

TORCH





The image shows the front of a white school bus, partially obscured by a semi-transparent red overlay. The bus features a large side mirror, a windshield with wipers, and a front grille with three circular headlights. A small American flag decal is visible on the side of the bus. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

More than 650 new freshmen and transfer students, along with 72 student leaders, participated in this fall's Deke Day for a day of service at 35 senior living and retirement communities. From balloon volleyball to art projects and even singing, students spent the day hanging out with residents and creating some unforgettable memories.

Since its start in 2003, Deke Day has been a key part of Lee's New Student Orientation, giving new students a hands-on way to experience the power of community service. It's more than just a day of giving back – it's about building real connections beyond the classroom and making an impact that lasts.

Photo by Ashlynn Akiona '25



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CELEBRATION 2024

LEE & UNIVERSITY

The 2024-25 school year began with a giant exclamation point!

It was Celebration 2024, filling the campus with a huge crowd of Lee's friends and well-wishers on a beautiful morning in early fall. From 1988 until 2018, the Celebration format has barely changed. The Lee faculty and Board of Directors, joined by alumni representatives, march in their colorful regalia to their seats in Conn Center to hear a mass choir and orchestra – over 300 student musicians – and a speech by President Paul Conn. From there, the procession files through a “human wall” of cheering students to the Ped Mall for an outdoor buffet.

Earlier in the day, students attended a Celebration Seminar – nine outstanding guest speakers who addressed a diverse variety of topics.

The alumni representatives are the V.I.P. guests of the event. The alums, one chosen from each of Lee's last sixty classes – 1964 through 2024 – came from all across the country to represent their classmates in the festive procession.



CELEBRATION 2024 SPEECH

President Conn on September 20, 2024

It's a wonderful morning to celebrate.

When we first announced here at Lee that we would be having this event today, I got the same question several times: "Okay, great, sounds like fun. . . . But what are we celebrating?"

That's an obvious question. We staged these events to celebrate some particular accomplishment, a new building or an enrollment record – and we always marched out of here to cut a ribbon or to finish a capital campaign. Well, today, we're doing none of that. We have no ribbon to cut and no capital campaign to announce. We're not here to honor any big donors – I'm not even going to ask you for money! (Later, of course, but not today. All of you can just relax.)

What we celebrate today are the things that are deeper and more profound than any single achievement. We're here to celebrate three things that matter in 2024: the blessings of God, the faithfulness of friends, and the bright hope of our future.

First, we celebrate the blessings of God. From the first day of our history, January 1, 1918, God's hand has been on us. He's blessed us so many ways. We can never count them all. I've been quizzed by other presidents from other institutions, asking why and how Lee thrived when so many other schools were faltering. It's a little hard to explain. It sounds like a lot of empty church talk, but it's true: Hitherto hath the Lord blessed us. Sometimes His blessing comes in the unexpected favor of good people, sometimes it comes by protecting us from evil, like the time when a men's dorm burned to the ground in the middle of the night, and the lives of 76 boys were spared. Sometimes God's blessings come in the form of talented, committed faculty who decide to join our family. Sometimes it comes in the form of new students who come so obviously ready to be shaped for lives of great meaning and purpose. In a hundred different ways, God's blessings have always hovered over us.

And today we also celebrate the faithfulness of friends – all our friends – those in the community and those in the church.

And sometimes I feel pulled between the two.

Sometimes it seems that the president of Lee is expected to live in two worlds – that of the community and that of the church.

It reminds me of the story of the late great president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who led America through the Second World War. He was known for the nimble way he balanced all the contrasting ideas that came to him. His wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, would sit quietly in a corner of the Oval Office, listening as various officials came to talk with President Roosevelt. One day, the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, came in and said to Roosevelt: "Mr. President, we've got to get our troops out of Algiers immediately. They just don't belong there. They're creating a problem for us." And Roosevelt said, "Cordell, you're right, you're absolutely right, I agree one hundred percent!" And he left, and then the Secretary of Defense Henry Stinson came in and said "Mr. President, we've got to send more troops to Algiers. It's a critical region, and we need to get more troops in there immediately." And Roosevelt said, "Henry, you're right, you're absolutely right. I agree one hundred percent." And he left. At that point, Eleanor couldn't take it any more. When the door closed, she said to her husband, "Franklin, what are you doing? One man comes in here and says one thing, and you agree with him; then somebody else comes in and says the exact opposite, and you agree with him. This is ridiculous; you just can't run the country this way." And Roosevelt said, "Eleanor, you're right, you're absolutely right. I agree with you one hundred percent!"

Well, for me, just let me say, I happily live in the two worlds of this community and this church. I'm a proud son of the Church of God, and I'm a proud son of Cleveland. To me, there's no tension or contradiction here. To be effective, any Lee president has gotta learn to love this church and love this community.

I feel strongly that Lee has delivered on our promises to both our community and our church.

Lee has injected into the bloodstream of Cleveland and Bradley County a constant infusion of outstanding young people who are deeply embedded as school

teachers, professional men and women, and business leaders who have become the fabric of this community.

And we've also delivered for our denomination. We have poured into the pulpits and pews of the Church of God a steady stream of talented, committed young people, who are now leading the church across the country and around the world.

I'm a citizen of both this community and this church, and I'm also an enthusiastic member of this faculty. These two hundred men and women who marched in this morning, in all their colorful regalia, are not just my colleagues, they're my brothers and sisters. I'm proud to be one of them. I don't know what you've heard about American university professors in the TV news, or on social media, but let me assure you that sitting in this room are the most highly capable, deeply dedicated, hard-working professionals you will ever meet. They are not "woke." They're not living in some kind of ivory tower. They aren't the problem; they're the solution. They invest every day in our sons and daughters, with passion and intelligence, because this is the profession to which God has called them. So this morning, my faculty colleagues, I salute you, I embrace you, and I thank God for you every day.

My wife, Darlia, and I, can personally remember when the Lee College which we loved, where we spent our college years, where we met and married, was a small and nondescript little college of 700 students. But still, something about it captured our hearts, as it has many others, and after grad school, we came back here, and we caught a vision of what Lee could become.

That grand sense of expectation wasn't my vision, it was God's vision. Actually, I've never personally been much of a visionary; I've always been just a pragmatist who saw the next problem, and tried to fix it. So I know it's crazy, and I can't quite explain it, but I always felt this place was somehow special to God. That's an old-fashioned and maybe naïve idea, I know. Even when Lee was a few old buildings on 25 acres, with only a handful of faculty with doctorates, with no status or reputation even in Cleveland, much less in the outside world – still, I always thought this was a school that mattered to God, and it could become a bright and shining place if we worked hard enough.

And that's what happened. All that latent potential, all those dormant possibilities, at some point they burst into reality, and as this little college blossomed into a wonderful university, there could be no doubt that it wasn't the result of any one person's vision, but the Hand of God, and that's why today we celebrate His blessings.

In the same breath, we celebrate the faithfulness of our friends. That's how God accomplishes his work here – through the faithfulness of our friends, thanks for being here with us today. You stepped up for us, over and over again, our friends in the community, our friends in the church, and friends from places far away.

I remember the first time a local Cleveland businessman gave a substantial gift to Lee. It was 1988. Back then, American Uniform Company was led by Gary Smith, the son-in-law of the late Mr. Frank Miles. Gary called me one day and said the family wanted to remember their father with a scholarship at Lee, and honestly, I was shocked. "Why?" I wondered. I didn't say it out loud, but why would you want to give money to us? But we arranged a luncheon, and that day, Gary made a little speech, and said, "Well, I hope we know what we're doing. I'm a Methodist, and our CFO here is Jewish, and we're honoring our father, who was Catholic, by giving our money to a Church of God college." And I said, "Hallelujah! The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Please hand me the check!"

After that, the families and businesses of Cleveland began stepping up. Hoyle Rymer opened the door to Magic Chef to help us. Clevelanders with no connection to our church or our college since then have given us millions of dollars, year after year.

And in so many other ways, our friends were faithful. Not just money, but political favor. When the City Council voted to let us close Church Street, it was a very tough, very controversial vote to cast. Some people were for us and some people were against us. But in the end, Cleveland took a chance on Lee College, and by the slender margin of one vote, the most significant event in the history of our campus development occurred.

Of course, our friends in the Church of God also stepped up. They always have. Even when Lee had little to offer, this denomination believed in us, and gave

generously to us, when no one else knew or cared who Lee University was. We've never forgotten that, and we never will. The Church of God is our wellspring; it is our mother. We want to deliver for you, and we want to make you proud of us.

In so many ways, Lee University should be a bridge. It should be a bridge between the church and the community.

A bridge between the past and the future.

A bridge between a world where people have plenty of everything to a world where people have almost nothing.

That's why groups of young students go to China and Africa to work in orphanages.

That's why an alum like Coleman Bailey, here today for the class of 2015, devotes his life to the suffering people in Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

That's why young men like Jonny Moore, class of 2005, live far from home to reach lost kids in Thailand.

Lee must be a bridge between the certainties of dogma and the questions of ordinary people wondering what to believe, a bridge between the people who create art and music and those who depend on art and music to brighten their lives. A bridge between old people in nursing homes and young people on college campuses. A bridge between those whose beliefs have hardened into dogmatic arrogance and those who are tempted by the idea that there is no such thing as ultimate truth.

God put us in this world not to build walls but to build bridges.

Most importantly, Lee must be a bridge between higher education and the people of faith. We operate within the community of higher education, where everything is subject to logic and proof and where the ultimate test is intellectual, and from it, we build a bridge to the community of faith, where God is revealed in Holy Scripture, and where the ultimate authority is the Word of God.

Most of us on the Lee faculty have lived in the environment of secular higher education, not because we embrace its ideology or its politics, but because we have learned how to be faithful believers in Babylon. As surely as God has called missionaries to foreign lands, as surely as God has called pastors to their pulpits, God called us to the world of higher education. In that

world, others don't necessarily share our worldview. At times, that hasn't been easy. At times, we found ourselves misunderstood by our professional colleagues in Babylon. But we stayed there because we believe that there is only one truth, God's truth, and we can give faithful witness to God's truth, even in environments where spiritual things are scorned, or simply ignored.

And then, we followed God's' calling back to Lee University, to share our lives with your sons and daughters. We do that with all our hearts. We don't just lecture students from the safe distance of a professor's podium, we live with them, we hear their doubts and questions, we see their tears and share their good and bad days. We welcome them into our homes; we worship with them; we're there when they discover the joys of this wide, wonderful world God made; we're by their sides as they learn to care deeply about history, or biology, about psychology or literature. We teach them how to become skillful accountants or nurses, how to teach kids in a public school classroom, how to write music or make films, or read a balance sheet.

We're not just their teachers; we are their guides. And along the way, they become not just our students, but our spiritual sons and daughters. We pray with them – and for them. We hear their questions, and when we can, we answer them. One of our recent students was a girl named Odessa Nelson. She came from a small town near Seattle, from a very conservative home. Odessa died in a skiing accident when she was back home, over the Christmas holidays, her senior year. She left behind a blog which no one had seen until after her death. Some of her statements will never leave me. On one occasion, she said: "When I first arrived on the Lee campus...I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be." And when she returned after the summer break, for her senior year, she exclaimed in that private blog: "I am once again in the place where we live our questions."

Well, yes, that's it, exactly. Lee University is the place where students live their questions. Where it's safe to express whatever is really on their hearts. Where their professors, or coaches, or RDs, or choir directors can be trusted to listen patiently, without judgement, then confidently point them toward God.

That's what we do at Lee University. That's who we are. God didn't call us to be merely an echo chamber for whatever is fashionable, either within the world or within the denomination. He called us here to give

faithful witness, with clarity but also with honesty, to students who come from your homes and churches, or from no church at all.

It's working at the point of tension between child-like faith and adult discovery, when young people are finding their footing, where their parents' faith is becoming their own. This is our work here at Lee. This is what it means to be a Christ-centered university.

Lee University is a place where we dream, and we don't apologize for our dreams, even if they seem foolish and impossible, because in the past 40 years, we have seen so many of our boldest dreams become reality.

We can't expect students to dream if their university fails to dream.

What a tragic loss, when students dream more than their institutions do. Youthful idealism can be squashed in the name of practicality; ambitious ideas can be sacrificed on the altar of "we already tried that," and students or faculty who want to push the institution forward are told: "it's not possible," or "it's not time yet," or "you just don't understand."

I've seen, in the past, a time when Lee College fell into that kind of paralysis, and it's a sad thing to behold.

The great poet Langston Hughes wrote this striking metaphor: "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird which cannot fly."

We must never let our dreams die. We might lose momentum, or enrollment, or revenue and get it back again. We can even lose people, good people, and others will step up to take their place. But if we lose our dreams, Lee will be a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.

We are a Christian liberal arts university, the most natural pairing I can imagine. Jesus Christ and the liberal arts: there is simply no contradiction there. Christ laid out such a beautiful and powerful vision of humankind, that it provided the basis and background for the arts and sciences, and for two thousand years we have written laws, composed music, and confronted injustice in His name, and by the spirit He embodied.

Christian liberal arts is not just the liberal arts with a thin layer of Christianity smeared on top. It's a recognition that all beauty and truth come from Him

and in some way, however imperfectly, seeks to connect back with Him.

