

# Austin Peay

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

The official alumni magazine of  
Austin Peay State University

Spring 2025

***TUITION-FREE  
AT AUSTIN PEAY  
ON THE MOVE!***





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**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Dear Austin Peay community,

As we celebrate the renewal and optimism that comes along with the spring, I'm thrilled to share with you the remarkable strides we're making at Austin Peay State University. Our campus is alive with possibilities, and our commitment to accessibility and excellence has never been stronger.

In the pages ahead, you'll learn about the Tuition-Free at Austin Peay program, which just launched for new freshmen and transfer students enrolling in Fall 2025. This initiative represents a major turning point in our university's history and will open doors for countless students who would otherwise find higher education out of reach. It promises to change lives while shaping the region's future.

I'm also proud to announce that APSU has become the fastest-growing public university in Tennessee, a testament to the quality education and experiences we offer. We're ready to build on this momentum as we inspire the next generation of Governors to pursue their dreams.

The spirit of growth and innovation extends beyond our classrooms. Austin Peay is truly on the move, expanding our footprint both on campus and in the community. This summer, we'll celebrate the grand opening of our state-of-the-art Health Professions Building and make a significant leap forward in our ability to train the next generation of healthcare professionals. This cutting-edge facility will be the largest academic building on campus and aims to enhance the student learning experience while addressing Tennessee's critical healthcare needs.

Equally exciting is the completion of the O'Malley Family Welcome Center. This new campus gateway serves as a warm introduction to Austin Peay, embodying our commitment to putting people first in everything we do. It's a clear visual statement about who we are and the value we place on the community.

Speaking of community, our Peayple in the Community initiative continues to demonstrate Austin Peay's commitment to making a difference in Clarksville. This annual tradition kicks off each academic year and has become a cornerstone of campus culture. Our students, faculty, and staff contributed over 3,600 volunteer hours to local organizations during last year's event, proving that service isn't just an activity at APSU - it's an integral part of our identity. We're excited for the next Peayple in the Community event in August, where we'll once again come together to help our neighbors.

Each of these developments is part of a larger vision as we approach our centennial in 2027. We're committed to building a university that's not only academically enriching but deeply connected to the needs of our students and the people around us. Every new building, project, and program is a step toward realizing these goals.

I invite you to share in our excitement for Austin Peay's future by reading the stories throughout this magazine. Whether you're a recent graduate or a longtime alum, you're an essential part of the university's story.

Your achievements, support, and continued engagement inspire us, and we're grateful for your part in shaping Austin Peay's legacy. Together, we're building a future where every Governor can achieve their fullest potential and contribute to a better world.

Let's Go Peay!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mike Licari".

Dr. Mike Licari  
APSU President





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## Austin Peay's Govs Success Institute: Empowering first-year students for college success

First-generation college students make up a significant portion of Austin Peay's enrollment, and the Govs Success Institute (GSI) allows them to experience campus life before their first semester starts.

The week-long initiative was launched over the summer and includes teambuilding activities, academic workshops, and introductions to campus resources. GSI also plans to engage with students by creating a Living-Learning Community for participants, which will allow them to maintain connections and support each other throughout their college careers.



## National security program rapidly grows, establishes unique European partnership

Austin Peay's Institute for National Security and Military Studies (INSMS) is the first of its kind in the southeastern United States, offering a bachelor's degree in national security studies that emphasizes intelligence studies and corporate security.

With the support of the U.S. Embassy, INSMS has also become the only American institution of higher education partnered with the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, Serbia. By establishing additional partnerships in Eastern Europe this year, INSMS is positioning Tennessee at the forefront of national security through education and security cooperation.



## APSU students earn nationally competitive Gilman-McCain Scholarships

From immersive cultural experiences to service projects, the Gilman-McCain Scholarship offers countless study abroad opportunities for military dependents - but only four APSU students have earned the award in the last 15 years.

Among them are senior communication major Izabel Hershey and junior health and human performance major Bo ram Kim, who each received funding this semester through the nationally competitive scholarship. Hershey traveled to London over spring break to work with multiple nonprofit organizations, while Kim is spending four months in South Korea learning how to teach Korean to native English speakers.





### Aviation Science program expands with new hangar acquisition and fleet growth

Austin Peay State University's Aviation Science program achieved significant milestones in 2024, solidifying its position as Tennessee's premier helicopter pilot training program. To support its growth, the university acquired Hangar 5 at the Clarksville-Montgomery County Regional Airport. This 13,700-square-foot facility provides space for aircraft storage, classrooms, and industry-standard flight simulation stations.

The program's enrollment has also surged to 52 students, from experienced Army veterans to first-time freshmen with no cockpit experience. To accommodate this growth and enhance training capabilities, APSU expanded its fleet in May 2024 and now boasts six aircraft. To learn more, visit [apsu.edu/engineering-technology/aviation-science](https://apsu.edu/engineering-technology/aviation-science).

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### Austin Peay ranked No. 1 for online programs in Tennessee by Forbes



Austin Peay has been named the top school for online programming in Tennessee by Forbes, marking a significant milestone in the institution's long-standing commitment to distance education.

The ranking evaluated 24 of the state's accredited online schools based on criteria including affordability and student outcomes. Austin Peay offers over 50 online programs that cater to diverse populations, including military personnel, working professionals, and nontraditional students.

About 60% of the university's students take at least one online course, and robust quality assurance practices ensure they meet traditional classroom standards. The College of Graduate Studies is particularly focused on distance education, with more than 30 post-graduate degrees and certificates that can be completed fully online.





### **Career Success Center modernizes student employment services**

Thanks to new initiatives like the Handshake platform, Austin Peay's Career Success Center is helping students find more pathways to employment than ever before. Over 3,000 APSU students have activated accounts on the platform, which connects them with over 900,000 employers nationwide.

Handshake's impact was evident at the most recent Fall Career Expo, with over 750 students participating - a 50% increase from last year. The Career Success Center has also enhanced its spring programming by moving the Spring Career Expo to February 2025 and expanding the scope of career summits for faculty and staff.



## College of Business's grad programs see record-breaking enrollment



APSU's College of Business experienced unprecedented growth in 2024, with graduate student enrollment surging by 102%. Driving this trend is the Master of Business Administration program, which has become one of the university's largest graduate offerings and is designed to reflect the needs of the Middle Tennessee region.

The MBA curriculum emphasizes real-world application, stewardship and strategic analysis and offers a flexible structure with fully online course options. Students will gain the skills necessary to analyze, project, and engineer strategic company plans for future growth in a multi-faceted domestic and global environment.



### **Dr. Mitchell Cordova named Austin Peay's next provost and vice president for Academic Affairs**

Austin Peay State University welcomes Dr. Mitchell Cordova as its new provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, effective July 1. With over 27 years of higher education experience, Cordova joins Austin Peay from Florida Gulf Coast University, where he led significant improvements in student success and enrollment as vice president for Student Success and Enrollment Management. A distinguished scholar and fellow of multiple professional organizations, Cordova brings expertise in biomechanics and a passion for innovation in education. His appointment promises to enhance the university's commitment to academic excellence and student achievement, aligning with the university's "Experience Austin Peay" strategic plan. Cordova succeeds Dr. Maria Cronley, who will return to a faculty role in the College of Business.





## AVIATION GOVS

Provide support in Hurricane Helene's aftermath

**A**fter Hurricane Helene's devastating impact on North Carolina, thousands of private citizens poured into the area to coordinate relief efforts and aid for those suffering losses.

Among those who leapt into action were Austin Peay State University aviation science flight instructor Sean Jones and senior Ray Johnson, whose quick actions and dedication brought much-needed help to the affected areas.

As the devastation became apparent, John Kinnard with AeroLuxe Aviation reached out to Johnson, who had completed his commercial training with the Nashville-based company, with an invitation to join the relief flights.

"We didn't even reach North Carolina, and we started missions," Johnson said, describing how they distributed supplies like baby essentials to storm-ravaged communities after landing for fuel in Gatlinburg. "As soon as we landed, we operated out of a Harley-

Davidson dealership, flying up and down the mountains to the lakes, helping people out."

After a few days, Johnson needed to return to Clarksville, and Sean Jones was trying to find his way to the Tar Heel State.

Jones, a 2022 aviation program graduate and now an instructor with a special operations aviation background and a student in Austin Peay's Master of Business Administration program, was alerted to the need for assistance by fellow special operations professionals. He was prepared to fly his own aircraft to North Carolina, but closed runways at home kept him grounded.

"I called Sean hoping he could come get me, and he told me the runway was shut down and he couldn't get his plane out," Johnson said. "When I found another guy to come get me, I called Sean back and asked if he wanted to ride with him to replace me."





“

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”

Upon arrival, Jones integrated into a network of special operations veterans and civilian volunteers tasked with delivering medical supplies and urgent assistance to remote areas.

“It reminded me a lot of combat,” Jones said. “In many ways, it was worse just due to the level of devastation.”

The Harley dealership became the holding area for supplies pouring in from across the country. For days after the disaster, Jones, Johnson, and APSU aviation alumni Sean-Michael Horn and Anthony Vasquez were part of the group that moved the most supplies in the region, providing aid to thousands.

The relief operation became a testament to community resilience, with volunteers from across the country. Firehouses, police stations, and churches became supply areas, and locals banded together to support one another.

While red tape could be a logistical hurdle, the special operations volunteers and Austin Peay's aviation alumni used their training to quickly get aid to those who needed it most.


“I'm proud to be a Tennessean,” Jones said. “I've been here since 1994, and I'm proud of all the guys from Austin Peay who just jumped up and went and showed such a tremendous amount of pride and dedication. I know if we'd had more seats, we could have filled them with APSU people.”









A close-up photograph of a violinist's left hand on the neck of a violin. The hand is adorned with several colorful beaded bracelets. The violin is dark wood, and the bow is visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of blue and purple light, creating a moody atmosphere.

