

# BLUFFTON

A magazine for Bluffton University alumni and friends | Fall 2019 | Vol. 16 No. 3



**CELEBRATING 75 YEARS  
OF SOCIAL WORK**



The social work program at Bluffton University has been, and continues to be, an outstanding example of our mission in action. This year, we are exploring “Living Our Best Lives” as our annual Civic Engagement theme. Faculty chose the theme after learning of Ohio’s low ranking (38 out of 50) on the 2018 State of American Wellbeing study. Throughout the academic year, we will be discussing how to construct a life of wellbeing, wholeness and joy.

As we honor our core values at Bluffton, we continue to build community, a key element of wellbeing. One new community building initiative is “Beaver Tail-Gating.” Located in the parking lot near the main entrance of Salzman Stadium, students, alumni, staff, faculty and community members are invited to visit, play games such as cornhole and enjoy food trucks, as we support our football team. I have greatly enjoyed connecting with the entire Bluffton community through Beaver Tail-Gating, and our students are appreciating that we truly are “Beavers All.”

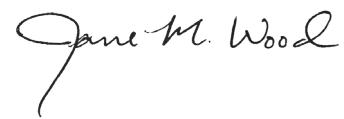
Two Beavers who are being celebrated this year are Alumni Award recipients Jean Szabo and Carrie (Ream ’85) Woodruff. Jean shared her passion and talents with Bluffton students for nearly 30 years as a music professor. For more than 20 years, Carrie has dedicated herself to improving the health and wellbeing of students at Lima City Schools. These two women found their joyful purpose in life and Bluffton University is grateful to be a part their respective stories.

Purposeful living, and liking what you do each day, is another measure of wellbeing. While we know a job does not

define a person, we also know a person’s vocation can truly impact their satisfaction in life. In the last issue of “Bluffton” we introduced you to the Bluffton Blueprint: A Guide to Building Your Greater Purpose. The Bluffton Blueprint is a set of four experiential courses designed to help students discover and discern their faith values in relation to their purpose in life. In this issue of “Bluffton” we invite you to take this journey alongside our students by supporting the Innovation Fund—our \$1 million goal to support innovative academic programs, including the Bluffton Blueprint.

This year we are joyously celebrating the 75th anniversary of our social work program. Looking through the archives, I came across this quote from the late Betty Sommer, associate professor emeritus of social work (1985-2005) as she reflected on her passion for her vocation, “It was helping students find their way, their gifts and their passions. That was exciting.”

At Bluffton, living out mission continues to be exciting and inspiring. During this holiday season, I want to say “thank you” to you, our Bluffton alumni and friends, and let you know our gratitude for your continued support of our student-focused mission, and for the ways that each one of you continue to live out your lives with purpose and meaning.



Jane M. Wood, Ph.D.  
President



# BLUFFTON

A magazine for Bluffton University alumni and friends

Fall 2019 Vol. 16 No. 3

WRITER

Tricia Bell

DESIGNER

Alison King

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Michael Ayers

Aubrey Bartel '20

Bluffton University Archives

Hannah Brown '20

Claire Clay '18

Kyla Devier

Emily Dyson '23

Jules Frazier '21

Alison King

Scarlett Purtee '21

VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVANCEMENT

Dr. Hans Houshower

houshowerh@bluffton.edu

VICE PRESIDENT OF  
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Robin Bowlus

bowlusr@bluffton.edu

BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY MISSION:

*Bluffton University seeks to prepare students of all backgrounds for life as well as vocation, for responsible citizenship, for service to all peoples and ultimately for the purposes of God's universal kingdom.*

BLUFFTON MAGAZINE is published March, June and October for alumni, parents, friends, faculty and staff by Bluffton University, 1 University Drive, Bluffton, OH 45817-2104 (419-358-3000, [www.bluffton.edu](http://www.bluffton.edu)).

We welcome your comments!

# CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF SOCIAL WORK

4 The Founding of Social Work

7 The Future of the Field

10 Why Social Work?

12 Along the Riley

14 Jean Szabo

16 Carrie (Ream '85) Woodruff, MAOM '02

18 Alumnotes

21 Faculty 360

22 Blueprint for Innovation



**On the cover:** Dr. Walt Paquin, director of social work, speaks with students in Social Welfare Policy and Analysis. Through the course, students are introduced to a framework for analyzing social needs and social problems. Practical implications in social welfare policy for social workers are emphasized, incorporating the roles and skills that comprise the practice of policy.

Photo by Claire Clay '18





# THE FOUNDING OF SOCIAL WORK

---

Since being established as a major in 1944, nearly 700 alumni have graduated from Bluffton with a social work degree. In that time, four social work faculty members have been granted emeriti status for their contributions to the development and enhancement of the program:

Carl Smucker '34 (1944-77), Paul Klassen '48 (1977-87),  
Betty Sommer (1985-2005) and Don Brubaker (1987-2008).



## Establishing the program

Starting with just two classes, Child Welfare and Public Welfare, Bluffton's social work program began in 1944. Led by 1934 Bluffton education graduate Carl Smucker, the first social work graduates, three in total, received their diplomas in 1948.

Because of the Great Depression, Smucker was lucky to find work following graduation in a children's home, according to his daughter Mary (Smucker '65) Conrad. The position led him to pursue his Master of Social Work at the University of Chicago.

Conrad remembers her father, who passed away in 1997, fondly recalling studying under Jane Addams, who is often referred to as the mother of modern social work.

"He was very inspired by her work," explained Conrad. "He was drawn to the field because he cared about people and about people in distress. His career in social work helped him express his Christian compassion."

