

BLUFFTON

A magazine for Bluffton University alumni and friends | Spring 2026 | Vol. 23 No. 1



BLUFFTON IN BLOOM

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Often, as I walk the winding paths of Bluffton University's campus, I remember what Bluffton was like when I started here 20 years ago, contemplate how Bluffton will face higher education's current challenges, and imagine what our campus can become as we further the mission of our institution.

This year, Bluffton is completing a one-year strategic plan and fundraising campaign – Pillars of Purpose – designed to address some of our most pressing needs while renewing our vision for educating today's students. The campaign is nearing its goal: with \$700,000 raised so far, we believe we can reach our goal by June 30, 2026. We are deeply grateful for the many alumni, friends and supporters who have helped move this work forward. In this issue of Bluffton, you'll find examples of that momentum through stories of students and alumni whose experiences reflect the strength and purpose of our community.

Bluffton is not immune to the pressures facing higher education today. Yet we have dedicated faculty and staff, loyal and generous donors, and a mission we believe in.

Earlier this spring, our community came together for Bluffton Blooms, our 2026 Day of Giving. The theme of this issue reflects what we witnessed that day: Bluffton at its best – supported by people who believe in the power of this place to grow students into thoughtful leaders and engaged citizens. Through that effort, alumni, donors, faculty, staff and friends helped provide resources for scholarships, academic programs, and student experiences that allow Bluffton students to flourish. We are grateful for everyone who made Bluffton Blooms a success and for the many ways our community continues to nurture the university's mission.

This fall, we will launch Bluffton's new five-year strategic plan – one that builds on the momentum we have created together and guides Bluffton forward through a time of significant change in higher education.

Thank you for all the ways you support Bluffton. Together, we are planting seeds that will bear fruit for generations to come.

With gratitude,



Dr. J. Alexander Sider
President



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Spring 2026 Vol. 23 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: Bluffton University entrance spring 2026
Photo by Andreas Baumgartner '08



PILLARS OF PURPOSE



INVESTING IN WHAT MATTERS MOST

The Pillars of Purpose campaign is more than a fundraising effort—it’s a movement grounded in stability, hope, trust and compassion. Rooted in Bluffton’s mission to prepare students for lives of purpose, the campaign strengthens the foundation for growth, innovation and student success.

Momentum is already building!

The Carlin and Sharon Carpenter Scoreboard has been fully funded, demonstrating the power of the Bluffton community to come together in support of students. With that milestone complete, focus now turns to three remaining priorities: modernizing classroom technology, revitalizing the health and exercise science program and refreshing Shoker Science Center facilities.

A Shared Commitment to the Future

Together, these priorities represent a shared investment in Bluffton students—ensuring they graduate prepared to lead, serve and make a difference. With June 30 fast approaching, your support is essential to fully fund these final campaign priorities and strengthen the learning experiences that define a Bluffton education.

Give today to help us meet our goal. Your investment advances Bluffton’s commitment to preparing students for lives of purpose, service and leadership.