# *P*EAYPLE'S CONCERT





# *f*OLK MEETS RAP:

## APSU'S FIDDLIN' PEAYPLE SHARES STAGE WITH MONEYBAGG YO

What happens when you mix folk music with a rap concert? Just ask Fiddlin' Peayple, a student-led ensemble from Austin Peay State University that won over thousands of Moneybagg Yo fans at F&M Bank Arena with a setlist of "folkified" pop hits.

The group won a slot opening for the platinum-selling rapper at the inaugural Peayple's Concert after placing first in the Battle @ Browning, a musical competition hosted by the Division of Student Affairs.

"I can't express the awe and pride we felt when the Fiddlin' Peayple earned that spot," said René Villarreal, an alum who performed with the ensemble at both events. "For the Battle @ Browning we decided to play our strongest, most crowd-pleasing songs, and we ultimately came to the same conclusion for the arena show: play the music we play well and have fun doing it."

Fiddlin' Peayple's arrangements for the show brought in more rock influence while keeping their signature sound. They performed music by artists from Cage the Elephant to Dolly Parton.

"No one expected to come to a Moneybagg Yo concert and hear us play Jolene," said senior music education and performance major Olivia Zerkle. "There were some confused people in the audience, but once we started rolling everyone got into it - and it exposed the crowd to a type of music they might not normally listen to."

Junior music education major Zach Lowery said several audience members were cheering and singing along, which made it a more meaningful experience for him.



“As a classically trained bassist, it’s nice to play a different type of music,” he said. “I’ve also never been the kind of person to go out and stand in front of the public until this last year, so it’s nice to be more open and confident socially.”

The excitement Fiddlin’ Peayple felt was immediate, but they didn’t realize just how impactful their performance was until later.

“Faculty I didn’t even know saw the show,” sophomore music education major Mattie Smith said. “A math teacher told me I did a great job at the concert, and one of my friends from high school was

there too. I thought, ‘Dadgum, this is really spreading.’”

Dr. Emily Hanna Crane, professor of music and the director of Fiddlin’ Peayple, was impressed by the ensemble’s hard work and talent throughout the process.

“When I saw the video of their performance at the Battle @ Browning, I knew they would win, and I felt immense pride as a teacher and mentor when they performed at F&M Bank Arena,” she said. “The students are doing the work to make this possible, and it’s amazing to see.”



## PEAYPLE'S CONCERT KICKS OFF NEW ERA AT F&M BANK ARENA

APSU made history in September 2024 with the inaugural Peayple's Concert, bringing platinum-selling rapper Moneybagg Yo to F&M Bank Arena for an unforgettable performance.

The Memphis artist, known for hits like “WHISKEY WHISKEY” and “Time Today,” headlined the event, which brought together the campus and the larger community. Students received special pricing with tickets as low as \$20, but the concert drew fans from across the region and established a new Austin Peay tradition.



# AUSTIN PEAY PARTNERS WITH BMW

**TO CELEBRATE VETERANS WEEK**

Hundreds of military-affiliated students, faculty, and staff gathered at Austin Peay State University from Nov. 4-9, 2024 to celebrate the campus's second annual Veterans Week, featuring new partnerships with BMW and a full schedule of community events.

From free meals and resource fairs to exclusive experiences like BMW test drives, each day highlighted Austin Peay's position as Tennessee's leading choice for military-affiliated students, who represent 30% of the student body.

"Veterans Week at APSU is more than just a series of events; it's a testament to the strong bonds between our university, our military-affiliated students, and the Clarksville community," said retired Army Maj. Gen. Walt Lord, Austin Peay's vice president for Military and Veterans Affairs. "This week showcases the unwavering commitment APSU has to those who have served our nation."

Highlights included the BMW Premier Block Party and Test Drive, where attendees could

try out new luxury vehicles over lunch with community partners, and the Driven by Excellence BMW Tailgate, featuring car showcases and an M School sweepstakes.

"It's great being at these events to connect with other veterans in the community and see what the resources on campus can offer," said Jon-Michael Morgan, a sophomore cybersecurity major and Marine Corps veteran. "I knew Austin Peay had a lot of experience working with military-affiliated students, and that gave me a lot of comfort, so I decided to use my GI Bill here."

Morgan attended several events with Rachel Masters, a junior English major and Air Force veteran. They connected with campus resources like Veterans Upward Bound while networking with other military-affiliated students.

"It helps you not to feel like an outsider when you come into a school where there are a







It's incredibly heartening to see a company of BMW's caliber recognize the value of our military community and choose to invest in their future."

lot of veterans, and you can enjoy activities together," Masters said. "I'm one of the older students in my classes, so it's nice to meet and spend time with other people who served. I love Austin Peay, and it's been a great experience here."

While several military-affiliated students attended Veterans Week, the celebration also recognized faculty and staff for their service.

The BMW events were particularly popular among veterans like Maurice Thompson, an inventory supervisor and Army retiree who appreciated the chance to engage with luxury vehicles.

"We appreciate Austin Peay putting this on for the military community," he said. "It's great to be able to come out and test drive these beautiful cars. I actually own a BMW myself, so I'm very excited about the opportunity."

Lord said the university's partnership with BMW reflects the community's support for military-affiliated students and creates new



opportunities for Austin Peay to impact service members and their families.

"It's incredibly heartening to see a company of BMW's caliber recognize the value of our military community and choose to invest in their future," Lord said. "We're excited about the possibilities this opens up for future collaborations and the positive impact it will have on our military-affiliated students."

Austin Peay State University is committed to fostering meaningful partnerships with businesses and organizations that align with the university's mission and values. If you'd like to learn more about creating a corporate or strategic partnership with Austin Peay contact Erin Morton, Senior Director of Corporate Relations and Strategic Alliances, at [mortoner@apsu.edu](mailto:mortoner@apsu.edu) or 931-221-7130.



# TUITION-FREE AT AUSTIN PEAY

## SET TO TRANSFORM TENNESSEE STUDENTS' LIVES

Austin Peay State University is launching its new Tuition-Free at Austin Peay program in Fall 2025, enabling eligible Tennessee students to pursue their undergraduate education without the burden of tuition and related educational fees.

"Every student deserves the opportunity to pursue their dreams through higher education, regardless of their financial circumstances," said APSU President Mike Licari. "This program reflects our deep commitment to making college accessible and affordable for Tennessee families. We want students to focus on their education and future, not worrying about how they'll pay for tuition."

The program will cover tuition and related educational fees for incoming freshmen and transfer students who meet these requirements:

- They must be Tennessee residents or graduates of Fort Campbell High School.
- Their household income cannot exceed \$75,000 per year.
- Students must qualify for the Tennessee HOPE Scholarship.
- They must enroll as full-time students beginning in Fall 2025 or later.

Tuition-Free at Austin Peay is a last-dollar program that covers any remaining tuition and related educational fees after all other financial aid, scholarships, and grants have been applied. This innovative approach allows students to concentrate on their studies without the burden of financial concerns.

"This initiative directly supports our strategic vision of being the region's university of choice for those seeking to improve their lives," said Dr. Maria Cronley, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. "We're removing obstacles so students can focus on what matters most – their education and future careers."

Prospective students must apply to APSU, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and sign up for Governors Orientation by May 1, 2025, to qualify for this program.

For more information about the Tuition-Free at Austin Peay program or to apply, visit [www.apsu.edu/tuition-free](http://www.apsu.edu/tuition-free) or contact the Office of Admissions at 931-221-7661 or [admissions@apsu.edu](mailto:admissions@apsu.edu).

## APSU EMERGES AS TENNESSEE'S FASTEST-GROWING UNIVERSITY

Austin Peay State University has achieved the highest enrollment percentage increase among Tennessee's public universities, demonstrating its growing appeal as an accessible option for higher education.

The latest data from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) shows that Austin Peay's total enrollment rose by 8.2% from 2023-24, increasing from 9,649 to 10,439 students. This growth rate is the highest among the state's Locally Governed Institutions (LGIs) and outpaces all universities in the University of Tennessee System.

"Our enrollment surge means more than just numbers - it represents thousands of people who have chosen Austin Peay to shape their futures," said APSU President Mike Licari. "The university's focus on student-centered learning, innovative programs, and community partnerships has clearly resonated, and we're committed to building on this momentum and evolving as a leading institution in our state."









# Nourishing Minds and Futures:

## APSU's S.O.S. Food Pantry

At Austin Peay State University, a pioneering initiative is changing lives and setting new standards in addressing campus food insecurity. The Support Our Students (S.O.S) Food Pantry, the first of its kind in the state, is taking a holistic approach to combating hunger on campus and beyond.

“Hunger never walks in the door alone,” said Alexandra Wills, APSU’s director of Community Engagement and Sustainability. “There’s always more to the story for each person who visits our pantry.”