At the request of Dr. Lloyd Ramseyer, Bluffton's fourth president, Smucker added more classes and developed the first social work program among the Mennonite colleges in the United States.

**"My father didn't just found the social work department, he lived it, and so did my mother [Irene (Yoder '63) Smucker]," said Conrad. "My mother was an equal partner in helping the students and being a part of the students' lives. It mattered to them."**

Paul Klassen '48 was one of the first three graduates. During his first year at Bluffton, he admits he was more interested in playing sports than picking a major. Then he was drafted. As a conscientious objector, Klassen spent three years in alternative service at a New Jersey psychiatric hospital.

"The hospital was progressive for that time, but not really, though," explained Klassen. "It was quite an experience for me at 18-19 years old."

## Passing the torch

That experience, combined with an appreciation for the work both Smucker and his fellow COs were doing, led him to social work. After a long career as a practitioner, Klassen took over for Smucker and led the department for 10 years.



Like Smucker, Klassen was focused on developing hands-on learning experiences. He routinely brought senior seminar students to Cleveland.

"We took all of the graduating students to Cleveland for their capstone course, and they were able to experience some of the best social work learning in the state," said Klassen, who also started a cross-cultural studies program to Cemanahuac Educational Community in Cuernavaca, Mexico. The experience, which was open to all students, featured a work placement project in agencies including children's homes.

"When our students went down, they learned more from the relationships with the people and the students there than you could possibly imagine," said Klassen. Students from Cuernavaca completed the exchange with learning opportunities at Bluffton.

Klassen, along with Betty Sommer, also continued work begun by Smucker to get Bluffton's social work program nationally accredited. The feat was achieved in 1983, and the program continues to maintain the designation. Bluffton was just the second private college in Ohio to meet the rigorous standards.

In 1979, Sommer started teaching at Bluffton part time after serving as a social worker in locales from Washington, D.C., to Nairobi, Kenya. She became a faculty member in 1985.

Sommer, who passed away in 2017, fondly recalled her career at Bluffton in a magazine profile when she was recognized with the 2011 Faculty/Staff Service Award.





"I enjoyed working with students, especially teaching them to apply theoretical concepts to helping actual people and solving social problems," said Sommer. "As a part of that process, almost every course had an outside-the-classroom assignment or project, often in conjunction with local social service agencies. Through these 'real-world' experiences, students could see the relevance of the classroom learning."

## Growing the program

When Klassen retired in 1987, Don Brubaker, a social work faculty member at Ohio Northern University, was hired to lead the department.

"The values of social work and the values of Bluffton College were quite compatible," said Brubaker, who spent 21 years at Bluffton.

In a callback to Smucker, Brubaker explained he chose to enter the field of social work to "live out my Christian beliefs and values."

His initial goals were growing the major and maintaining accreditation.

"The pressure was increasingly to have competency-based programs, where goals could be identified and measured," said Brubaker.

However, hands-on education continued to be a key part of the educational experience. Brubaker and Sommer led several weekend experiences to Chicago and many courses required volunteer experience at area nonprofits and social service agencies.

Many students also shared research from their studies.

"Sometimes it was before the staff of an agency and sometimes much broader than that, and they were giving professional presentations at conferences," said Brubaker. "I was always very proud of the students demonstrating the confidence to do that."

Still, being a student is different than being a professional.

**"I recognized that many times, as students were preparing to do their internships, they would question, 'Do I know enough? Do I have the right answers for my clients?'" said Brubaker.**  
**"But, it's not about having the right answer, it's about asking the right questions and knowing how to listen."**

While many social work graduates continued their education, moved away and practiced in other states and countries, Bluffton's social work program had, according to Sommer, not only improved the educational opportunities on campus, but the entire region of northwest Ohio.

"I believe the quality of social services in our area has been enhanced by the contributions of our graduates."

---

**(Page 4) Bluffton's four emeriti social work faculty in front of Ropp Hall (from left) Don Brubaker, Paul Klassen, Carl Smucker and Betty Sommer, 1994**

**(Page 5) Carl Smucker advising students, date unknown**

**(Page 6) Betty Sommer with Molly (Hershberger '99) Kelly, 1997**





# THE FUTURE OF THE FIELD

---

While social work has a long and positive history at Bluffton, the general perception of the field is often mired in negative rhetoric.

Current social work faculty Dr. Walt Paquin and Heidi Mercer shared some thoughts on the profession, changes over the years and the continued need for social workers.



## The profession of social work

When asked if social workers solve problems, Walt Paquin and Heidi Mercer, shared their answer in adamant unison. “No!”

“We provide resources,” explained Paquin, head of the social work department at Bluffton since 2017 and professor in the program since 2011.

**“We teach people to fish, but we won’t fish for them,” added Mercer, assistant professor of social work since 2017 and director of field education.**

So, what do social workers do? The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) begins the preamble to its code of ethics with these words: “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty.”

“We work with every facet of people’s lives. If your kids are in school, there’s probably a social worker there working with bullying prevention and helping kids get free and reduced lunch,” explained Paquin. “If you are adopting, a child social worker will be involved. If you have a family member in a nursing home, social workers are there. If you have a child born with a disability, a social worker will work with you. If you are in prison or on parole, your parole officer might be a social worker.”



“You can also be an advocate for the people the crime was committed against,” added Mercer. “When a loved one passes



away, a social worker is often at the hospital alongside the doctor to support you and provide resources. It is likely that we will all meet with a social worker at some point in our lives.”

## Changes over the years

When people envision a social worker out in the field, they are likely to conjure images of Child Protective Services employees taking children away. That’s a myth Mercer said social workers are working hard to dispel.

