

# BLUFFTON

A magazine for Bluffton University alumni and friends | Spring 2023 | Vol. 20 No. 1



**VIRTUE-DRIVEN  
ATHLETICS**

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Springtime on Bluffton's beautiful campus is exquisite! From the tulips to the forsythia to the pink and white dogwoods—we are surrounded by the hope and promise of spring and all that it brings for us. Also part of the sights and sounds of spring are the cheers and excitement of our spring student-athletes practicing and competing.

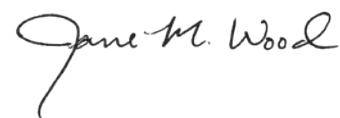
My daughter played competitive softball, and thus exuberantly cheering on Bluffton's teams from the stands also heralds springtime for me. Athletics helped my daughter learn to manage the pressure of competition, understand the importance of teamwork, and learn how to win (and lose) with a grateful heart. Our student-athletes also learn during practice and competition lifelong skills; our alumni tell us that they also developed relationships that last a lifetime.

In this issue of "Bluffton," you'll learn more about our Virtue-Driven Athletics program, an early initiative of "We Flourish," Bluffton's five-year strategic plan. Virtue-Driven Athletics brings to the forefront the defining habits and qualities that make a Bluffton University athlete distinct. Profiles from two alumni highlighted in this issue illustrate the significant impact of athletics on campus and the role it continues to play for many of our alumni.

I'm also heartened to highlight High-Five Fridays, a program that connects Beaver student-athletes to Bluffton Pirate elementary and middle school students. Watching our players model their ambassador role as both successful academic students as well as student-athletes to younger students makes me proud to be their president.

Our ability to continue to offer stellar academic and athletic programs depends greatly on your support. We are so appreciative of the contributions of our alumni and friends. Equipment in Sommer Center's weight room is being replaced and upgraded thanks to a generous gift from the Sommer family, enhancements to the softball field are underway thanks to alumni support, and the 50th class reunion gift will fund renovations of the exercise physiology lab in the basement of Ropp Hall. These initiatives, along with the great anticipation that accompanies the opening of the Knowlton Science Center this fall, greatly benefit the entire campus community and continue to allow us to prepare our students as we follow our mission for "life as well as vocation" and, "ultimately, for the purposes of God's universal kingdom."

Many blessings to you and your family and Go Beavers!



Jane M. Wood, Ph.D.  
President



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Spring 2023 Vol. 20 No. 1

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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.*

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We welcome your comments!

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**On the cover:** A Bluffton elementary student runs through a tunnel of Bluffton student-athletes on April 14, 2023, for High-Five Fridays.

Photo by Alison King





# Virtue-Driven Athletics

As an NCAA DIII school, Bluffton coaches and student-athletes not only perform well in competition but focus their team culture around Bluffton's four enduring values of community, discovery, respect and service. Through our Virtue-Driven Athletics program, we lift up habits of excellence through a shared framework which all Bluffton athletes encounter.



## Some highlights of the Virtue-Driven Athletics experience include:

### Habit Trackers

A tool to help student-athletes focus on daily, weekly, monthly and long-term goals. Bluffton's habit trackers help with developing habits of excellence and tracking successes for sustainable growth.

### High-Five Fridays

Beavers and Pirates come together on select Fridays throughout the academic year when Bluffton student-athletes hand out high-fives and heap extra encouragement on Bluffton Elementary School students as they head to class.

### DAM Awards

During a red-carpet event, student-athletes are recognized for both their athletic prowess and dedication to their sport and teams. Awards range from Newcomer of the Year to Team Cheerleader.

### Inspiring Speakers

Special speakers/events are planned specifically for the student-athlete experience on campus. Recent events have included speakers Jimmy Burrow, vice president of the Joe Burrow Foundation; and Dan Hughes, retired WNBA and Olympic champion coach.

### Day of Service

During Welcome Weekend, Bluffton athletes team up to make a difference in the Bluffton community. A variety of opportunities are available, and service locations range from Mennonite Home Communities to the Bluffton food pantry. Additional service experiences take place throughout the year such as adopt-a-family during the holiday season.





**On Friday mornings in April and September, arms are stretched high and smiles are wide as Bluffton University student-athletes greet Bluffton Elementary and Middle School students at the start of their day.**

Chris McLaurin '25, a sport and recreation management major, remembers looking up to the football players in his hometown of Bolton, Miss.

"I was like 'wow, I want to be just like you,'" said McLaurin, now a tight end with Bluffton football.

Recognizing the impact of positive role models and simple actions, McLaurin never misses an opportunity to share a high-five, a smile and some words of encouragement with the K-8 students in the village.

**"Some people really need a smile. You never know what people go through at home," said McLaurin. "So, if it means sacrificing sleeping in for the day, I'm going to get up and come out for the kids."**

McLaurin is not alone. Each Friday during the months of April and September, dozens of Bluffton University student-athletes and coaches form a high-five tunnel in front of the entrances to Bluffton Elementary School and Bluffton Middle School.

Matthew Nardo, head football coach, brought the High-Five Friday idea to Bluffton after hearing about a similar program between the University of Nebraska at Kearney's football team and Kearney Public Schools.

"One thing I loved from what I saw with UNK was the amount of community support they had on Saturdays and the way the community was tied in with their program," said Nardo. "We have the same opportunity to do this here at Bluffton—to be involved in our community, to let them know we are as much a part of them as they are a part of us."

High-Five Fridays started in April 2022, and the mornings of encouragement are now integral to Bluffton's Virtue-Driven Athletics program. Representatives from each team come dressed in gear highlighting their sport. While some of the young students are timid at first, others run through the tunnel, turn around and get a second or third helping of praise.

**"It's always fun and exciting," said Jake Slager '07, a Bluffton Elementary School parent. "My wife and I are alumni, so we talk about being Bluffton Beavers. We love these Fridays and the community support."**

Ashley Kloecker '26, a mathematics major and softball player from Troy, Ohio, realizes the kids may need some extra time to settle down after a High-Five Friday, but she's noticed that "all of the teachers seem hyped when they go through the line, too."

Greg Denecker, superintendent of the Bluffton Exempted Village School District also appreciates the increased connection between the Beavers and the Pirates.