This philosophy drives the S.O.S. Food Pantry’s comprehensive approach to supporting students and their entire families. The S.O.S. Food Pantry stands apart for its commitment to helping entire families, not just individual students. If a student has dependents living with

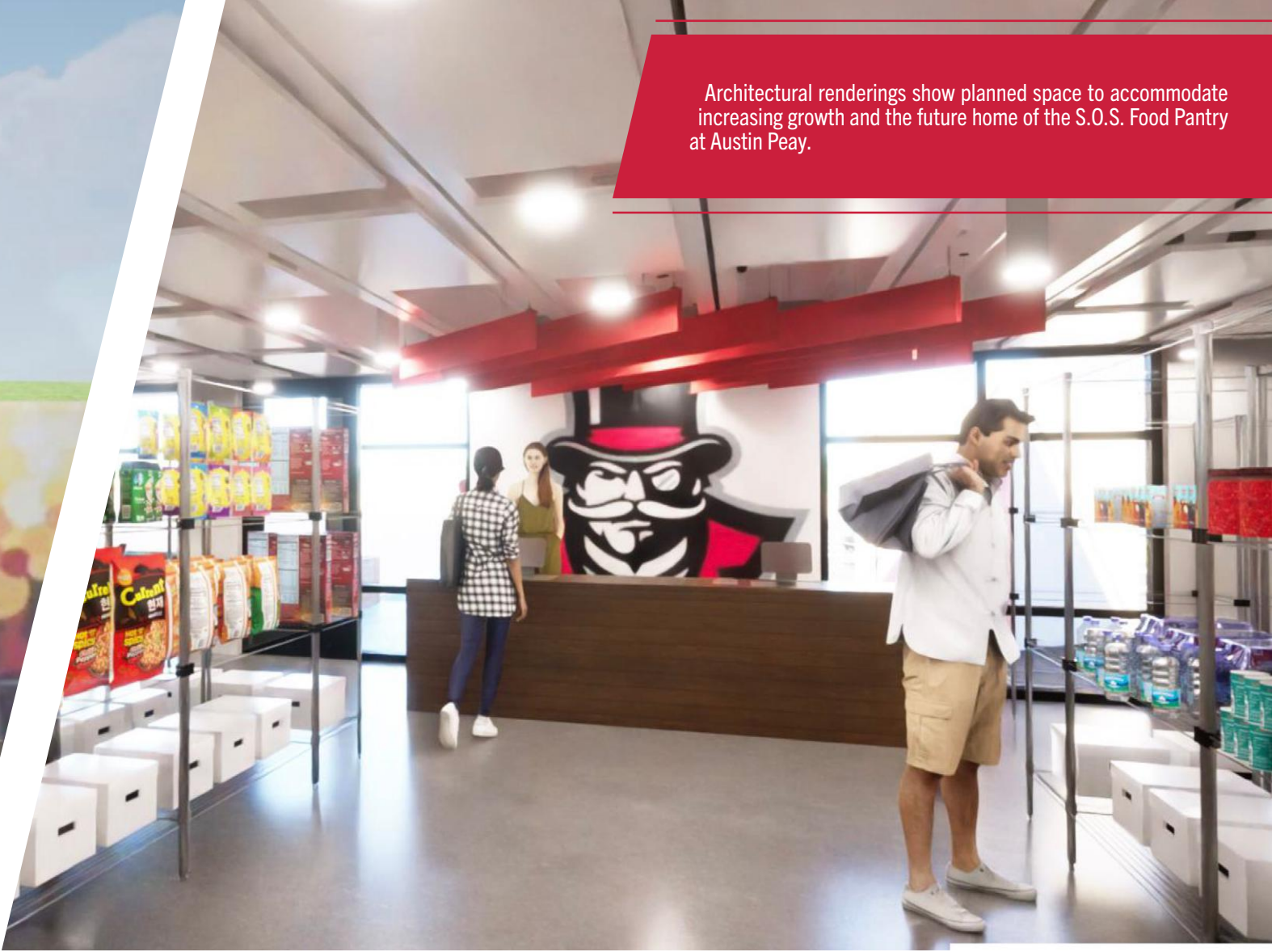
them – from children to grandparents – the pantry provides food for everyone. This approach has a significant impact: in a recent week, 91 individual students visited the pantry, but 143 people were actually fed.

The S.O.S. Food Pantry goes beyond traditional shelf-stable food distribution. Students manage the on-campus production of fresh produce, eggs, and honey. The pantry freezes produce to extend its availability. Features like hydroponic towers, winter coat racks, and holiday meal boxes further demonstrate the pantry’s commitment to holistic support of students through every season.

Students like Morgan Absher, a mother of three, have found relief through the pantry.



Architectural renderings show planned space to accommodate increasing growth and the future home of the S.O.S. Food Pantry at Austin Peay.



“It has been a blessing to be able to visit and receive the basics,” Absher said. “I’m able to take items off my grocery list and put that money toward other bills and things needed in my household.”

The pantry has also been a lifesaver for freshman Khiella Riley, who arrived at APSU without external support.

“It has provided me with the security I need to focus on my education, without the constant worry about where my next meal will come from,” Riley said.

The S.O.S. Food Pantry is more than a student resource – it’s a community. It provides not only food, but also a listening ear and connections to additional services for students at Austin Peay. As student needs continue to grow, the pantry is poised for expansion to reach even more of the campus community. Through the S.O.S. Food Pantry, Austin Peay is nourishing minds, futures, and the community, one meal at a time.

For more information about supporting the S.O.S. Food Pantry, contact Victor Felts, director of philanthropy for the Division of Student Affairs, at [feltsv@apsu.edu](mailto:feltsv@apsu.edu) or 931-221-7167. Gifts can be made online at [givetoapsu.com/foodpantry](http://givetoapsu.com/foodpantry).

**“There’s always more to the  
*story* for each person who  
visits our pantry.”**



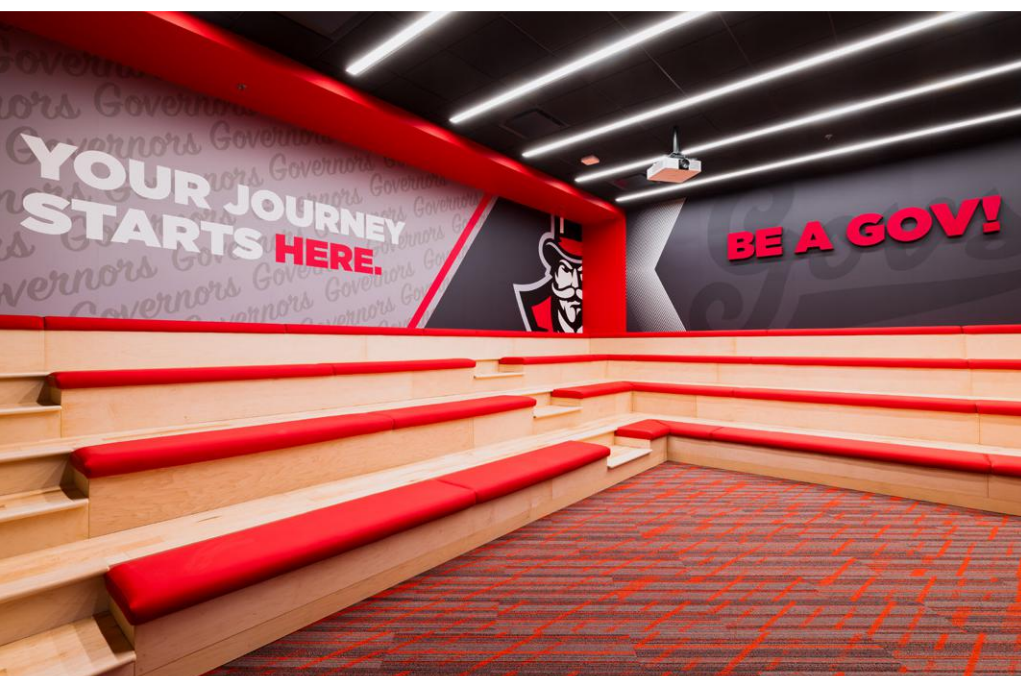




The O'Malley Family Welcome Center will serve as a gateway to Austin Peay for prospective students and community members, anchoring the university's growth into downtown Clarksville.

Visitors to the center will be able to meet with admissions officers, financial aid counselors, and academic advisors, or set up campus tours to learn more about what APSU has to offer.

The facility was named after APSU Board of Trustees Vice-Chair Mike O'Malley and his family for their longstanding support of the university.





O'MALLEY FAMILY  
WELCOME CENTER

LET'S GO PEAY!



APSU's growing healthcare-related programs will move into the state-of-the-art Health Professions Building this summer, establishing a new hub for innovation and education on campus.

The 114,000-square-foot building will feature research labs, active learning classrooms, and collaborative learning spaces designed to train the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Funding for the project was approved by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2021, with additional support from the Clarksville-Montgomery County Community Health Foundation.







# MOVIE





## AUSTIN PEAY'S FULL SPECTRUM LEARNING OPENS SENSORY ROOM FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Austin Peay State University's Full Spectrum Learning (FSL) program expanded its reach last fall with a new sensory-friendly room to support neurodivergent students. Located on the first floor of the Felix G. Woodward Library, the space is designed to help autistic students relax and find calm amid the stresses of college life.

"It's a space for them to center themselves and self-regulate before they go off to class or spend a few hours working in the study room on an English paper," said Abegayle Goldblatt, the FSL program coordinator who spearheaded the project.

The sensory room features activities, objects, and furnishings to meet students' diverse needs, including fidget toys, bean bag chairs, dimmed lighting, a rocking chair, yoga mats, earplugs, and a white noise machine. Research shows that 80% of autistic children have sensory processing disorder, making it harder for them to focus in academic settings.