“As social workers, we must be clear and transparent in every interaction we have. At the end of the day, it’s the client’s choice. Our goal is to have sessions that will help clients restore their dignity and worth, but if clients refuse to do the work, they can lose their children or go to jail,” explained Mercer. “We’re the investigators of child abuse and neglect. In most states, it’s actually a police officer who physically removes a child and a judge decides when that happens.”

While children’s services continues to be, and will always be, a major part of the field of social work, Paquin and Mercer have seen a dramatic increase in two other areas over the past few years.

“We’ve moved a lot from thinking about children and families as our focus on practice to a much broader field,” said Paquin. “Now, the place we see social workers needed the most is elder care. More people are retiring and living longer, and you even have people in their 60s and 70s caring for their aging parents.”

Mercer added, “More than half of our graduates from last year are working in community mental health agencies as their first job. That is definitely a growing need, as well.”

While bachelor’s-level social workers (LSW), cannot diagnose



mental illnesses, master's-level social workers (MSW) can. Both work together to ensure clients receive proper care.

"Before it was psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors who worked with a diagnosis. Now, social workers are being utilized more clinically. It's really made us consider how we prepare our students for the field," Mercer explained.

One unique aspect of the program, which benefits this shift in the profession, is Bluffton's social work major is closely aligned with psychology and criminal justice majors. As a whole, the social sciences and social work department is focused on helping students achieve their individual career goals.

**"We have a lot of students double major or minor in psychology or criminal justice. A lot of schools do not allow the flexibility within the major to do that," said Paquin. "Our students get a strong background in psychology and criminal justice. When they're working in these divergent fields, they understand the connectedness of the professions."**

While changes to nearly every career are coming at a rapid pace, according to Mercer, there is one part of social work that will never change, "the need for us to exist."

## Always a need

While technology is changing the landscape of social work, Paquin argues there is "no substitute for a person. The kind of work we do can never be done by computers. We may provide websites with links to resources, but to truly help clients navigate their situations and to advocate for clients, you will always need people."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the field is in demand. The job outlook for social work is growing at a pace that is "much faster than average."

That's good news for recent graduates, but before they even decide on a major, many students are discouraged from entering the field based on another stereotype—you're never going to make any money.

"We're not paid great," said Mercer, "but people don't go into this field for the money."

While incomes vary, just like in any career field, Paquin likens the pay, with a Bureau of Labor Statistics median income of \$49,470, to another common Bluffton profession.

"It's comparable to what a teacher makes. If you want to have a good life, doing something that is good for the world, social work is an appealing choice."

Since Bluffton's program is nationally accredited, students can utilize their skills, not just in Ohio, but across the country. Many graduates are serving their communities and the world as social workers, but others, who graduated as social work majors, are using those same skills in a variety of ways—as small business owners, teachers or human resources professionals.

Paquin explained, "The problem-solving skills and critical-thinking skills required to be a good social worker are transferable to any profession."



**(Page 7) 2019 social work graduates with Dr. Walt Paquin and Heidi Mercer**

**(Page 8) Members of the social work club at an ice cream social**

**(Page 8) Dr. Walt Paquin and students in class**

**(Page 9) Heidi Mercer meets with officers of the social work club**



1944

Bluffton social work program begins

Carl Smucker '34 becomes the first social work professor (retires 1977)

First courses are Child Welfare and Public Welfare

Classes soon added in casework, group work and community organization

1948

First graduating social work class (three students)

1957

The Association of Mennonite Social Workers (AMSW) is formed (disbands in 1977)

First annual meeting is at Goshen in 1957

Second annual meeting is at Bluffton College in 1958, where Carl Smucker presents his paper on "Social Work as a Christian Profession"

1968

Social Work Club becomes an official club at Bluffton

1974

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) establishes the national accreditation system for undergraduate social work education

1977

Paul Klassen '48 becomes the second program director (retires 1987)

1983

Paul Klassen leads the initial Council for Social Work Education accreditation process which is granted; the program remains accredited

1985

Betty Sommer joins the social work program (retires 2005)

1987

Don Brubaker becomes the program director (retires 2008)

# WHY SOCIAL WORK?



"Skilled social workers are what makes the world work. They are the ones who connect people with services, who help them with trauma, who help them find a place to live or to work on their addictions. Social work is the part of society that helps people connect with each other and help each other."

**David Voth '78**  
**Executive director, Crime Victim Services, Lima, Ohio**



"I primarily work with kids. The majority of my caseload is under eight, so I can see the immense potential of the kids I get to work with. The ability to help parents and kids work together to make substantial change and to be on a more positive growing path is incredibly rewarding and totally worth it."

**Shae Golden '18**  
**Mental health counselor, Family Resource Center, Findlay, Ohio**



"I chose social work, or I should say social work chose me, because I didn't start college until I was 29. God led me to it. I do crisis work in the emergency department, and I love helping patients, but I also love guiding and leading the people I work with."

**Heidi Aust-Cox '08**  
**Supervisor, Behavioral Health Institute, St. Rita's Medical Center, Lima, Ohio**



"The best part of my job is making a difference in the community, helping families overcome barriers and just making sure kids in our community in Allen County are safe. That's really meaningful and purposeful. I think there is nothing more rewarding than a career in social work."

**Sarah (Orr '09) Ridenour**  
**Supervisor, Allen County Children Services, Lima, Ohio**



"I'm so blessed to be in this career. It's rewarding when I go home every night knowing I made a difference, and it's not just me but everybody in our agency working as a team to help people change their lives, live independently and get out of abusive situations."