**"We're in such a unique situation and so fortunate to have Bluffton University two blocks away from our school. We have a lot of students from the university who volunteer with our students," said Denecker. "This is a neat program for our kids. When the High-Five Fridays are done in the fall, we remind the kids that they'll be back in the spring!"**



**How will your involvement in Bluffton athletics benefit your future?**

I've learned a lot. I've learned the importance of time management and how to carry myself in professional settings. I've also learned how to be a leader. I feel these traits will be beneficial to my future once I'm coaching a team of my own.

**Karl Foster '24**  
Sport and recreation leadership  
Detroit, Mich.



**Why do you choose to be a student-athlete?**

I chose to be a student-athlete because it gives me the opportunity to learn, compete and succeed with other student-athletes. It also gives me the opportunity to work on something I enjoy year-round.

**Brittney Ramirez '25**  
Business administration and marketing  
Archbold, Ohio



**Why do you choose to be a student-athlete?**

Being a student-athlete allows me to play basketball while seeking an education for my future. I knew I wasn't done with the sport I love, and Bluffton gave me the chance to continue. Bluffton felt like home when I came to visit, and it has yet to disappoint!

**Maddie Fitzpatrick '24**  
Psychology  
Mount Gilead, Ohio



**How will your involvement in Bluffton athletics benefit your future?**

I know the connections I am making will benefit me greatly in the future. Second, athletics has taught me to persevere through the hard times to accomplish a long-term goal. It has shown me how rewarding hard work is.

**Andrew Collinsworth '25**  
Communication and media  
Westerville, Ohio



**What is the best part of being on a team at Bluffton?**

You always have a support system to go to. I love watching all of us grow and progress as a team and as individuals throughout the season. I am excited I get the opportunity to grow alongside the program throughout my years here at Bluffton.

**Sydney Grisier '26**  
Criminal justice and social work  
Bryan, Ohio

# Student-Athlete Q & A

In the 1920s, longtime coach A.C. Burcky suggested the Beaver as a mascot because Bluffton student-athletes were resourceful, didn't tire easily, and worked to leave the world a better place. The same is true today! Now, Bluffton student-athletes share a few of the reasons they compete as Bluffton Beavers.



**Why do you choose to be a student-athlete?**

I have been around sports for as long as I can remember. So, when it came to going to college, there was never a doubt in my mind that I was going to keep playing sports and competing at college.

**Cole Kropka '25**  
Business administration and sport management  
New London, Ohio



**What is the best part of being on a team at Bluffton?**

Being on the men's golf team is amazing at Bluffton because of the friendships I have gained. Bluffton athletics is also bigger than just athletics. The community service aspect teaches you how to help your community even when it is not asked of you.

**Hunter Jolliff '25**  
Accounting and business administration  
Elida, Ohio



**How will your involvement in Bluffton athletics benefit your future?**

Being a student-athlete has taught me how to be responsible and have good time management skills. It has also pushed me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to learn new things about myself to gain the confidence I need to succeed in whatever I do!

**Alysha Like '23**  
Pre-physical therapy  
McComb, Ohio



**What is the best part of being on a team at Bluffton?**

The best part of being on a team at Bluffton is gaining life-long brothers and friends while doing the things I love. Bluffton athletics also helps me stay ahead on schoolwork and will help me be a better man throughout my life.

**Markus Finley '24**  
Sport and recreation leadership  
Indianapolis, Ind.



**How will your involvement in Bluffton athletics benefit your future?**

Being a college athlete is preparing me for the challenges that come with being an adult 'in the real world.' I have such a strict and busy schedule but being a student teacher and a college athlete has prepared me for the chaos that comes with life!

**Bobbi Adams '23**  
Primary P-5 education  
Delaware, Ohio



# ESPORTS

AT BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY

In its first semester as a varsity sport at Bluffton University, all three teams under the esports umbrella advanced to their respective playoffs with Bluffton's Rocket League Purple team reaching the grand finals.

"That team was just like a well-oiled machine at the end," explained Brian Williams, esports coordinator. "Unfortunately, we lost to Albertus Magnus College out of New Haven, Conn., but we made it to the peak of play which we are very happy about."

During the spring semester, Bluffton also fielded a seconded Rocket League team and an Overwatch Team. With the addition of esports, Bluffton University now offers 19 varsity sports. Though an esports club was founded in 2019, becoming a varsity sport allows esports student-athletes to compete at a higher level. Williams, a Miami University graduate and former member of their varsity esports team, was hired in November 2022 to manage, coach and recruit for Bluffton's co-ed program.



"I'm definitely excited to see where esports at Bluffton goes. We have a lot of potential," said Williams. "Esports is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. So, I'm excited to see how we continue to perform at the collegiate level, and hopefully we'll get some of our players beyond that level."

While the NCAA has chosen not to govern collegiate esports, Bluffton is competing on a varsity level through the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE). Teams are established to compete in different games ranging from the ever-popular Super Smash Bros. to Rocket League (a soccer game first released in 2015 where customized cars stand in for players). And just like any other sport on campus, team members practice multiple times a week to improve their skills.

"There are different things we each excel at and need to improve upon," said Justin Metsker '23, an economics and mathematics double major and captain of the purple team. "We had to learn to trust each, to hold each other accountable, but we had fun and definitely became a team."

Moving forward, Bluffton's current students will serve as the backbone of the various teams as more recruits are brought in and additional teams are established. For Williams, communication is key to coaching.

"Coach has really brought us all together and taught us why we do things a certain way," said Braeden Wilson '26, a marketing and sport management double major. "He just really helped us see why we need to communicate and helped us see the game outside the box I guess you could say."

Esports teams typically compete year-round with tournaments in the spring and fall semesters. Bluffton's teams compete in Neufeld Hall's Esports Center.