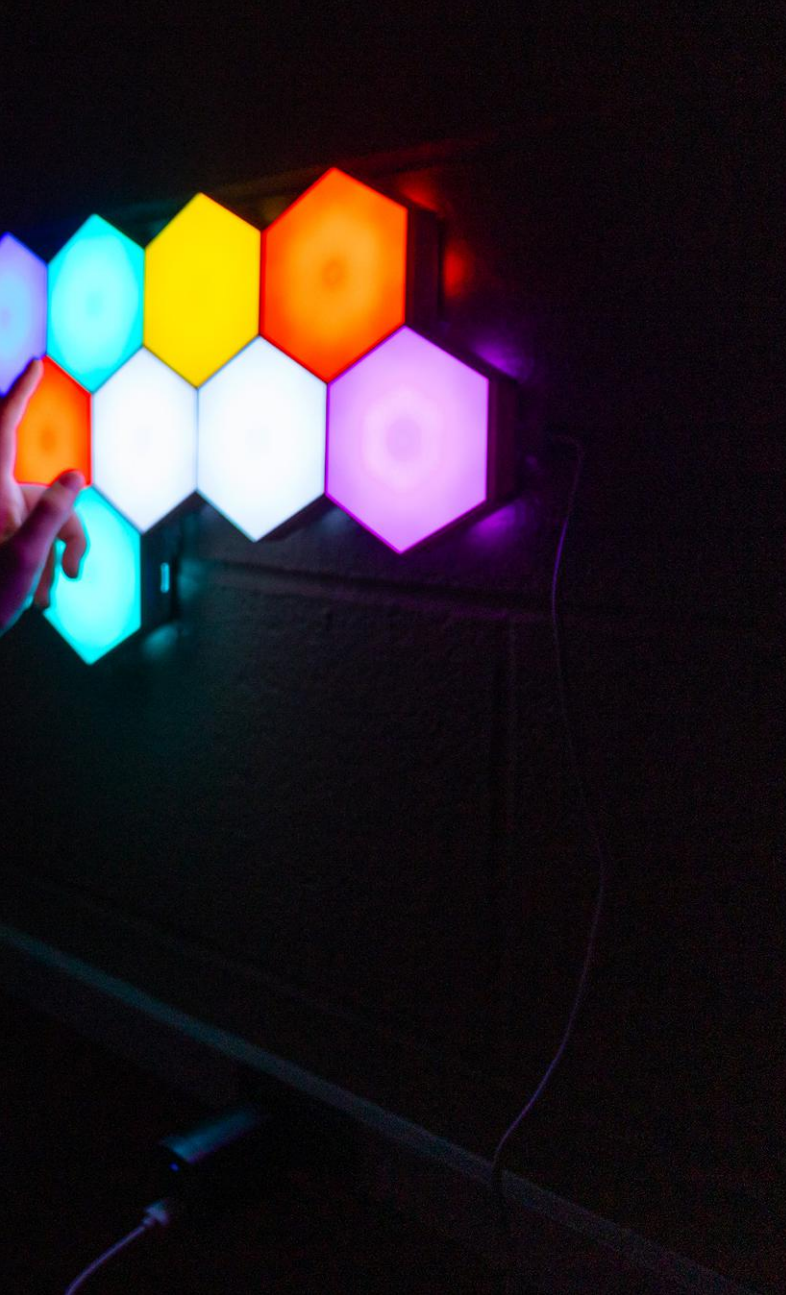
The space intentionally incorporates items requested by students to address their needs and foster a welcoming environment.

Diamond Brant, FSL community relations coordinator, created a binder of breathing techniques and a yoga pose guide to adorn the walls. With more student-centered amenities such as rocking chairs and hammocks across campus, Goldblatt sees the sensory room as another step to making Austin Peay more welcoming and inclusive.

"The whole campus is already moving toward that direction, which is just amazing," Goldblatt said. "The library has opened up their facility to us and worked with us, which is so nice. It's a work in progress. I'm excited that we have this space, and that the whole APSU community is jumping on board."

While the room is only open to FSL students and mentors, Goldblatt hopes to expand access as the initiative grows. FSL is partnering with



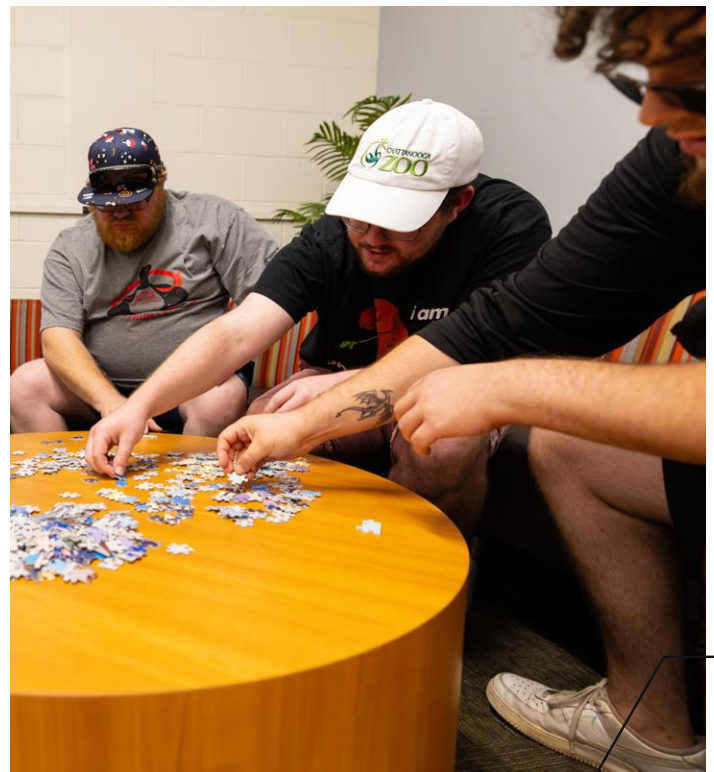


## About Full Spectrum Learning

The APSU Full Spectrum Learning program supports students with autism spectrum disorder. It offers class cohorts, peer and faculty mentors, tutors, study hours, and support meetings with FSL staff. The program aims to help autistic students complete their college degrees and transition into the workforce.

## About the Eriksson College of Education

The Eriksson College of Education prepares dynamic teachers and educational leaders to positively impact communities and schools in the 21st century. The college offers initial and advanced licensure and non-licensure programs. The college's programs, including the nationally known Grow Your Own Teacher Residency, are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). For more, visit [apsu.edu/education](https://apsu.edu/education).



Autism Tennessee to explore creating sensory-friendly spaces across campus.

The project is a personal labor of love for Goldblatt. She even dedicated a cozy “Beanie Corner” to her beloved dog who passed away when she began working on the space.

“It’s got the fuzziest bean bag, her pillow, and the weighted blanket,” she said. “It was really important for me to have a corner where the students can feel the calmness she provided me.”

Student feedback has been positive, with many appreciating a space to decompress. FSL aims to survey students again to ensure the room continues to meet their needs.

The FSL sensory room in Room 119 of Woodward Library is open on weekdays. Students can access it by checking in at the FSL study room.







Austin Peay is thriving in season of growth due to your support of several strategic endeavors.

I'm happy to share that Austin Peay State University leads Tennessee's public higher education landscape, posting a remarkable 8.2% enrollment surge — the highest growth rate among all state universities. We're proud to be the top choice for so many students shaping their futures.

Austin Peay will also launch its new Tuition-Free at Austin Peay program this fall. This initiative will enable eligible Tennessee students to pursue their undergraduate education without the burden of tuition and related educational fees and allow the work of the Division of Alumni,

Engagement and Philanthropy to make an even bigger impact on student achievement. We continue to open doors to higher education through programs like these and from investments provided by alumni and friends like you.

Giving Tuesday, the largest giving day in the world, takes place the Tuesday after Thanksgiving each year. Austin Peay celebrates it as "GOVing Tuesday." This year, we once again completed a fundable project day. Out of the more than 55 project proposals submitted by faculty and staff, 13 were selected as the focus of GOVing Tuesday 2024. With the help of alumni and friends, the university fully funded all projects by the end of the day on Dec. 3, 2024 with \$58,645.20 raised. That's a 29.4% increase from 2023. Thank you to all who helped us achieve this goal.

We launched the 2025 SHAPE Campaign, which is designed for APSU faculty and staff to support their university by helping to fund scholarships, research funding, improved facilities and hands-on learning experiences to elevate the Austin Peay experience. Many faculty and staff members participate in SHAPE by contributing to Gobs Give 2025, the university's annual online giving campaign. The Gobs Give 2025 theme "On The Move" demonstrates the university's ongoing commitment to growth and innovation to benefit the student experience at Austin Peay. Your investment in the Gobs For Life Experience increases the impact we have APSU's academic colleges, athletics programs, division of Military and Veterans Affairs, and Student Affairs.

Through your generosity and engagement, we are not only shaping the present but also laying the foundation for a bright and promising future. Together, we are creating a legacy of excellence that will benefit generations of Gobs to come.

Sincerely,

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

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# CANDLELIGHT BALL

**Saturday, May 3, 2025 | 6:00 p.m.**  
**Renaissance Hotel • Downtown Nashville**  
**611 Commerce St., Nashville, TN 37203**

The Candlelight Ball is an Austin Peay State University tradition with a history of providing scholarships to students each year. Established in 1984, the ball was founded by the late retired Army Brig. Gen. Wendell H. Gilbert to raise scholarship funding for APSU students. Gilbert served as APSU's vice president for Development and University Relations for 17 years.

Over time, underwriters and guests have aided in scholarships and funding for campus renovations. We are proud that this event offers a meaningful way for community members to give back to APSU, while also helping students achieve their goals and enhancing the Austin Peay Experience for our entire campus community.

**In 2024 at the 40th Annual Candlelight Ball, we set a record-breaking number by raising over \$237,000 for the university and plan to break that record once again.**

**Thank you to Wyatt Johnson Toyota for serving as our Governor Sponsor,  
which is the 2025 Title Sponsor for Candlelight Ball.**

**RSVP by April 15 by visiting [www.alumni.apsu.edu/candlelightball2025](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/candlelightball2025)**



The Austin Peay Offices of Alumni, Engagement and Annual Giving have been working to intentionally engage our alumni, friends and campus population to benefit the Gobs For Life Experience.

We're thrilled to announce the success of our Graduating Class Gift Campaign, which has raised \$50,000 to support future APSU students. This initiative began in 2018 and has grown significantly. It now includes contributions from associate and postgraduate degree holders, showcasing the generosity and spirit of our diverse graduate population.

The Domino's Run for Gobs 5K, held on Oct. 5, 2024, was the most successful event of its kind to date. With a turnout of 233 participants, we raised \$8,165 to support areas across the Austin Peay campus. We look forward to this year's event on Oct. 11. Our goal is to see this run grow not only in numbers but also in its impact on our university community.

We look forward to celebrating the 41st Candlelight Ball in May with our loyal donors and community members. As our premier event, we can't wait to see the impact the scholarships and other funds raised at Candlelight Ball will have on Austin Peay students as we approach the university's centennial in 2027.