**LaGina Brun '15**  
**Court advocacy coordinator, Crossroads Crisis Center, Lima, Ohio**



*Current social work students and alumni recently came together for a Social Work Meet and Greet, an event that introduces students to the different agencies and field placement opportunities available. During the event, both groups shared why they chose social work.*



“Back home, I worked at a school for kids with disabilities, and I saw how they were mistreated and how messed up the system could be. I feel like I have a responsibility to try to change things and advocate for them.”

**Tae Higgins '20, Rochester, N.Y.  
Social work major**



“The first major I pursued was accounting. Social work is a complete 180, but I realized I don’t want to be behind a desk all day. I want a job where I can see change in people and where my job is worth something. It sounds cliché, but I want to make a difference.”

**Sydney Rex '21, Harrod, Ohio  
Social work major**



“Right now as a social work major, it’s all about getting experience and figuring out what I want to do and who I want to work with. So far, I want to work with everybody and anybody. There are so many opportunities out there.”

**Kai Smith '22, Portsmouth, R.I.  
Social work and pre-art therapy double major**



“We do a lot of field experience and placements in this major, and I’ve already used some of the things I learned in class out in the field. I just want people to live their best lives. If people are lacking resources, I want to be a resource for them.”

**Maddie Huffman '21, Maineville, Ohio  
Social work major**



“A professor in my juvenile corrections class told me that social work pairs really well with criminal justice so I decided to try it out. I think they’ll go hand in hand. I’m learning skills in my social work classes that I’ll be able to apply in the field of criminal justice.”

**Logan Wilhelm '20, Tiffin, Ohio  
Social work and criminal justice double major**

Bluffton University social work program celebrates its 50-year anniversary

**1994**

Initial Carl Smucker lecture is delivered on campus

**1996**

Dr. Jennifer Hughes becomes the program director (2008-14)

**2008**

Evening social work program begins (2010-17)

**2010**

Betty Sommer receives the 2011 faculty/staff service award

**2011**

Dr. Nancy Banman becomes the program director (2015-2017)

**2015**

Dr. Walt Paquin becomes the program director (2017-present)

**2017**

Bluffton University social work program celebrates its 75-year anniversary

**2019**

#### **Faculty over the years:**

Carl Smucker '34 (1944-78)

Dr. Joseph Steiner '62 (1967-69)

Dan Schwendeman '71 (1978-81)

Paul Klassen '48 (1977-88)

Dr. Rosanna Chan (1982-85)

Betty Sommer (1985-2005)

Don Brubaker (1987-2008)

Dr. Jennifer Hughes (2005-14)

Laurel Neufeld Weaver '83 (2008 – 11)

Heather (Sparks '97) Koontz (2008-13)

Dr. Walt Paquin (2011-present)

Dr. Diana Kleman (2013-17)

Dr. Nancy Banman (2015-17)

Heidi Mercer (2017-present)

**Faculty over the years**



# ALONG THE RILEY

## Enrollment growth

Bluffton University has enrolled its highest number of first-year students since 2013-14. The first-year class of 250 also has an average GPA of 3.26 and an average ACT score of 21.

"Bluffton's alumni and friends are the top influencers for students coming to Bluffton," said Robin Bowlus, Vice president of enrollment management. "Their passion and excitement for the Bluffton experience is helping Bluffton's story reach students who are looking for a university that will help them discover their greater purpose."



Twenty-five percent of students in the first-year class are considered underrepresented, an increase from 19 percent the previous year. The first-year cohort also includes seven international students for a total of 25 international students on campus, the highest number since 2003.

Nineteen transfer students are enrolled this fall, coming from five states—Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio.

## Bluffton improves in "U.S. News" rankings

Bluffton University has once again been named to the top tier of Midwest "regional colleges" in the "U.S. News & World Report" rankings.

The 2020 edition of the magazine's "Best Colleges" guidebook ranks Bluffton 26



among 78 comparable institutions in 12 Midwest states. Last year, Bluffton was ranked 30 of 79 comparable institutions. Now listed in the "U.S. News" rankings for 22 consecutive years, Bluffton has consistently ranked in the top tier of Midwest colleges.

Bluffton also ranks 19 in Best Value Schools and 26 in Top Performers in Social Mobility among Midwest colleges. According to "U.S. News," the Best Value calculation takes into account a school's academic quality, as indicated by its 2020 ranking, and the 2018-19 net cost of attendance for a student who received the average level of need-based financial aid. Top Performers in Social Mobility are ranked for their success in advancing social mobility by enrolling and graduating large proportions of disadvantaged students awarded Pell Grants.



## Living Our Best Lives

Dr. Beth Taylor Mack, director of health behavior and wellness for YMCA of the USA, emphasized the importance of relationships to first-year students during Bluffton University's Opening Convocation. Her presentation, "The Power of Relationships: How Connectivity Impacts

Wellbeing," directly related to this year's summer reading for first-year students, "The Geography of Bliss" by Eric Weiner.

The summer reading and Convocation presentation started a year-long exploration into Bluffton's 2019-20 Civic Engagement theme of "Living Our Best Lives." Throughout the year, Bluffton's students, faculty and staff will draw on the Civic Engagement theme to explore how we live with wholeness and joy.

New students were officially welcomed into the Bluffton University academic community during the event.

"This is the start of what could be not only lifelong relationships that improve wellbeing, but life extending relationships because of wellbeing," Taylor Mack said.



## CMBA residency held on campus

Eleven students, traveling from as far away as Nigeria, came together on Bluffton's campus in August for the sixth Collaborative MBA residency.

The residency is one of the unique aspects of the collaboration between Bluffton University, Canadian Mennonite University, Eastern Mennonite University and Goshen College. Because of the partnership, Collaborative MBA students have access to a large group of professors with diverse backgrounds from the partner schools.

