

BLUFFTON

A magazine for Bluffton University alumni and friends | Spring 2024 | Vol. 21 No. 1



NEW BEGINNINGS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In spring the world around us begins anew. Just as spring tulips and daffodils bloom, so does our campus turn to a new season. In this issue of “Bluffton,” you’ll learn about many new beginnings happening on our campus.

From The DAM Awards to Baccalaureate and senior toast, our students enjoyed many end-of-the-year events in the spring semester. We concluded the semester with Commencement, where graduates and guests had the pleasure of listening to a profound address from Mennonite Church USA Executive Director Glen Guyton. And, he played the guitar to the delight of our students, who clapped along.

Our 2024 graduates, now alumni, will start new beginnings as teachers, businesspeople, coaches, and even some will remain as students, furthering their education in graduate school.

We celebrated retiring faculty and staff, who will embark on their own new beginnings outside of Bluffton. I am so appreciative of their commitment to Bluffton University and our students.

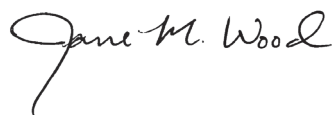
Faculty and students experienced the beautiful new Austin E. Knowlton Science Center for the first year. State-of-the-art lab classrooms and technology were greatly appreciated by our students and faculty. Indeed, we discovered that not just science students frequented the facility. Students from all disciplines took advantage of the light-filled spaces within the building as a “hangout” and study space.

In April, we dedicated the Kim Fischer Press Box at our softball field. Coach Fischer’s family and many former players attended the dedication that honored our longtime and gifted coach. That project would not have happened without the generosity of our alumni and friends. Thank you!

The most prominent new beginning is the announcement of the proposed merger with the University of Findlay. While our students are leaving us for the summer, our faculty and staff are hard at work as members of the merger’s many Transition Teams. I encourage you to continue learning about this proposed merger from our joint website at www.findlayblufftonfuture.com – our communication teams are regularly updating the site with new information. If you have any individual questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out.

These new beginnings may yet be fully known, but they will 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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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 in November and June for alumni, parents, friends, faculty and staff by Bluffton University, 1 University Drive, Bluffton, OH 45817-2104 (419-358-3000, www.bluffton.edu).

We welcome your comments!

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On the cover: May 2024 bachelor's degree graduates Madeline Kidd, Kenneth Schneider and Brittney Ramirez pose on Klassen Court in preparation for the annual Commencement Ceremony.

Photo by Claire Clay '18, MBA '20





University of Findlay®
Bluffton University®

Strong Roots. Brighter Future.

Proposed merger makes history in Findlay and Bluffton

University of Findlay and Bluffton University are joining in a historic partnership.

At campus meetings and a press conference on March 20, UF President Dr. Katherine Fell, and Bluffton President Dr. Jane Wood, announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the intention to pursue a merger of Bluffton operations with UF.

The decision was supported by both institutions' Boards of Trustees. Pending all regulatory approvals, the merger is anticipated to make a positive impact on the higher education landscape in Ohio and beyond.

“Higher education faces significant challenges,” Fell noted. “These times call upon us to be innovative and forward-thinking, and I believe this merger will prove to be both.”

Between 2018 and 2022 there were 95 college mergers across the nation. Throughout the past year, 14 colleges or universities closed, most of them private, four-year institutions.

Both presidents emphasized that this is not a cost-cutting endeavor but an opportunity for a stronger, larger university with two campuses.

“Our early interactions have made clear that we share a commitment to preparing generations of students to find and live out their callings,” Wood explained.

“By combining the best of pre-professional and liberal arts programs, our institutions will become even better at equipping future students to discover and to research what will ultimately bring meaning and purpose to their lives. We are stronger together.”

In fall 2023, the Boards of Trustees hired Higher Ed Consolidation Solutions to complete an objective, third-party due diligence report including all financials to assess the benefits and risks of a merger. The assessment found no major barriers and identified many benefits.





Bluffton University Board of Trustees Chair Cheryl Hacker, Bluffton University President Jane Wood, University of Findlay President Katherine Fell and University of Findlay Board of Trustees Chair Chris Ostrander are pictured here after signing the Memorandum of Understanding for a proposed merger of the two institutions.

Both presidents affirmed students and employees would benefit from access to expanded resources on both campuses, located 20 miles apart in northwest Ohio.

“Together, we can achieve efficiency through shared resources in IT services such as software, vendor contracts in food and insurance, and more,” Wood said. “Additionally, our two campuses would enjoy expanded human resources, counseling and Title IX services.”

Pending NCAA approval, Findlay would continue to participate in NCAA Division II as the Oilers, while Bluffton would continue competing in Division III as the Beavers.

UF intends to remain affiliated with the Churches of God, General Conference, while Bluffton would remain affiliated with Mennonite Church USA.

“Both universities are vital members of our respective communities,” Fell pointed out. “Community leaders and area residents recognize and value the contributions we make to education, economic development, and an improved quality of life. The merger would enrich these contributions.”

Entering the next phase, Fell said 16 transition teams have been formed to envision a “best of” approach for integrating the campuses. Some teams are focusing on areas such as academic affairs; advancement and alumni; athletics; faith and culture; finance and administrative processes; information technology; institutional branding; and student services. More than 90 faculty and staff from both universities are serving on transition teams.

“We see a brighter future ahead - one where the University of Findlay and Bluffton University come together to establish an even stronger premier private institution of higher education in northwest Ohio,” Fell said.

For more information, visit the joint website, www.FindlayBlufftonFuture.com.



124TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

Saturday, May 4, 2024

Graduates celebrate success

Four years ago, the graduating baccalaureate class of 2024 began their journey at Bluffton University in the midst of a pandemic. Saturday, May 4, their journey was celebrated as 147 bachelor's and master's degrees were conferred.