You know we love music here at Lee. You just heard the choir sing a "Sanctus" in Latin, written by a French composer, and right after it, a gospel song from Pentecostal folks in rural Appalachia. But in both cases, the music touches our hearts because it arises from a deep human longing to reach out to God and to be touched by Him. That spiritual impulse appears in every century and every culture. It's the most primal, irreducible core of the human experience.

That's what the humanities express. All the history, all the literature, all the theatre, all the art of thousands of years flows from the image of God which is embedded in the heart of every man and woman. So the humanities aren't competitive with faith; the humanities express the presence of God.

So to us who believe in the one true God, to us who believe that the best life is a life of faith, why should we allow this treasure, this amazing storehouse of the humanities, be hijacked by unbelievers who detach the arts from the God who inspired them, and who worship beauty and learning for its own sake. We must not. We must not surrender this deepest and most profound gift of God to other people.

From that perspective, we don't see ourselves at war with contemporary culture, but rather at work within it, to transform it through the love and spirit of God. We aren't at war with our generation or with any of the men and women with whom we share this planet. Our war is with the Evil One, and we must understand that men and women everywhere are not Satan's allies, but his victims.

Remember the story of Malchus? He was part of the mob who arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter thought of him as the enemy. But when Peter, thinking they were at war, cut off Malchus's ear, Jesus himself didn't join the attack. Instead, he stooped in the dirt of the garden, picked up the severed ear, and healed Malchus, because he knew Malchus was not the enemy. We are not at war with the Malchuses of our generation; we are here as agents of love, not to attack them, but to bring healing to them.

This morning, I freely confess that we need help from you – all of you – to accomplish this work. So, okay,

what can you do to make a difference at Lee?

Well, let's get the first answer on the table right away. You can help us financially. There it is. You knew it was coming at some point, didn't you? One local business leader told me, after my speech at an earlier Celebration, "Paul, next time, why don't you just ask us to throw our wallets on the stage, and you take what you need and give the rest back?!"

Well, we haven't reached that point yet. But of course, it's true. Money talks, and we need to hear from you! There's an old country song that says, "If you're happy, notify your face." So I guess I could say, "If you believe in us, please notify your checkbook!"

But that's not the main thing we need from you. Honestly. We need you to trust us. We need you to communicate with us. When you hear things about Lee that concern you, we need you to give us the benefit of the doubt.

So I say to our Cleveland neighbors: We want a lot more than just your money. And to our brothers and sisters in the Church, we need a lot more than your money. We need, in the simplest and deepest way, your friendship. Your continuing friendship. You've given it to us before, so generously. It's what has brought us where we are, and we need it now, more than ever, to take us to the next level, to seize the bright new future that lies ahead for us.

We gather here this morning to put down a marker. In the Old Testament, there was something called an "Ebenezer". It was a monument which the children of Israel erected to mark a point in their journey, so they and their children could look back and remember God's work in their lives.

Here, on this campus today, we raise our Ebenezer. It is by God's grace we've come. We've been on this journey for over a hundred years, and lately, we have navigated some tough and treacherous passages. But, although we have been down, we are not out. An exciting path lies before us. because we're not done yet. I hope and believe that this day, September 20, 2024, marks a new beginning of growth and accomplishment for Lee University. If you've watched the last few decades of transformation at Lee, you ain't seen nothing yet. There's an exciting new journey ahead.

The time has come to quit asking why, and start asking why not?

It's time to quit asking, why did Covid happen? Or why weren't we better prepared when it did happen? Why did we hire this person, or lose that person. Why don't we have football? Why aren't our salaries higher, or why don't we have more parking? Okay, we've heard those questions. Some of them we can do something about, and some of them we can't.

But now it's time to ask the really important questions, the why not questions. Why not a big new engineering building, with all the bells and whistles? Why not enrollment back above five thousand? Why not a state-of-the-art student recreation center? Why not a renewed commitment to apologetics and ministerial training? Why not expand our campus boundaries to the north and south along the Parker Street corridor? Why not a Lee that is growing again, dreaming again? Why not send out more graduates than ever, going out into this society, with the dreams and the anointing to do God's work in a world which desperately needs their love and their message?

What a wonderful place to be – Lee University! And what a perfect time to be here – 2024 – on the edge of the most exciting chapter in the life of our university!

Over the past four decades, many pivotal decisions in the growth of Lee University have been introduced in Celebration speeches. Starting with Celebration '88, and continuing through Celebration 2024, these speeches have laid out major goals for the next period. Frequently, whatever was projected in one Celebration speech was completed by the next Celebration two years later. Lee's enrollment growth can be charted in these speeches. In that first Celebration in 1988, the question was raised: "why not two thousand students?" By the



2014 event, reaching the level of five thousand students was being celebrated.

Likewise with major capital campaigns and the new buildings they produced. Year after year, Celebration speeches announced Lee's commitment to new facilities for music, humanities, science, communication, religion, and education. Other major milestones were first unveiled in Celebration speeches — the closing of Church Street, the rebuilding of Ellis Hall after the 1993 fire, the birth of new programs such as nursing and theatre, the transition from college to university status. It has been a pattern for the Celebration crowd to march from Conn Center to cut the ribbons for new dorms or buildings such as the Student Union and Dixon Center.

One can virtually trace the recent history of Lee University by reading the fifteen Celebration speeches spread over three decades. The full texts of these speeches were always printed in the next edition of the "Vindagua". Following that custom, we have done the same in this issue of the Torch

In the future, will the Lee community look back at the Celebration 2024 speech as a prelude to the next stage of Lee's growth and development? Only time will tell.







Alex Kendrick

"Making Movies that Send a Message"



Mitchell Tolle

"The Unlikely Journey of a Professional Artist"



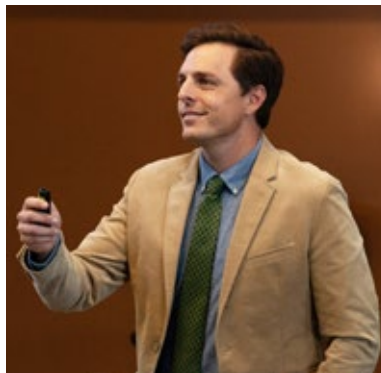
Gary Lewis

"Where the Church of God is Going and Why You Should Care"



Sarah Colonna

"Decoding the Mysteries of Cancer"



Wade Lombard

"The Life of an Entrepreneur: Building from the Ground Up"



Clark Beckham

"From Campus Choir to American Idol"



Patricia Nichols

"Women in the Army: A Place of Ministry"



Olivia Reeves

"Going for the Gold at the Paris Olympics"



Andrew Smith

"First Lee, then Afghanistan, then Back Again"

CELEBRATION SEMINAR SPEAKERS

"Something for everyone," was the promise when the lineup of Celebration Seminars was announced. The list was impressive, both in the quality of the speakers and the diversity of topics. A well-known movie producer, Alex Kendrick. An outstanding artist, Mitchell Tolle. The Church of God's chief executive, Gary Lewis. Olivia Reeves, a gold medalist in the 2024 Olympics. And a stellar list of prominent Lee alumni: Sarah Colonna (medicine), Wade Lombard (business), Clark Beckham ("Idol" runner-up), Patricia Nichols (military chaplaincy), and Andrew Smith (decorated Army veteran.)



November 1st - 2nd

Homecoming 2024 was a wonderful weekend of joyful reunions which brought together current students and alumni to celebrate Lee's rich traditions and vibrant community. The campus buzzed with excitement as former classmates reconnected, swapping stories and reminiscing about their college days. From academic receptions to the We Are Lee tailgate, from club breakfasts to the spirited basketball games, the tone for the weekend was energized.

Homecoming events have a way of bringing us back to familiar places with a renewed sense of pride. The autumn leaves and hint of fall in the air add to the festive atmosphere, with friends old and new gathering on the Ped Mall, enjoying live music, and savoring delicious food. The energy and engagement from hundreds of alums made it an incredible success. Students and alumni were actively participating in all events—from the parade to the basketball games and Conn Center events. Homecoming 2024 was a weekend filled with laughter, nostalgia, and the shared excitement of what the future holds.

1918 Society Golf Tournament

In addition to on-campus events, the Alumni Advisory Board hosted the third annual **1918 Society Golf Tournament** at the Cleveland Country Club. The weather was a bit overcast with some drizzling rain on Friday morning, but it didn't dampen the spirits of the eighty-eight golfers who gathered on the course. The tournament offered a fun yet competitive atmosphere, bringing alumni together for a day of camaraderie and sport. (More importantly, the event also served as a fundraiser for the 2024 Annual Alumni Fund). With each swing of the club, participants not only enjoyed the game, but also contributed to a cause that would help make a difference in the lives of students.

Formed in 2013, the Alumni Advisory Board (AAB) plays a crucial role in supporting the Office of Alumni Relations. The board's primary goals are to assist with the Annual Alumni Fund and to award the Young Alumni Professional Development Grant. The AAB also works tirelessly behind the scenes to organize and execute the 1918 Society Golf Tournament. A special thank you goes to the members of the Alumni Advisory Board for their hard work in planning and preparing for the third annual 1918 Society Golf Tournament. It's truly appreciated! Becky Griffis Wood '76, Shayn Fernandez '12, Kristin Crawford Kerley '00, Zach Nelson '12, Kristen

Murray Grisham '00, Maurice "Mo" Huggins '13, Debra Gladden '04, Zach Clevenger '15, Chad Goodman '11, Riley Whittington '18, Gerica Davis Vestal '11.

Friday, November 1st

The overcast skies and light drizzle on Friday morning gave way to better weather in time for the **Grand Reunion** on the Ped Mall. It was a memorable evening, filled with laughter, good food, and warm conversation. Alumni gathered on the Ped Mall and in the Deacon Jones Dining Hall for a delicious meal, creating a cozy, welcoming atmosphere despite the weather. Later that evening, the campus came alive with a variety of exciting events. **Volley for a Cure** took place in Walker Arena, with its familiar combination of an exciting volleyball match with a meaningful cause. And Lee won, beating University of West Alabama by a 3-1 score!

In the Conn Center, **Traditions of Lee** offered a nostalgic look at the university's history by highlighting significant anniversaries. Traditions of Lee featured a series of stunning musical performances, with the



Symphonic Band, Chorale, Jazz Ensemble, the Voices of Lee, and the Celebration Festival Choir each taking the stage. Each ensemble brought its unique sound and energy, captivating audiences with powerful renditions of both classic and contemporary pieces. The Symphonic Band filled the air with rich, dynamic harmonies, while Lee Chorale showcased their vocal precision and emotive performances. The Voices of Lee, globally known for their exceptional vocal talent, delivered an unforgettable performance that left the audience cheering for more. These musical acts, along with others, added an extra layer of celebration to the weekend.

In the Buzz Oates Theater, ***Dear Albert Einstein*** captivated audiences on both Friday and Saturday with its quirky, heartfelt coming-of-age story. The musical, filled with humor and charm, took the audience on a whimsical journey through the life of 12-year-old Susan Fisher, a math whiz navigating the challenges of fitting in at her new junior high school—while being followed around by an imaginary Albert Einstein. Under the direction of theatre professor Dr. Christine Williams, the student cast delivered engaging and entertaining performances. With its tuneful score and delightful storytelling, *Dear Albert Einstein* proved to be a musical that left everyone with a smile.

The ***Shenanigans Improv Show***, a student-led campus organization, drew a packed crowd in the Dixon Center on Friday night, as current students showcased their quick wit and comedic timing. The talented performers had the audience in stitches, delivering unscripted humor and spontaneous sketches that kept everyone laughing from start to finish. The energy in the room was electric. The show was just one of many events that made the weekend so memorable, offering a lighthearted break and a chance to enjoy the talents of Lee's students. The diversity of activities throughout the night, from theater to sports to music, offered something for everyone, along with a strong sense of community that provided an unforgettable evening at Lee University.

Saturday, November 2nd

Saturday morning brought a range of breakfast events. Academic departments, student clubs, and choirs hosted informal gatherings, allowing alumni to reconnect with former professors, fellow classmates, and current students. From department-specific breakfasts to choir reunions, the morning was filled with warmth and nostalgia, as alumni shared memories, celebrated

the accomplishments of our alumni, and providing opportunities to form new connections with the next generation of Lee students. A popular highlight was the recognition of Outstanding Alumni by each department.

The ***Class of 1974 Reunion*** was a heartwarming event that offered a chance for classmates to reconnect and reminisce about their time together. The Class of 1974 Breakfast was staged in the Conn Center Lobby. Over coffee and breakfast pastries, members of the reunion committee shared fond memories, recounting their experiences from their college days, from memorable professors to campus traditions, sparking laughter and nostalgic conversations. It was a time to reflect on the past, celebrate lasting friendships, and renew the bond with a place that shaped so many lives.

Saturday's Homecoming festivities filled the campus with energy and excitement. There was something for everyone. Activities filled the Ped Mall, where the air was alive with music. The Evangelistic Singers, Lee Singers, and Campus Choir provided choral performances in the Amphitheater. Over on the Science & Math Complex lawn, alumni businesses set up booths for the Flame Fair, offering a great opportunity to network and reconnect with fellow alumni while showcasing their ventures.

From the Clock Tower to Alumni Park, campus clubs and organizations set up booths, showing off the latest student initiatives. Meanwhile, ***President's Circle*** donors gathered on the Deacon Jones Dining Hall Patio, enjoying prime viewing spots for the spirited Homecoming parade that wound its way through campus, leading up to the Lady Flames and Flames basketball games.