During their time at Bluffton, students began their first course, Leadership and Management for the Common Good, taught by George Lehman.

The group will meet in person again in the summer of 2020 for an international



residency in Costa Rica. The international residency highlights how people and organizations are linked by larger global networks.

For the remainder of the 21-month program, participants will meet for class once a week through videoconferencing and advance as a cohort.



## State of the University

President Jane Wood is looking to the future, both in the academic development of the student body at Bluffton University and in the overall health of the Northwest Ohio region. Wood shared her vision and top initiatives for the university before a packed crowd of students, faculty, staff and community members during a State of the University address on Sept. 10 in Yoder Recital Hall.

Wood started the presentation with highlights from her first year in office including Bluffton's successful 10-year reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, initiatives which brought in the largest first-year class since the 2013-14 academic year and the rollout of a new general education program designed by faculty.

Moving forward, she shared about strategic planning initiatives which will shape the next 5 to 10 years at Bluffton, a focus on improving wellbeing in Northwest Ohio and a look at what the future holds for today's graduates.

Strategic planning, which started with collaborative sessions in the summer among Bluffton's Board of Trustees, faculty/staff,



## A family affair...

The entire Zickafoose family helped move the youngest sibling, Grace, into her Ramseyer Hall room for her first year on campus during Welcome Weekend. Zickafoose was familiar with the room. It was the same one assigned to her sister, Blake, when she lived on campus.

Pictured are Jon '81, Grace '23, Rileigh '15, Jennifer (Liechty '82) and Jordan '08. Blake '11, who lives in Arizona and wasn't technically on campus, joined the fun of unpacking through the FaceTime app on Rileigh's phone.

and community/business leaders, will continue with students this fall.

"We want to say at Bluffton, how can we best be distinctive and what do we do incredibly well," said Wood. "Faculty and staff have some great ideas, and students, we look forward to working with you."

## Nature Preserve programming

The Bluffton University Nature Preserve has long been a place for appreciating the natural world and learning about it. Located at the northwest edge of campus, its 160 acres is home to woodland and grassland trails, a riverine ecosystem and a small-lake wildlife habitat.

With the addition of the Moyer Nature Center, opportunities for programming have increased. This fall, events have



included Science Club meetings where members generated species lists and a Fall Nature Walk for families to learn about various trees and butterflies. Second grade students from Bluffton Elementary School also visited the Nature Preserve to learn about the change of seasons.

The events have been led by Amy Norris, naturalist and programming coordinator, who previously worked as a wetland ecologist.





## Jean Szabo

*Professor emeritus of music*

Years of service: 1965-92

### Sharing talents and gifts

For 27 years, Jean Szabo was committed to developing the musical talents of Bluffton's students. A member of the music faculty from 1965-92, Szabo enjoyed helping students accomplish and exceed their goals.

"It was wonderful getting to meet new students each year and sharing in their gifts," said Szabo. "For many, piano was a challenge, but I tried to make each lesson a good experience, and it was wonderful watching their accomplishments."

Szabo is this year's recipient of the Faculty/Staff Service Award. The award recognizes a former faculty or staff member who fostered a spirit of community on campus through relationships with others, including students whom the recipient mentored and inspired.

Szabo's passion for music began at an early age with piano lessons starting when she was just five years old. Originally taught by her aunt, an accomplished pianist who died in an automobile accident, Szabo spent many years under the guidance of Pearl Bogart Mann, who taught applied piano at Bluffton as well as private lessons.

"Mrs. Mann was my teacher from first grade through my first year of college," said Szabo. "That was a wonderful experience. I loved playing right away, to be able to create that beautiful sound. She pushed and challenged me."

### A true calling

Mann also encouraged Szabo to pursue music as a career. Szabo graduated from Baldwin Wallace University in 1949 with a Bachelor of Music and returned to her hometown with her husband Jim. She taught private lessons at home for several years until she got a call from former Bluffton President Robert Kreider.

"He asked if I would be interested in teaching here, and I sure was!" said Szabo.

Szabo taught music majors and non-majors alike, from functional piano to music theory to a music appreciation class called What to Listen for in Music.

"Those were mainly non-music majors. A lot of them hadn't had much background in music," explained Szabo.

"In that class, they learned to hear something new in music that they hadn't experienced before."

While she enjoyed teaching private lessons, Szabo explained college students "felt more challenged. They felt more of a responsibility for what they were doing with their time."

In 1970, she earned a Master of Music from Bowling Green State University. Szabo received tenure in 1974 and completed her first sabbatical in Vienna, Austria, the same year. Sabbaticals followed at Kingston Polytechnic in London, England, and selected universities in Canada and the United States.

### Commitment in-and-out of the classroom

During her employment, Szabo was also a member of several professional organizations, accompanied countless recitals and served as the chair of the Artist Series Committee for 10 years.

"It's great to hear performances on campus," said Szabo. "Students are encouraged and challenged by listening to professionals."

For many years, Szabo also accompanied, on harpsichord, the annual performance of "Messiah" on campus.

"That was new for me. Pianos have keys that are connected to hammers that hit the strings, whereas the harpsichord has quills that pluck the strings," explained Szabo. "It gave a completely different sound."

Off campus, the Szabo family, which included her husband Jim and sons Jeff, Jerry and Jon, were known for performing around the community as an ensemble. And, as a member of First Methodist Church in Bluffton, Szabo played at services for 60 years.

Szabo joked that she once asked her son when a person should retire. "He said 'while you're still good at it.'"

But when you're passionate about something, it's hard to give up. Now living at Maple Crest Senior Living Village, Szabo is retired but continues to serve as the accompanist for a group of fellow residents who rehearse every week.