Commencement speaker Glen Guyton, Mennonite Church USA executive director, encouraged graduates to celebrate how far they have come before stressing about the future. Graduates were encouraged to say out loud, with hands raised, "I succeeded."

"You are a thousand times better than you were," Guyton stressed. "Success is about growth."

Guyton offered some secrets to success to the graduates. "Look back to see where you come from, don't chase the idea of would have – should of – could of and, celebrate yourself," he said. "My hope is that you do not pursue happiness – but be happy. That you do not chase dreams – but dream."

Six states and four countries were represented in the graduating class. Dr. Alex Sider, interim vice president of academic affairs, shared that 16 first-generation students, 4 students with alumni parents and 1 student with an alumni grandparent were among the graduates.

The Master of Nutrition in Dietetics graduated its first four students. This one-year program meets new Registered Dietitian Nutritionist credentialing requirements.

In addition, Master of Arts in Education and Master of Business Administration graduate degrees were presented. Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Bachelor of Arts degrees were also conferred.





Commencement speaker Glen Guyton



Glen Guyton serves as a transformative leader within Mennonite Church USA, championing peace, justice and inclusivity. With a distinctive journey from an Air Force officer to the first African-American executive director of MC USA, Glen's leadership is marked by a commitment to Anabaptist principles and a deep dedication to nonviolence and community service. His work focuses on bridging divides, fostering understanding and promoting Anabaptist Christian values.

As an author, he provides cultural and spiritual guidebooks aimed at empowering youth, young adults and congregations to enact meaningful change within their communities. With a Bachelor of Science in Management from the U.S. Air Force Academy and an Master of Education from Regent University, Guyton's academic background lays the foundation for his insightful strategies that drive positive change.



CONGRATULATIONS

TO OUR NEW EMERITI FACULTY



Dr. Perry J. Bush

*Emeritus Professor
of History*

Dr. Perry Bush joined the Bluffton faculty in 1994. During his 30 years, Dr. Bush has been the historian's voice of not only Bluffton's campus history, but also captured important stories and impact of organizations in the northwest Ohio region, and for the Mennonite church. Perry served Bluffton's faculty in many administrative roles, served in the community with local non-profits and in 2012, was selected as a Fullbright Scholar. But most importantly, Dr. Bush provided his students with transformative learning experiences through his passionate and lively teaching of history.



Dr. Deborah Myers

*Emeritus Professor
of Food and Nutrition*

Dr. Deborah Myers joined the Bluffton faculty in 2000 after a very successful career as a registered dietician in acute care clinical settings. After arriving at Bluffton, Deb quickly took on leadership roles as director of the program and eventually chairing the nutrition and dietetics department and the allied health sciences department. In 2012, Deb had a vision for Bluffton to be a site for the dietetics internship program and most recently, in 2023, Deb led the department through the transition to a graduate program of the RDN Integrated Master's degree or Master of Nutrition and Dietetics.



Gary L. Schiefer

*Emeritus Professor
of Business*

Gary Schiefer arrived at Bluffton in 1990 to join the business department. During his time teaching, Gary taught classes in economics, management and finance – a rare combination for a faculty member to teach so effectively across all those disciplines. Almost every first-year business student for the last 34 years have started their major with a “Gary class” and ended their major with his capstone class. In addition to his teaching, Gary served for more than a decade as department chair and chaired or served on more than 20 faculty governance committees.



CELEBRATING SUCCESS IN ATHLETICS

A.C. BURCKY AWARD

Distance runner Cole Kropka of New London, Ohio, received the 2024 A.C. Burcky Award as outstanding male athlete of the year. Kropka, who will graduate in December 2024, is only the second runner in school history to break 16 minutes for the indoor 5k. He currently ranks in the top 10 in the 8k, 5k (indoor and outdoor), indoor 3k and the steeplechase.

“While he is a man of few words, he leads through his actions and pushes everyone on our team to want to be better,” said Coach Connor Gulick. “He’s someone I never have to question as to whether he did the work over the summer or not.”

A sport management and business administration double major, Kropka is the son of Roger and Collette Kropka. He has been Academic All-HCAC in each semester he has been eligible and currently maintains a 3.81 career GPA.

The A.C. Burcky Award is named for the late professor of physical education and coach who served Bluffton from 1922-68. A.C. Burcky was inducted into the NAIA Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. In 1970, the Burcky Addition to Founders Hall was dedicated in his honor.

KATHRYN E. LITTLE AWARD

Kelly Armentrout of Lima, Ohio, received the 2024 Kathryn E. Little Award as outstanding senior female athlete of the year.

She was a four-year member of the volleyball team and served as team captain her senior season. This despite suffering a season-ending injury before her junior year. Throughout her rehabilitation, she demonstrated the resilience and leadership skills that embodies the Kathryn E. Little award. She was American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) scholarship demonstrator recipient and received the conference sportsmanship award.

An exercise science major with minors in coaching, business administration and wellness, Armentrout has been on the



dean’s list for multiple semesters. The daughter of Rob and Amy Armentrout, she also served as a President’s Ambassador, Bluffton mascot J. Denny Beaver, a member of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and a founder of the spirit club.

Her award is named for Kathryn Little, who served in Bluffton’s health, physical education and recreation department and in athletics from 1958-74. Little was a member of the first class inducted into the Bluffton Athletics Hall of Fame.