## NACE STARLEAGUE

Bluffton esports teams compete in the NACE Starleague, the largest collegiate esports league in North America. More than 700 colleges and universities participate in its tournaments. During the spring 2023 season, Bluffton played against teams from universities including:

- Alvernia University
- Akron University
- Bowling Green State University
- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- Emerson College
- Northern Kentucky University

### Current teams

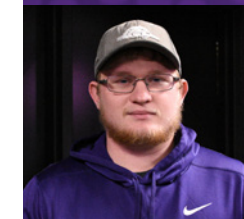
- Overwatch
- Rocket League Purple (Varsity)
- Rocket League White (Junior Varsity)

### Recruiting for

- Rocket League
- Overwatch
- Valorant
- Super Smash Bros.
- Fortnite

## Meet the Conference Finalists

Bluffton's Rocket League purple team were undefeated during the regular season, won their conference and advanced to the grand finals. Coach Williams describes each of the players.



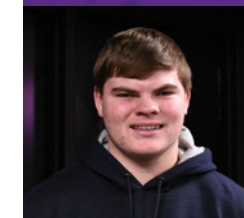
### Justin Metsker '23, captain Burbank, Ohio

Our team captain led the team to the grand finals thanks to the help of his strategy-making spreadsheets and communication.



### Zachary Rhynes '25 Toledo, Ohio

Better known as Rocket, Zach came out of his shell over the course of the season and became a leader and great team member.



### Braeden Wilson '26 Belle Center, Ohio

A freshman, Braeden was a little lower in skill than the other two at first, but he caught up with his teammates quickly and excelled in his role on the team.

# ALONG THE RILEY



## Nursing accreditation

Bluffton University's nursing program has been granted the full five-year accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), the nation's leading accrediting agency for nursing programs at the bachelor's, master's and residency levels.

The accreditation status follows a successful virtual site accreditation visit with an evaluation team composed of three CCNE-appointed nursing education leaders.

"Receiving our CCNE accreditation is a testament to the quality of the nursing education program that we offer at Bluffton University," said Dr. Sherri Winegardner, director and professor of nursing at Bluffton. "Students attending our program can be assured that they are participating in an educational program that is engaging in effective and quality academic practices relative to nursing education."

Bluffton's nursing program is a four-year, dual-degree, dual-entry program in collaboration with Rhodes State College. Through the program, students earn both an associate degree in nursing from Rhodes State College, leading to licensure as a Registered Nurse (RN), and advanced nursing coursework at Bluffton, leading to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN).

Benefits of the accreditation status extend to both nursing alumni as well as current Bluffton nursing students.

## Beaver Reveal

Perhaps one of the most tightly guarded secrets at Bluffton University are the identities of J. Denny and Jenny Beaver. Five students: Darius Boeke '23, Ashley Eachus '23, Laura Irwin '23, Anton Miller '24 and Madison Staton '23 were revealed to be the performers behind the J. Denny and Jenny mascots for 2022-23. They were revealed Jan. 28, 2023, between the men's and women's home basketball games against Transylvania in Sommer Center. Each of the students is highly involved on campus with activities ranging from Student Senate to Campus Ministries. While most students spend one year as a Beaver, Irwin kept the secret for three cycles and Miller for two.



J. Denny came on the scene in fall 2010 to honor Dr. J. Denny Weaver, professor emeritus of religion and longtime faculty athletics representative at Bluffton. Jenny was introduced in fall 2014 to help J. Denny spread campus spirit. Since their introductions, 46 students have served as J. Denny or Jenny Beaver. The reveal kicked off the application process for the next round of Beavers selected for 2023-24.

## Religious communication

During the fall, Dr. Gerald Mast's Religious Communication class developed study notes based on class discussions of three texts from the Bible including one each from the Old Testament, New Testament and Psalms.

The notes will be considered for inclusion in the Anabaptist Community Bible, a venture of MennoMedia's Anabaptism at 500. The project celebrates the 500th



anniversary of the Anabaptist movement in 2025. Mast is a member of the Anabaptism at 500 advisory group.

The class included a mix of students taking the course for general elective credits as well as for Bluffton's communication major. Students felt the pressure to "do a good job."

"It was a bit nerve racking," explained Jeremy Locklear '22. "What if readers don't agree with our interpretations? What if my thoughts don't match up? But we took the project seriously, and it made us think more carefully about what we were reading."

Other groups from the university are considering taking part in the project. Mast is also involved in gathering notes from historic Anabaptist sources such as Menno Simons and imprisoned Anabaptists as recorded in the "Martyrs Mirror."



## Historic neighborhood researched

History majors "put their fingers on the bones of Lima's historic African American neighborhood" in Dr. Perry Bush's fall 2022 Theory and Application class.

Through the class, students become historians by researching a specific neighborhood in Lima, Ohio, at four points in time during in the early half of the 20th century. The goal is to learn as

much as they can about the neighborhood and the people living in it. For the first time in the project's 25-year history, the people studied were overwhelmingly African American.

"We didn't find it shocking when we compared our data with each other and learned that our neighborhood was predominantly black," said Macey Thomas '25. "But that changed when we compared our data to the data collected through the previous projects."

The studied neighborhood was located near St. Paul AME Church which remains active on West Spring Street. Bush says the data points to the de facto segregation and Jim-Crow-era racism prevalent in Lima and most American cities at the time.

As with previous neighborhood reconstruction projects, Bush is sharing the data with the Allen County Museum. The students' research was also highlighted in the "Lima News" and on WLIO-TV.



## Athletes of the year

Jack Towell of Batavia, Ohio, received the 2023 A.C. Burcky Award as outstanding senior male athlete of the year. He led the baseball team in batting average, RBI, hits, doubles, homeruns and slugging percentage. Towell is the all-time record holder for times hit by a pitch.

Haley Gill of Indianapolis, Ind., received the 2023 Kathryn E. Little Award as outstanding senior female athlete of the year as a member of the women's golf team. She holds the record for the best 18-hole score in program history as well as the second and third place records for the best



## Our Legacy: Bluffton alumni connections

Kendra (Johns '01) Nickel, MBA '15, and Kathy Dickson '03 from Bluffton's 2001 cast of "Quilters" joined Dr. Melissa Friesen, director, and the 2023 cast on stage following the April 1 performance in Yoder Recital Hall. This year's production featured several alumni connections including alumna Sara Brenner '79 performing as the family matriarch. The centerpiece of Bluffton's original production, an intricate quilt designed by Martha (Badertscher '62) Hostetler, was once again featured on stage.

54-hole score. Gill is a four-time selection to the Women's Golf Coaches Association's All-American Scholar Team.