**Carrie (Ream) Woodruff***Food Service Director, Lima City Schools*

Bluffton '85, MAOM '02 Major: Food and nutrition

**Finding the right path in life**

Carrie Woodruff discovered her calling at a women in science conference during her junior year of high school. There, the Ada, Ohio, native discovered the up-and-coming field of nutrition. She also learned one of the best places to study nutrition was just minutes from home at Bluffton.

"I called my mom [Mary Martha (Best '59) Kellogg] from the conference and said, 'Guess what? Bluffton has a nutrition program, and I think that's what I want to do,'" said Woodruff.

Now, after a long and continuing career in the field, Woodruff is being recognized as the recipient of the 2019 Professional Achievement Award. The award distinguishes a graduate who has continued the pursuit of intellect growth and has explored creative avenues in his or her chosen field.

"I love what I do. I love the fact that I can provide students with nutritious menus, and I can help guide their future," said Woodruff. "Nutrition is so important and instilling those ideas at an early age for kids is so important. I truly believe in this work."

For the past 20 years, Woodruff has served as the food service director of the Lima City Schools. During that time, she has balanced the budget, overseen the implementation of free breakfast and lunch programs, earned multiple USDA grants for fresh fruits and vegetables in the schools, and testified about school nutrition in Washington, D.C.

**Fueling the future**

While Woodruff's position is mainly administrative, and she doesn't directly work with children, she has witnessed the impact of improved nutrition.

For example, when Woodruff began, the district's breakfast program reached about 19 percent of students. With the support of administration, Woodruff led an initiative to provide free breakfast served directly to students in the classroom. Now, about 85 percent of the district's students eat breakfast at school each morning.

"After these kids started to get a good breakfast, we saw a 40 percent drop in nurse visits almost immediately," said Woodruff.

Another instrumental project was rebranding the district's nine school cafeterias into "Spartan Cafés."

"The kids get excited for lunch, and they have more Spartan pride and school spirit," said Woodruff. "We created unity within the nine buildings."

Each café features the district's mascot and school colors, as well as a unique saying that explores the importance of healthy eating. Sayings range from Lima Senior's "Feeding the Students: Past, Present and Future" to South Science and Technology Magnet's "Gearing up to fuel the future."

While Woodruff is committed to helping young learners, she's also dedicated to advancing the profession. She has mentored more than 50 post-baccalaureate dietetic interns, including many from Bluffton.

"I think it's important for these students to see what working in a school is like. It's not something you immediately think about doing when going into dietetics, but it's a good mix of dietetics with business," said Woodruff, who strengthened her business skills through Bluffton's Master of Arts in Organizational Management program.

**A place of honesty and integrity**

At Bluffton, Woodruff was totally committed to her studies and graduated with her bachelor's degree in three years. She cites Barb Stettler, associate professor emeritus of family and consumer sciences, as a key mentor.

"There is none better than her. She was hard, she had high expectations, but she really did push me to be the best I could be," said Woodruff.

Woodruff fondly remembers Bluffton as a place of honesty and integrity, especially through the use of the Honor Code.

"I remember taking our tests and signing them at the end. That act definitely makes you aware of right and wrong," said Woodruff. "Being in that Christian environment made an impact on my life."

Prior to her current position, Woodruff refined her skills at Lima Memorial Hospital and with Aramark at the Lima Ford Engine Plant. Presenting food demonstrations for 4-H also gave her early experience in teaching others about nutrition.

Now, she calls herself blessed to be where she is at in life.

"I do believe in God, and I believe I've been purposely placed here," said Woodruff. "And, I wouldn't be where I'm at without the support of my family."



AN CAFE



# ALUMNOTES

## 1960-69

**Michael Smith '68** has retired after a 35-year career as a certified registered nurse anesthetist. He and his wife Charlene now reside in Rio Rancho, N.M.

## 1970-79

**John Giles '75**, Kissimmee, Fla., is enjoying retirement to the fullest with his wife Lisa and their dog Pippin. They enjoy traveling and taking in the many activities available at the retirement community, Solivita, where they reside.

## 1990-99

**Lara Gephart '94**, Corpus Christi, Texas, was accepted into the Working Group Airport Master Firefighter program in December

2018. The purpose is to document understanding of key responsibilities to administer and manage an airport fire department. Lara, the first in her department to apply to the program, passed the test on her first attempt.

**Patrick Jones '96** was sworn in April 16, 2019, as the Perrysburg, Ohio, chief of police, having served the past 15 years with the division. He is also an adjunct faculty member in Bowling Green State University's criminal justice program. Patrick lives in Fostoria, Ohio, with his wife **Kimberli (Williams x95)** and their daughters Isabella and Gabriella.

## 2000-09

**Amanda (Christen '02) Dominique**, Monroe, Mich., is an instructional designer with Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering

Specialists (ACAMS). She and her husband David have three children.

**Lori (Pongtana '03) Burrows** is the regional vice president for development, covering central and western Ohio, for the Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges (OFIC). She and her husband Brian reside in Columbus.

**Jill (Mack '04) and Scott Bingham** were married on May 4, 2019. The couple purchased a new home in Massillon, Ohio.

**Rachael (Szydlowski '04) Sowards**, Albuquerque, N.M., completed a competitive fellowship with Building Excellent Schools in August 2018, resulting in the submission of the highest scoring charter school application in New Mexico state history. She also led Solare Collegiate Charter School in securing more than \$1 million in startup funding.