LARRY W. JONES MEMORIAL AWARD

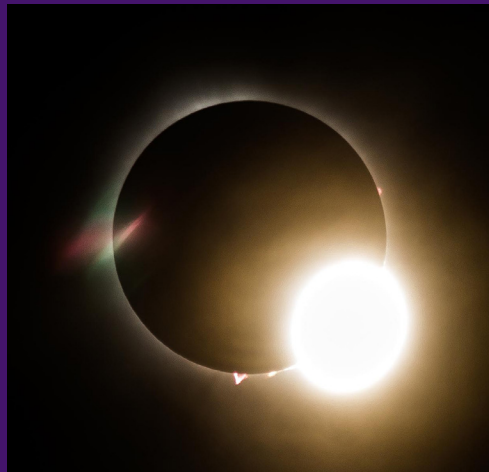
Bluffton’s Sports Information Director and 2005 graduate Bill Hanefeld received the Larry W. Jones Memorial Award. This award is presented “in recognition of interest, support and significant contributions to Bluffton University athletics” by a non-athlete.

Hanefeld began his career in sports information by working in Bluffton’s sports information office as a summer campus job. During his 19 years at the helm as SID, he has worked many hours running a one-person department and making sure statistics and records are correct, programs are available and recaps are accurate.

His family, wife Becca and daughters Adalie and Chloe, can often be seen in the pressbox or behind the scorer’s table supporting him and Bluffton’s student-athletes.

The award is named after Larry Jones, who graduated from Bluffton University in 1970. He participated in varsity basketball while at Bluffton and later served as an athletic official before being killed in an automobile accident in 1978.





TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE

On April 8, 2024, Bluffton University was in the path of totality for a solar eclipse. Research participants from the University of Wyoming utilized spaces on our campus to launch 31 weather balloons. The balloons were released 1-per-hour starting 24 hours prior to the solar eclipse and ending 6 hours afterwards.





Dr. Luke Myers, associate professor of physics, served as a liaison between Bluffton University and the research group.

“Each balloon carried a set of sensors for measuring temperature, wind speed and direction, and other weather factors,” said Myers, who taught an astronomy class this semester. “They are studying how the atmosphere is affected by the solar eclipse.”

Each of the balloons ended up being three-to-four feet in diameter, and as they rose, they would grow until they popped. After they popped, the balloons would gently float back down to earth.

Sponsored by the Wyoming NASA Space Grant Consortium, the group also researched an eclipse in October 2023. These student researchers are undergraduates from the University of Wyoming and are participating in the Nationwide Eclipse Ballooning Project.

Bluffton University students also took part in the eclipse. Free solar eclipse glasses were provided to students and afterwards, the glasses could be returned so they can be sent to South America for use during an upcoming eclipse in that area.





BEAVERS BASEBALL

AT COMERICA PARK





On April 24, 2024, the Bluffton University Baseball Team traveled north to Comerica Park in Detroit, Mich., home of the Detroit Tigers, to take on Alma College in a non-conference game on a Major League Baseball field! The Beavers fell 11-6 but the score didn't take away from the once-in-a-lifetime experience for the players. The team got a private tour of the stadium, was able to take infield, outfield and batting practice on the field, and the pitchers cheered on the team from the bullpen. Eight Beavers had hits, and four players had RBIs. Graduate senior Jack Towell tied the career RBI record with 144 when he drew a bases-loaded walk in the seventh inning.



ALONG THE RILEY



Engineering partnership

Dr. Jane Wood, Bluffton University president, and Dr. Margaret Young, interim dean and director at The Ohio State University at Lima, signed a partnership agreement in December at the Ohio State Lima Engineering Education and Manufacturing Center (EEMC). Bluffton is excited about developing the partnership to establish a new pathway for incoming students to study engineering using the resources of both universities.

Participating students will earn degrees from both Bluffton University and Ohio State focused on engineering.

Students will take approximately half of their classes at each location and will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Engineering Science from Bluffton University and a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology from Ohio State Lima. They'll also be able to fully participate in Bluffton's campus community, in athletics and student clubs/organizations while earning their degrees. Students will follow a strict curriculum which will allow them to graduate and complete both degrees in just four years.

Environmental science major

Starting in fall 2024, Bluffton students will have the opportunity to major in environmental science. The program will provide students a broader understanding of the natural and built worlds around

them through classes in biology, chemistry, geology, and soil, water and climate sciences.

"This major offers a pathway for students to become not just environmental scientists, plant and wildlife biologists, and conservationists, but also concerned citizens of the world who have a clearer understanding of the issues we face and potential solutions to them," said Dr. Jacob Buchanan, who will oversee the program as M'Della Moon Endowed Chair in Botany and Environmental Science. "Environmental Science fits Bluffton's values and mission, and we anticipate interested students will find that their passion involves learning about the world around them and collaborating with others to address environmental issues and injustices."



Through the major, students will have the opportunity to become involved in the management of the Bluffton University Nature Preserve, located adjacent to campus. The site serves as a learning laboratory for increased efforts in sustainability and native plant restoration.

The major is made possible thanks to the M'Della Moon Endowment, established in fall 2022, through a \$1.5 million gift made by anonymous donors.

Weaver memoir

Dr. J. Denny Weaver, professor emeritus of religion, returned to Bluffton University's campus to celebrate the release of "New Moves: A Theological Odyssey." The theological memoir follows Weaver's career as a theologian



and the development of his nonviolent understanding of Jesus' atonement.

Now a resident of Madison, Wisc., Weaver taught at Bluffton from 1975-2006. While his professional training at Duke University was in church history, Weaver gravitated toward theology starting in the early years of his 31-year career as a professor of religion.

"This book traces the development of my worldview and my development as a theologian—from a small boy from a quite conservative Mennonite Sunday school to the publication of 'The Nonviolent Atonement,'" Weaver shared during the Feb. 9 event. "The book entails my learning from a variety of sources: foreign experiences, embarrassment, mind-changes, career-direction changes, challenges, controversies—I've been both damned and praised—the triumphs, the aftermath of the publication of 'The Nonviolent Atonement,' and more."