## Master of Dietetics

Bluffton University is now offering a Master of Dietetics graduate degree for students interested in becoming a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN).

Beginning in January 2024, students must have a master's degree and at least 1,000 hours of supervised experiential learning to sit for the RDN licensing examination. Bluffton's new program fulfills both requirements.

"We are excited about moving our long-standing dietetics program and Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) to the master's degree level with the newly accredited RDN Integrated Master's Program (Future Education Model)," said Dr. Deborah Myers, director of dietetics at Bluffton. "This will allow students to obtain both a master's degree and 1,000 hours of experiential learning in an affordable one-year program, designed to prepare skilled and competent dietetics practitioners."

At Bluffton, admitted students can complete the requirements to sit for the RDN exam in one calendar year through online and in-person classes as well as supervised experiential learning.

High school students who are interested in becoming an RDN can complete their undergraduate coursework at Bluffton University and move straight into the master's program though Bluffton's 4+1 program.

# 123RD ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

*Saturday, May 6, 2023*

The achievements of Bluffton University's class of 2023 were celebrated on Saturday, May 6, during Bluffton's 123rd Commencement ceremony. More than 200 students crossed the stage, including traditional undergraduates, degree completion and master's degree students.

"We are so pleased to celebrate each one of our graduates and their accomplishments today," said President Wood. "We are gathered together to participate in and witness an academic ceremony that marks a significant moment of achievement that will be forever important in each student's life."

Kathy Carr, a 1978 graduate, shared the Commencement address "Bluffton College Then - Bluffton University Now."

While noting how campus has changed and will continue to change, she also reflected on the enduring qualities of a Bluffton education, including the values of discovery, community, respect and service.

Her prayers and advice for the class of 2023 included:

Follow your heart. It knows the way.

Before you act, listen. Before you react, think.  
Before you criticize, wait. And, before you quit, try.

Always remember that you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think and loved more than you'll ever know.

Carr concluded her remarks with a reminder that graduation isn't the end of a journey. Instead, "it's the beginning of a beautiful one."

"Take pride in how far you've come," said Carr.  
"Have faith in how far you can go."



## Commencement speaker Kathy (Gaines '78) Carr



Kathy (Gaines '78) Carr began her career with Fort Wayne Community Schools as a special education teacher in 1978, teaching severely and profoundly mentally handicapped students, moderately mentally handicapped students and students with learning disabilities. During her 42 years with the district, she served as a resource teacher, dean of students, principal, manager of recruitment and hiring, and director of human resources.

Retired since 2020, she has been a consultant at South Bend Community Schools. Carr actively serves her community and is currently on the Board of Directors of the YWCA of Northeast Indiana. She received Bluffton's Lifetime Service Award in October 2022.

# ALUMNOTES

## 1970-79

**Susan (Heffentrager '70) Elverson**, Harleysville, Pa., moved into the Peter Becker Community for senior Christians. She enjoys the people and values that reminds her of Bluffton. Elverson takes part in many volunteer opportunities, classes, clubs and field trips.

**Ed Bratt '72**, Leipsic, Ohio, substitute teaches in Putnam County and works part-time for Legacy Farmers' Cooperative. He is married to **Linda (Butler '70) Bratt**.

**Larry Fry '72**, Mayfield Village, Ohio, retired after 36 years of teaching/coaching for the Shaker Heights school district and is currently an Ohio volleyball and OVR club volleyball referee. He enjoys traveling/cruising, riding motorcycle, playing complete softball. Larry and his spouse, **Livia '72**, delight in their five grandchildren.

**Janis (Ramseyer '72) Gingerich**, Burton, Ohio, is retired from a career in education as a teacher and elementary principal. She now volunteers weekly and visits children and grandchildren. She is married to Dan Gingerich.

**Jane (Bower '72) Richards**, Bluffton, Ohio, retired from teaching and volunteers at a local hospital and school. She travels frequently to spend time with family and friends.

**Doris (Hamman '72) Schumacher**, Brookings, S.D., attends church and teaches English Language Learners. She is married to **Tom Schumacher '72**.

**Tom E. Schumacher '72**, Brookings, S.D., keeps busy as professor emeritus, South Dakota State University; board member of EcoSun Prairie Farms (non-

profit working to include native prairie in agricultural systems); board member Brookings Multicultural Center; sermons at Mount Mennonite Church and at the South Dakota Agricultural Heritage Museum. He enjoys reading, indoor gardening, cooking and new experiences.

**Patricia (Roush '72) Sheidler**, Bluffton, Ohio, is a retired teacher who enjoys quilting, reading, bicycling and traveling. She is active at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, where she volunteers. Patricia enjoys playing the mountain dulcimer with a local group. She is married to **Dennis Sheidler '70**.

**Jane (Kingsley '72) Steinmetz**, Bluffton, Ohio, volunteers at the beautiful Etcetera Shop in Bluffton. Other interests are her four children and their families (10 grandchildren, ages 1-26), traveling near and far, biking, tennis, reading, church and spending time with friends. Before retirement, she taught at Bluffton Elementary School and mothered her children through school, sports, college and beyond! Her husband, **Mark Steinmetz '70**, is deceased.

**John Frederick Brown '73**, Sebring, Fla., is retired and spends a good deal of time on the golf course and likes to travel when possible. He truly enjoys visiting his granddaughter in Ohio. He continues to make wonderful connections with friends from college days at Bluffton. He has been married to **Bonnie (Bonna) Jean (Byrd '74) Brown**, for nearly 50 years.

**Louis K. Chiu '73**, Copperopolis, Calif., is retired and spends time with his kids and grandkids and plays in a Chinese and a Western orchestra. He volunteers with the Calaveras County Sheriff's Office.

**Sue (Neuenschwander '73) Cupples**, Findlay, Ohio, retired as a certified school librarian from Carey Exempted Village Schools and is also a BGSU and University of Findlay graduate. Sue volunteers at St. Paul's UMC, Findlay, Ohio, and enjoys reading, knitting, crocheting, baking, skiing and activities with husband, **Jack Cupples '73**, and their family.

**Becky and Terry Malone '73**, Lexington, Ky., Becky has retired from reading instruction and is now doing English as a second language and tutoring. Terry works at the University of Kentucky as a physical therapy professor.