And both games entertained large crowds. Neither game produced much drama – the men blew out Sewanee after watching the women trounce Grace – but it was a great way to showcase this year's teams.

During halftime of the men's game, Bruce Deel '90 was introduced as the ***2024 Distinguished Alumnus of the Year***. The Homecoming Court was also celebrated, continuing a tradition that goes back over sixty years.

Delta Zeta Tau 60th Anniversary

Homecoming 2024 marked a special milestone as Delta Zeta Tau celebrated 60 years of sisterhood, service, and faith at Lee University. The weekend kicked

off on Friday night with a cozy S'mores Social on the Deacon Jones Dining Hall Patio, where three hundred alumni and current members gathered around the fire to share stories and create new memories. An elegant anniversary breakfast followed on Saturday morning, offering a chance to reflect on the chapter's six decades of impact at Lee and the lasting bonds that have shaped the **Delta Zeta Tau sisterhood**. Throughout the weekend, alumni reconnected, reminisced, and celebrated the club's rich history. One highlight was the Alumni Softball Game on Bowdle-O'Bannon Field, where alumni and current members came together for some friendly competition. From gatherings to spirited athletic events, Homecoming 2024 was a fitting tribute to the Delta Zeta Tau legacy, filled with moments of joy, gratitude, and the enduring spirit of sisterhood. Delta Zeta Tau continues to be "Forever Proud, Forever Strong, Forever DZT" for alumni and current students.

Lee University Symphonic Band 35th Anniversary

One ensemble that celebrated during Homecoming 2024 was the Lee University **Symphonic Band**, a group with a storied legacy of musical excellence under the leadership of Dr. Mark Bailey '78. For 35 years, Dr. Bailey has guided the band, both on campus and around the world, fostering a deep commitment to instrumental music, excellence in performance, and a heart for worship. The weekend's festivities included a performance on Friday night, followed by a special anniversary concert on Saturday evening that brought together past and present members of the Symphonic Band. Alumni musicians were invited to join current students on stage, playing together in a perfect showcase of the bond between generations of musicians, as well

as to the lasting impact of Dr. Bailey's leadership on the Symphonic Band and Lee University's music program.

Conclusion

Overall, Homecoming 2024 was a huge success, filled with warmth, nostalgia, and a renewed sense of community. Alumni returned with their families, excited to reconnect with old friends and reminisce about their days on campus. From the departmental receptions, club breakfasts, the vibrant parade to the basketball games, Homecoming provided a space to reconnect alums with Lee University. It was a weekend of celebrating shared history, lasting friendships, and the enduring Lee spirit.

Mark your calendars and plan to come back home for **Homecoming 2025, November 7-8!** We can't wait to welcome you back to campus for another unforgettable weekend of reunion, celebration, and Lee University spirit. Whether it's reconnecting with old friends, revisiting familiar places, or experiencing new traditions, we want to see you and make more memories together. Don't miss out on the fun—make plans to join us for Homecoming 2025!

Mark Bailey '78 founded Symphonic Band thirty-five years ago, and hundreds of students have been part of this excellent group. A doctoral graduate of University of Cincinnati, Bailey returned to his alma mater with a vision for instrumental music which had not existed before he came. Combining the traditional repertoire of the wind band with the music of sacred music and praise, the "SymBand" provides a powerful musical and worship experience for audiences around the nation, and in places as far away as China, Europe, and South America.







DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR - BRUCE DEEL '90



Bruce Deel is the Founder and CEO of City of Refuge, an Atlanta based non-profit working to bring light, hope and transformation to those living on the margin. City of Refuge provides housing, education, medical, dental, vision and mental health care as well as vocational training for those leaving homelessness, returning from incarceration or overcoming addiction.

In addition, City of Refuge offers an array of support services for survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking and Bruce founded MOST, Men Opposing Sex Trafficking, an organization supporting anti-trafficking efforts in 3 areas; Prevention, Interdiction and Recovery.

Bruce is the author of Trust First and serves as a speaker and consultant to corporate and non-profit organizations around the country. He has been featured as a TEDx Speaker and is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for participating in the Longest Consecutive Softball Game, 121 hours, which raised funds to fight sex trafficking.

He has been married to his wife Rhonda for 37 years, is the father of 5 beautiful daughters and Papa to 12 extraordinary grandchildren.

HONORARY ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR - SCOTT TAYLOR



Scott Taylor, a native of Bradley County is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Bank of Cleveland. Taylor has always played an active role in the community and currently serves as Vice Chair of the Cleveland Bradley Industrial Development Board, Cleveland State Community College Foundation Board, Cleveland 100, and is an active member of MainStreet Cleveland.

Taylor is a graduate of Cleveland High School and attended Cleveland State Community College and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He began his 49-year banking career at Merchants Bank in 1975 and is one of the founders of Bank of Cleveland, which was formed in 1987. Under his direction, Bank of Cleveland has become one of the top performing banks headquartered in Tennessee.

Scott Taylor and his wife, Sharon, who passed away in 2021, have two children, Clint and his wife Beth, and Clarke, and his wife Kristen, and four grandsons, Caleb, Boone, Thomas and Will.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI BY DEPARTMENT

Behavioral & Social Sciences
Camden Morgante '08

Helen DeVos College of Education
Gary T. Ray '81

Communication Arts
Jessica Juarez '94

History, Political Science, & Humanities
Chris Cretton '06

Language & Literature
Janet Rahamut, '70 Honorary Alumna

Mathematical Sciences
Brittany Deaton '24

Natural Sciences
Matthew Workman '12

School of Business
Nate Tucker '95

School of Music
Mary Beth Wickes, Honorary Alumna

School of Theology & Ministry
Douglas LeRoy '65

School of Nursing
Kelsey Yoder '21

LEE'S DHMM STUDENTS PARTNER WITH OPERATION BLESSING HURRICANE RELIEF

by Bethany Marsh '25

Students from Lee's Disaster and Healthcare Mission Management (DHMM) program and Emergency Response Club recently traveled to Valdosta, Georgia, to partner with Operation Blessing in a disaster response from Hurricane Helene.

This trip was led by Jake Fast '18, director of the DHMM program and assistant professor of science in emergency management, and Matthew Adams, lecturer of nursing.

"I am so incredibly proud of these students who used their fall break to do strenuous and exhausting work for others," said Fast. "They truly represented Christ's love through their efforts and were able to show compassion and kindness when it was needed most."

Four senior DHMM majors, accompanied by Fast, traveled to Valdosta and started work with Operation Blessing on Monday, Oct. 7, and four underclassmen connected to the DHMM Emergency Response Club, accompanied by Adams, joined them on Thursday, Oct. 10. Both groups worked with Operation Blessing through Saturday, Oct. 12.





The student volunteers included Connor Brown, Aubrey Case, Emma Folsom, Ella Joyce, Grace LeMoine, Sarah Livingston, Logan Oaks, and Emmalee Rau. They spent the week helping with debris cleanup and chainsawing fallen trees that had caused damage to nearly every property where they were working.

Anchor Faith Church Valdosta hosted the group during their week stay in Valdosta.

“It was an absolute privilege to get to serve in Valdosta for the Hurricane Helene response,” said Sarah Livingston, DHMM Club president and a participant on the trip. “Having the opportunity to practice what we study with such an incredible team, including Operation Blessing and the Anchor Faith Church staff, made this trip extra special and dear to my heart. I greatly appreciate this experience and all that I learned from it, including how to use a chainsaw!”

The group’s connection to Operation Blessing was initiated through Michaela Morris Pope, a Lee alum who graduated from the DHMM program in December 2021 and is now the disaster case coordinator for Operation Blessing.

“After Hurricane Helene, Operation Blessing and its volunteers hit the ground running, providing support through hot meals, debris removal, tarping, and

chainsaw services,” said Pope. “It was such an honor to partner with the students from Lee’s DHMM program as a former DHMM student myself. My time in the program not only prepared me to confidently work in our emergency operations center, but also on the ground right in the middle of the chaos of disaster response.”

Operation Blessing is a nonprofit, humanitarian organization dedicated to demonstrating God’s love by alleviating human suffering. For 40 years, through compassionate, efficient, and locally focused programs, Operation Blessing has provided hunger relief, medical care, clean water, and disaster relief to millions around the world.

Lee University’s DHMM program prepares students to become leaders in the field of disaster preparation and response and healthcare missions. While in the program, students will receive numerous certifications and skills-based training, as well as experiential opportunities in various settings.

For more information about Operation Blessing, visit <https://www.ob.org/>.

For more information about the DHMM program or club, visit <https://www.leeuniversity.edu/academics/nursing/dhmm/>.

MOCK TRIAL WINS FIRST PLACE

by Iris Luce '24

Lee University's Mock Trial (LUMT) won first place at the Chucky Mullins Invitational, hosted by the University of Mississippi, and five members brought home individual awards.

"Lee's Mock Trial team has been so tremendously focused and driven all semester that I am not at all surprised by how well they performed," said Dr. Mark Scully, associate professor of political science and faculty sponsor for LUMT. "That does not mean, however, that I am any less proud of what they accomplished. I think this is a great example of what students can do in a cooperative, supportive environment where they are holding each other accountable, while also encouraging and supporting each other."

LUMT faced off against 20 teams from a variety of states, including Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Kentucky, among others. The Lee team scored a perfect 8-0-0, making it the top-ranked team in the entire tournament.

"Not only did we rank first, but we were the only team to acquire all eight of the ballots—we swept the entire field," said Paul Atherton, a senior political science major and president of Mock Trial. "The team is more motivated than ever before."

Mr. Atherton; Aiden Giavelli, a senior chemistry major; and Nolan Wallace, a junior political science major; each won the Outstanding Witness Award. Mr. Atherton and Victoria Lee, a senior history major, each brought home Outstanding Attorney awards.

"This was a good invitational to introduce what Mock Trial truly is to our new members and show them how it works, but also to put our hard work to the test," said Mr. Giavelli. "I can confidently say that our team has gotten better and grown together as a 'mock' family."

Following the success at the University of Mississippi, LUMT also competed at Emory University's Peach Bowl. The team prepares to compete at Georgia State University's Downtown Derby in November.

This year's competing Mock Trial team includes Mr. Atherton, Madelyn Ballew, Josh Cope, Shelby Flanigan, Mr. Giavelli, Lee, Grace Polikowski, Matthew Shackelford, and Nolan Wallace. The team also includes non-active members Rachel Atherton and Sydney Fant.

Lee University Mock Trial is a student-led organization for those interested in litigation and the law, acting and improvisation, critical thinking, and public speaking. LUMT comprises approximately 10 Lee students of various majors. Students participate as attorneys or witnesses in multiple competitions during the academic year.

For more information about the LUMT team, contact mocktrial@leeuniversity.edu.





- Eleven Faculty **Awarded Promotion in Rank**



- **University Relations Team** Expands



- Lee Moves Up in **U.S. News Best Colleges Rankings** (left)
- **Red Back Hymnal Night** Returns (right)



- **Voices of Lee** Celebrates 30th Anniversary



- **DHMM Students** Help with Hurricane Relief (left)
- **PLW Preaching Center** Hosts Inaugural Conference (right)



- Lee Welcomes **New Faculty** to Campus



- Nursing Grads Earn **100% NCLEX Pass Rate**

LEE REVIEW

HEADLINES YOU
MIGHT HAVE MISSED



“My goal was to combine Lee’s core values of service with our engineering project, and I think the students are very excited to have such a meaningful project that is useful for the elementary school.”

- Marcie Williams, PhD
Assistant Professor of Engineering

LEE ENGINEERING STUDENTS PARTNER WITH TAYLOR ELEMENTARY TO DESIGN GARDEN IRRIGATION SYSTEM

by **Bethany Marsh '25**

Lee's engineering department is partnering with 5th grade students at Taylor Elementary School to design an automatic watering system for their community garden.

Taylor Elementary School, a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) designated school, has a community garden in raised beds with no irrigation system. When manually watering the garden became an issue, the 5th grade students started a project to design an automatic watering system and asked Lee's senior engineering students to aid them in this process.

"Taylor Elementary is thrilled for the collaboration with Lee University because it offers numerous opportunities for my students to explore STEM careers while interacting with college students pursuing their degrees," said Miranda Avdyukov, the 5th grade math and science teacher at Taylor Elementary. "This project has sparked a newfound interest in my students for improving their community, while also fostering creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills to address real-world issues. We are incredibly grateful for this partnership and the positive impact it will have on our school through this collaborative effort."

The engineering students met with the Taylor students to discuss what ideas they had for the watering system before starting to sketch designs to find the best engineering solution. Part of this process also included taking measurements of the garden to accurately map out these designs.

According to Dr. Marcie Williams, assistant professor of engineering, the engineering students have thought heavily on the conservation of water to make sure that the final design is both eco-friendly and doable at Taylor Elementary.

"This project has been an extraordinary opportunity for both the school and the engineering team working to bring it to life," said Carson Sears, one of the senior engineering students working on this project. "Through our research and development of the watering system, we've gained valuable insights into real-world engineering design principles. We believe this project will ultimately have a positive impact through providing new learning opportunities for students and preparing our team for future careers in engineering."