Pete Suter '94, '02
Vice president of advancement

WAYS TO GIVE



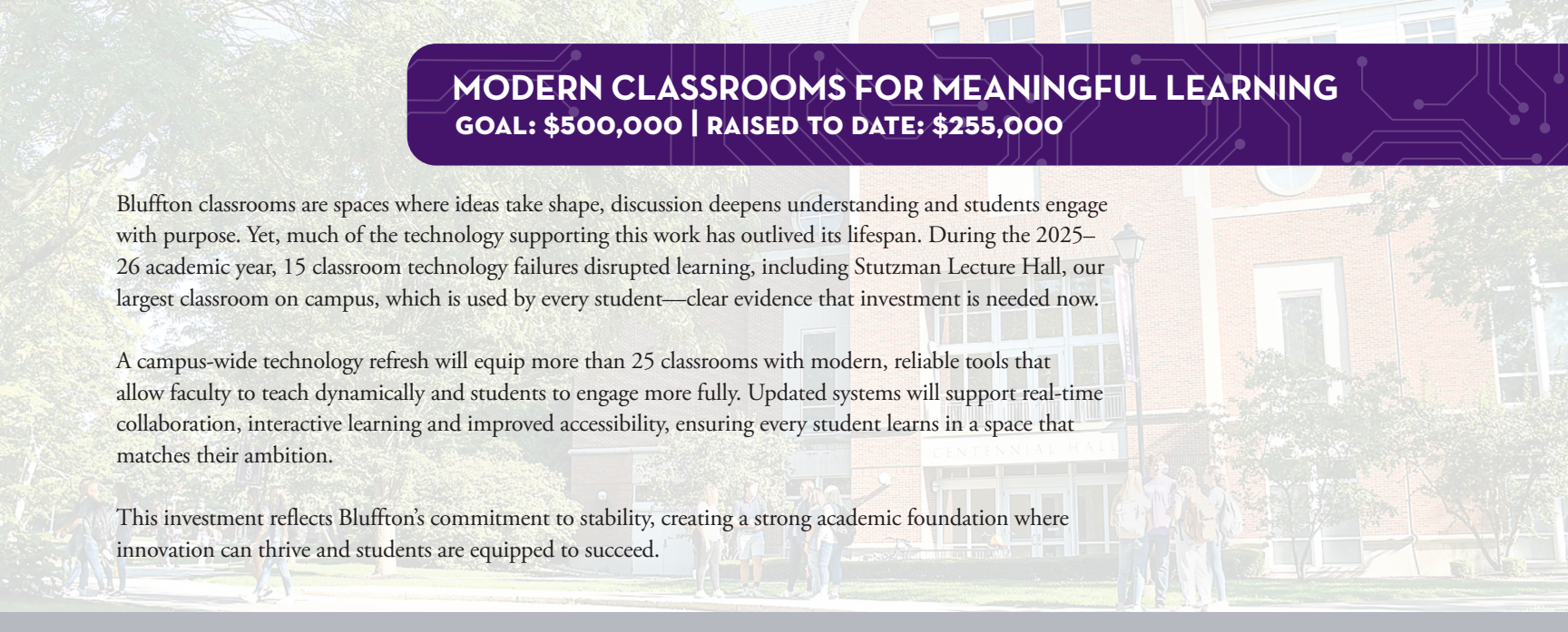
Scan the **QR code** to give online.

.....



Send **cash or check** to
1 University Dr., Bluffton, OH, 45817



A wide-angle photograph of a Bluffton University campus. In the foreground, a group of students is walking on a paved path. In the background, a large, multi-story brick building with many windows is visible, surrounded by green trees. The sky is clear and blue.