**Mike McClure '73**, Swanton, Ohio, has retired from teaching and coaching baseball and basketball. He played baseball until he turned 71. His spouse is **Deborah '73**.

**Mary Ann (Augspurger '73) Moman**, Indianapolis, Ind., retired from United Methodist ministry and is enjoying time with children and grandchildren. She volunteers with Indiana Landmarks. In retirement Mary Ann has continued to work with new clergy in the Indiana Conference, which gives her hope for the future.

**Adah (Milan '73) Roberts**, Macon, Ga., is a certified public accountant. She served as finance director for both the city of Macon and Jacksonville, N.C., but is now retired. Adah is a member of the League of Women Voters, on the board of several non-profits and volunteers with a few others. Her family has most of her attention now and she likes to travel with husband, Dr. Franc Wallace, M.D.

**Joseph Thomas Wechter '73**, Ontario, Ohio, owns an insurance agency in Shelby, Ohio, and plans to

## ALUMNI PROFILE

### Estee (Arend '13) Hemphill

Class year: 2013

Major: Sport management

## On her game everyday

Originally a criminal justice major with the goal of becoming an arson investigator, Estee (Arend '13) Hemphill found her true vocation through a campus job. Starting in her first year at Bluffton, Hemphill was an assistant for the volleyball team. It was such an amazing experience that by spring she was also working for the softball team.

"I realized my job didn't really feel like a job," said Hemphill. "I enjoyed going to work each day, and I felt part of that community even though I wasn't a student-athlete."

Eventually, Hemphill changed her major to sport management and became a baseball assistant for Coach James Grandey for the next three years. Now, as the assistant director of service for the Cleveland Guardians, Hemphill remains excited for work each day.

### Thriving in the grind

In her position, Hemphill oversees two areas for the Guardians: fan services and season ticket services. Through both roles, each day is unique, and tasks range from answering questions (fan services responds to roughly 90,000 calls and 20,000 emails each year) to hosting fan appreciation events at spring training. Hemphill describes the work as building relationships and similar to how people are treated at Bluffton.

"I wasn't just a number at Bluffton. I was a person. I contributed and I made a difference. There is the same feeling at the Cleveland Guardians," said Hemphill. "Our fans aren't account numbers to us. We want to know how they use their tickets, how many kids they have, what the team means to them."

After a decade with Cleveland baseball, Hemphill continues to "thrive in the grind" and from March through October the whole organization must be "on our game."

"The biggest thing for me is making decisions and being part of the impact," said Hemphill. "Our purpose is to unite and inspire the city of Cleveland through the power of team, but our mission is to win the World Series, and I'm part of that. I love it."

### Grit, determination, perseverance

Hemphill started as a year-round, part-time employee in Cleveland to get her foot in the door and grow with the



organization. To stand out, she volunteered for every opportunity presented.

"I wanted people to see my skillset, to see that I was someone who they couldn't let walk away from this organization," said Hemphill. "So, I tell people to look at part-time jobs as an opportunity to advance."

After a year, she was promoted to a full-time position. Prior to Cleveland, Hemphill spent a year working in the athletics office at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. During college, she also worked on the grounds crew at Bluffton, completed a marketing internship with Bluffton Family Recreation, volunteered with Beyond the Ball during her cross-cultural experience to Chicago, and interned with grounds crews for the Miami Valley Scrappers and Carolina Panthers.

"Having those opportunities on my resume only helped other people realize I have grit, I have determination, I have perseverance," said Hemphill. "Those are the skills that have helped me get to where I am now."

Hemphill acknowledges that sometimes game days can be exhausting, but she views her coworkers as family and Progressive Field as home.

"There's so much joy that comes from driving over the bridge and seeing the lights of Progressive Field," Hemphill explained. "It's home, and when I go to work, I'm going to the place that brings me so much joy and excitement."



**Michael Pickel PT, DPT**

Class year: 2019

Major: Pre-physical therapy

## Forging a new path

The youngest of three boys, Michael Pickel's goal from an early age was to "speed up" his life.

"I always wanted to hang out with my older brothers, but especially in sports," said Pickel. "I had the mindset that I needed to keep up with them."

The need to not only keep up but to succeed crossed over to academics and resulted in Pickel graduating early from Bluffton and being the youngest person in his cohort, at 24, to graduate from the physical therapy program at Hampton University. Pickel's interest in physical therapy began in high school when he visited a physical therapist after injuring his elbow. At Bluffton, his interest was cemented when he shadowed physical therapists at Bluffton Hospital.

"I thought I could really see myself doing this," said Pickel, of his current career. "Now, the most rewarding part is when patients are able to do even really simple things that they haven't been able to do in a really long time."

### Developing a program

Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Pickel is now based in Fairfax, Va., a suburb of Washington, D.C. He enjoys the proximity to a wide variety of restaurants, museum and cultural events. Though the location is much larger than the Village of Bluffton, he's building a community for himself near the nation's capital like he did on campus.

"I had mentors and a small group of friends who built me up and kept me on my path to make sure I didn't fall," said Pickel of Bluffton.

And at Bluffton, he overcame one of the biggest hurdles on his vocational journey. After a year at a larger college, Pickel knew he wanted to transfer, but Bluffton didn't offer a direct path to graduate school. So, with the help of Dr. Angela Montel, professor of biology, and Iris Neufeld, registrar, Pickel researched programs and created a self-designed, pre-physical therapy major. A few years later, the pre-physical therapy program Pickel helped establish has skyrocketed in popularity.

"The overall theme I took away from my time at Bluffton is you have the ability to forge your own path," said Pickel. "You don't



have to follow somebody else's footsteps. You can create your own path."

### Drive to succeed

Now in his first year as a physical therapist, Pickel is working at The Jackson Clinics while studying for a sports clinical specialist (SCS) board certification. Administered through the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties, the certification will qualify him as an expert in athletic injury management. Pickel is scheduled to complete the 18-month program in February 2024.

"I am basically working full time and in school full time. That's tough. I expected it, but that doesn't make it any easier to do," said Pickel. "It's challenging but the job itself has been super rewarding. I definitely enjoy it as much as I thought I would."