We recently hosted Lunch with Gobs, a unique opportunity for APSU alumni and friends to connect with current students in an informal setting. We invited our alumni and friends to share a meal, impart career advice, discuss life after graduation and share their favorite APSU experiences with students.

We can't wait to see our alumni and friends back on campus this fall for the many exciting events we have planned, including Homecoming 2025.

Visit [alumni.apsu.edu](http://alumni.apsu.edu) for the full list of APSU alumni and community engagement events. If you have questions, suggestions, need additional information about our events, or want to form a new alumni chapter, contact us at 931-221-7979.

Sincerely,

Brad Averitt ('10, '17)

Assistant Vice President for Alumni and Engagement





## Austin Peay Celebrates Commitment to Leadership, Scholarship, Service with New NPHC Plaza

Austin Peay State University (APSU) recently unveiled its new National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) Plaza, marking a significant milestone in recognizing the contributions of historically Black Greek-letter organizations to the campus community. The ribbon-cutting ceremony on Oct. 26, 2024, was attended by university officials, students, alumni, and community members.

The NPHC, also known as the Divine Nine, comprises nine influential African American Greek-letter organizations that have shaped student life and leadership at APSU for decades. The Divine Nine are: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. The new plaza serves as a physical representation of the university's dedication to celebrating these organizations and their impact on campus culture.

Dr. Leonard Clemons, APSU's vice president of Student Affairs, opened the ceremony by highlighting the importance of the NPHC organizations in fostering leadership, scholarship, and service among students.

"These nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations have been pillars of leadership, scholarship, and service on our campus for decades," Dr. Clemons said. "They have fostered a sense of community, provided mentorship, and instilled values that our students carry with them long after graduation."

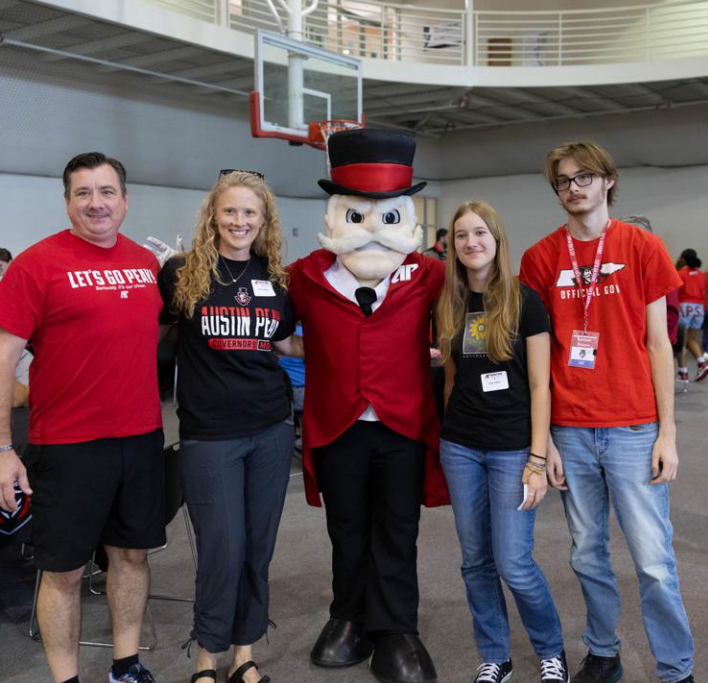
The plaza aligns with APSU's mission of creating an inclusive campus environment. At Austin Peay, diversity is seen as a strength that enriches the academic environment, broadens perspectives, and prepares students for an interconnected world. The NPHC organizations have been at the forefront of promoting these values and fostering a sense of belonging for all students.

The NPHC Plaza stands as a lasting symbol of APSU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was created through collaborative efforts of the university administration, alumni, current NPHC members, and donors. It represents the Divine Nine's history on campus and ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive environment for all students.

The NPHC Plaza unveiling is part of APSU's broader initiative to enhance the educational experience for its diverse student body. By recognizing and celebrating the contributions of historically Black Greek-letter organizations, APSU is taking concrete steps to ensure that all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed.

The NPHC Plaza serves as a reminder of the power of diversity and the importance of creating spaces that honor and celebrate the various cultures and traditions that make up the fabric of campus life. It embodies APSU's commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where all students can thrive and take part in the Govs For Life Experience.





# Generations of Govs:

## APSU's Legacy Pinning Ceremony Unites Past and Present in Record Numbers

Austin Peay State University's Legacy Student Pinning Ceremony, a tradition since 2017, saw significant growth in 2024. The event, which honors students with family ties to APSU, welcomed a record-breaking 367 attendees this year, up from 299 in 2023.

The ceremony, held on Aug. 22, 2024, just before convocation, brought together 112 legacy students, 234 legacy family members, and 21 National Alumni Association members or faculty/staff. This significant increase reflects the university's commitment to fostering a strong sense of community through the Govs For Life Experience.

During the ceremony, alumni pinned special pins on their legacy students, symbolizing the continuation of the APSU tradition within families. President Mike Licari warmly welcomed the new students. New to this year's event, the deans of each college personally escorted their incoming students to convocation following the pinning ceremony. This addition underscores the university's commitment to fostering personal connections between incoming students and academic leadership, helping new Govs feel welcomed and supported from their very first day on campus.

The Legacy Student Pinning Ceremony has come a long way since its inception in 2017, when it began as a lunch event on move-in day with just 71 attendees. Its growth is a testament to the strong bonds within the APSU community and the university's legacy scholarship initiative.

In a notable development, five scholarships from the APSU Foundation were awarded to legacy students in attendance, further emphasizing the university's commitment to supporting its legacy families.

As APSU looks to the future, the Legacy Student Pinning Ceremony stands as a shining example of how traditions can evolve and flourish, strengthening the ties between past, present, and future generations of the university community.

**"This significant increase reflects the university's commitment to fostering a strong sense of community through the Govs For Life Experience."**



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## O'Malley Family Welcome Center Ribbon-Cutting

Friday, April 11, 2025, 11:30 a.m.  
317 College St. Clarksville, TN 37040

## Domino's Run for Gobs 5K and Valerie Hunter-Kelly Run/Walk for the Gobs

Saturday, Oct. 11, 2025, 8 a.m.  
Pace Alumni Center

## APSU Governors Military Hall of Fame Induction and Celebration

Friday, Nov. 7, 2025  
5:30 p.m. Reception/ 6 p.m. Dinner  
Morgan University Center Ballroom  
*We are currently taking nominations for our Class of 2025 at  
[www.alumni.apsu.edu/MHOFnominations](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/MHOFnominations)*



**Save the dates for Homecoming this year,  
Oct. 24-25, and join us for the events  
listed below!**

47th Annual Golf Tournament  
All Athletic Alumni Mixer  
GOMB Smash Bang Alumni Party  
African American Alumni Chapter Scholarship Mixer  
Distinguished Alumni Awards Ceremony

For updates throughout the year on these events,  
please check out our website at:

**[www.alumni.apsu.edu/homecoming](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/homecoming)**



# BEAT DAYS!

Thank you to our Sponsors for our 2024 Beat Days!

Wendy's • Byers and Harvey Real Estate • Dutch Bros Coffee

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## CENTENNIAL AMBASSADOR



Join us as a Centennial Ambassador and be the driving force behind celebrating our rich history and vibrant future! Use your influence to inspire faculty, staff, alumni, and community members to embrace the Gobs for Life spirit. Together, let's make our centennial year a legacy to remember. Sign up today and be a part of something extraordinary!

Scan the QR Code or visit [www.alumni.apsu.edu/centennialambassador](http://www.alumni.apsu.edu/centennialambassador)





# APSU GOVERNORS MILITARY HALL OF FAME

## CLASS OF 2024



**COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR (RET.)  
ANTHONY L. ALFRED ('13)**

Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Anthony L. Alfred is a distinguished U.S. Army veteran with a 30-year career. His leadership roles include division chief of the Attack Helicopter Training Division and command sergeant major at Fort Rucker's Army Aviation Training Center. Alfred's expertise spans aviation safety, training, and combat operations. He led an 800-kilometer ground assault convoy into Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. His innovative leadership resulted in multiple unit awards, including the U.S. Army Aviation Logistics School Annual Safety Award. His personal achievements include graduating from the Air Assault Course with a 97.8% average and receiving nominations for the Army Aviation Association NCO of the Year after 26 years of service. He is a recipient of the Order of Saint Michael and the Draper Armor and Cavalry Leadership Award.



**LIEUTENANT GENERAL (RET.)  
RONALD BAILEY ('77)**

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Ronald Bailey, a 1977 Austin Peay State University graduate, had a distinguished 40-year career in the U.S. Marine Corps. He was the first African American to command the 1st Marine Division, overseeing over 25,000 marines and sailors. As deputy commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations (PP&O) at Headquarters Marine Corps, he guided deployment plans and force-structure policies. Bailey earned two master's degrees during his service: one in business management from Webster University and another in national security strategy from the National War College. His numerous awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit with combat V, and the Presidential Unit Citation. After retiring in 2017, Bailey served as vice president of external affairs at Austin Peay before joining the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) as vice president of industry development in 2020, focusing on workforce development and recruitment strategies.



**LIEUTENANT COLONEL (RET.)  
WANDA BRUCE GRAHAM ('75)**

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Wanda Bruce Graham, a 1975 Austin Peay State University graduate, had a distinguished 24-year career in the U.S. Army. She held several leadership roles, including commander of the Nashville Military Entrance Processing Station and commander of the Joint Military Postal Activity Atlantic. Graham earned numerous awards, including the Defense Superior Service Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal with four oak leaf clusters. After retiring in 2003, she continued her commitment to service through various veteran and community organizations. She served on the Tennessee State Veterans Home Board, as president of the Middle TN Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), and on the board of directors for Operation Stand Down Tennessee. Graham is also active in local government, serving on the Williamson County Election Commission and volunteering with multiple community organizations, embodying the MOAA motto, "Never Stop Serving."