The project began this August, and the students will work through March 2025 before presenting their automatic watering system in April 2025.

"In thinking about design projects, I really wanted to focus on designs that involved and served the community," said Williams. "My goal was to combine Lee's core values of service with our engineering project, and I think the students are very excited to have such a meaningful project that is useful for the elementary school."

Anyone interested in partnering with Lee's engineering department on future design projects, contact Williams at marciwilliams@leeuniversity.edu.

For more information about Lee's engineering department, visit <https://www.leeuniversity.edu/academics/arts-sciences/mathematical-sciences/engineering-science/>.







WISHING A CAMPUS LEADER A FOND FAREWELL: *Jayson VanHook*

by Brian Conn '96

Director of Communications

The Lee family learned in early October of the impending departure of veteran administrator Jayson “J.B.” VanHook ‘98, announced in meetings of the Board of Directors, Cabinet, faculty, and staff. Dr. VanHook transitioned to University of North Georgia (UNG) in Dahlonega as Associate Vice President for Data Strategy and Chief Data Officer, a role he began November 4.

This move marks the conclusion of a 27-year run as a Lee employee, more than half of which VanHook spent as a member of the President’s Cabinet. The post VanHook most recently held since 2021 was Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing, a sector which included not only the enrollment units and various offices engaged in the marketing activities of the university, but also the entire information technology team along with the institutional research office. The sector developed over time primarily aligning with the strengths and experience of VanHook as its vice president.

VanHook began his Lee work as an admissions counselor in 1997, immediately before wrapping up a bachelor’s degree in psychology, and while he worked to recruit students during some of the university’s most fruitful years of undergraduate enrollment growth, he began two enterprises that would define the trajectory of his career at Lee and beyond: team leadership and data analysis. After a short time as an admissions counselor, he enrolled in a master’s degree program in industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology at University of Tennessee – Chattanooga, was promoted to assistant director of Admissions, and was tapped to lead the A-Force team, the big productive student ambassador group who play a critical role in Lee’s recruitment efforts.

While completing the I/O Psych degree, he discovered a love and a skill for strategic data analysis in all manner of large, complex organizations, especially higher education, and this passion followed easily to a promotion to director of Lee’s office of Institutional

Research in 2002. Over the next 8 years, he completed a Ph.D. in Educational Studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, his team grew to include the records office, he was promoted to Assistant Vice President for Research and Records, and in 2010 he was named Vice President for Information Services.

His sector expanded in 2019 to the new name Information and Marketing, with the addition of Marketing, Public Relations, and Publications offices to his team. The addition of Enrollment at the end of 2021 created the final iteration of his portfolio at Lee, the sector Enrollment and Marketing.

Through this time, VanHook worked diligently, most often behind the scenes, applying his strengths to many initiatives pivotal to the university's path. He chaired and co-chaired multiple Celebration Steering Committees, chaired the committee planning for a year-long observation of the university's centennial, led the team conducting the university's comprehensive institutional scan, co-led the rigorous, ten-year re-accreditation self-study, along with coordinating, compiling, and analyzing numerous internal surveys crucial to the university's strategic planning process.

He carried out all these projects against a backdrop of his unit's steady delivery of support services to students and employees alike and the consistent innovation required for the university to survive and thrive in the midst of a global information revolution. Somewhere in there he had the opportunity to lead the talented team responsible for creating the feature-length documentary of Lee's centennial, *Hundred Year Journey*, in which he is credited as Writer and Executive Producer. He also shared his skills outside Lee walls, consulting with major manufacturers and other industries in America, Eastern Europe, and Asia on technology/data-driven enhancements to various aspects of their operations.

All this history and productivity comprises a narrative describing a multitasking professional with a knack for collaboration and strategy and a willingness to personally put in the work to see an exceptional result come to fruition. If you talk to him, he'd describe himself as a data-analyst who can do some other things well. So, the University of North Georgia has identified his expertise with, and passion for, data especially in the world of higher education, and they probably

don't realize that they are getting even more than they bargained for.

The role VanHook is filling seems custom built for his skillset and experience, and it is indeed a new role at the school. In an announcement on the UNG website, UNG President Michael Shannon said of the role and of VanHook's arrival that it was "a significant step forward in our data-driven strategic initiatives. Dr. VanHook will develop a comprehensive data strategy to inform student retention and graduation efforts, enrollment planning, and our ambitious Moonshot initiatives."

"Few alumni have brought so much value to Lee as Jayson VanHook. He is a multi-talented individual who has done many different jobs here during the last quarter-century, and we tell him 'goodbye' with gratitude and best wishes for his new challenge in Georgia," says Lee University president, Paul Conn.

UNG's gain is most certainly Lee's loss. And the Lee family feels this departure and will continue to, though we are thrilled for the VanHooks' exciting new venture.

With grown children, Jayson and his wife Sherra '05 are happy that this new appointment will keep them in the region. J.B.'s son Logan '23 and Logan's wife Madeline '21, M'23 are both Lee graduates living in Nashville. His daughter Madison is a junior psychology major / studio art minor at Lee, and Sherra's son, also named Logan, is studying exercise science at Chattanooga State.

"While it's bittersweet in a lot of ways," Sherra says, "we're confident in God's leading and excited to see what our future holds!"

"Sherra and I are looking forward to our next adventure together at the University of North Georgia," says J.B. "Lee University will always hold such a special place in our hearts, as our time there has been transformative."

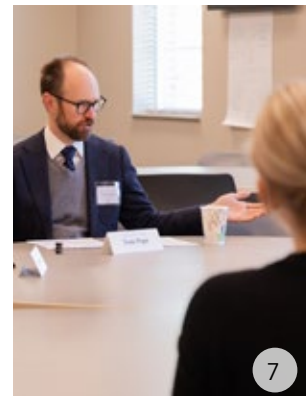
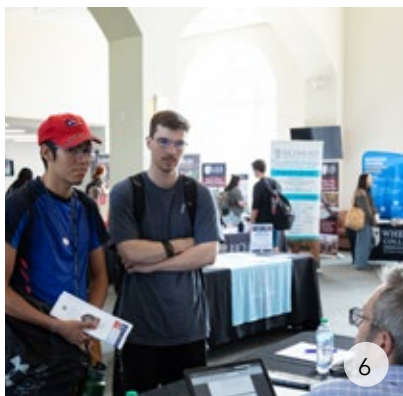
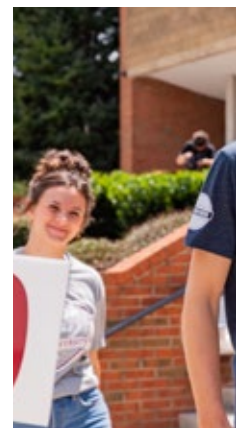
Here is a fact: Lee is a better place for the investment Jayson has personally made here. We thank him for his service to Lee and its people, and we wish him Godspeed for the future.

BTS ALUM, WORLD WAR II VETERAN, TURNS 100

Robert Moore, a proud alumnus of Lee (Bible Training School), recently marked his 100th birthday with a joyful celebration surrounded by family and friends at Westmore Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee. Born in Dandridge, Tennessee, on November 2, 1924, Robert, affectionately known as “Papo” to his loved ones, has lived a remarkable life. He attended the Bible Training School from 1940 to 1942 before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1943, where he served in the Italian Campaign during World War II. It was

during his service in Italy that he met Maria, the love of his life, with whom he shared 59 years of marriage. After returning to Tennessee, the couple built a life together. Following Maria’s passing, Robert remarried in 2006 to Ruth Ann Casteel. He is the proud patriarch of a large family, including five children, sixteen grandchildren, twenty-nine great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren. The birthday celebration was a testament to the enduring legacy of this extraordinary man.







CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

1 Dorm Wars 2024

The 31st annual Dorm Wars featured fierce competition, with Hicks-Brinsfield, Atkins-Ellis, and Keeble-Dirksen crowned champions.

2 NSO Welcome Walk

The Lee family gathers to welcome hundreds of newcomers – with Valor, the Viking – during New Student Orientation.

3 Deke Day

Over 650 new freshmen and transfer students spend a day giving back to the community during Deke Day.

4 Men's Soccer vs. UWF

The Lee Flames take on the University of West Florida in an exciting match at the Ray Conn Sports Complex.

5 Parade of Favorites

Emma Grace Morgan is crowned Lee University's 2024 Miss Parade of Favorites.

6 Graduate Fair

Students explore grad school options and program offerings during the fall Graduate Fair.

7 CRC Symposium

Dr. Thomas Pope leads a discussion group during the 9th annual Civic Virtue and Thought Symposium, hosted by the Center for Responsible Citizenship.

8 Presidential Concert Series

David Shifrin, Gloria Chien, and the award-winning Miró Quartet open Lee's 24-25 Presidential Concert Series.

9 Trunk-or-Treak

Lee's Greek clubs decorate their trunks and pass out candy to kids from the community.

10 Constitution Bowl

Local highschoolers compete against opposing teams and test their knowledge on the U.S. Constitution.

11 Tap Night

Members of Omega celebrate Tap Night, the semi-annual tradition where Greek organizations welcome new members into their ranks.

12 McNair-Ledford Symposium

Award winners from the Sixth Annual McNair-Ledford Undergraduate Research Symposium proudly display their research presentation awards.

13 Java and Jams

Omega Alpha Phi and Tau Kappa Omega host a night of coffee and music.

14 Hope for Exiles

Jeroy Watson leads a service with worship group Hope for Exiles in the Conn Center for members of the Lee and Cleveland community.





THE GRAND CANYON RIM TO RIM TO RIM

by Jeff Salyer, PhD '01

Director of Marketing, Assistant Professor of Communication

“That sounds terrible! I’m in.”

This is the common way a conversation begins among several of my friends. We do our best to warn our kids about the troubles that come with succumbing to peer pressure, but what we fail to tell them is that peer pressure never stops, and for me, it seems to have gotten worse. There’s a large group of men in my circle of influence who are known by a few monikers – The Half Warriors, The 5:30 AM Running Crew, or those crazy guys. Most of these men went to Lee or have strong connections through family or their work. Over the years, several in the group, at different times, have engaged in what might be considered reckless behavior, always centered on running. These adventures include countless half and full marathons, 50k trail races, Ragnar Relays, The Run Now Relay to Boston, America’s oldest ultramarathon, the JFK 50 Miler, Leadville 100 miler, the Last Annual Vol State 500k solo race across Tennessee, and most recently, an attempt to run rim to rim to rim of the Grand Canyon.

Matt Carlson ‘00 wanted to do something “epic” for his 50th birthday and pitched the idea of running across the Grand Canyon. In retrospect, we decided a trip to Dollywood might have been a better way to celebrate, but we tend to avoid the easy and enjoyable in favor of the difficult and rewarding. Eight of us from the larger group, ranging in age from 45 to 60 years old, began a spring and summer of training, preparing for the early October goal date.

Rim to rim to rim consists of running or hiking across the Grand Canyon using the trail system in the national park. There are several routes one could use in the attempt, and part of the adventure is choosing the route you think will most likely lead to your success.

Some of the trails have rest stops with fresh water and toilets, while other trails are more desolate. We chose the south rim to north rim and a return to the south. The National Park Service has several warnings posted about attempting to hike from one rim to the other in one day as dangerous and ill-advised, let alone to go there and back.

We gathered in the hotel lobby at 2:30 a.m. to drive over to the trailhead and begin by 3 a.m. We gathered in a circle, said a prayer over the day, and began the long, deep descent in the dark. The temperature was a

comfortable 39 degrees, but as we dropped down in the Canyon, the temperature steadily rose with each step. The trail is steep and technical, and the loose dirt made some steps treacherous. Looking on one side of the trail, you could see faint dots of headlamps moving hundreds of feet down into the dark abyss. We hugged the canyon wall as we made the 7-mile journey to the Colorado River, descending over 4,000 feet. Most experts warn that the descent is the most difficult part of the journey. Your quads and calves strain against gravity, which naturally pulls you, as you attempt to safely navigate the technical trails.

We reached Phantom Ranch right before sunrise, filled our water bottles, and immediately began a long ascent towards the north rim. We were all feeling great! Now we were in a runnable section with well-trod trails. For the next 9 miles, the grade was steady but not overly steep, and we traversed our way through the canyon. It’s almost impossible to describe how beautiful the Grand Canyon is from this new perspective. The day before, I was overwhelmed by how vast the Grand Canyon was from the rim. Pictures do not do it justice. But at the bottom, looking up to the north rim over a mile in the air is truly breathtaking and terrifying.



They have a saying at the Grand Canyon, “descent is optional, ascent is mandatory.” The climb to the north rim is over 6,000 feet and becomes steep at mile 15. The sun is now fully up. The temperature has risen to 100 degrees, and there is limited shade on the north side at that time of day. This is where our stories begin to diverge. Matt Ryerson, Robert Green, and Dewayne Moree are behind Cason Conn, in the front. Duane Goff ‘00 and Carlson are together in the middle, and Eric Geren and I were in the back. We made an agreement that no one would be alone on the trail, especially in the back of the pack because people die hiking and running in the Grand Canyon every year. I followed all the training, but something got out of whack with my hydration and nutrition, combined with the heat and climbing, and by mile 16.5, I was not doing well. I’ll spare you the gory details, but for 5 miles, we trudged sickly, slowly onward, stopping for shade often. Some other runners saw my distress and gave me some extra electrolytes with caffeine, which helped push us to the end.