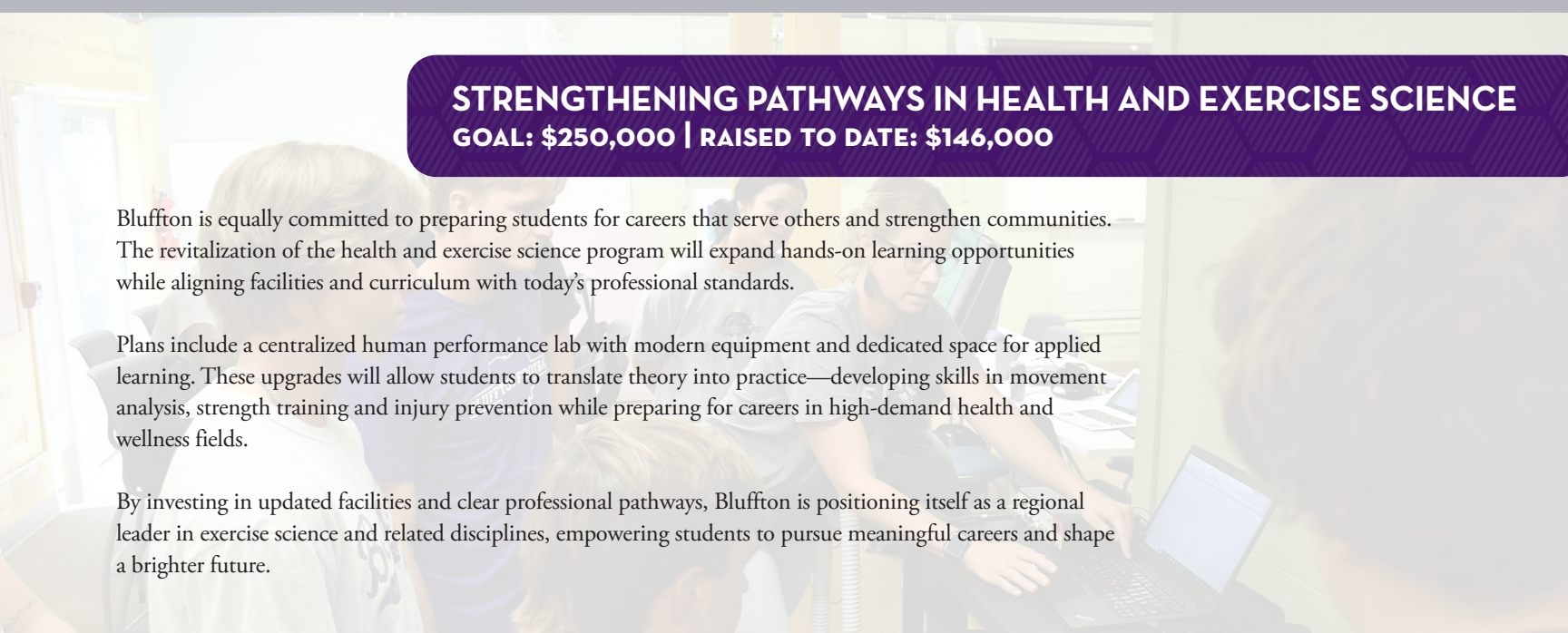
MODERN CLASSROOMS FOR MEANINGFUL LEARNING

GOAL: \$500,000 | RAISED TO DATE: \$255,000

Bluffton classrooms are spaces where ideas take shape, discussion deepens understanding and students engage with purpose. Yet, much of the technology supporting this work has outlived its lifespan. During the 2025–26 academic year, 15 classroom technology failures disrupted learning, including Stutzman Lecture Hall, our largest classroom on campus, which is used by every student—clear evidence that investment is needed now.

A campus-wide technology refresh will equip more than 25 classrooms with modern, reliable tools that allow faculty to teach dynamically and students to engage more fully. Updated systems will support real-time collaboration, interactive learning and improved accessibility, ensuring every student learns in a space that matches their ambition.

This investment reflects Bluffton's commitment to stability, creating a strong academic foundation where innovation can thrive and students are equipped to succeed.

A photograph showing a group of students in a laboratory setting. They are gathered around a table, looking at a laptop screen. One student is pointing at the screen while others look on. The background shows lab equipment and shelves.