### **THE LATE STAFF SERGEANT RAYBURN S. JACKSON ('37)**

The late Staff Sgt. Rayburn Jackson served in World War II from 1941 to 1945. He began active service on July 12, 1941. He served in the U.S. Army's 2nd Battalion, 32nd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division, 32nd Armored Regiment, 2nd Battalion. Jackson received two Purple Hearts and a bronze oak-leaf cluster for wounds he received in action in the European Theater of Operations. He was wounded in Germany on Nov. 3, 1944, and in Belgium on Jan. 9, 1945, during the Battle of the Bulge. He received the Silver Star Medal on May 5, 1945, for gallantry in action in Germany on April 18, 1945, and the French Government presented him the Croix de Guerre on Oct. 30, 1945. Rayburn served two years in the Army stateside and two years overseas, holding the ranks of private, technical sergeant 4 (tank driver), sergeant (tank commander), and staff sergeant (platoon sergeant). He was discharged on Aug. 14, 1945.



### **LIEUTENANT COLONEL (RET.) JERRY V. JONES ('70)**

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Jerry V. Jones served over 24 years in the U.S. Army, holding various command and leadership positions in the United States, the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia. His distinguished military career earned him the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, and several other U.S., NATO, and foreign military decorations. After retiring, Jones founded a consultancy specializing in strategic and tactical risk analysis for emergency preparedness and contingency operations. He has applied his military expertise to work with DHS, FEMA, and the CDC on disaster recovery, bioterrorism preparedness, and pandemic response. Jones has also advised on national and international events, including the 2002 Winter Olympics. He holds a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Science in business administration and is married with four children.



### **COLONEL (RET.) HAROLD "RED" ROBERTS ('71, '73)**

Col. (Ret.) Harold "Red" Roberts ('71, '73) served over 30 years in the U.S. Army National Guard, advancing from armor crewman to colonel. Commissioned as a field artillery officer in 1974, he held various leadership positions, including battery commander, installation commander, and chief of the 230th Army Liaison Team. Roberts deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2003-2004, serving as U.S. liaison officer to the International Security Assistance Force. His career earned him numerous awards, including the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, and NATO Medal. Roberts was inducted into the Army Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame in 2024. He holds both a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in health and physical education from Austin Peay State University. Throughout his service, Roberts demonstrated exceptional leadership and dedication to his country and fellow soldiers.



### **THE LATE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR (RET.) DAROL WALKER**

The late Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Darol Walker had a distinguished 21-year Army career, including two combat tours in Vietnam (1964-1965 and 1967-1968). As a light weapons infantry advisor, he earned a Bronze Star with "V" Device for heroically rescuing a wounded colleague under enemy fire. Walker's expertise in combat tactics, training, and administration earned him multiple decorations, including a second Bronze Star and two Army Commendation Medals. He served at West Point, training cadets in tactical field operations, and later served in ROTC programs at Middle Tennessee State University and Austin Peay State University. Upon retiring in 1976, he received the Meritorious Service Medal. His final efficiency report praised him as one of the most valuable NCOs in his rater's 26 years of service, particularly noting his ability to interface between the Army and civilian populations. Walker's career exemplified leadership, valor, and dedication to service.



# RED COAT SOCIETY

## 2025 INDUCTEES



**TOM  
CREECH**



**JIM  
DURRETT**



**KYLE  
LUTHER**



**LARRY  
ROCCONI JR.**



**JEFF  
TRUITT**

Austin Peay State University's Division of Alumni, Engagement and Philanthropy, along with the Monocle Society, added Tom Creech, Jim Durrett, Kyle Luther, Larry Rocconi Jr., and Jeff Truitt to the Governors' Red Coat Society during ceremonies at halftime of the men's basketball game against Bellarmine on Jan. 30, at F&M Bank Arena.

The Governors' Red Coat Society is a hall of fame that was established in 2004 to honor individuals who have provided longtime support to APSU athletics. This year's class is the 20th group inducted into the Red Coat Society, which now has 58 members.

The owner and funeral director at McReynolds-Nave & Larson, Creech is an Austin Peay graduate and the former Gobs Club president. Creech is now a member of the APSU Alumni Association and a board member with the Top Hat Collective, which is the official NIL collective for Austin Peay Athletics. A longtime philanthropic supporter and season ticket holder for all of Austin Peay's sports, Creech consistently travels to support the Governors on away trips.

From 2014-22, Durrett completed two terms as the Montgomery County mayor. His administration completed several projects that have benefitted the local community and Austin Peay, including the Downtown Commons and F&M Bank Arena. Durrett has been a passionate supporter of APSU Athletics through his time and talents.

He is a consistent fixture at Governors sports events is involved in philanthropy, and is always willing to help however he can.

The marketing president at Traditions First Bank, Luther is an Austin Peay graduate and is currently on the APSU Foundation Board. Luther was a long-time Gobs Club member and now serves as a Monocle Society member and as president of the Top Hat Collective. He also served on the APSU Athletics Foundation subcommittee, is currently part of the Governors' cabinet, and has been a longtime season ticket holder for the university's football and basketball teams. Luther's father, Dave, was inducted into the Red Coat Society in 2016, making them the hall of fame's first father-son duo.

A founding member of Mitchell, Ross, Rocconi, & McMillan PLLC in Clarksville, Rocconi Jr. is a former APSU Foundation Athletics subcommittee member and a current board member for the Top Hat Collective. A Mississippi native and Ole Miss graduate, Rocconi Jr. has been an avid supporter of Austin Peay football through philanthropy and as a season ticket holder. Rocconi Jr. has been a constant staple at Austin Peay events, supporting all the Governors' athletic programs during his time in Clarksville.

The chief operating officer at Servpro in Clarksville and a United States Air Force veteran, Truitt is an Austin Peay graduate and a board member for the Top Hat Collective. Truitt is the definition of answering



the call, supporting APSU Athletics through philanthropy, season ticket purchases, and always being there to assist with program needs. Truitt also was a large advocate in pushing through F&M Bank Arena as the former chief of staff for Mayor Durrett.

Austin Peay extends membership in the Red Coat Society to individuals who have:

- Been members in good standing with the Monocle Society or its predecessors for at least five years
- Supported the athletic programs at APSU through financial contributions or participation in Monocle Society fundraisers and events
- Provided support to more than one sport both at home and away
- Become recognized within the APSU community for their association with athletics

## Red Coat Society Induction Classes

2025 – Tom Creech, Jim Durrett, Kyle Luther, Larry Rocconi Jr., Jeff Truitt  
2023 – Patty Rye, Brad and Jan Kirtley, Khandra Smalley  
2022 – Dr. Jeannie Beauchamp, Ed Bunio, Tom Jones, Eunice Washington  
2020 – L.M. Ellis, L.W. Harris, Vanessa Hollis  
2019 – Joe and Cathi Maynard, Ron Morton  
2018 – Jeff Bibb, Ricky Cooksey  
2017 – Sherwin Clift, Dr. Don Luck  
2016 – Ed Baggett, Dave Luther  
2015 – Terry Griffin, Hal Mathews  
2014 – Hendricks Fox, Dr. Tim Hall, Jack B. Turner  
2013 – Charles Hand  
2012 – James Corlew, Don Jenkins, Gary Mathews  
2011 – Dr. Bruce Myers  
2010 – Jimmy Dunn  
2009 – Jerry Nass, Mike O'Malley, Mike Schrecker  
2008 – Dwight Dickson, Paula Hallett, Len Rye  
2007 – Bill Atkins, Dr. Sherry Hoppe, Dr. Gaines Hunt, Bill Roberts  
2006 – Lawrence Baggett, Evans Harvill, Zoot Parker, Carolyn Yarbrough  
2005 – Don Corlew, Davis McCutchen, Bobby Mills, Edmund Terrell  
2004 – Brandon Buhler, Perkins Freeman, Richard Hardwick, H.R. Wortham







## APSU Receives NCAA Accelerating Academic Success Program Grant for 2024-25 Academic Year

**“We have high academic standards for our student-athletes, and they continue to meet and exceed those standards every single year.”**

For the second-consecutive year and the fifth time in department history, Austin Peay State University’s athletics department is the recipient of an NCAA Accelerating Academic Success Program initiative grant.

“It is a great day to be a Gov,” said Vice President and Director of Athletics Gerald Harrison. “We could not be more excited to be selected to receive the NCAA AASP grant for the third time since I have been at Austin Peay. This grant always helps us push the ‘Total Gov Concept’ to new heights, and I know that we will do that this year through the holistic development of our student-athletes in the Total Gov Academy.”

Austin Peay Athletics received a single-year grant totaling \$100,000 from the NCAA and was one of only 17 Division I institutions to receive a grant for the 2024-25 academic year. The athletics department will use the grant to fund initiatives under the Total Gov Academy, including personal development, professional development, leadership development, community engagement, the Ellis Initiative, and enhancement to APSU’s Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

“We are thrilled to receive the AASP grant once again, continuing the vital support for our student-athletes at Austin Peay,” said Associate Director of Athletics for Student-Athlete Success Dr. Kristal McGreggor. “This year’s funding will be instrumental in elevating the Total Gov Academy and launching a new leadership institute. Through these programs, we are providing our student-athletes with invaluable resources and opportunities for personal, academic, and professional growth. This support reaffirms our dedication to their success, equipping them with the skills to thrive in life beyond sports and make meaningful contributions to their communities.”

Established in 2012, the program awards over \$1 million annually to Division I colleges and universities that meet grant qualifications for the support of their academic initiatives to help increase the graduation rates of student-athletes. The AASP grants are an example of how the NCAA and its member schools invest in academic support and success of student-athletes.

“This is always an exciting time of the year – to congratulate and highlight our Accelerating Academic Success Program recipients,” said



Felicia Martin, NCAA senior vice president of inclusion, education, and community engagement. “Each campus recipient is intentional with their application by clearly stating a commitment to invest in and to evolve services to support student athletes’ educational experience and their academic success.”