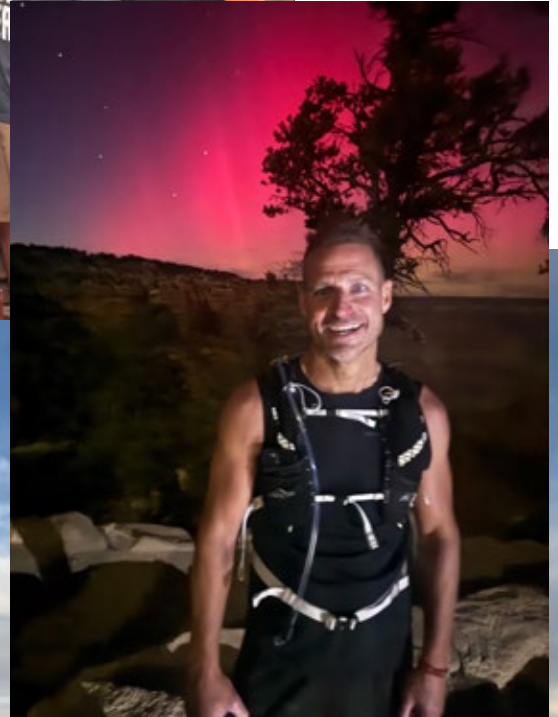
Eric carried my pack for several miles to save me the burden of the weight. I was humbled and grateful

for his friendship and sacrifice. We didn’t know until we all talked later, but most of us were not doing well. We all stuck together in groups and emerged at the North Kaibab trailhead 10 hours after we began, which isn’t a bad time. Five of us called it quits on our rim to rim attempt at that point. Cason was flying back down the trail towards the south rim when we were at mile 18. Matt Ryerson met us when we were about half a mile from the finish, and Dewayne Moree caught up with him after we reached the top. We had one car at the north rim, and we (10 of us) piled in for the 4-hour drive back to the hotel on the south rim. On the way, we met up with my family to alleviate the car crowding.

By the time we got back, Cason was ready to be picked up at the Bright Angel trailhead, having completed the 48-mile journey in an impressive 14 hours. Despite dehydration, a swing to cold temperatures, and a rattlesnake on the trail, Dewayne and Matt finished a little after 1 a.m. for a 22-hour completion time. We’ve adopted a couple of group mottos, and they work well together. “Do hard things!” and “If you’re going to be dumb, you gotta be tough.” While so much of the world is focused on making life easier, more convenient,

and less painful, we’ve learned there is so much more value in the journey when you take risks, set lofty goals, go through some pain, and attempt things where success is not guaranteed. It’s not about the achievements, earning medals (we’re having our own made), or accolades from people. These runs are not about us as individuals. They are about community, living our lives together, supporting one another as brothers rooted in our shared faith, and setting a positive example for our kids. So, when one of us says, “Let’s go run a hundred miler next,” without hesitation, we say, “That sounds like a terrible idea! I’m in.”





PRISON PROJECT REFLECTION

Lee Student works with Sudreau Global Justice Institute

by Emma Joy McCarthy '23

Within the gates of a Ugandan prison, hopelessness feels as tangible as the unyielding blanket of humidity. My week began with the tears of a guilty man and ended with the tears of one innocent.

We came to plea bargain, to negotiate sentences outside of court to give prisoners certainty of the time they will serve and expedite the cases remaining for jury trial. The power rests in the prisoners' own hands: no person has to plea bargain nor accept the sentence offered. Yet nearly all realize a trial will take far longer than they are willing to wait and likely end with a longer sentence. Plea bargaining is more often than not the best choice.

Day One, we jump right in. We read files, we interview prisoners. Murder, defilement, aggravated burglary. The weight of it all bears down like the harsh African sun. Wrong has been done here and it comes at a cost. Even still, a gentle breeze carries the faintest of whispers: mercy triumphs over judgment.

It makes no sense, looking into the eyes of a man who brutally killed for hire and assuring him you will make sure he serves no more time than justice allows. Arguing for a shorter sentence for a man who robbed numerous victims. Telling a man who raped his daughter, "I am here to represent you and protect your constitutional rights." Just as it made no sense for a perfect man from Nazareth to hang on a cross on my

and your behalf. There is judgment, yes. Years of prison await most of these men, and few would argue their fate should be different. But grace says this will not be where the story ends, and compassion says despite it all, I want the best for you. Love says you are worth more than the worst mistake you have ever made.

I call the name of a prisoner, a man arrested a year ago for killing his coworker. I walk with him to the table and we both sit down. Our eyes meet. I looked at his driver's license copied in his file mere moments earlier, and I know we are the same age. From separate sides of the earth, we probably took our first steps within months of each other. I'm sure he also spent summer evenings running barefoot through the grass catching fireflies, woke up before the sun every Christmas morning, and beamed with excitement when he saved up enough to buy his first car. How did we end up on separate sides of this table?

We talk about his case. His voice trembling, he admits to pulling the trigger that caused his friend's death. Regret is written across his face so clearly, it may as well be with a pen. I negotiate his sentence with the prosecutor, emphasizing his remorse. He is a first time offender. He is young. The prosecutor accepts 20 years. The prisoner takes the deal, pretending to be brave as he nods his thanks. I shake his hand and return his file with the submitted plea deal, and suddenly it makes sense. I didn't always understand how a lawyer could represent someone who was undoubtedly guilty, but I do now. The

most heinous wrongdoing does not negate someone's humanity. The most despicable crime does not remove the mark of God's image. Somehow, grace has found its way into the picture.

We strain our eyes, searching for both mercy and justice. Shadows shift and we see – mercy comes like a fist from the left and justice comes like a fist from the right. We close our eyes and brace ourselves for the collision, yet somehow, impossibly, the fists open and they clasp hands. Fingers interlace and we can no longer tell one from the other. Is access to legal representation a right one is owed, an act of justice? Or is it an unmerited privilege, an act of mercy? The line is blurred, or perhaps it never existed at all.

For every man rightfully in prison, there seem to be two who should not be there. Case after case introduces me to farmers, fisherman, students, and fathers arrested for the most petty of charges, imprisoned and separated from their families for reasons which may be laughable if they were not reality.

I sit across the table from a group of prisoners, nine men who share a file comprised of a single sheet of paper. I share their confusion surrounding their arrest. "I was just walking down the street," one explains, his eyes still wide with bewilderment as he remembers that day. "The police came and arrested all of us. Everyone they could find who was on the street at that time." Disturbing the peace, the charge reads. No further explanation.

I take the case to the prosecution, and their sentences become time served. These men are among our immediate releases. I return to the table, carrying

news so incredible and life-altering I feel unworthy to deliver it.

"I'm going to finish school," one man whispers, his eyes glowing as he realizes the freedom that is now his. Another turns to face the prison gate in wonder, beaming as he talks about his wife and daughter he is returning home to. We fill out the plea bargaining forms, and the papers rustle through the wind, an unspoken reminder – mercy triumphs over judgment.

The week ends and prison gates lock behind us. Evening light dances across the rust colored earth as we walk away. How many hundreds of men do we leave behind? Most unknown to me, none to their Maker.

The men I did sit with, their faces I will never forget. The 29-year-old who aided in many robberies, feeling invincible until the fateful night the police finally caught up with him. My name is feminine in my own country and masculine in his. We share it. The 19-year-old, imprisoned for merely being present in a place known for drug use. He himself never touched substances. He is barely out of high school, the same age as my brother. The 37-year-old father, arrested in an unwarranted roundup of everyone on the street. He left behind four kids with no idea how they would get by in his absence.

This week I learned desperation tastes like salty tears mixed with dust and sweat. Hope sounds like the whispered prayer of gratitude from a prisoner whose name is called after waiting eight hours in the sun. And redemption looks like everyday clothes on the back of a man who once wore orange stripes.







LEE UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS



BASKETBALL IS BACK!

*FLAMES
SET HIGH
EXPECTATIONS
FOR 2024-25
SEASON*



by George Starr
Director of Sports Broadcasting

The Lee men's basketball team was picked to finish second in the Gulf South Conference Preseason Poll, just two points behind rival Alabama Huntsville as they tip off another exciting season of Lee basketball.

The Flames and Chargers are once again poised to battle it out for the top two positions with the University of West Alabama not far behind ranked third in the poll.

Overall, the close voting resulted in Huntsville receiving six first-place votes and Lee four, totaling 115 points for the Chargers and 113 for the Flames. West Alabama received a pair of first-place votes and 102 tallies. Christian Brothers was selected fourth (75 points).

"It's always nice to be recognized in the pre-season polls, but with so much changing in college basketball, and the ability for rosters to turnover, you never know what each team will have until we start playing games," said Lee Coach Bubba Smith after viewing the poll for the first time.

The Flames are confident coming off their fourth trip to the NCAA Tournament in the last five years. "We have plenty of GSC experience on our roster and new additions that were part of championship teams last year, so we should have high expectations for ourselves. The GSC is always going to be good, top to bottom. We have great coaches in this league, really good players, and there are no easy games. All coaches will say this, but we are more concerned with the improvements we need to make and where we ultimately finish in late February and early March," Coach Smith concluded.

The Flames return impact players from a year ago, Noah Boler-Kyle, Tim Vaughn, Tariq Daughton, Willie Walton, Jamarcus Wilkins, and Zach Gray.

Lee also hit the recruiting trail and landed some talented transfer players and freshman class. Giancarlo Valdez, a 6-foot-3 guard who is a graduate student from Division I program Stetson University (Fla.) landed on the GSC Newcomer Watchlist. At Stetson, Valdez was a part of the team that made it to the ASUN Championship and a NCAA DI Tournament berth. The Flames also

bolstered the roster with transfers Marlon Smith, who comes to the Flames from last year's GSC Champions, West Georgia, and Brett Bowman, who comes from Shorter.

LADY FLAMES PICKED 2nd IN GSC PRESEASON POLL

With everyone returning from last year's 21-11 NCAA Tournament team, the Lady Flames once again enter as one of the top teams in the GSC as the 2024-25 season tips off.

For the fifth time in the last six seasons the GSC, coaches picked Union as the team to beat. The Lady Bulldogs collected eight first-place votes and 118 total points. Lee, Union's longtime in-state rival, received four first-place nods and 114 points.

"This will be an exciting season for women's basketball in the GSC," proclaimed Lee Coach Marty Rowe as he viewed the voting for the first time. "We are optimistic about our team but there are no guarantees in this league. There has been some (coaching) turnover in the league since last season, which I think is exciting. Our group is going to need to improve daily and be ready for tough battles game in, game out."

Senior guard, Mallory Hampton was named to the Preseason All-GSC team after averaging a league-best 19.6 points per game and over 100 assists a year ago. Hampton also thrived in the classroom as she was named to the CSC Academic All-District Team and helped the Lady Flames earn the prestigious WBCA National Academic Award.

Said Coach Rowe, "I'm thrilled that coaches continue to recognize Mallory the way they do. She has earned it over the last two seasons, and we are looking forward to seeing her lead us again this year."

In addition to Hampton, Lee brings back a full roster of impact players including Anna Muhonen, Haylee Johnson, Addison Smith, Kara Williams, Haley Cameron, Milah Williams, Keira Leffew, Mia Hurst, and Baylee Delbridge.



*Burnette Competes
on PGA Tour*



*Smith Officially
Named Women's
Lacrosse Head
Coach*



*Daniels, Nedrow,
Suto Claim
Baseball All-
American Award*



*McIntyre
Promoted to
Deputy Athletic
Director*



*18 Lee Athletes Earn
GSC All-Academic
Team*



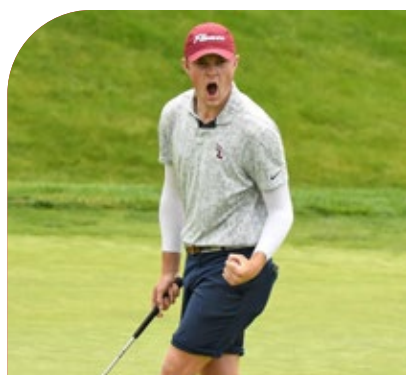
*Women's Lacrosse
Named Member
of Academic
Honor Squad*



Lee Ranks 15th out of 304 NCAA Division II Schools in Director's Cup



Men's and Women's Golf Set School Records with Fall Victories



Lewis-Perkins Ends Career with All-American, GSC Golfer of the Year Honors



Men's and Women's Cross Country Capture First in GSC



Srichantamit Honored as All-American, GSC Golfer of the Year



LeeUniversityFlames



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ALYX DILL:

For the Love of God and Sports

by George Starr

Over the years I have been blessed to have covered and write about hundreds of talented athletes, but very few have left me searching for ways to describe a young lady who loves God, sports, and Lee University like Alyx Dill ‘27.

Alyx was raised in a Christian home by her parents Jeremy and Shannon Dill. “My family is one of God’s biggest blessings, and I am so thankful to have grown up in a loving household with a family that led me to trust in and live for the Lord,” she proclaimed.

Her love for sports began at an early age. “Ever since I was in elementary school, I have been fascinated by sports. Growing up, my dad would always have a football or basketball game on (the TV), and that really started my love for sports,” Alyx pointed out. “I was always the type to play around on the playground, and God has given me a desire for sports and athletics in general. I love watching, supporting, and playing anything.”