Following the readings, Weaver answered questions and signed copies of the book. He is the author and editor of many books of note including 13 volumes of the C. Henry Smith book series.

Keeney Peace Lecture

During the annual Keeney Peace Lecture at Bluffton University, Sarah Augustine discussed how overconsumption has brought us to the brink of global disaster while inviting a consideration of indigenous wisdom as the path toward faithful ecological solutions instead of the dominant economic and cultural systems responsible for the current crisis.



“In our individualistic culture, we tend to think reality is shaped by the values and actions of individuals. In some ways that’s true, but our world is shaped by our collective beliefs,” said Augustine. “Each generation’s actions effect the ones that come after it. While the dominate culture views progress as the accumulation of power, wealth and security over time, in a similar direction, nature reveals a constant process of birth and death that spans far beyond a single lifetime.”



A climate activist, Pueblo descendant and Mennonite, Augustine is the co-founder and executive director of the Coalition for Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery. Her March 26 presentation was titled, “So We and Our Children May Live.”

Bluffton’s Keeney Peace Lectureship was established in 1978 by the family of William Sr. and Kathryn Keeney to express appreciation for Bluffton’s influence and to strengthen the continuing peace witness among the community.

Lunch and Learn

After a short hiatus, the Lunch and Learn series returned to campus this spring! Utilizing the state-of-the-art Wannemacher Food Science Lab in the Austin E. Knowlton Science Center, six undergraduate dietetics students shared a variety of topics related to the “power” of food. The students prepared multiple recipes and allowed attendees to sample each item, all while providing nutrition education about a specific topic. Topics included fiber, antioxidants, calcium, vitamin D, anti-inflammatory foods and



Dive Into Reading!

The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center hosted a literacy event for elementary-aged kids and their families on President’s Day. Dive Into Reading promoted strategies backed by the science of reading. Families left with a book and information to continue the skill building at home.

Education majors also practiced their teaching skills by developing activity centers and volunteering. A grant awarded to Dr. Cherie Hocanson and Jordan Hamilton, both assistant professors of education, funded the event. Hocanson and Hamilton also presented about the outcomes of the grant at the Ohio Dean’s Compact/Ohio Department of Higher Education and Workforce State Conference.



vitamin B12. The 30-minute cooking demo was limited to faculty, staff and students this year with hopes to expand registration opportunities in the future.

Great Minds Fellowship

As part of the Great Minds Fellowship Grant awarded to Bluffton University by the Ohio Department of Higher Education, starting in fall 2024, Bluffton will provide up to \$10,000 in

financial support to Bluffton University Master of Social Work students who are pursuing careers in high-need areas such as substance abuse counseling and mental-health treatment.

“This award strengthens our commitment to graduate education in the social work field,” said Dr. Alex Sider, interim vice president of academic affairs.

The grant is intended to help graduate students grow in their careers while helping communities across the state better care for those living with mental health and substance abuse disorders.



ALUMNOTES

1960-69

Milton Lee M.D. '60, Bullhead City, Ariz., recently retired as an associate professor and was recognized with emeritus status by University of Michigan in 2022.

John Miller '62, Newnan, Ga., is happily retired. He remains active in photography, gardening, repairing and restoring stringed instruments, and cooking.

Ronald Yoder '62, Portland, Ore., says, "In this time of rapid change Bluffton is normalizing for me. You are a dynamic changing organization that seems to negotiate the uncertain time we live in. Thanks for all you do for young adults that come to grow in a values-based environment."

Robert L. Hewitt, Ph.D. '69, Chambersburg, Pa., received the "Daring to Dream of a World Without Homelessness" award for service on the Board of Directors of Bridge of Hope National (2014-23) for three terms. For the past five years, Hewitt and his wife have facilitated a nine-week journey titled "Multiethnic Conversations: A Small Group Study."

1970-79

Diane (Bishop '71) Bullock, Prescott Valley, Ariz., remarried after her husband's passing in 2017.

Robert Alger '73, Dunkirk, Ohio, is retired alongside his wife, Sue. He still subs for preschool occasionally and teaches a LifeWise Academy class for Harden Northern School.

Shirley (Young '74) DeWeese, Lewistown, Ohio, retired from teaching learning disabilities at Indian Lake Schools in 2005. She

enjoys family, Florida and traveling out West. She and husband Don celebrated 50 years of marriage in July 2023. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.

Wanda Knox '74, Lebanon, Ohio, moved to Otterbein Senior Living in May 2020 to be closer to daughter **Jamie (Knox '88) Beachy** and **Doug Beachy '87** as well as their children and grandchildren. "It is a great blessing watching my total of 22 great-grandchildren growing up and getting involved in Christian activities."

Craig Bowman '75, Findlay, Ohio, retired from teaching and moved to northwest Ohio.

James Hopkins '75, Eastlake, Ohio, and wife, Cindy, celebrated 51 years of marriage in March 2024. Both are active in the music ministry of their church, in their community, and watching 10 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild grow up.

Jim Amstutz '76, Ephrata, Pa., and his wife, Lorraine, were invited to give the Schrag Peace Lecture titled, "Peacefully Resolving Conflict in Our Polarized Society," at Messiah University on April 9.

Larry Archer '76, Ottawa, Ohio, retired in 2017 as an elementary school counselor.

Dennis Smith '76, Cedaredge, Colo., and his wife Marilyn have two daughters and four grown grandchildren. He is a retired school teacher who serves at the local prison. They love to share Colorado.

Rhonda (Badertscher '76) Yoder, Middlebury, Ind., retired after 43 years as an elementary music teacher. She has two daughters and six grandchildren.