Austin Peay’s athletics department posted a 3.00 grade-point average or better for the 14th consecutive semester in May 2024. More than 76% of the department’s student-athletes received academic recognition during the Spring 2024 semester, with 75 of 294 student-athletes posting a 4.0 GPA and 123 student-athletes qualifying for the Austin Peay dean’s list.

During the 2023-24 academic year, the Governors had two student-athletes recognized as the conference scholar-athletes of the year in their respective sports. Maddux Trujillo was named the United Athletic Conference’s Football Scholar-Athlete of the Year, while Lyle Miller-Green was named the Atlantic Sun Conference’s Baseball Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

In addition, 37 Austin Peay student-athletes were recognized as College Sports Communicators Academic All-District® Team selections during the 2024-25 academic year. Miller-Green and Jon Jon Gazdar – from the Govs baseball program – also were named CSC First Team Academic All-America® selections, making them the eighth and ninth Austin Peay student-athletes to earn this recognition in the university’s history.

“I am grateful that the NCAA has chosen to support our great university with this grant,” said Austin Peay President Dr. Michael Licari. “We have high academic standards for our student-athletes, and they continue to meet and exceed those standards every single year. This support will help our student-athletes continue to have sustained success in the classroom while also providing personal and professional development through the Govs Academy.”

## Chandler Kirton Named United Athletic Conference Scholar-Athlete of the Year

For the second straight season, an Austin Peay State University football player has been named the United Athletic Conference’s Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Chandler Kirton earned the league’s top academic honor and a unanimous selection to the Academic All-UAC team, as selected by the league’s football athletics communications directors and academic coordinators.

Austin Peay football student-athletes have earned UAC Scholar-Athlete of the Year recognition throughout the conference’s two-year history, with Kirton joining 2023 recipient Maddux Trujillo. Kirton and Trujillo were also both unanimous selections to the Academic All-UAC team, which recognizes the top 11 student-athletes across the UAC based on academic and athletic achievement.

Kirton, an Atlantic Beach, Florida native, recently graduated from Austin Peay with a 3.94 grade-point average and a bachelor’s degree in management. Kirton also was the UAC’s nominee and one of 13 finalists for the 2024 Doris Robinson Scholar-Athlete Award, which recognizes an FCS football student-athlete who excels on the playing field, in the classroom, and across the community.

During his Austin Peay career, Kirton was on the Austin Peay Dean’s List in all six semesters and was a 2023 College Sports Communicators Academic All-District® honoree. Kirton was also a semifinalist for the 2024 William V. Campbell Trophy®, college football’s premier scholar-athlete award, which is presented annually by the National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame.

On the field, Kirton started 35 straight games for the Governors after starting at center in all 12 games during the 2024 season. He had played right guard in all but one game prior to the 2024 season, allowed just one sack and was called for just a single holding penalty during his first full season at center.

Kirton was a 2023 First Team All-UAC and a 2022 All-ASUN Conference selection on the offensive line; he also earned 2022 HERO Sports Freshman All-America honors.





# 2025 SCHEDULE



## GOVERNORS ANNOUNCE 2025 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

WITH SIX GAMES AT FORTERA STADIUM FOR JEFF FARIS ERA, YEAR II

**T**he second season of the Jeff Faris Era will kick off when the Governors take on in-state foe and former conference rival Middle Tennessee on Aug. 30, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

The Gobs will then battle their second-straight FBS opponent when they travel to Georgia on Sept. 6, to take on the 2021 and 2022 College Football Playoff Champions in Athens, Georgia.

Austin Peay will then renew acquaintances with another former conference opponent when it takes on Morehead State on Sept. 13, in its home opener at Fortera Stadium. The Governors will then hit the road for the third time in the first four weeks of the season when they square off with 2024 UAC Champion Abilene Christian on Sept. 20, in Abilene, Texas.

A pair of home games are up next with the Governors set to welcome Utah Tech on Sept. 27 and West Georgia on Oct. 4 to wrap up the first half of the 2025 season. The second half of the season will start

when Austin Peay battles longtime conference rival Eastern Kentucky on Oct. 11, in Richmond, Kentucky, before taking its bye in Week 8.

Following the bye week, the Gobs will return to Fortera Stadium to host the 2025 Homecoming game against North Alabama on Oct. 25. After Homecoming, the Governors will make their second-ever trip to Cedar City, Utah, to take on Southern Utah on Nov. 1, in UAC action.

After the trip west, Austin Peay will kick off a two-game home stand at Fortera Stadium when it plays Central Arkansas on Nov. 8, on Military Appreciation Day. The 2025 regular-season home finale is up next, with the Gobs scheduled to play their final nonconference game against Samford on Nov. 15.

Finally, the Governors will wrap up the 2025 regular season when they take on Tarleton State on Nov. 22, in their first-ever trip to Stephenville, Texas.



# 47<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL HALL OF FAME

## 2025 CLASS

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 145.



**Chris Fletcher (Football, 2004-07)**

A standout running back who excelled in both the Pioneer Football League and Ohio Valley Conference, Fletcher holds program records with 4,688 career rushing yards and 42 rushing touchdowns. He earned First Team All-OVC honors in 2007 after two All-

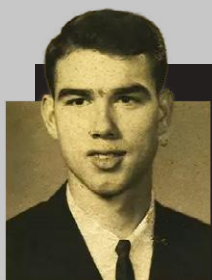
Pioneer League selections. Fletcher averaged 106.5 yards per game and scored a program-record 270 points in his career.



**Morgan Rackel (Softball, 2018-19)**

In just two seasons, Rackel made an indelible mark on APSU softball. The 2018 OVC Pitcher of the Year posted 43 career wins, 446 strikeouts, and a 2.16 ERA. She earned First Team All-OVC and NFCA All-Region honors while setting multiple program records both

pitching and hitting.



**Phillip Sleight (Baseball, 1966-69)**

A standout centerfielder during the wooden bat era, Sleight was a three-time All-OVC West Division selection and two-time team MVP. He hit .294 over his career with six triples, six home runs, and 50 RBIs. The four-time letter winner earned the Russell Award

for scholarship, leadership, and ability three times.



**Kristen Stucker (Volleyball, 2015-19)**

The only three-time OVC Setter of the Year in conference history, Stucker led APSU to two regular season titles and the 2017 OVC Tournament Championship. She ranks second in program history with 4,705 career assists and earned First Team All-OVC

honors three times.



**Lidia Yanes Garcia (Tennis, 2015-19)**

A three-time OVC Player of the Year and four-time First Team All-OVC selection, Yanes Garcia dominated singles play with a 91-16 overall record and 35-2 mark in conference matches. She led the Govs to their 2022 OVC Championship and NCAA

Tournament appearances.



**Steve Williard (Public Address Announcer)**

The voice of Austin Peay athletics for over 25 years, Williard served as public address announcer for basketball (39 years), football (28 seasons), and baseball (10+ seasons). He called over 500 basketball games and donated

95% of his earnings back to university athletics programs.

The APSU Athletics Hall of Fame can be visited online at [LetsGoPeay.com/HOF](https://LetsGoPeay.com/HOF).



# WELCOME

## Evan Amstutz

### Named Austin Peay's 10th Head Volleyball Coach



Austin Peay State University has named Evan Amstutz, who helped lead Stephen F. Austin State University to conference championships in three of the last five seasons, as its 10th head volleyball coach.

"It is a great day to be a Gov and I am so excited to welcome Evan, his wife Molly, and their children Charlotte and Ryan to Austin Peay," said Vice President and Director of Athletics Gerald Harrison. "Coach Amstutz has had success in every stop of his coaching career; he is an innovator and a tireless worker who will bring new energy to our volleyball program. He is a believer in the 'Total Gov Concept' and I know that his teams will not only shine on the volleyball court, but in the classroom and our community."

Amstutz joins Austin Peay after five successful seasons at Stephen F. Austin, where he rose from assistant coach to associate head coach in 2022. During his tenure, the Ladyjacks compiled a remarkable 120-34 (.779) overall record and captured three conference championships, including the 2022 Western Athletic Conference Tournament Championship and the 2023 WAC Regular-Season Championship. The team made NCAA Tournament appearances in both 2022 and 2023, with the latter marking the program's first-ever at-large bid.

"What an amazing opportunity in front of us here in Clarksville," said Amstutz. "My family and I would never get opportunities like this if it wasn't in God's plan for us and how he wants to use us. We are ready to push Austin Peay volleyball to the next level, to accomplish amazing things, and to enjoy the ride. The Clarksville community, Austin Peay alumni, and fans all over will be proud of the volleyball team, how it competes, and the young professionals graduates ... Let's Go Peay!"

At Stephen F. Austin, Amstutz mentored 16 all-conference selections and helped develop several standout players, including 2023 WAC Player of the Year Ielan Bradley and 2022 WAC Libero of the Year Haley Hoang. Bradley went on to earn AVCA All-American Honorable Mention recognition in 2023.

**"We are ready to push Austin Peay volleyball to the next level, to accomplish amazing things, and to enjoy the ride."**

Prior to his time at SFA, Amstutz served as an assistant coach at Angelo State for two seasons (2018-19), helping the program achieve a 51-13 record and develop eight All-LSC selections. The 2019 team posted an impressive 29-3 record and captured the Lone Star Conference Tournament championship.

Amstutz's head coaching experience includes launching the Division III men's volleyball program at his alma mater, Wittenberg University, where he led the Tigers to a 14-11 record in their inaugural 2015 season. Under his guidance, the program achieved the highest winning percentage for a first-year program in league history and received AVCA Top-15 votes.

His coaching career began as a student assistant at Wittenberg (2011-12), where he contributed to the women's volleyball team's 2011 NCAA Division III National Championship. He later served as a volunteer assistant at Miami (Ohio) for two seasons (2013-14), helping the RedHawks improve from 11th place to second place in the Mid-American Conference.

A native of Toledo, Ohio, Amstutz earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Wittenberg in 2013 and his master's degree in kinesiology and health from Miami (Ohio) in 2015.