At just over 5-foot-2, she was a setter and two-time captain of the Polk County High School volleyball team. During football and basketball seasons, she was a loyal member of the Pep Club. Alyx graduated from high school in 2023 and was valedictorian of her class, which she called, “another blessing from God.”

Sports had already become a major part of her life. “I absolutely loved playing volleyball, and I am so thankful that God allowed me to play for Him,” she explained. “Playing volleyball gave me some of the best friends and memories I have to this day, and God even gave me the opportunity to lead team devotions during my senior year.”

Alyx would have loved to try and play college volleyball, but things did not work out, and being a manager for three teams at Lee might be working better. “I am thankful that God’s plans are higher and better than mine because I love managing. If I had played in college, I probably would not have had all the experiences that I do now,” she noted.

Being a big UTK Volunteer fan, Alyx had planned to attend the Knoxville university for over a year. “It was my biggest dream. I had registered for classes and picked a dorm when I attended orientation a couple of months prior to the start of the semester. At the orientation, I just felt like something was off, like maybe this was not the place for me. I prayed about where I should go for a few weeks, and the Lord was leading me to Lee University,” she confessed.

After finally figuring out that she had made a final decision about college, Alyx wasted no time in trying



(Left to Right) Matt Moore-FCA Area Director, Christa Fabre-Lee Volleyball Coach, Alyx Dill, Baylor Terrell-Cleveland Cosmetic Dentistry/FCA Sponsor, Bubba Smith-Lee Men's Basketball Coach

to get involved in sports at Lee. “To make connections, I emailed the coaches to see if they had any spots available for me to help. I was still praying about whether the Lord wanted me at Lee or UTK, then the coaches started responding and making meetings with me to talk about managing possibilities.

“Working with volleyball, men’s basketball, and baseball has been such a blessing since coming to Lee; in fact, working with athletics is one of my favorite parts of Lee University,” said Alyx.

“I am so thankful that God led me to Lee. God is so good in how He works things out, and His plans are always higher than ours. Although it was hard to give up UTK, the Lord has blessed me more than I could have imagined here at Lee. Working with the teams, being able to still see my family, growing in my relationship with Him, and meeting some of my best friends has been such a blessing in just one year at Lee.”

She admits that each of the three programs has played a different role in her life, and there are several reasons why she loves working with each program. “For starters, all three sports have the best coaches, as they quickly welcomed me into their programs and lovingly cared for me personally, as well.

“Since I played volleyball in high school, I was interested in managing the team so that I could still be a part of the sport I loved. Coach (Christa) Fabre ’12 and Coach Cece (Blanchard) have made it so much more than volleyball, though, as the team and the coaches have become such a source of encouragement and light in my life! Lee volleyball is really one of the most encouraging groups of people.”

Volleyball Coach Fabre shared, “What a gift Alyx has been for our program. We are going into our second year having her as a manager, and from the start, she has served our team with humility, always looking

for ways to help. She takes care of so much behind the scenes. She is intentional about learning our drills and how each one is run so she can help them move smoothly. More importantly, she has connected with our girls in such a cool way and is an example of Christ’s love to them day in and day out!”

While the volleyball team has games remaining on its schedule, men’s basketball is getting ready to begin its season. “Men’s basketball has also been such a big part of my Lee experience. The team has quickly become a family to me. As soon as I started working with the team, I knew that this was one of those ‘for such a time as this’ opportunities. This is where I met my best friend and fellow manager Jessikiah Brown ’24, and I could never be more grateful for the Christ-centered relationship I have gained with her,” Alyx said while sharing her love for the team.

She has already had memorable road trips with the team. “I have been blessed with the opportunity to travel with the men’s basketball team. A typical trip would consist of getting meals ready, doing laundry, keeping score, and just doing anything needed,” Alex shared.

“We have gone to so many places in just one season, and there have been so many fun memories stemming from long bus rides, team dinners, and even away practices. I will never forget flying for the first time on our way to the NCAA tournament. I was excited but nervous, and all the boys were trying to check and make sure I was okay (some of the sweetest people ever).”

Said Men’s Assistant Basketball Coach Jason Laatsch, “Last summer, I received an email from a new freshman eager to join our basketball team as a student manager. At the time, I had no idea just how profoundly this person would influence our program. That person was Alyx Dill, and she has since become one of the most valuable additions to

our team, making a significant difference in numerous ways from the moment she arrived on campus. Our basketball culture is built on the pillars of attitude, effort, unity, trust, and servanthood—qualities that perfectly embody Alyx.

“Moreover, Alyx has demonstrated an extraordinary Christ-like spirit in her acts of giving, loving, and serving. Her presence radiates the light of Jesus, enriching our team and program. We are incredibly grateful to have Alyx as part of our team and deeply appreciate the positive impact she continues to make.”

Basketball is a long season, but Alyx made time to fit baseball into her busy schedule with the first pitch being thrown in February. “Coaches (Mark) Brew ‘01, (Jorge) Saez ‘21, (Kaleb) Schmidt, and (Thomas) Zazzaro ‘22 have been so generous and kind in my time with baseball,” she allowed. “Being a small part in such a Christ-centered organization has been a blessing. It is a blessing to learn from these experienced and genuine coaches, as they truly care about preparing me for my future career aspirations.

“I have also had the opportunity to assist Jonathan Dukes ‘12 (baseball PA announcer) in the press box, and it has been such an encouragement in my life to see how joyful, caring, and loving he is because of His relationship with the Lord.”

Alyx, a 4.0 high school student, shared, “Academics have always been very important to me, and I take class attendance seriously. It is definitely a challenge to stay caught up in class, finish homework, and study while travelling, working games, and spending over four hours in practices. It has taught me how important it is to be smart and efficient with my time. Since I spend so much time in practices and even miss classes due to my work with the teams, I have been challenged to take

advantage of all the free moments I get so that I do not get behind in my classes,” she admitted.

It comes as no surprise that Alyx is a sport management major. “I am excited to see what future career opportunities the Lord provides. I would love to work in the business of sports, specifically as a sports agent, general manager, athletic director, or other organizational opportunity. On the other hand, the Lord has used the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) as a very big part of my testimony, so I would also love to work in some capacity in this ministry organization with collegiate athletes. The best of both worlds would obviously be staying at Lee University to serve these organizations in a ministry capacity.”


“God has taught me a lot about how powerful and graceful He is through FCA, as He has given me so many opportunities I do not deserve...”

The local FCA recently selected Alyx as the Fellowship of Christian Athlete of the Month (August). “The FCA has been another true blessing from God. After the Lord saved me and came into my heart, I started hearing of FCA at my middle school. I was always the shy girl that never wanted to talk to anyone, and suddenly, I felt like God was telling me that I should be a

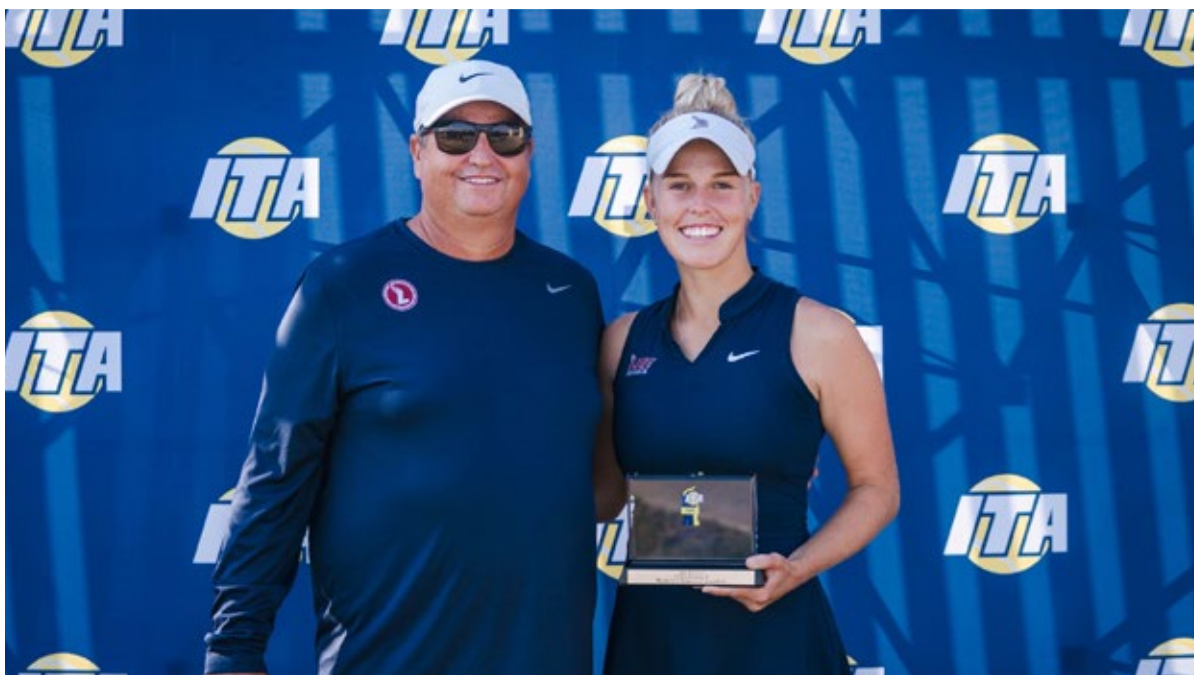
huddle leader. Throughout middle and high school, I had the opportunity to be a huddle leader.

“God has taught me a lot about how powerful and graceful He is through FCA, as He has given me so many opportunities I do not deserve. In high school, I was honored with the FCA Ocoee Athlete of the Year Award, which recognized the legacy of Chris Leggett – a missionary from Cleveland that was martyred for his faith. This was such an honor to be a part of, as I did nothing to deserve it, but the Lord is faithful!

You get the feeling that God has just began to have plenty was exciting plans for the young 5-foot-2 lady from Polk County High who has found her calling in sports, the Lord, and the FCA at Lee University.



SIMES BRINGS TENNIS NATIONAL TITLE TO LEE



by Carman Lastoria '08
Director of Donor Relations

Every player aspires to win a National Championship, but few get the joy of actually seeing those aspirations come to life.

Lee women's tennis standout, Ashleigh Simes '25, is one of those few.

Simes began the fall weekend in Mount Berry, Georgia, as Lee University's first representative at the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) Cup as an at-large selection, and now she is the first Lady Flame tennis player to be a national champion after winning her fourth match in four days to claim the title on October 13.

"When I won the decisive match to become a National Champion, it was very overwhelming. It's hard for me to describe, especially because I try my best not to show much emotion, but I felt a massive rush of happiness and accomplishment," expressed Simes. "There was also a huge sense of disbelief, but all of the hard work and support from my teammates, coach, and Lee community, made the moment even more special."

Simes faced the University of North Georgia's Anglina Linnikova in the final and claimed a straight-set victory. She won the opening set 6-2 and completed the championship run with a dominating 6-1 performance in the second set.

The beautiful irony of her championship experience was that Simes was on the brink of losing right out of the gate when she was pushed to the limit in her opening match.

“The tournament was a roller coaster. In my first match, I was down 6-1 and 4-1 (two points away from being eliminated), and at that point it seemed like that match was slipping away,” admitted Simes. “I remember telling myself to just take it one point at a time. I also had Coach Hynes out on the court with me, and he helped me to come up with a different game plan. In the second match, I was a set down again, but after the first match I did believe I could turn things around again. All of the girls I played were incredible competitors; every match was a battle. I think what helped me the most was being able to stay in the moment and believing in myself.”

Over the entirety of the ITA Cup, Simes went 4-0. She lost just two sets, each of those coming in her first two matches. In the semifinal contest against Flagler’s Dana Heimen, Simes needed a first-set tiebreaker to win 7-6 and was pushed again in the second set where she held off Heimen for the 7-6 (7-3), 7-5 win. Overall, Simes outscored her opposition 55-39.

Coach Patric Hynes, now in his 11th season as leader of the Lee tennis programs, was with Simes every step of the way as a calming and encouraging presence on the sidelines.

“Right after the match, I have to admit that I had a really difficult time holding it together. We had a lot of bumps in the road getting to this moment. She had to fight through some difficult moments in all three matches leading up to the final,” said Hynes. “Even just getting to the tournament was not easy. She started off as an alternate, so we needed someone to pull out of the tournament to just get onto the field. Once we were there, I felt like Ash could do something special. Our region is strong, and she had already had a semi-final result at our regional qualifying tournament. Starting this one out, we were a handful of points away from going out first round and had to battle back again in the quarterfinals. Semifinals she was flying, then broke two strings in three points and we lost momentum, but she managed to grab it back. The final was a coach’s dream; that was the best I’ve seen her play. I’m just so proud of what Ash has accomplished. Good things happen to good people, and she’s one of the best.”

Simes embarked on a long journey to make Lee University her home three years ago. The senior was born and raised literally on the other side of the world in Canberra, Australia.

“Australia is very beautiful; the snakes and spiders definitely aren’t as bad as everyone thinks,” Simes noted with a smile. “I miss the food, my friends, and especially my family. My parents are both nurses, and while they often can’t watch my matches, they have always believed in me and supported me throughout my tennis journey. From early on, they have always encouraged me to do what I love and pushed me to give my best, which I am so grateful for. My brother has also always encouraged me and been there for me, for which I am incredibly lucky. I did get homesick when I first came to Lee, but my teammates have become like a second family to me.”