A member of Bluffton's basketball team from 2017-19, Pickel is narrowing his treatment focus to athletes not only because he can relate to their experiences but because they have a similar drive to succeed.

"Athletes are typically the most motivated in the physical therapy setting to keep up with their exercises and to put in the work to progress themselves even outside of therapy," he explained. "With athletes, they may have a scholarship on the line, or they may have a desire to complete at a really high level."

continue showing up as long as his health allows. He serves on several volunteer boards in the area and just built a house near his daughter's family to be more involved with the grandchildren. Joseph enjoys golfing, travelling, grandkids, sporting events and time with family and friends.

### Bonnie (Bonna) Jean (Byrd '74)

**Brown**, Sebring, Fla., continues to attempt learning the frustrating game of golf and was involved with directing and performing in a variety show in March. Her most rewarding activity is enjoying time with her granddaughter in Ohio. She is married to **John Frederick Brown '73**.

**Sam Brown '74**, Medina, Ohio, retired from a sales career in the printed flexible packaging industry. Like many, grandchildren are a big part of his life. He enjoys golfing throughout the year with fellow graduates Cotner, Schrader and Campbell. He splits his time living in Medina and the Blue Ridge mountains of North Georgia with his wife Susan Brown.

**Jim Cotner '74**, Whitehouse, Ohio, retired in 2016 and now spends time enjoying four grandchildren, volunteering at church, RVing and golfing with friends.

**Susan (Wolfgang '74) Davis**, Brentwood, Tenn., retired after 40 years as a librarian at Vanderbilt University. She enjoys reading, traveling, volunteering with Meals on Wheels and testing old recipes for the historical society.

**Hans Houshower '74**, Oakland, Calif., is retired after a career in the non-profit sector including 15 years as VP for advancement at Bluffton University. He is settling into the San Francisco Bay area with his two sons and their families and looks forward to increased volunteer activities and hiking in 2023.

**Douglas Meister '74**, Louisville, Ky., retired after 45 years in ministry in Tennessee, Ohio and Kentucky. He

served, or is serving, on regional and general ministry committees as well as on ecumenical teams including the Roman Catholic/Disciples of Christ Dialogue. He is an avid collector of A. H. Heisey of Newark, Ohio, antique glassware and is a percussionist in the River Cities Concert Band of Louisville, Ky. He is married to Diane Shelton Meister.

**Marty Riggs '74**, Marion, Ohio, after being in the field of education for 32 years, retired in 2005 in order to accept the position of assistant baseball coach at Duke University, Durham, N.C., a position he will cherish the remainder of his life. He accepted a position in 2011 with the Columbus Clippers baseball Organization and is there presently. Marty also continues to follow each of his five grandkids in their activities.

**Sally Weaver '74 Sommer**, Bluffton, Ohio, is serving on several boards including Et Cetera Shop, Inc. in Bluffton and two national Quaker boards. She volunteers at ReStore in Lima and Et Cetera and is also very involved in local Quaker meeting and their yearly meeting. She is married to **Jon Sommer '73**.

**Karen (Rinehart '74) Van Zile**, Murrells Inlet, S.C., has retired to the beach of South Carolina after 37 years in secondary education and administration. She is loving life and is active in her community and church activities. Her husband, **Michael Van Zile '73**, is deceased.

## 1980-89

**Susie Kauffman '80**, Chicago, Ill., is teaching soils classes at two community colleges. She never worked so hard or enjoyed it so much!

## 1990-99

**Kurt Nightingale '92**, Westerville, Ohio, retired from law enforcement

after 25 years of service on Sept. 3, 2022, from the Westerville Division of Police. He spent 18 years as a field training officer. Kurt is now teaching at various police academies and plans to continue his love of travel with his wife of 28 years, **DeAnn (Black '93) Nightingale**.

**DeAnn (Black '93) Nightingale**, Westerville, Ohio, is celebrating 20 years of entrepreneurship with her company, Three Bags Full Consignment Events, located in central Ohio. She also recently retired from homeschooling after 14 years following the graduation of her youngest child. DeAnn and husband, **Kurt '92**, plan to continue traveling, especially exploring the West, now that they are empty nesters.

**Lynn (Woeste '95) Carpenter**, Lima, Ohio, current executive director of foundation, marketing, volunteer services and provider recruitment at Lima Memorial Hospital, has been promoted to vice president and chief operating officer. Throughout her 28-year career at Lima Memorial, Lynn has provided strategic and operational leadership for numerous service lines, departments and key initiatives. She holds a Master of Business Administration degree and is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

**Nikki (Fortman '96) Shannon**, St. Marys, Ohio, is now working at Health Partners of Western Ohio in Lima, Ohio, as a nurse on Dr. Parranto's team.

**Angela (Puckett '97) Montgomery**, Beaverdam, Ohio, has been at West Ohio Community Action Partnership for eight years. She served as a Head Start home-based teacher for three years and then moved into management. She has served as the Child and Family Service Manager for the last five years.



## IN MEMORY OF SUSAN STREETER CARPENTER

Dr. Susan Streeter Carpenter, professor emeritus of English, died recently at the age of 75. She served on Bluffton's faculty in the English department from 2005-16.



A graduate of Case Western Reserve University, Carpenter met her lifetime partner and husband, Berch Carpenter, in 1969 while on a co-op in Philadelphia for a master's degree in teaching from Antioch College. Carpenter taught for a year in a California high school but returned to Yellow Springs where she worked for various social causes, wrote and taught as an adjunct professor. In 2005, she earned a Ph.D. in English and comparative literature from the University of Cincinnati.

During her time at Bluffton, Carpenter encouraged creative excellence among her students and mentored many of them into promising careers. She also maintained her own productivity as a writer, including publication of a novel, "Riders on the Storm," from her personal experiences in the complex times of the 1960s. On a regular basis, she organized events for the campus community that provided venues for the expression of poetry, prose and music on themes of importance—especially those related to women's concerns and women's voices.

Carpenter's short stories and fiction received numerous awards. She earned an Ohio Arts Council Fellowship, a Pushcart Prize nomination and two first-place Westheimer awards from the University of Cincinnati, as well as a Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship in the Humanities for an early version of her novel.