Tim Smith '77, Bellefontaine, Ohio, often thinks about his friends from his days at BC. Great times!

Jim McCormick '79, continues as a service and support administration supervisor with the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services. He has worked in human services for 43 years, and lives with wife, Judy, and son, Casey, in Miamisburg, Ohio.

1980-89

Pamela (Leeper '81) Ensign, Delaware, Ohio, retired in July 2022 after more than 31 years teaching fourth grade Title I Reading and Math. Her husband, Donald, passed away in 2017.

Mark Hilty '83, Barrington, R.I., is retired from daily medical practice. He remains a delegate to the Massachusetts Medical Society and volunteers at Providence schools. Hilty is also an advocate for common sense gun regulation and active with Narragansett Council of Boy Scouts. He enjoys working with the local land trust, gardening, skiing, boating and working on/driving his race car.

Greg Pitman x83, Loveland, Ohio, played basketball and studied pre-med at Bluffton. He is now a practicing chiropractor and has been a nutritionist for 40 years.

Deb (Brielmaier '84) Brunner, Bellefontaine, Ohio, is in her 11th year as an intervention specialist at Calvary Christian School in Bellefontaine. She still loves teaching and is blessed to be part of a growing Christian school. Along with her husband, John, she has two grown children and is looking forward to their first grandchild coming soon.



Karter Tow

Class year: 2024

Major: Pre-dietetics

Sprinting to the future

As early as the fourth grade, Karter Tow has shown interest in running.

“My dad and older brother used to run a Thanksgiving Day turkey trot, and I wanted to follow in their footsteps,” said Tow. “I started preparing with my dad, and I fell in love with the process of training for a race. I was hooked ever since that day.”

That passion for running continued through high school and into college, where he ran cross country and took part in his first marathon in 2022. However, his true goal was to complete the Boston Marathon.

He accepted the challenge this year to wrap up his undergraduate studies at Bluffton while taking on the world’s oldest annual marathon. “Once my senior year got here, I felt like it was now or never,” Tow explained. “I felt like it was the perfect time in my life.”

An International Experience

Tow’s time during the Columbus Marathon in 2022 qualified him for the 128th Boston Marathon. His time of 2:36:20 secured a spot in the sub-elite wave of runners, a category in wave one, corral one of the entire marathon behind the professional and sponsored runners.

On the day of the race, Tow and nearly 30,000 participants were driven 26 miles to Hopkinton, Mass., to the Athletes’ Village where the race began. “I think the most interesting thing was when I got into my starting corral there were so many



international athletes that you couldn’t really go and tell everyone good luck before the race because we didn’t speak the same language,” Tow noted.

He had two major goals for the competition: “The most important part for me was ‘am I having fun with it,’” he stated. “The race went well the first half. The second half, due to the heat, the hills and the difficulty of the course made it a tough day, but my goal overall was just to finish.”

Crossing the Finish Line

Finishing the Boston Marathon with a time of 2:54:50, Tow trained both physically and mentally to complete the race. He ran approximately 90 miles each week in preparation, while balancing his final year of undergraduate studies. Majoring in pre-dietetics, Tow will continue his education at Bluffton in the fall of 2024, pursuing a Master of Nutrition and Dietetics. His interest in becoming a sports dietitian helped him better understand the nutritional needs to be successful before, during and after the marathon.

“Focusing on what you’re putting in your body definitely plays a huge part in the recovery,” Tow said. “Making sure you have enough fuel in your workouts, and especially as a student making sure you put your focus on being a student first and then tailoring your day around the other goals.”

Tow believes he’ll return to the historic Boston Marathon someday; however, he has his sights set on completing an entire circuit of international races.

“I think my long-term goal is to run the six major marathons, which includes Chicago, New York, Berlin, [Tokyo, London and Boston],” said Tow.



RaeLee Hightower

Class year: 2018

Major: English

Learning and living

RaeLee Hightower knew she wanted to teach after graduating college, but a desire to travel the country of Japan also called to her. Now more than 6,000 miles from her hometown of Tulsa, Okla., Hightower has spent the last few years living and working in Japan.

“I enjoy teaching others, but I had also always been interested in Japanese culture, so I figured applying for the JET Program would be a great opportunity to experience the country and culture firsthand. I was right!” said Hightower.

Initially coming to Japan through the JET Program (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program), Hightower has been able to combine her passion of teaching and culture through her interactions with students and colleagues, as well as her travels while abroad. This program offers students with strong English language skills the opportunity to assist language teachers in the Japanese education system.

The classroom and beyond

As an assistant language teacher (ALT) in English in public elementary schools, Hightower works alongside the head teacher to provide learning opportunities that help students build English fluency. Lessons usually consist of listening and speaking activities and can include fun presentations and games.

Hightower notes that some of the most fun moments come outside of the classroom where students enjoy extracurricular and cultural activities.



“One of my favorite parts about being an ALT is seeing my students participate in things like Sports Day, where each class competes against one another, track meet style,” she said. “Another favorite is the School Cultural Festival, where each class sets up different activities and performances for friends and family to come and enjoy.”

Building relationships

At Bluffton, students build strong bonds with faculty and staff during their time on campus. It’s these connections that Hightower notes are important in building strong relationships no matter where we are in the world.

“Comparing my college years to now living in a different country really made me realize how important it is to form social connections wherever possible,” said Hightower. “Each of my instructors over my years as a college student have helped shape the individual I am today, especially those I worked closely with in the English department.”

Taking inspiration from Kate Spike, assistant professor of English at Bluffton, Hightower uses the tools she learned to help shape her own students, while also allowing the students to bring new understandings to her own way of thinking. “Kate taught me that teaching someone English doesn’t need to be rocket science, it just needs you to be open minded, patient, and, in turn, willing to learn from your pupils.”