That “second family” idea is a familiar refrain you often hear from Lee University student athletes. It speaks of the culture of the athletic department and the intentionality of the coaches and staff to pour into their student athletes in every facet of their lives, not just in their sport.

“Being a part of the Lee tennis program has meant everything to me. It has been an incredible journey, not just for my tennis career, but for my personal growth,” said Simes. “The support I have had from Coach Hynes and all of the assistant coaches has helped me to become a better player and person. I’ve also had so many amazing teammates along the way, and I wouldn’t be where I am today without them. This program makes me feel part of something





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REMEMBERING LARRY CARPENTER

by George Starr

My mind was filled with all types of memories after my former co-worker and boss finally lost his battle with cancer. At first the doctors gave him only six months or less, but for those who called him Coach or “Carp” he’d still be sharing a smile and telling us he loved us well over two years later before finally succumbing to the deadly disease.

To me, Larry Carpenter ‘77 is the pure and simple meaning of Lee College Vikings and Lee University Flames Athletics. A Church of God kid, he was recruited by Coach Dale Hughes ‘64 and developed into a two-time NCCAA All-American and helped lead the Vikings to their first NCCAA National Championship. He was also the first player to have his jersey retired, but that was some 50 years ago and only the beginning of the man I think we should title “Mr. Lee Athletics!”

Upon graduation from Lee in 1977, Larry took a full-time job at Olin Chemical but jumped at the opportunity to serve as a part-time basketball assistant (1976-92) under head coach Randy Steele ‘81. At the same time, he and his devoted wife Cheri ‘91 were raising three children in a Christian home. In 1993 he was named head coach of the Flames and directed the team to its second NCCAA title in 1994.

Over several years, I had been working as a sports editor for the Cleveland newspaper and doing radio broadcasts for Lee basketball. In addition to serving as the men’s basketball coach, Carpenter was the athletic

director and would recommend my becoming the fulltime sports information director and radio man.

That was about the same time (1999) he stepped away from coaching and began his remarkable career as Lee’s athletic director. I jumped on board for many long rides that I will never forget.

We traveled to Florida to follow golf, to Kansas and Alabama to watch our women’s soccer teams win NAIA National Championships, back to Kansas City for men’s basketball, and a real quick drive back across the heartland to Kentucky to cover our women’s basketball team as they tried to win their first NAIA national crown.

During these crazy days, strongly supporting our baseball team in the World Series required journeys from Cleveland to Lewiston, Idaho, seven times. You would never believe the friends he made during those adventures. He joined with our President, Dr. Paul Conn ‘67, when the volleyball team made three long trips to the NAIA Fab Four in Sioux City, Iowa.

The honors poured in for Coach Carpenter during our time in the NAIA. He received NACDA AD of the Year in the Southeast Region in 1999-2000 and 2008-2009. He was also voted TranSouth AD of the Year in 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 and Region XI AD of the Year in 2001-2002. The accolades continued in 2007-2008 as he was selected SSAC AD of the Year in Region XIII and NAIA National Athletic Director of the Year.

Voices of Lee

30TH ANNIVERSARY

Voices of Lee is such a prominent feature of Lee University that we can hardly remember when it didn't exist.

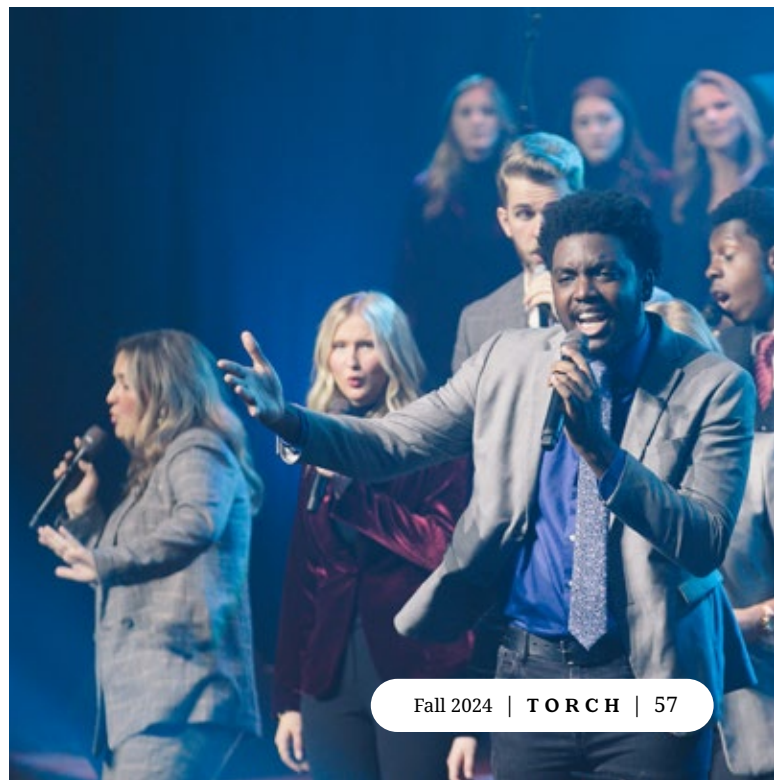
The birth of this dynamic group was thirty years ago, fall semester of 1994. That year, Danny Murray '75 first put the group on display as part of Celebration '94. The inaugural performance was in Dixon Center for an invited crowd of donors who had gathered for the Celebration weekend.

Murray frequently recounts his memory of how the idea of Voices first developed. He and his wife Debbie '75 were visiting with Paul '67 and Darlia '77 Conn at their home, during the 1993 Christmas holidays. After dinner, the four friends sat in front of the fireplace – it was a cold night – and talked late into the night about the possibilities of an all-new group, one which would present a musical style unlike that of Singers, Campus Choir, or any other Lee group. The idea took root in Danny's mind, and by the end of the visit, they had settled on the a capella style and even the name: Voices of Lee.

Conn told Murray he could choose the best singers from across campus to start the new group. Murray, however, took a different approach: he created a sixteen-member ensemble made up entirely of freshman, all of whom he had hand-picked and recruited in a spring and summer of travel across the nation. The result was an exciting, fresh sound that is still the Voices trademark. Thirty years and hundreds of thousands of miles later, the Voices of Lee are today Lee University's most effective ambassadors. They have sung in venues large and small, performing gospel music, sacred hymn tunes, patriotic and pop music, and the lush "vocal orchestra" sound of a superior chorale.

All those memories were in full flow during a September weekend when Voices alumni came to campus to celebrate the group's 30th anniversary. The highlight was a Saturday night concert which filled Conn Center for the ultimate "trip down Memory Lane" for Lee's most celebrated musical ensemble.







A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

by **Bill Estes, PhD**

Dean of the Helen DeVos College of Education

Any great institution must find ways to hold onto the good while embracing the changes necessary for relevancy and progress. While the modern university – and particularly academics – seems immune to change, it does come and often quite quickly. I imagine that each time one reads the Torch, both nostalgia and progress wind up next to each other on the pages as you see your Alma Mater hold to the good while embracing the next new challenge.

One of the most important facets of “the good” that I hope Lee University never lets go is the value of having a great faculty. Faculty who are excellent in their field and have chosen to put students first. Faculty who can communicate their discipline to others in a way that not only deepens an understanding of unique constructs, but makes connections to the larger world. Great faculty has always been at the core of this institution and something we daily strive to maintain.

We in the Helen DeVos College of Education happen to find ourselves in a sweet spot at the moment as we are holding on to “the good.” Right now, in the back of the Sharp Curriculum Library, is an office which holds 97 years of collegiate teaching experience. This office holds four former full professors who have chosen to continue



their professional and personal calling as part-time instructors here in the Helen DeVos College of Education. Drs. Laura Anderson '74, JoAnn Higginbotham, Bill Kamm, and Patricia McClung '02 are all retired professors who have chosen to continue making the Helen DeVos College of Education and Lee University great.

Their choices and efforts really do epitomize the strong foundation and history of both the college and university. Their service to others continues, and their institutional knowledge keeps all of us grounded and connected to the best aspects of Lee U.





DEBORAH TUFF WINS HISTORIC EMMY AWARD

Deborah Tuff '04, spokeswoman and media strategist for Gwinnett County, Georgia, has spearheaded several new initiatives in her role. These include the lifestyle news segment "Go Gwinnett!", the Women's History Month campaign featuring all elected, appointed, and public safety leadership in the county, and the Telly and Emmy Award-winning series "Upfront Gwinnett." Both the Emmy Award and Telly Awards are firsts for the county.

Tuff assumed her role in May 2021 after a distinguished career in television spanning nearly two decades. She is notable for being the first Black Miss Parkview, a significant personal achievement. She began her education by earning a degree in communications in 2004 from Lee University, under then Dean, Dr. Michael Laney.

Tuff launched her career in television news in Dothan, Alabama, before moving on to Raleigh, North Carolina. Later, she worked as a publicist in Atlanta and then transitioned to Lincoln, Nebraska, where she created the twice Emmy-nominated half-hour entertainment program, "Star City Buzz." She not only executive produced the show but also hosted and edited it.

Following her success with "Star City Buzz," Tuff became the digital reporter for the syndicated program "The Now KC." She then moved to Omaha, Nebraska, to work as a breaking news anchor. During her pregnancy with her first child, she returned to Atlanta and joined NBC-Atlanta as a reporter, where she gained recognition



for viral stories that touched the heart, including one about six inmates saving a deputy's life.

In her current role, Tuff oversees Gwinnett County's communications and media relations strategies, collaborates with senior leadership to ensure effective public communication, manages media relations, conducts media training, crafts public messages, and maintains the county's public image through the media.

LEE ALUMNI UPDATES



- 1 **Anna Grace Merritt '22**
Recognized as Novice Teacher of the Year.
- 2 **Lindsey Scott '21**
Recognized as Novice Teacher of the Year.
- 3 **Allan DiSiena '16, M'22**
Recognized as Teacher of the Year.
- 4 **Rachel Harwood '21**
Recognized as a Mentor of Excellence.
- 5 **Bailey Kress '00**
Recognized with Guardian Angel Award - A patient donated \$20,000 to hospital based on the care received.
- 6 **Jacob Mason '16**
Recognized as Teacher of the Year.
- 7 **Kari Ormsby Mays M'22**
Recognized as Novice Teacher of the Year.
- 8 **Abby Berryman Noggle '23**
Named Nurse Coordinator for Pediatric Initiative with Children's Care Atlanta



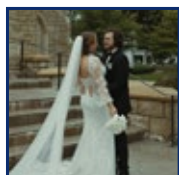
- 9 **Lacey Peck '16**
Recognized with a Daisy Award.
- 10 **Nick Ray '17**
Elected as Northwest Alabama Ministerial Association President for 2024-2026; Selected as Who's Who Among American
- 11 **Halee Reeder '23**
Recognized with a Daisy Award.
- 12 **Thomas Beil '08 M'21, Jordan Santley '21, and Daniel Costa Prata '20 M'22**
Perfect Planner awarded the 2024 Business Innovation Award at the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals Edge Conference.
- 13 **Kady Roberts '22**
Recognized with Daisy Award and Ministry Performance Award



- 14 **Jordan Wagers '22**
Recognized as Novice Teacher of the Year.
- 15 **Danielle Emert Byerley '23**
Recognized with Daisy Award and Nurse of Excellence Award
- 16 **Natalie Burgdorf Treft '21**
Recognized as Preceptor of Excellence
- 17 **Annabelle Suder '21**
Recognized as Novice Teacher of the Year.



Ethan '22 and Sophie Fugate Bagley - Married May 2024. Cleveland, TN.



Sam and Sydney Brown Clark '24 - Married May 2024. Nashville, TN.



Dale and Rebecca Franklin Gross '24 - Married September 2024. Cleveland, TN.

Ray and Chloe Peyton '20 Anater - Welcomed Baby Boy, Ryan Tucker, July 2024. Mount Joy, PA.



Josh '22 and Mollie Burris '22 Black - Welcomed Baby Boy, Sampson Porter, November 2024. Cleveland, TN.

Hudson '12 and Rachel Laba '14 Hodges - Welcomed Baby Girl, Eden Rae, August 2024. Chattanooga, TN.



Will '21 and Mica Sheppard '20 Clark - Welcomed Baby Girl, Cali Rose, May 2024. Franklin, TN.

Joseph '17 and Christa '12 Fabre - Welcomed Baby Boy, Crew Charles, June 2024. Cleveland, TN.

Josue '14 and Lydia Montiel '12 Collins - Welcomed Baby Boy, Otoniel Isaac, May 2024. Ft. Lauderdale, FL.



Gabe '16 M'18 and Kelsi Deel '13 Franco - Welcomed Baby Girl, Reese Gabriella, November 2024. Atlanta, GA.

Colby '09 and Lauren House '14 Kaluzniak - Welcomed Baby Girl, Margaret Lucille, September 2024. Chattanooga, TN.



Christopher and Megan Cook Chittom '21 - Welcomed Baby Girl, Sutton James, September 2024. West Monroe, L.A.

JD and Megan Ramsay '08 Price - Welcomed Baby Boy, Maximus Walter, September 2024. Kennesaw, GA.