## OUR LEGACY

### *Bluffton alumni in the world*

**Blake Hershberger '18**, Canton, Ohio, recently completed a year of service with SALT (Serving And Learning Together) with Mennonite Central Committee. He worked with a local NGO in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, called "Shanti Mitra." Their main focus is teaching children in economically disadvantaged areas about human rights and peace building skills as a way to empower them to transform their communities. Now, he is working with the Young Adult Internship through MCC Great Lakes.





# HOMECOMING 2019

Students and alumni came together for a full slate of events at Homecoming 2019. From a social work reunion and artist reception in the morning to the inaugural season of Beaver Tail-Gating and the big game in the afternoon, everyone came together as Beavers All.

During halftime of the game, Tim Bender of Wellman, Iowa, and Leslie Beasley of Columbus, Ohio, were crowned king and queen. Go Beavers!



**Seth '06 and Julianne (Niswander '08) Burkholder**, New Albany, Ohio, welcomed their first child, Leo Michael, on Nov. 20, 2018. Seth is a CPA and works for an accounting firm.

**David Espinoza '07**, Toledo, Ohio, has been named the head men's and women's track and field coach at the University of Pikeville in Pikeville, Ky.

**Chris Bauman '09**, sports information director at Spring Arbor University, was named the 2019 Sports Information Director of the Year by the Crossroads League Conference. His wife **Andrea (Ressler '09)** owns Dandelion

Marketing and Design. They reside in Concord, Mich., with their sons Sawyer and Camden.

**Michael Wagner '09**, Pandora, Ohio, recently became an assistant professor in the College of Business at the University of Northwestern Ohio.

**Brent '10 and Christy (Rupp '10) Householder** reside in Montpelier, Vt. Brent is the director of finance and administration for the Humane Society of Chittenden County. Christy is the head veterinary technician and office manager at Mad River Veterinary Service.

## 2010-18

**Emily Baransy '11**, Fort Wayne, Ind., is the director of operations and programs for Grantmakers in Aging, a national membership organization of philanthropies amplifying the voices of older people and issues of aging. She is recently engaged and will marry Jacob Hinsey in June 2020.

**Jonathan Tumblin '12**, has moved to Tiskilwa, Ill. He accepted a position as guest group coordinator at Menno Haven Camp and Retreat Center.

**Shawn '12 and Abbi (Stern '10) Yoder**, London, Ohio, welcomed Malachi ("Kai") Drew on June 9, 2019. He joins a big sister, Cassie.

**Jameel x14 and Kate (Elder '13) Ellis**, Massillon, Ohio, welcomed a son, Jonas Theodore, on March 24, 2019. He joins big sister, Aurora, who was born Jan. 11, 2017.

**Megan (Bontrager '15) Risser** was married on July 6, 2019. She and her husband Jared reside in Goshen, Ind. Megan is in her fifth year of teaching third grade at Millersburg Elementary Middle School.

## IN MEMORIAM

**LaVonne (Hostetler '46) Klassen**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away May 19, 2019, at age 96.

**Richard Wenger '47**, Springfield, Ohio, passed away Nov. 3, 2017, at age 96.

**Gene (Thatcher x49) Holtkamp**, Albuquerque, N.M., passed away April 2, 2019, at age 96.

**Evan Herr x50**, Solon, Ohio, passed away Sept. 4, 2018, at age 91.

**Lelia "Mae" (Miller '50) Ramseyer**, Smithville, Ohio, passed away May 8, 2019, at age 90.

**Dr. John C. Stutzman '50**, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, passed away Aug. 9, 2019, at age 91.

**Carl A. Ervin '58**, Dalton, Ohio, passed away Aug. 17, 2019, at age 85.

**Delbert "Del" Ackerman x59**, Naples, Fla., passed away Aug. 15, 2019, at age 83.

**Richard "Dick" Heckathorn '59**, Middleburg Heights, Ohio, passed away July 1, 2018, at age 83.

**Ivan Dangler '61**, Lewis Center, Ohio, passed away March 5, 2019, at age 79.

**Jettie McWilliams x61**, Ashland City, Tenn., passed away Aug. 17, 2019, at age 91.

**Paul J. Fike II '62**, Columbus, Ga., passed away May 21, 2019, at age 80.

**James Kornhaus '62**, Basehor, Kan., passed away Dec. 11, 2018, at age 79.

**Martha "Marti" (Lewis '64) Casteel**, Russell, Pa., passed away Sept. 25, 2019, at age 76.

**James Shaw Rinehart '64**, Lexington, Ky., passed away Aug. 6, 2019, at age 77.

**Steven E. Mosiman x66**, Dubuque, Iowa, passed away March 28, 2019, at age 75.

**Geneva (Stamm '67) Shetler**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Sept. 13, 2019, at age 100.

**Rosilyn (Thiessen x68) Switzer**, St. Marys, Ontario, Canada, passed away May 2, 2018, at age 71.

**Susan (Grambo '70) Klein**, Norwalk, Ohio, passed away July 2, 2019, at age 71.

**Paul A. Smithson '84**, Ann Arbor, Mich., passed away July 27, 2019, at age 58.

**Richard A. Keller '86**, Lima, Ohio, passed away July 14, 2019, at age 74.

**Brad DeVier '95**, Harrod, Ohio, passed away May 18, 2019, at age 50.

## LEAD DIFFERENTLY AT WORK, AT HOME AND IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

At Bluffton, we believe advanced education makes a difference in the lives of our graduates, in the management of their organizations and in the well-being of their communities.

Continue your education at Bluffton through our accelerated adult degree-completion program, or through our graduate programs in business and education.

Bluffton offers the convenience of one-night-a-week online professional programs that not only open up career opportunities but allow for flexible, manageable coursework that fits into your work and family schedule.