Hightower is happy as an assistant English teacher, but optimistic about what cultural adventures the future might hold.

“I get to have fun with the kids every day and live in the Japanese countryside to boot! However, my dream is to someday live in the mountains of northern Japan and have my own little homestead. Maybe I can even open a small bed and breakfast or start a YouTube channel, who knows?”



Neil E. Cowen x84, Coolville, Ohio, was elected Mayor of Coolville on Nov. 7, 2023, and is employed with Hopewell Health Inc. as a chemical dependency counselor's assistant, and as assistant house manager at Our House in Logan, Ohio. He lives with his partner Teena Stambaugh.

Sheri Hostetler '84, Alameda, Calif., co-published "So We and Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis" (Herald Press, 2023) with Sarah Augustine. Together, Sheri and Sarah founded an Indigenous justice organization, the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. Sheri has been pastor at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco since 2000.

Todd Reichenbach '84, Fort Wayne, Ind., is owner of accounting firm ATM CPAs and Company since 2021.

Myrna (Flory '85) Hamrick, Van Wert, Ohio, has retired from teaching high school English after 32 years and is now teaching at LifeWise Academy Van Wert.

Steve Neff '87, Lima, Ohio, donated a large cross to St. John's Episcopal Church in Worthington, Ohio.

Shawn Thicksten '87, Springfield, Ill., is director of operations for Brandt in Springfield, Ill.

Penny (Adams '89) Herron, Cheney, Kan., works at Mennonite Housing as director of property management. She has been with the organization for 30 years. Herron has been married for 30 years, as of July 2023, to her spouse, Lester, and enjoys living on their small farm. They have a daughter and son.

1990-99

Jason Henry '90, Cincinnati, Ohio, is a senior vice president in commercial lending in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Lisa (Taylor '90) McGinnis, Bloomville, Ohio, retired after 32 years in public education. She was the director of special education at Buckeye Central. McGinnis is now an adjunct professor in the education department at Heidelberg University.

Clarence "Andy" Nowlin '90, Columbus, Ohio, was named an Outstanding Diversity Champion in Columbus Business First's 2024 Diversity in Business Awards. The awards program highlights inclusive organizations and individuals who encourage diversity at Columbus workplaces. As chief human resources and inclusion officer, Nowlin established LifeCare Alliance's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee.

David Urich '90, Bailey, Colo., retired from 26 years in corrections in Ohio and Colorado. He is currently a school bus driver for Platte Canyon School district.

Mark Wanyerka '91, Olmstead Falls, Ohio, has been married to Traci Wanyerka since 1993. He's officiated basketball at the high school and collegiate level since 1990 and is a salesman for Universal Windows Direct, based in Cleveland, Ohio.

Amy (Overholt '93) Blackmore, Van Wert, Ohio, married Brent Blackmore on Dec. 15, 2023. Amy is in her 24th year of teaching at Lincolnview Elementary School.

Jay Heckman '94, Ottawa, Ohio, has been the owner/installer of Heckman Floor Installations and Custom Tile Showers for 29 years. He is married to Sandi, and they have five kids. He is also the golf coach at Ottawa-Glandorf High School and on the leadership team at Kalida Family Outreach Center.

Gary Smiddy '94, Defiance, Ohio, began working as a private security contractor for the State of Ohio in December 2021 after a 25-year law enforcement career.

Kristen (Frederick '96) and Gary

will celebrate their 27th wedding anniversary in July 2024. They have four children Elyse (25), Katie (23), Audrey (19) and Garyson (17) and grandson Enzo (2).

Stacie (Preston '96) and Blagoy **Pogoncheff**, Cameron, N.C., will celebrate 25 years of marriage this year. She works for Lee County Parks and Recreation and is the county coordinator for Special Olympics N.C., as well as provides inclusive recreation to the community. She coaches the high school men's and women's varsity swim team and unified track team.

2000-09

Stephanie (Massie '01) Lippi, Mansfield, Ohio, has been serving churches for the past four years by managing the Church Facilities Conference and Expo, a national event to help churches grow their skills and education in the areas of worship production, facilities stewardship, safety and security, and building projects and upgrades.

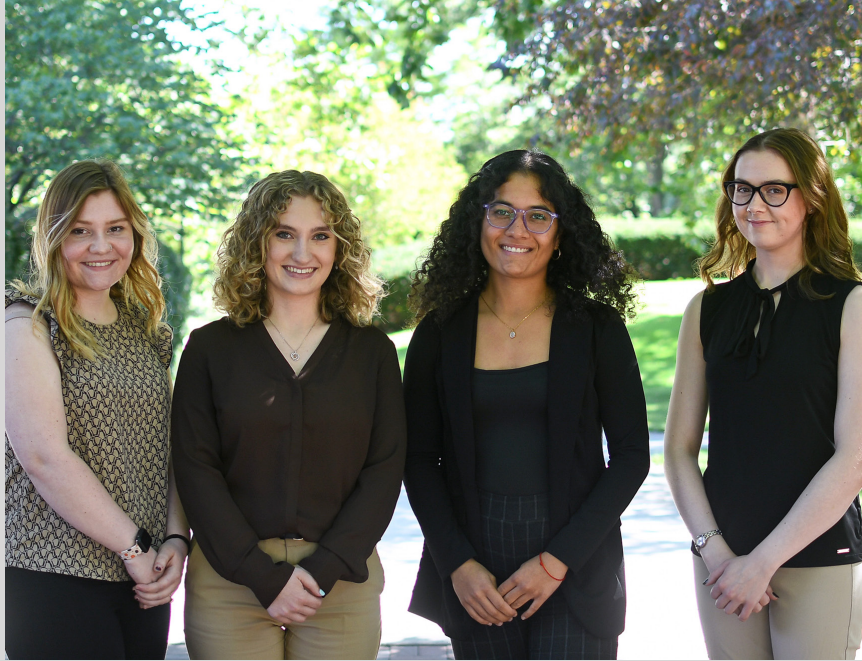
Cheryl Woodson Saunders '01, Troy, Ohio, is planning to retire this year.