In addition to her husband, Carpenter is survived by her son Chad (Kara), daughter Laura (Justin) Truitt and three grandchildren.

A memorial service for Carpenter was held on May 20 at the Vernet Ecological Center in Glen Helen Nature Preserve.

## 2000-09

**Tami Chapek '00**, Columbus, Ohio, launched her business, WelnspireWe, over five years ago. Seven coaches were recently added to the team. They offer executive leadership and career coaching for mid- to senior-level leaders looking to be the best they can be.

**Danny Rodriguez '00**, Cincinnati, Ohio, began his third year coaching at Milford High School in Cincinnati. During the 2022 season, he was able to lead five individuals to the DI state track and field meet. He also sent two athletes to complete on scholarship at the college level. He is looking forward to returning to the state meet this coming season.

**Elizabeth (Dick '00) Shewell**, Youngstown, Ohio, adopted a baby boy, Josiah Robert, on Jan. 20, 2023.

**Stephanie Elton '03**, Toledo, Ohio, was appointed Jan. 1, 2023, president of Blue Water Communications, a boutique public relations firm that specializes in museums, destinations and architecture.

**Beth Yoder '03**, Archbold, Ohio, earned her doctorate in education from the University of Findlay. She earned the Isadore Newman Dissertation Award from MWERA and presented at the MWERA and NAFME conferences. Her research is on music performance anxiety in school band directors. She is the 5-12 band director at Archbold Area Schools.

**Nathan Kreider '04**, Lima, Ohio, coaches middle school football and wrestling at Shawnee Middle School in Lima, Ohio. Nathan and his wife, Dr. Sarah Kreider, welcomed in October their newest son, Oscar Louis Kreider. The new little brother was also welcomed into their home by their four children, Zach, Abby, Patrick and Pete.

**Ben McCullough '07**, Findlay, Ohio, and his wife, Megan, welcomed their third child, Cedric Edward, on Nov 29. In January, Ben began a new role at MPC as a business analyst supporting coast to coast operations.

## 2010-19

**Maegan (Rohdes '11) Reece**, Columbus Grove, Ohio, and husband, Wes, welcomed their first child, Clara, in December 2022.

**Aaron '11** and **Joni Yost '11**, Goshen, Ind. are pleased to announce the birth of their daughter, Maisie, born Aug. 8. Two-year-old Winnie is a proud big sister. Aaron works as data services manager at AMBS, and Joni serves as an English language teacher at Waterford Elementary School.

**Samantha Wildow '13**, Dayton, Ohio, was recently named editor of the Miami Valley Today newspaper in Troy, Ohio. She lives in Dayton with her husband, Josh Brown, and their two dogs, Ghost and Scuz.

**Lydia Speicher '14**, Raymond, Ohio, has been working towards her Master in Clinical Mental Health Counseling with a concentration in art therapy from Lesley University in Cambridge, Mass. After graduating in May 2023, she will pursue her Licensed Professional Counseling credentials. She has a cat named Waldo.

**Jena O'Brien '19**, Goshen, Ind., earned her Master of Science in Strategic Communications from Arkansas State University in fall 2022.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Josephine (Conrad x44) Sommer**, Pekin, Ill. passed away April 23, 2022, at the age of 99.

**Mary L. (Locher) Yoder '46**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Dec. 14, 2022, at the age of 99.

**Harley R. Steine '48**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Oct. 26, 2022, at the age of 95.

**Joann L. (Beck) Fell '52**, Fostoria, Ohio, passed away Jan. 26, 2023, at the age of 93.

**Ilse E. (Hochstattler) Reist '53**, Scottsdale, Pa., passed away Dec. 3, 2022, at the age of 94.

**Jean D. (Saylor) Shaw '53**, Wapakoneta, Ohio, passed away Oct. 28, 2022, at the age of 90.

**Corrinne C. (Kamp) Boehr '54**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Feb. 4, 2023, at the age of 91.

**Richard A. Yaussy '54**, Hickory, N.C., passed away March 9, 2023, at the age of 92.

**Ann E. (Reusser) Shumaker '55**, Kirtland, Ohio, passed away Feb. 7, 2023, at the age of 90.

**James W. Stauffer '61**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Nov. 20, 2022, at the age of 90.

**Ronald Conrad '63**, Stouffville, Ont., passed away Aug. 22, 2022, at age 81.

**Dennis W. Risser '63**, Goshen, Ind., passed away Nov. 28, 2022, at the age of 81.

**Thomas LeRoy Bechtel x65**, Goshen, Ind., passed away April 11, 2023, at the age of 80.

**Margaret I. (Walton) Hanover '68**, Saint Marys, Ohio, passed away Nov. 2, 2022, at the age of 93.

**Treva A. (Kohli) Tremain '69**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Nov. 3, 2022, at the age of 75.

**Rebekah J. (Bailey) Shannon '70**, Bellvue, Ohio, passed away March 5, 2023, at the age of 75.

**Barbara J. Suter '70**, Boulder, Colo., passed away Jan. 13, 2023, at the age of 74.

**Michael L. Frank '71**, Orange, Mass., passed away March 1, 2023, at the age of 74.

**Joslyn E. (Hostetter) Saunders '75**, Richfield, Ohio, passed away Nov. 23, 2022, at the age of 69.

**Eileen R. Ewing '76**, Madison, Wis., passed away Jan. 23, 2023, at the age of 68.

**Peter Amstutz x86** Goshen, Ind., passed away Feb. 28, 2023, at age 59.

**Pamela M. Ricker '87**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Nov. 15, 2022, at the age of 57.

**Michael D. Yakir '91**, Mansfield, Ohio, passed away Oct. 30, 2022, at the age of 72.

**Ryan S. Fryman '97**, Columbus, Ohio, passed away March 8, 2023, at the age of 50.

**Stephanie Zoller '00**, Beaver, Ohio, passed away Feb. 10, 2023, at the age of 68.

**Daniel L. Kohn '01**, Bellville, Ohio, passed away Dec. 29, 2022, at the age of 55.

**Amanda J. (Rayl) Markley '02**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Jan. 25, 2023, at the age of 43.

**Kathy R. (Bockey) Spangler '12**, Oak Harbor, Ohio, passed away Dec. 11, 2022, at the age of 36.

### Employees

**Miriam Hochstettler**, Nappanee, Ind., passed away March 5, 2023, at age 88.

**Sharon J. (Berry) Knepper**, Lebanon, Ohio, passed away Feb. 14, 2023, at the age of 83.

**Dana G. Staley**, Harrod, Ohio, passed away Feb. 23, 2023, at the age of 77.

**Thomas W. Truman**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Dec. 10, 2022, at the age of 81.

### Trustees

**Richard D. Cripe '56**, Syracuse, Ind., passed away March 10, 2023, at the age of 88.

## IN MEMORY OF JOANNE (VERCLER '51) NISWANDER



Joanne (Vercler '51) Niswander, alumna and long-time Bluffton University volunteer, passed away Oct. 8, 2022. She was 93. Born in Meadows, Ill., Joanne met her husband, Dean Niswander '49 at Bluffton, and they married in 1950.