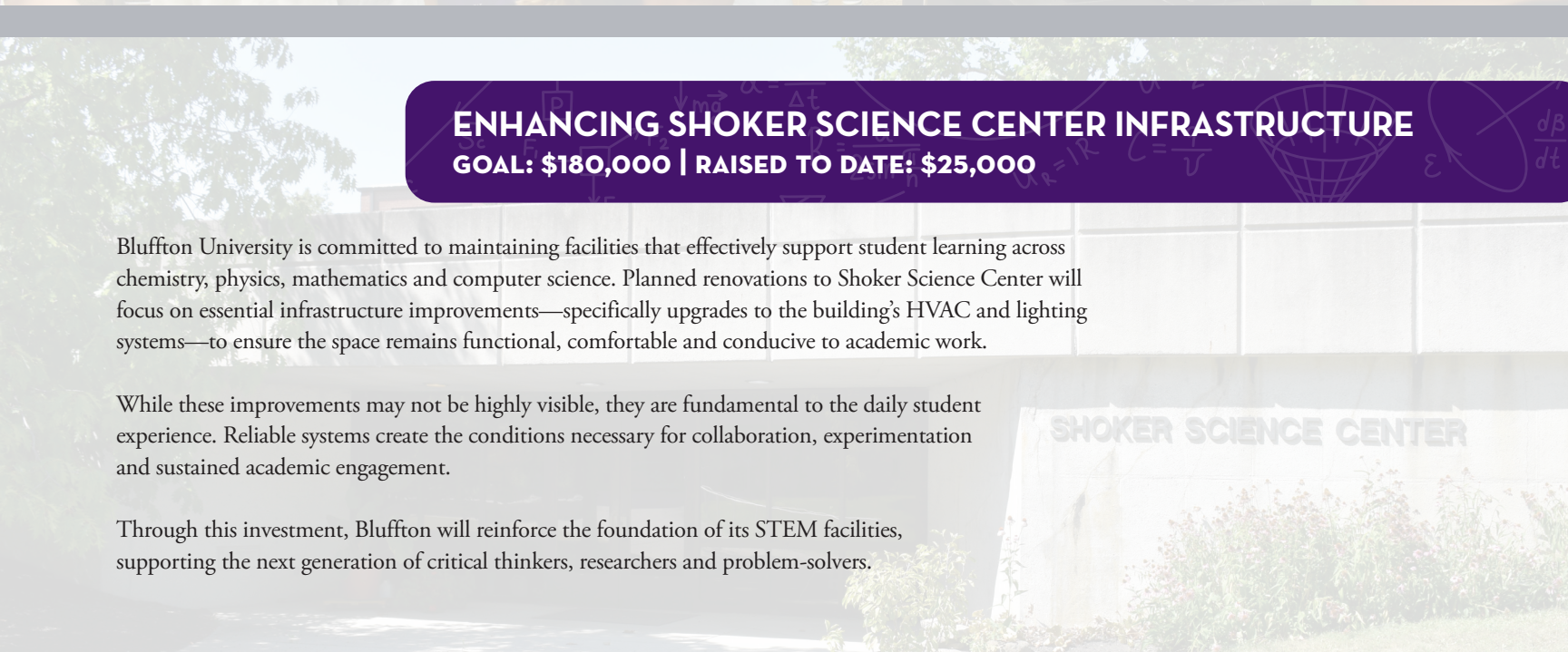
STRENGTHENING PATHWAYS IN HEALTH AND EXERCISE SCIENCE

GOAL: \$250,000 | RAISED TO DATE: \$146,000

Bluffton is equally committed to preparing students for careers that serve others and strengthen communities. The revitalization of the health and exercise science program will expand hands-on learning opportunities while aligning facilities and curriculum with today's professional standards.

Plans include a centralized human performance lab with modern equipment and dedicated space for applied learning. These upgrades will allow students to translate theory into practice—developing skills in movement analysis, strength training and injury prevention while preparing for careers in high-demand health and wellness fields.

By investing in updated facilities and clear professional pathways, Bluffton is positioning itself as a regional leader in exercise science and related disciplines, empowering students to pursue meaningful careers and shape a brighter future.

A photograph of the Shoker Science Center building. The building is a large, modern structure with a glass facade and a sign that reads "SHOKER SCIENCE CENTER". There are trees and bushes in the foreground, and the sky is blue.

ENHANCING SHOKER SCIENCE CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL: \$180,000 | RAISED TO DATE: \$25,000

Bluffton University is committed to maintaining facilities that effectively support student learning across chemistry, physics, mathematics and computer science. Planned renovations to Shoker Science Center will focus on essential infrastructure improvements—specifically upgrades to the building's HVAC and lighting systems—to ensure the space remains functional, comfortable and conducive to academic work.

While these improvements may not be highly visible, they are fundamental to the daily student experience. Reliable systems create the conditions necessary for collaboration, experimentation and sustained academic engagement.

Through this investment, Bluffton will reinforce the foundation of its STEM facilities, supporting the next generation of critical thinkers, researchers and problem-solvers.