Heather (Brumfield '03) Schafer, and Jeff live in Findlay, Ohio, with a 5-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl. Heather works with adults with different abilities at New Visions dayhab.

Cindy (Wiltheiss '04) Voth is the pastoral team leader at Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

Brian Asher '05, resides in Westerville, Ohio, with his wife, Randi, and two beautiful daughters, Hattie Ann (7) and Eliza James (5). He is currently the SVP of Brokerage Services for FST Logistics in Dublin, Ohio, a full-service 3PL provider for North America. The company is employee owned and operated.





First class of Master of Nutrition and Dietetics students graduate

At the May 2024 Commencement ceremony, Bluffton University graduated the first four Master of Nutrition and Dietetics students. **Alissa Rutherford**, **Searra Hough** and **Emily Wood** earned their bachelor's degrees as nutrition and dietetics majors at Bluffton University while **Anneliz Cora** earned her undergraduate degree from another university with a completely different major.

Bluffton's graduate program is Candidacy Accredited by ACEND. Students who complete the undergraduate program in nutrition and dietetics at Bluffton automatically meet all course requirements for the master's program. Students from a non-accredited program or who majored in a closely related field such as biology, exercise science or health education may need to take additional classes before starting.

Christina Champion '05, Andover, Kan., is a mate at Trader Joe's in Wichita, Kan.

Dustin DeWeese '06, Springfield, Ohio, has been employed with the Ohio Department of Medicaid for the last two years as a business analyst in the managed care department. He has expertise in the MyCare Ohio program.

Brittany (Kuszmaul '06) Sleesman, Bryan, Ohio, started working with Clinisync (the Ohio Health Information Exchange).

David Espinoza '07, Toledo, Ohio, was promoted in December 2023 to director of track and field and cross country at the University of Pikeville. In May, it will be the one year anniversary of his bilateral lung transplant.

Hillary Ashivaka '08, Indianapolis, Ind., says Bluffton is his forever home.

Michael Wagner '09, Pandora, Ohio, has been promoted to associate professor in the College of Business at the University of Northwestern Ohio.

2010-19

Shahad Aldoori '13, Liverpool, N.Y., got married in June 2022.

Lucas Fullenkamp '13, Norwood, Mass., started working as a business analyst at MIT Lincoln Laboratory in 2022 and married Brigid Koenen in September 2023.

Becca (Lapp '17) Wierwille, Watsontown, Pa., is publishing the second book in her Road Trip Rescue series of faith-filled contemporary adventures for kids ages 8-12 titled "Road Trip Return."

Carrie (Blust '18, MAEd '20) Clay, Ostrander, Ohio, and her husband welcomed their first child, Carson, in November 2023.

Colton Steiner '18, Dalton, Ohio, recently wrote his first novel "Ryan Blake: Digging For Answers" and is currently working on a second.

2020-PRESENT

Michael Short '20, Archbold, Ohio, works at Sauder Woodworking in Archbold as an EDI Specialist/ Programmer Analyst in their IT department.

Rowena Zuercher '20 and **Ryan Oostland '20**, Aurora, Colo., married on Nov. 5, 2023.

Kylie Brock '21, Villa Hills, Ky., presented a research poster regarding congestive heart failure in veterans at the Tampa VA Hospital during the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo 2023 in Denver. She now works at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. Dr. Deborah Myers, professor of food and nutrition, and some of Bluffton's master's degree students attended the presentation.



Charles Brown III '22, Cincinnati, Ohio, has begun a career in the quality department at Perfetti Van Melle testing candy.

Ky Gurley '22, Lima, Ohio, earned her Master of Science in Sociology from Grand Canyon University in December. As of Oct. 30, 2023, she is part of the Alpha Chi National College Honor Society.

Alyssa (Potteiger '23) Stewart, Findlay, Ohio, married after graduation and is now attending Heidelberg University for a master's degree in athletic training.

IN MEMORIAM

Phyllis (Hartzler '47) Baumgartner, Berne, Ind., passed away Jan. 4, 2024, at the age of 98.

Richard "Dick" Berky '48, Cedar Falls, Iowa, passed away on Feb. 16, 2024, at the age of 99.

Richard "Dick" Baum x50, Clinton, Ill., passed away April 4, 2024, at the age of 96.

Marilyn (Clark x51) Brown, Des Moines, Wash., passed away Dec. 5, 2023, at the age of 94.

Ruth Anne (Steiner '51) Sprunger, Fort Wayne, Ind., passed away Dec. 14, 2023, at the age of 93.

Addison Myers '52, Columbia, Mo., passed away Dec. 23, 2023, at the age of 92.

Leland Voth x52, Harrisonburg, Va., passed away Dec. 1, 2023, at the age of 94.

Harvella Bauman Stutzman '54, Colorado Springs, Colo., passed away Jan. 11, 2024, at the age of 91.

Carol (Whirlledge '57) Selman, Goshen, Ind., passed away Jan. 2, 2024, at the age of 89.

Ted Hasis '59, St. Marys, Ohio, passed away March 9, 2024, at the age of 86.

Nancy Gross (Wisner '60) Hilty, Newton, Kan., passed away Dec. 30, 2023, at the age of 85.

Carlton "C.K." Steiner '61, Smithville, Ohio, passed away Dec. 19, 2023, at the age of 85.

Martha "Marty" (Badertscher '62) Hostetler, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away April 1, 2024, at the age of 83.