Austin Peay dedicates, begins construction on Karen Edwards

# INDOOR GOLF FACILITY



**A**ustin Peay State University recently began construction on the Karen Edwards Indoor Golf Facility, a 2,500-square foot golf practice facility for the men's and women's golf programs, on the third floor of the Winfield Dunn Center.

"This is a monumental day for our Austin Peay men's and women's golf programs," Vice President and Director of Athletics Gerald Harrison said during a groundbreaking ceremony. "I want to thank Tom Edwards and his daughters Amy and Emily for their generosity and wanting to honor their mother in a special way. The Karen Edwards Indoor Golf Facility will be a state-of-the-art facility that rivals any indoor golf practice facility in the Atlantic Sun Conference. This facility will help take our men's and women's golf programs to the next level, and I am so excited to see what Coach Combs and Coach Key can do in the years to come."

The naming of the facility was approved pursuant of Austin Peay rule by the APSU Board of Trustees on Sept. 20, 2024 – the vote passed unanimously. The facility, located on the east side of the Dunn Center, will be turfed and equipped with golf simulators, Trackman systems, putting greens, a chipping area, and a lounge area, plus graphics and design.

"We are extremely thankful to the Edwards family for the Karen Edwards Indoor Golf Facility that is being built on campus," said head men's golf coach Easton Key. "This will be a huge advantage to be able to practice and work on all assets of our games during all seasons and weather throughout the year. Being an outdoor sport, we need something that will allow us the opportunity to still practice and develop when the weather doesn't allow us to be outside, and this will provide just that. We are so grateful for this new addition to our programs and what it means for the future of Austin Peay men's and women's golf."

Head women's golf coach Jessica Combs also thanked the Edwards family for their generosity.

"To have somewhere on campus for our golf teams to practice, relax, and call their own has been something we've looked forward to for a very long time," she said. "This facility opens new opportunities for each student-athlete to reach new heights in their golf game, which will elevate Austin Peay golf as a whole for many years to come. We are so excited to get the process started and create an even better student-athlete experience for our teams."

Tom Edwards and his daughters, Amy and Emily, named the facility after the late Karen Edwards to make an impactful gift that brought together her passions - Austin Peay and women's golf. The Karen Edwards Indoor Golf Facility won't just impact Austin Peay golfers for years to come; it will leave a legacy of someone who truly poured into Austin Peay and the Clarksville-Montgomery County Community every day.

The Edwards family are not only familiar faces around Austin Peay but the entire Clarksville-Montgomery County community. Karen, a 1978 graduate of Austin Peay, was deeply involved in women's and youth golf in the local community. The Edwards family have been longtime philanthropic supporters of Austin Peay, with a majority of their giving supporting the athletics department.





The Clarksville Arts & Heritage Council honored **Sally Welch ('65, '70)** with its Lifetime Achievement Award in Art.



**Dr. Stephanie Bilderback ('10, '15)** successfully defended her dissertation, "Examining Workplace Performance and Training for Organizational Sustainability in the Fashion Industry."



**Thomas Mercer Sr. ('84)** recently launched Your Family Matters, LLP, an investment advisory firm listed as a Registered Investment Advisor (RIA) in Tennessee.



APSU alumnus **Taira McAfee's ('11)** poem, A Soldier, was published in Clarksville Living Magazine.



**Bill Persinger ('91)** retired as Austin Peay's executive director of Public Relations & Marketing after 33 years of service to the university.



**Marcus Marotti ('12, '13)** was appointed partner-in-training with the accounting firm of Stone, Rudolph and Henry, PLC.



**Susan Budzyna Klein ('93)** was featured in a CBS News story, "Army broadcast journalist credits MACV for getting her life back on track."



**Brittneye Haley Hall ('13)** was promoted to director of business development and marketing at Tennessee Orthopaedic Alliance.



APSU trustee **Keri McInnis ('95)** was named co-chair of the inaugural Rock the Street, Wall Street Woman of the Year Luncheon in Nashville, Tennessee.



**Charissa Taylor ('14)** was announced as a 2024 finalist for the Nashville Emerging Leaders Awards (NELA) in the Hospitality and Tourism category for her business, The Pink Sugar Funnel Cakery.



**Wendy Matheny McCooley ('98)** was recently featured on QVC's Crafting with Stephanie Weightman.



The Atlanta Athletic Club (AAC) appointed **Marcus Rutsche ('03)** as its director of racquet sports following an extensive national search.



### **Austin Peay alumnus Curtis Johnson honored with APSU Presidential Medal of Distinction**

Curtis Johnson ('68) was awarded the prestigious Presidential Medal of Distinction during APSU's Military Appreciation Football Game at Fortera Stadium on Nov. 9, 2024. The Presidential Medal of Distinction is the highest award presented by the APSU president, honoring outstanding individuals for their exemplary volunteer service and remarkable contributions to the university community. This award recognizes those individuals who demonstrate a strong dedication to Austin Peay's mission by exemplifying the university's abiding values of respect, trust, inclusion, discovery and excellence. The award also recognizes those achievements that bring honor to the university through intellectual creativity, civic engagement and national or international distinction.



National Alumni Association Vice President **Fernandez Lockett ('07)** will be inducted into the Bob Jones High School Hall of Fame in Madison, Alabama.





**Isaiah Johnson ('23)** was hired as a business development representative at CoAdvantage.



**Kim Lint** was selected as the next principal of Christian County Public Schools' Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Early Learning Center.



**Jana Leder ('23, '24)** was promoted to sales executive at Objektkultur Software GmbH.



APSU College of Business Professor **John Volker** completed 35 years of service to the university.

## IN MEMORY

**William Slate Gray ('81)**

7/17/2024

**Roy Danial Lane ('13)**

9/22/2024

**Caleb Alexander Jackson ('12)**

11/13/2024

**Barbara Sue Britt ('98)**

12/18/2024

**Elizabeth Vernell Sowell ('58)**

7/18/2024

**Derek Wayne Bailey ('00)**

9/23/2024

**Robert Wilson Givan ('65)**

11/16/2024

**Robert Lee Culp ('74)**

12/28/2024

**Sonya R. Snow ('11)**

7/22/2024

**John Andrew Gass ('78)**

10/5/2024

**John Thomas Clardy ('65)**

11/18/2024

**Carl Gregory Conway ('03)**

01/13/2025

**Perry Allen Reniker ('81)**

8/4/2024

**Douglas Barnet Parker ('62)**

10/10/2024

**Jimmie Lee Cogburn ('64)**

11/18/2024

**David Clark Redmond ('76)**

01/09/2025

**Austin Peay VII**

8/6/2024

**Amanda Marie Letzkus ('07)**

10/17/2024

**Walter Joseph Marczak ('83,'89)**

12/1/2024

**Charles Earl Loser ('66)**

01/10/2025

**William Michael Dawson ('90)**

8/13/2024

**Michael Douglas Ross ('78)**

10/17/2024

**Robin Letitia Moss ('02,'06)**

12/7/2024

**Gary Thomas Schmittou ('73)**

01/17/2025

**Cleveland Carr Turner ('63)**

8/24/2024

**James Tommy Head ('67)**

10/19/2024

**Donna Kay George ('75)**

12/8/2024

**Christopher P. Brundage ('86)**

01/27/2025

**Pat Lindsey Webb ('61)**

8/25/2024

**Rebecca Tatom Hubbell ('08)**

10/19/2024

**Linda Joyce Smith ('79)**

12/10/2024

**Carolyn Yarbrough**

01/29/2025

**Christopher McEwan Gooch ('78)**

8/27/2024

**Mary Frances Weiland**

10/20/2024

**Annette Beadles Marks**

12/11/2024

**Sami Badie Naddy ('89)**

8/30/2024

**Anna Olds Brewer ('64)**

10/27/2024

**Lori Ann Cox ('02)**

12/14/2024

**Ronald Moore McKinney ('62)**

9/8/2024

**Luther Lee Hays ('52)**

10/28/2024

**David Bomar Keele ('77)**

12/17/2024



## Remembering President Oscar C. Page •

Austin Peay State University mourns the loss of Dr. Oscar C. Page, who served as president from 1988 to 1994. Page led APSU through significant growth, increasing enrollment from 5,168 to 8,073 and making it Tennessee's fastest-growing university. He strengthened APSU's position as the state's designated liberal arts institution while bolstering professional programs. Page's legacy includes expanding scholarship funding from \$155,104 to \$750,000 annually and establishing three Chairs of Excellence, leaving a lasting impact on student success.



Office of Alumni and Annual Giving

601 College St.  
Clarksville, TN 37044

1-800-264-ALUM



# GOVINGTUESDAY

Thank you for making  
**#GOVingTuesday2024 a success!**

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." In 2024, APSU once again completed a fundable project day for the event. Out of more than 55 proposals submitted by APSU faculty and staff, 13 were selected as the focus of GOVing Tuesday 2024. With the help of alumni and friends, the university fully funded all 13 projects by the end of the day on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2024.

Student Affairs  
**Club Sports Equipment**

College of STEM  
**Community Health Outreach  
and Diagnostic Screening**

Behavioral and Health  
Sciences  
**Mental Health Conference**

Military and Veterans Affairs  
**Military Affiliated  
Professionals Program  
(MAPP) Tools**

SGL  
**SGL Herbarium Experience**

College of Arts and Letters  
**Zone 3 Writer's Festival**

College of Business  
**Hospitality Management  
Simulation**

Felix G. Woodward Library  
**Library Makerspace  
Upgrades**

Athletics  
**Women's Track and Field  
Locker Room Upgrades**

PR and Marketing  
**Let's Go Print-Print Shop  
T-Shirt Press**

University College  
**Posters on the Hill**

College of STEM  
**Alumni Mentoring  
Mathematics Education  
Conference**

College of Education  
**Full Spectrum Learning Tech  
For Success**

Athletics  
**Sports Nutrition**