CULTIVATING LEADERS

THE GROWTH OF BLUFFTON'S MASTER'S PROGRAMS

Bluffton University's commitment to advanced education is rooted in its long tradition of preparing students of all backgrounds for life as well as vocation. Introducing the Master of Arts in Education in the mid-1990s, Bluffton has steadily expanded its graduate offerings to include the Master of Arts in Organizational Management, Master of Business Administration, Master of Social Work, and Master of Nutrition and Dietetics. These programs reflect both academic innovation and responsiveness to community and workforce needs, demonstrating Bluffton's continued dedication to serving adult learners and professionals in a changing higher education landscape.

Today, Bluffton's graduate programs, delivered through flexible online and hybrid formats and grounded in mission-driven values, continue to grow, attracting working professionals and lifelong learners seeking to deepen their expertise and advance their careers.

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

The Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program was Bluffton's first graduate offering, launched in the fall of 1995. Designed to support educators seeking professional advancement, the program reflected a growing national demand for advanced teacher preparation rooted in both practical classroom application and educational leadership.

By 1998, the program had achieved full accreditation and graduated its first cohort of 18 students, marking a significant milestone in Bluffton's expansion into graduate education. Early iterations of the program emphasized cohort-based learning, allowing educators to progress through coursework together while maintaining full-time teaching responsibilities.

Over time, the MAEd evolved to meet changing licensure standards, instructional technology demands, and the increasing need for flexible delivery models. Today, the program continues to serve educators seeking advancement in teaching



practice, leadership, and curriculum design, offering accessible pathways for working professionals balancing career and study.

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION & MASTER OF ARTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Graduate business education at Bluffton emerged through the Master of Arts in Organizational Management (MAOM) program, which launched in the fall of 1999. Built around a cohort model, the program was designed to provide a broad and applied understanding of advanced management principles across 13 courses completed over 2 years.

Building on this foundation, Bluffton later expanded its graduate business portfolio with the Master of Business Administration (MBA), designed to meet the needs of emerging and established leaders across industries. The MBA program emphasizes leadership development, strategic decision-making, and applied business practice, with flexible pathways that support working professionals.

The MBA leadership strand introduced an accelerated 12-month option in 2019, complementing the traditional 22-month format. This expansion reflects Bluffton's continued responsiveness to the needs of students seeking to balance graduate education with career advancement and personal responsibilities.

Today, the MBA program continues to evolve as part of Bluffton's broader graduate portfolio, offering adaptable formats and experiential learning opportunities designed to prepare students for leadership in complex, globalized environments.

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Social work studies were nothing new at Bluffton, having already had a rich history in the undergraduate level and celebrating 82 years as a program at Bluffton this fall. The master of social work (MSW) program began as a collaborative venture between Bluffton University and Goshen College in 2017. The project was supported by a Lilly Foundation grant and aligned with the strategic plans of both institutions.

The program earned state approval from both Indiana and Ohio, along with recognition from the Higher Learning Commission in fall 2022.

Shortly afterward, it entered the candidacy phase for CSWE accreditation, beginning the standard multi-year accreditation process.

In March 2026, the program achieved initial accreditation for eight years, a significant milestone that enhances opportunities for its students. Since welcoming its first cohort of 22 students, enrollment has steadily increased, reaching 52 in the second year and 70 in the third.

MASTER OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

The master of nutrition and dietetics (MND) program is the newest on Bluffton's campus, having been established in 2023. While nutrition and dietetics also have strong historical roots at Bluffton, the master's program responded to a need for future dietitians to earn a master's degree following licensing changes in 2024.

Bluffton previously offered a one-year Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) but now provides students a one-year MND track that meets licensing requirements and allows students to complete 1,000 hours of supervised experiential learning in the program. Dr. Deb Myers, emeritus professor of nutrition and dietetics, was responsible for spearheading this new program.

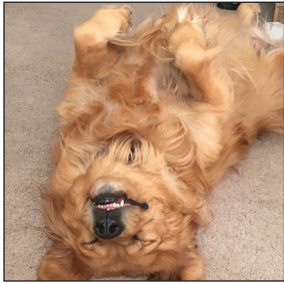
Bluffton's MND program is candidacy-accredited by ACEND and now offers two specialized tracks in eating disorders or sports nutrition that students may pursue. Students who complete the undergraduate program in nutrition and dietetics at Bluffton automatically meet all course requirements for the master's program. Bluffton graduated its first cohort of four MND students in May 2024 and graduated 17 MND students this May.