Mary (Badertscher '63) Stahlman, Sidney, Ohio, passed away Feb. 9, 2024, at the age of 86.

William J. Bishop '65, Lansdale, Pa., passed away Dec. 13, 2023, at the age of 81.

Dennis "Denny" Altstaetter '66, Northfield, Minn., passed away March 24, 2024, at the age of 80.

Elizabeth Raid '66, Newton, Kan., passed away Feb. 21, 2024, at the age of 79.

Michael Lora '67, Toledo, Ohio, passed away Nov. 15, 2023, at the age of 78.

James Steven "Steve" Clark '69, Paulding, Ohio, passed away Feb. 22, 2024, at the age of 78.

Shirley (Wossilek '70) Dick, Wakeman, Ohio, passed away March 5, 2024, at the age of 76.

Michael Teeters '70, Piqua, Ohio, passed away Dec. 19, 2023, at the age of 76.

Michael Hefner '71, Upper Arlington, Ohio, passed away Jan. 28, 2024, at the age of 81.

Henry Freeman '72, Akron, Ohio, passed away on March 4, 2024, at the age of 74.

Rodney Barnes '73, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Nov. 12, 2023, at the age of 72.

Roy Hartman '73, Avon Lake, Ohio, passed away April 7, 2024, at the age of 72.

Nancy (Yeager '78) Stanton, Jupiter, Fla., passed away Jan. 1, 2024, at the age of 67.

Sharon (Irish '78) Wood, Columbus, Ohio, passed away Nov. 28, 2023, at the age of 67.

Marsha (Begg '79) Duffey, Westerville, Ohio, passed away on Feb. 14, 2024, at the age of 67.

Mary Diane (Fultz '81) Grosvenor, Richfield, N.C., passed away Jan. 11, 2024, at the age of 77.

Rodney Bontrager '83, LaGrange, Ind., passed away on Feb. 18, 2024, at the age of 67.

Edgar Mongold '85, Washington Court House, Ohio, passed away Dec. 28, 2023, at the age of 69.

Scott Beavers '91, Powell, Ohio, passed away April 4, 2024, at the age of 59.

Alice Parker '91, Hawley, Mass., passed away Dec. 24, 2023, at the age of 98.

Nancy (Wenning Nieport '95) Burkhart, The Villages, Fla., passed away March 11, 2024, at the age of 66.

Tiffany Stuckey '02, Celina, Ohio, passed away Feb. 22, 2024, at the age of 43.

Melissa Lehmkuhl '18, Spencerville, Ohio, passed away March 23, 2024, at the age of 53.

Annie McCrate '21, Westerville, Ohio, passed away Jan. 28, 2024, at the age of 24.

Employees

Robert "Bob" Cecire, Findlay, Ohio, passed away March 6, 2023, at the age of 83.

Peggy Ruggley, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Dec. 21, 2023, at the age of 74.





The Kim Fischer Softball Press Box Dedication

Saturday, April 6, 2024



The Kim Fischer Press Box at the Bluffton University Softball Field was dedicated on Saturday, April 6, prior to a double header against Defiance College. The dedication included a ribbon cutting, ceremonial first pitch from Fischer's sister, Susan Baker, and words of remembrance from Fischer's former players. 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. 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 6 seasons. Fischer was named WBCA Coach of the Year in 1982, 1984, 1985, 1987 (co) and 1990, and AMC Coach of the Year in 1994 (co). Dr. Kim Fischer finished her career at Otterbein University as a member of the teaching faculty and passed away on May 19, 2023.



Karen and Ed Diller Family Scholarships Make New Beginnings Possible

About four years ago, Karen '69 and Ed Diller '69 shared with me their interest in finding a different and significant way to invest in students to help them get to graduation. Improved graduation rates not only help more students be prepared for life and vocation, but also help with overall campus enrollment and create more alumni to support future generations.

With Karen and Ed's future-driven vision and their passion to prepare more Bluffton graduates while honoring their immediate family legacy (Jason '95 and Rachel (Helmick) '98 Diller and Anna Diller-Stried '01 and Tim Stried '98), they established the Karen and Ed Diller Family Scholarship. Karen and Ed were also deeply influenced by the Bluffton legacy of parents, siblings and numerous other relatives.

This scholarship provided an annual grant and a stipend to a Bluffton student in their second semester who identified as American minority student with a GPA of 3.1 or higher, with financial need as determined by the FAFSA. Their vision was to close the gap on the student's cost of attendance, allowing the student to complete their education with little-to-no out-of-pocket costs.

Through their philanthropy, Karen and Ed want to make new beginnings possible, specifically for American minority students.

At graduation in May, the first Diller Family Scholar crossed the Commencement stage. I was able to take a photo of the student shaking hands with President Wood. Moments later, I was thrilled to send a message to Karen and Ed so they could share in the celebration of a Bluffton alumni's new beginning.

Since they started this scholarship, Karen and Ed established two additional grants; the most recent being set up this spring to be awarded this fall to a rising junior. Bluffton's retention data shows that completion rates after the sophomore year for high-achieving students are often driven by the lack of resources to finish their degree. Karen and Ed's commitment and strong belief that a Bluffton education matters, even as we pursue a merger of operations with the University of Findlay, is inspiring.

Bluffton is blessed with loyal donors who have a strong passion to ensure that the Bluffton experience carries forward to future generations. Every four years, a little bit of the Bluffton experience renews itself with the current students; but the underpinnings of a shared Bluffton experience are strong thanks to Bluffton's Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, alumni and donors.



Robin Bowlus

Robin Bowlus, MBA '17

*Vice president of advancement
and enrollment management*

Support our students!

Online at: www.bluffton.edu/newbeginnings

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