The Niswanders lived in Bluffton until 1964 when they moved to Okemos, Mich. While there, Niswander was secretary at Okemos schools and later served as secretary to the Lansing District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church. In 1976, the family moved to Gibonsburg, Ohio, where she served as a docent at the Toledo Museum of Art. In 1991, they returned to Bluffton, where she and Dean volunteered as goodwill ambassadors for 10 years in Bluffton University's development office. The couple traveled extensively throughout the United States for five years visiting with Bluffton alumni. They also spent two years planning and presenting displays for Bluffton's 100th anniversary, celebrated in 1999-2000. For all their volunteer work and other contributions, they received the Outstanding Alumni Award in 1996 and the Ray Ramseyer Philanthropic Award in 2002.

Niswander sung in many musical groups and played organ at various churches throughout her life. She was a member of the Telesis Club in Bluffton and authored eight books as well as newspaper and online columns including reflections and book reviews. At Maple Crest Senior Living Village, she helped raise and release hundreds of Monarch butterflies.

Niswander was preceded in death by her husband, a brother and a son-in-law. Survivors include three sons and three daughters including Jeanne (Niswander x76) Manganaro, 12 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren. A memorial service was held on Oct. 29, 2022, at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton.

# LEAVING IT ALL ON THE COURT

## Coach Neal's Legacy at Bluffton

Guy Neal, head men's basketball coach, retired at the end of his 34th season as the winningest coach in Bluffton athletics history. Over the last three decades, Neal has coached the men's basketball team to 392 wins and multiple conference tournaments in both the Association of Mideast Colleges (AMC) and the Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference (HCAC). Neal was named the AMC Coach of the Year in just his third season and HCAC Coach of the Year twice. He also coached three All-Americans and two HCAC Players of the Year. Neal's teams earned top 25 team rankings twice.

"I want to thank my past and present colleagues in the Bluffton University athletic department who have been so supportive over the years," said Neal, who also retired as a member of Bluffton's health, fitness and sport science faculty at the end of the academic year.

"I also want to thank the many outstanding assistant coaches I have had the privilege to work with and who have contributed in their own ways to the players and program. A big thank you goes to the long list of players who have worked so hard to develop our successful program and culture at Bluffton. Most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Diane, and children, Erin and Tyler, for their love and support for the 34 years of this journey!"

Bluffton's athletic department hosted a public recognition for Neal's accomplishments on Saturday, Feb. 4, following the men's basketball game in Sommer Center.



# Kim Fischer Softball Field Press Box

Last summer, a group of alumnae approached the alumni office about hosting a reunion for the players of Coach Kim Fischer. At the same time, President Wood had a vision for a softball press box with restrooms to be built as an addition to the softball complex. In less than six-months, former players came together to commit more than half of the \$300,000 in honor of Bluffton's winningest female coach, Kim Fischer. Inducted into the Bluffton University Hall of Fame in 1999, Fischer coached Beavers volleyball for 19 seasons, women's basketball for 11 seasons, and softball for six seasons. Fischer was named WBCC Coach of the Year in 1982, 1984, 1985, 1987 (co) and 1990, and AMC Coach of the Year in 1994 (co).

The Bluffton University softball program has been one of the most decorated programs in the history of the Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference since joining the HCAC in 1999. With no fewer than 45 First Team All-HCAC selections during that time, Bluffton has produced three HCAC MVPs and one Coach of the Year. The Beavers earned their way to nine straight conference tournaments, the only school to do that from 2007 through 2015. There have been 12 National Fast Pitch Coaches Association All-Region honorees since 2004, including senior Bobbi Adams who was recognized in both 2021 and 2022. Bluffton has finished in the top two of the Heartland Conference 10 times with All-Americans Sarah Betts and Allison Lange anchoring the 2004 squad that saw Bluffton go 12-2 in league play en route to their first regular-season HCAC title.

There is about \$60,000 remaining to fully fund this project. We invite you to add your support to the project before June 30. Gifts of all sizes are encouraged; however, donors who make gifts of \$10,000 or more will be recognized on a special plaque on the softball press box. For anyone who was a female athlete at Bluffton or has a daughter or friend who played, this is a wonderful opportunity to add your support to the long history of successful women's sports at Bluffton.

Go Beavers!

*Robin Bowlus*

**Robin Bowlus, MBA '17**  
Vice president of advancement  
and enrollment management





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## MYTHS, LEGENDS, STORIES OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

**Alumni and Friends Tour with President Jane Wood**

**MAY 9-22, 2024**

Join President Jane M. Wood and Bluffton University alumni and friends as we visit Scottish and Irish landscapes and cities that inspired the literary minds of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, C.S. Lewis, James Joyce, Sir Walter Scott, William Shakespeare, Ali Smith, Robert Louis Stevenson and W.B. Yeats.

We'll traverse small villages, enjoy the beautiful countryside and view seaside cliffs. Our journey starts in Edinburgh and includes the Scottish Highlands, Glasgow, Belfast, Galway and Dublin!

**Make your deposit!** [www.bluffton.edu/alumnitrip2024](http://www.bluffton.edu/alumnitrip2024)



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Edinburgh Castle
- St. Andrews
- Trossachs National Park
- Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
- Titanic Belfast Museum
- Causey Farm
- St. Patrick's Cathedral