Chase Spears '01

Chase Spears completed a Ph.D. in Leadership Communication from Kansas State University, following his recent retirement from serving as a career U.S. Army public affairs officer. He specializes in advising leaders on how to communicate in powerful ways. Chase and his wife Lori '02 live in Lansing, Kansas.



We want to continue to support you in your success after Lee. The 1918 Society was designed with you in mind. Take advantage of the exciting events, professional resources, and networking opportunities provided by our alumni association. You are forever a flame, and we want to celebrate you. ***We Are Lee!***

Follow us on social media to stay connected @LeeUAlumni





Tn

Memory

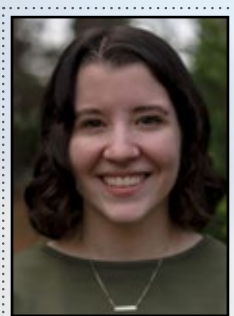
In Memory...

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

- Psalm 34:18



Kim Jones '96, of Cleveland, Tennessee, passed away peacefully in her home on Oct. 3, 2024, at the age of 50. A lifelong resident of Cleveland, Kim attended Cleveland High School and graduated from Lee with her bachelor's in accounting. She and her husband, Eddie, served as student pastors in Kentucky, before moving back to Cleveland to take on the role of middle school pastors at North Cleveland Church of God. For the past 12 years, Kim has served as the accounting/finance administrative assistant for Church of God Youth and Discipleship. Above all else, Kim felt her highest calling to be motherhood and was known for her kindness, loyalty, and gracious spirit, which she brought to every task placed before her.



Rebecca "Becca" Gunter Choong '24, of Cleveland, Tennessee, passed away on Oct. 11, 2024, at the age of 24. The daughter of Timothy Allen Gunter Sr. and the late Susan Elaine Moore Gunter, Becca was born in Knoxville and raised in Chattanooga. She graduated from Chattanooga Christian School and was scheduled to receive her bachelor's degree in psychology from Lee this month. Becca explored the world through her love of psychology, culture, the arts, nature, and live music. She was expressive, witty, thoughtful, kind, sincere, intentional, and funny, and will be remembered most for how she loved others and stood up against injustice and for human rights. She is survived by her husband, her father, and seven siblings.



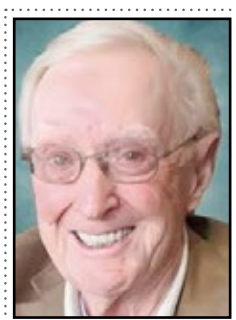
Keith Jeffords '81, an plastic surgeon from Smyrna, Georgia, passed away on Nov 6, 2024, at the age of 64. A highly respected physician with a unique background in multiple surgical disciplines, Dr. Jeffords was one of fewer than 50 doctors in the U.S. with his specialized expertise. He founded Paramount Plastic Surgery in metro-Atlanta and was a published author and sought-after lecturer worldwide. A graduate of Lee College and Emory University, he furthered his medical education at Harvard, Jackson Memorial Hospital, and Eastern Virginia Medical School. He is survived by his mother, sisters, and dozens of nieces, nephews, cousins, and other family who will cherish his memory.



Alyssa Guy Turner '98, of Duluth, Minnesota, passed away peacefully on Sept. 11, 2024, at the age of 48. While at Lee, she earned her Bachelor of Science in biological science with a pre-professional emphasis. Alyssa served her community as an emergency medicine pediatrician at Essentia Health for the last 11 years. A lover of nature and flowers, she enjoyed running in Grandma's marathon. Her other hobbies included cooking, music, and having her nails painted by her daughters. Her legacy will be honored at Lee with the newly created "Alyssa Guy Turner Assistantship" in the Department of Natural Sciences. She is survived by her husband, Troy, along with her children, family, and friends.



Sara Cassidy Gray '19, of Cleveland, Tennessee, passed away on Aug. 2, 2024, at the age of 28. An avid learner, Sara earned her bachelor's degree at Lee and was working toward her master's in international business, while working for the non-profit "Foster Love." She enjoyed spending time in nature, as evidenced by her hobbies of hiking, paddle boarding on the Ocoee River, and going home to Florida to be by the beach. Sara was a talented painter who enjoyed collecting and stargazing. She is remembered as having a fearless love of God and being a light to those who knew her. Sara was welcomed to heaven by her grandparents and is survived by her parents, siblings, family, and friends.

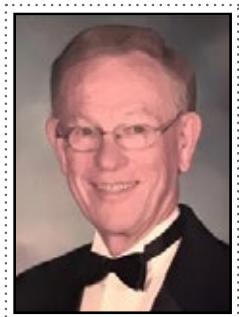


Rev. William F. "Bill" Williams '56, of Cleveland, Tennessee, passed away at the age of 93 on Sept. 3, 2024. A veteran of the U.S. Air Force, William served his country as a 3770th Tech Training Squadron before being licensed as an exhorter in the Church of God and later becoming ordained. Upon graduating from Lee College, he married Rose Marie. The couple spent the next 40 years in ministry, serving in various capacities throughout the U.S., most notably of which were their Church of God state overseer roles in Colorado/Utah, Oklahoma, Texas, and South Georgia. He spent the last 26 years of his life in retirement, enjoying time with his family and pouring himself back into the church community. He is survived by Rose Marie and his son, sister, and grandchildren.



Zachary Cole Beatty '17, of Chattanooga, Tennessee, passed away on Sept. 29, 2024, at the age of 34. Zac graduated from Lee with a bachelor's degree in theatre performing arts and a minor in American Sign Language. He was also a member of Phi Mu Alpha Honor Society. His interests aligned with his major and he spent much of his free time singing, watching movies, drawing, and playing piano. Zac loved to spend time with his family, friends, and cat, and when not with them, he enjoyed traveling far and wide. Despite his battle with cancer, Zac is remembered for the smile on his face and positive attitude, and he will be missed by all who knew him.

In Memory...



William "Thomas" Payne peacefully passed away on Oct. 31, 2024, at the age of 84. A graduate of Vanderbilt University, Tom earned his Doctorate in Dentistry from the University of Alabama before serving in the U.S. Navy. In 1970, he left the Navy to establish a successful dental practice in Guntersville, Alabama. He was a lifelong friend of Lee University and a devoted supporter of its mission. In memory of his late wife, Carolyn, he established the Carolyn Payne Scholarship, which has helped dozens of young women pursue their education at Lee since 1988. Tom's legacy of kindness, service, and generosity will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him.



Deborah Jane "D.J." Levels '78, of Ooltewah, Tennessee, passed away on Aug. 24, 2024, at the age of 70. During her time at Lee, she was a member of Ladies of Lee. After graduation, D.J. worked as a computer programmer, being instrumental in the development of programs for hospitals across the United States and retired from Epic, a healthcare software company, as a project manager. A talented musician and guitarist, D.J. performed for many weddings, funerals, and other events. She is survived by her sister, brother-in-law, nieces, and many cousins.



John Dudley Pyeatt Jr. '50, of Cleveland, Tennessee, went to be with the Lord on July 28, 2024, at the age of 96. Originally from New Mexico, John made his way to Cleveland via the Bible Training School, now Lee University. He spent most of his career as an auditor and business administrator for the Church of God International Offices, working in that position for over 43 years. He was also a founding member of Westmore Church of God, where he volunteered his time as a clerk and church council member. John and his wife of over 60 years, Barbara, loved to travel. He is preceded in death by his wife, son, and 10 siblings, but remembered by both his family and church family.



Evelyn Passman Loveday '52, of Cleveland, Tennessee, went home to be with the Lord on Sept. 9, 2024, at the age of 92. Originally from Franklinton, Louisiana, Evelyn made her home in Cleveland as a former employee of both Lee University and the Church of God International Offices. She had a heart for mission projects and dedicated much of her time to her faith, family, and church. Preceded in death by her parents and siblings, she is remembered by her children and many other family members.

THE LAST WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT:

IN LOVE WITH LEE

Reprinted from *The Evangel*, Fall 2024 Issue

Is it possible for an individual to be “in love” with an institution?

If so, I think that pretty much describes my relationship with Lee University. It’s not just a casual flirtation; it’s a lifetime love affair.

It started when I learned to skate. One Christmas when I was a little boy, my brothers and I were given roller skates for Christmas. Only the old-timers will remember those primitive roller skates from the 1950’s — the kind that we clamped onto the bottom of our shoes, fastened with a set of metal clamps which we tightened with a key.

Our family lived in Cleveland, on the edge of the Lee College campus. None of the boys had ever skated before, so rather than try out our new skates on the city streets, we used the sidewalks around the Lee campus, which was empty over the holidays. It was perfect, block after block of empty sidewalks, safely removed from any traffic. My earliest memories of Lee are of whizzing around that small campus, growing more and more confident in my ability to stay upright at faster and faster speeds.

So the love affair began. Now, seventy years later, as I walk along those same sidewalks, from my office to the dining hall, I sometimes remember those earliest days of discovering the campus that would come to be my life.

My family’s story actually began at Lee in 1939 — when it was called BTS and occupied a different campus in Sevierville, Tennessee. That fall, a lovely young brunette named Edna Minor arrived from her home in Decatur, Alabama. She had recently begun a personal walk with the Lord and travelled to BTS to follow His call. There she met a fellow freshman named Charles Conn, an intensely romantic young man who had come from Atlanta, Georgia, for the same reason.



The two idealistic young Christians met, married, and spent the rest of their lives in ministry in the Church of God.

Dad enjoyed saying that there were twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples of Christ, so logically he followed the Biblical pattern by having twelve children. He and my mother never lost their fond memories of BTS, and as children growing up, we heard countless stories about their time there. Later, that little Bible school moved to Cleveland and became Lee College, and eventually Dad’s ministry brought him to Cleveland as well. So that’s how I became the little boy skating across the Lee campus.

When the Conn children reached college age, there was no question that our destination would be Lee. One after another, we all graduated high school and enrolled at Lee as freshman— all twelve of us. Some stayed four years, some only a single year; but I fell in love with Lee and am still here.

While I was a student at Lee, like my father thirty years earlier, I also met a girl. She was Darlia McLuhan, a missionary’s daughter. Originally from Saskatchewan, Canada, she had spent ten years in Africa before enrolling at Lee as a piano student. We married immediately after graduation and moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where I earned a Ph.D. and M.A. in psychology from Emory University.

We had never considered that our future ministry might be back at Lee. We thought we would probably plant a church somewhere, perhaps in Boston or elsewhere in New England. But our alma mater came calling. The vice president phoned one day in the spring of 1971. Lee College wanted to start a major in psychology, he said, but they had no one to teach the inaugural courses. Would I move to Cleveland and help get the major started?

Darlia and I prayed about it and felt it was not just Lee College calling, but the Lord Himself, so we said “yes”. We agreed to teach at Lee for the next two years, giving them time to find another psychology professor, then we would move on.

That was 53 years ago, and we’re still here. There has never been a day during these 53 years that we haven’t felt God’s hand on us to stay at Lee and do whatever needed to be done here. We have always felt strongly that it is a divine appointment.

I taught psychology for the next thirteen years. In 1984, the newly appointed president, Dr. Lamar Vest, asked me to move from the classroom to his leadership team as his vice president. I agreed, but I loved teaching and couldn’t imagine staying long in an administrative position, so I told Dr. Vest I would commit to two years only.

Once again, God had other plans. When those two years ended, the Board selected me as Lee’s next president. Darlia and I raised a family of three children, all of whom graduated from Lee. Their three spouses graduated from Lee. And to date, of our ten grandchildren, the eight who have reached college age have come to Lee also.

So my relationship with Lee has not only been a lifelong love affair, it has been one which includes the whole family. Lee has experienced lots of changes over the years, of course, since 1939 when my parents attended. The world has changed, the church has changed, and so of course Lee also has changed, in dramatic ways.

On the other hand, some things have NOT changed, and those permanent things are the core of who Lee is. We have a slogan at Lee: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” The styles shift with time, but the substance never does. The buildings and grounds have changed – larger, grander, more modern. The faculty has changed – more Ph.D.’s, more specialties, greater diversity. The students have changed – there are more of them, and their dress and life experiences are different.

But the core of Lee University remains the same. We are now a first-rate institution which sends graduates to the most prestigious graduate schools in America, but we still prepare students to enter full-time ministry as pastors and missionaries. Our professors can now match up to the best in America, but they still pour into students not just their knowledge, but also their hearts and love for God. We have become respected throughout higher education as a top-tier university, but we have never forgotten that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Lee University is not “woke!” It is not an ivory tower. It is not a place which has ever compromised our commitment to Biblical principles. We are intentionally Christ-centered, unapologetically Pentecostal, and proudly part of our Church of God heritage.

One other thing has not changed: we still need your prayers. We are working hard every day to provide excellent education for your children and grandchildren, while constantly pointing them toward God and His work in their lives.

Paul Conn

Paul Conn '67, PhD
President





*P.O. Box 3450
Cleveland, TN 37320-3450*

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO LEAVE A LEGACY AT LEE. MAYBE THE BEST WAY IS ON FRESHMAN MOVE-IN DAY.

We love our legacy students here at Lee University! They are so important in continuing over a century of Christ-centered excellence into Lee's bright future.

If you have a middle schooler or high schooler, we would love to know who they are and how to connect with them. Please follow the QR code to **submit this information**, and we will follow up when the time is right.

