scott M. Powers**

9/16/25

**Michael Edward Plunkett ('96)**

9/19/25

**Samuel Nolen Richardson ('66)**

9/19/25

**Jimmy Adams Reynolds ('77)**

9/24/25

**Japhet Eric Nussbaumer ('63)**

9/25/25

**Servella Lee Terry**

9/25/25

**Becky Elaine Jacques ('00)**

9/28/25

**Mary Frances Hayes ('48)**

10/1/25

**Deborah Jean Fowler ('75)**

10/8/25

**Adren Lee Duncan ('77)**

10/11/25

**Joyce Summers ('61)**

10/17/25

**Karen Webb Camp ('64)**

10/25/25

**Doris Yvonne Kelsey ('58)**

11/8/25

**George Mimms Rawlins ('61)**

11/11/25

**Jeff Burkhart**

11/14/25

**David Leon Bibb ('70)**

11/19/25

**Vicky Evelyn Calderon ('78)**

11/21/25

**Christopher Douglas Haynes ('10)**

11/22/25

**Betty Roberts Shanklin ('64)**

11/23/25

**Ray Bryant Hughes ('20)**

11/29/25

**Shirley Elaine Bradley ('60)**

12/1/25

**Nathan Dwain Clark**

12/1/25

**June Ellen Cox ('01)**

12/6/25

**Lois Dawn Conroy ('89, 96)**

12/10/25

**David Mitchel Boyd ('05)**

12/11/25

**Gale Frances Pace ('65)**

12/12/25

**Rebecca Ann Glass**

12/13/25

**Martha Ann Speake ('69)**

12/15/25

**Yolanda Renee Troutman ('83)**

12/18/25

**James Ronald Gupton ('66)**

12/20/25

**Carolyn Hadley Malone ('53)**

12/20/25

**Carolyn Haley Lander ('75)**

1/8/26

**Kevin Daniel Noel ('07)**

1/8/26

**Phyllis Marie Loos**

1/11/26

**Annelle Gandy Gracey ('79, '93)**

1/11/26

**Paul Green Crenshaw ('58)**

1/12/26

**Edna June Talley ('53)**

1/12/26

## Thank you for making **#GOVingTuesday25** a success!



For Jenny C. Grier ('25), utilizing tools offered in the Military Affiliated Professionals Program (MAPP) funded through GOVing Tuesday 2024 represented more than career support—it was a catalyst for transformation.

“Without MAPP, I would have earned a degree — but I wouldn’t have found my voice. I would have walked across a stage, but I wouldn’t have walked into my purpose. MAPP gave me community, mentorship, clarity, confidence, and the courage to step into a professional role where my impact now stretches across oceans and time zones. MAPP didn’t just change my life. It multiplied my reach.”

---

Giving Tuesday, the largest giving day in the world, takes place the Tuesday after Thanksgiving every year. Austin Peay State University celebrates Giving Tuesday under the name “GOVing Tuesday.”

During the fourth annual GOVing Tuesday, the Austin Peay community came together to raise \$75,670.36. Those gifts translated into tangible, visible impact across 17 projects that directly support students, faculty, and programs in meaningful ways.