To learn more, visit [www.bluffton.edu/ags](http://www.bluffton.edu/ags)



# FACULTY 360



## Heidi Mercer

### **If you could interview anyone — living or dead — who would it be and why?**

I would love to interview Jane Addams, the mother of social work. I would like to hear about her wisdom in working with families and communities at the Settlement House. I'd also like to hear what she thinks about social work in more modern times.

### **What's the best piece of advice you've received?**

The best advice that I got was from a t-shirt found in a thrift shop when I was in high school. The t-shirt read "Bloom where you are planted." For me, this suggests no matter where you are, take opportunities to be your best. During times of struggle or confusion, I always tend to go back to this quote.

### **You lived and worked in the United Kingdom for several years. What do you look back on most from that experience?**

I think living there challenged me in so many ways and helped me to gain confidence and strengths in areas I never knew existed in myself. Working in the field of social work in a foreign country is something that I will always be grateful for. Learning about resiliency (how people can bounce back) and thrive from the worst experiences helped me consider how to work with individuals. This period of time shaped how I not only practice with clients, but how I look at the world. Living six blocks away from the sea was also pretty brilliant!

### **What memorable moment in your life shaped who you are today?**

### **What drew you to the field of social work?**

Both of these questions can be answered in one go. Believe it or not, I started out as a photography major. Spring semester of my freshman year there was an alternative spring break offered. We went to the sunny city of Cleveland and it was there that the social work bug bit me. We had a chance to work in a variety of nonprofit settings and even participated in a homelessness teach-in. Afterwards I asked our university's AmeriCorp VISTA- "What career would this be?" and she said "social work." I have never looked back.

*Heidi Mercer is assistant professor of social work and director of field education at Bluffton.*





# BLUEPRINT FOR INNOVATION

## ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF *Simply Innovate— the Campaign for Bluffton*

This issue of the magazine highlights the 75th year of our outstanding social work program, a reminder that Bluffton has been a leader in learning and professional preparation for decades.

To extend this tradition, in fall 2016, the university launched Simply Innovate—the Campaign for Bluffton University with the goal of securing necessary funds to construct a new science building, maintain consistent support for annual operations and student aid, grow endowment and fund innovations in academic program development.

Now, just three years later, I am pleased to report that we are close to achieving our campaign goals:

With \$14.3 million of our science building goal confirmed, we are close to achieving our \$14.5 million fundraising goal—the largest capital project goal in Bluffton’s history.

We are on track to achieve our goal of consistent annual support of \$1.1 million or greater for operations and student financial aid.

We have already surpassed our \$5 million endowment fundraising goal with gifts and commitments of \$6.1 million to help sustain Bluffton’s mission into the future.

And, we have secured \$250,000 toward our \$1 million goal to support innovation in academic programs—so yes, here is our special opportunity going forward!

**With the campaign’s science building, annual fund and endowment goals nearly achieved, I want to invite all alumni and friends to consider contributing to our Innovation Fund with gifts and commitments that will help Bluffton pilot and develop innovative new learning experiences for our students.**



In particular this year, I invite you to help fund the start-up costs of signature experiences of the Bluffton Blueprint, the mission-centric and high-impact general education program that President Wood and faculty have developed for the Gen Z students who are now enrolling at Bluffton.

## THE GREAT ADVENTURE

\$100,000 - To support two-year startup costs of The Great Adventure: Each fall break, Bluffton will take all first-year students on a retreat in the Great Smoky Mountains to support academic success, spiritual growth and vocational discernment.

## LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

\$100,000 - To support two-year startup costs of the Learning in Community course: Beginning fall 2020, second-year students will engage in a high-impact, experiential learning course in Lima, Ohio, with community partners to connect their on-campus learning with the commitment to service we want all Bluffton graduates to embody.

## CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

\$100,000 - To help support the Cross-Cultural Experience program so that all students, regardless of financial means, can take full advantage of this transformational experience. We especially want to ensure that students can enroll in international experiences where program and travel costs are higher but the experience is "once in a lifetime."

Bluffton's Board of Trustees has already committed \$50,000 in increased support to the Innovation Fund this year. With trustee leadership and broad-based support from many alumni and friends, we can make substantial progress toward our goal during the year ahead.

**For more information and ways to support the Innovation Fund, visit [www.bluffton.edu/innovation](http://www.bluffton.edu/innovation).**

Thank you for your past, present and future support of Bluffton's mission, students and programs,



Dr. Hans Houshower  
Vice president for advancement



## ALUMNI & FRIENDS – EUROPE 2020

### *Cross-Cultural Learning – It's Not Just for Students*



President Wood invites you to join her for an alumni and friends travel experience to Europe Sept. 26 - Oct. 6, 2020. Professor Gerald Mast will be your faculty guide for a tour that will trace the migration of Mennonites from Zurich, Switzerland to the Netherlands and include Mennonite heritage destinations, castles, cathedrals, a Rhine River cruise and the opportunity to explore Amsterdam, one of Europe's dynamic cities.

To learn more and to make a reservation, visit [www.bluffton.edu/Euro2020](http://www.bluffton.edu/Euro2020)

## SLICE • SHARE • CELEBRATE

As the cornerstone was laid for the school's first building, Noah C. Hirsch, Bluffton's first president, concluded his remarks with an idea that has proved as durable as the structure itself:

**"Let us expect great things."**

We have, and we continue to do so.

From perfecting recipes with wholesome ingredients to executing professional business and marketing plans, this bread is an example of the great things happening at Bluffton University today.

Through the Bluffton Bread Company, join us as you slice into a product developed especially for you, share with family and friends and celebrate all that is good in this world.

[www.bluffton.edu/blufftonbread](http://www.bluffton.edu/blufftonbread)