Bluffton University's graduate programs reflect the institution's enduring mission to prepare students for lives of purpose, service and leadership. Guided by this mission, the university remains responsive to the evolving needs of its students and the communities they serve. In this way, its commitment to advanced education stands as both a reflection of its legacy and a confident investment in the future—equipping graduates to lead with purpose and make meaningful contributions in their communities.



PETS OF BLUFFTONU

Bluffton University's faculty and staff are supported by beloved pets who bring joy, comfort and a sense of balance to their everyday lives. From playful pups to curious cats, these companions are part of the rhythms and routines that sustain our campus community. Through these snapshots, we celebrate the simple connections that help make Bluffton feel like home.



Jessica Pratt - Lucy



Allie Waggener - Cooper



Emily Hilty with Family Horse



Bethany Dario - Boaz and Mercy



Dan Berger with Beloved Dog



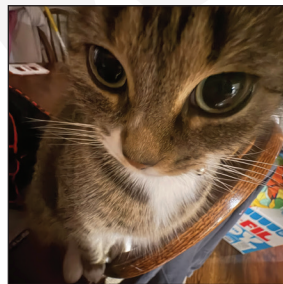
Hannah Horn - Phoebe Horn



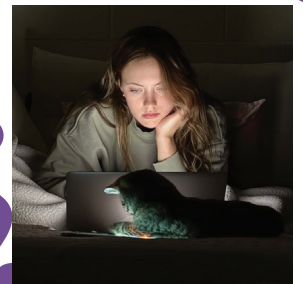
Searra Hough - Sundae



Brad Potts - Lenny



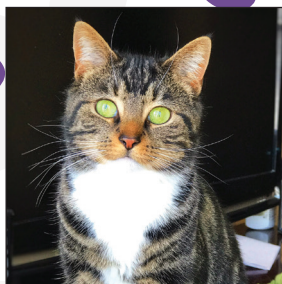
Jessica Pratt - Luna



Jenna Woods - Miss Honey



Emily Buss - Daisy



Jenna Woods - Callie



Kelly Armentrout - Margo



Tami Forbes - Rosie and Little Bit



Kelly Armentrout - Margo



Steve Harnish - Birds



Cara Echols - Chi Johannes



Luke and Claire Kleman - Zuko



Art Shelly - Riley



Pete Suter - Cisco



Kelley VanGilder - Boo, Chi Chi, Mylo, and Oreo



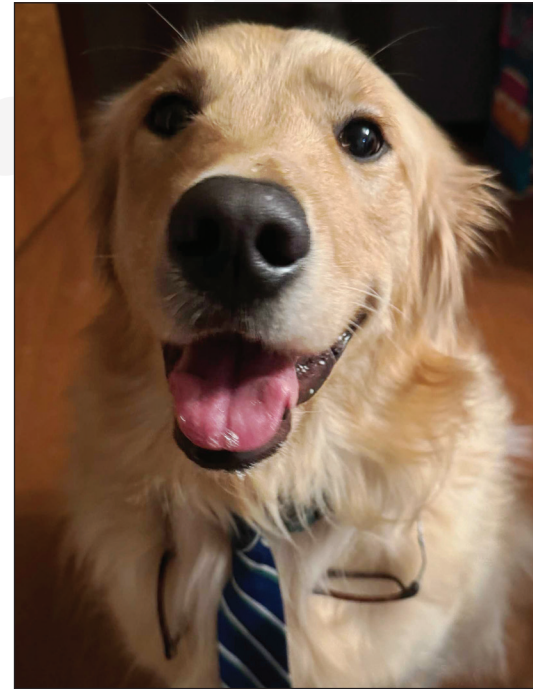
Kate Spike - Poppy



Noah Heing and Carter Ritchey - Mickey and Nelson



Kathleen Aufderhaar - Bobby



Alex Sider and Kathy Dickson - Tucker



Alex Sider and Kathy Dickson - Cats



Alex Sider and Kathy Dickson - Cats



Alex Sider and Kathy Dickson - Tucker

The Presidential Instagram

Follow along for Tucker Tuesdays and more campus moments!





**BLUFFTON
UNIVERSITY**

ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME

INDUCTION CEREMONY, JAN. 24, 2026



HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Jeremy Best '96



A sharpshooter with a passion for others, Jeremy Best '96 made a lasting mark on Bluffton basketball during his three seasons in navy and white. A transfer student from St. Joseph's College, who quickly found his place on campus, Best excelled under the mentorship of Coach Guy Neal—an influence he still credits as foundational in

his life and career. Known for his efficiency and range, Best ranks 16th all-time with 1223 career points and fifth all-time with 161 made 3-pointers, and remains the only player in program history to record a perfect 8-for-8 performance from beyond the arc. He also appears in multiple single-game and single-season top 10 lists, including 42 points in a game and seasons with 63 and 59 made 3-pointers.

Best's memories of Bluffton stretch far beyond statistics. He speaks often of the relationships that shaped him—

teammates who became lifelong friends, supportive faculty and staff who ensured he was "never just a number," and the powerful mentorship of Coach Neal. Bluffton is also where he met his wife, beginning a relationship that is over 30 years strong. "I'm grateful for my entire experience at Bluffton," he said.

"The values and connections I built here have stayed with me."

After graduating with a degree in education, Best devoted his career to shaping young people in the classroom and on the court. Now in his 30th year in education and 23rd as a head boys basketball coach, he holds a 324-184 career record, including 291 wins at Crestview, where he led teams to 6 conference titles, 10 sectional championships, 4 district titles, 3 regional championships, and 2 state championships (2014, 2019).

Humbled by the honor, Best credits Bluffton for giving him the direction, relationships, and values that continue to guide his life and work.

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Lori Schwieterman '83



Lori Schwieterman '83 came to Bluffton University with a passion for volleyball, basketball and softball, and quickly found a community that felt like home. After attending a women's sports day, she "just fell in love with Bluffton," inspired by its close-knit environment and supportive coaches. A three-sport athlete who studied

health and physical education, she formed friendships that still matter today.

"The relationships you gain at Bluffton stay with you," she said.

Following graduation, Schwieterman began a 31-year teaching and coaching career that included stops at Ottoville and Spencerville before returning home to St. Henry High

School. Across these programs, she coached at nearly every level—varsity, JV and junior high—in volleyball, basketball, softball and even track. At St. Henry, she became a cornerstone of the athletic community and helped launch the school's softball program.

Her most notable success came in volleyball. As St. Henry's varsity coach from 1996–2009, Schwieterman compiled a 291–74 record. Her teams earned 10 straight conference titles, 11 sectional championships, 6 district titles, 5 regional crowns, state semifinal appearances in 1998 and 1999, runner-up finishes in 1996 and 2003, and the 2004 Division IV state championship. Her achievements earned widespread recognition, including induction into the OHSVCA Hall of Fame in 2007, multiple Coach of the Year awards, and the 2010 OHSAA Sportsmanship, Ethics and Integrity Award, an honor she says, "reflects the values Bluffton instills."

Now retired, Schwieterman continues supporting young athletes through club volleyball and her ongoing involvement at St. Henry Schools. She credits her players, assistants and community for every milestone.



126TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

Saturday, May 2, 2026

Bluffton University graduated its 126th class during the Saturday, May 2, Commencement ceremony. The 126th graduating class consisted of 125 bachelor's and master's degrees.

Framing Commencement not as an ending but a beginning, speaker Hannah (Kehr '07) Heinzekehr, senior program director for strategic communications in the Office of the President at the University of Notre Dame, encouraged the Class of 2026 to embrace “the next right step” in a lifelong journey of growth, resilience and purpose.

Drawing from her own experience as a Bluffton graduate, Heinzekehr reflected on the common desire to see Commencement as a moment of arrival—a point at which uncertainty fades and life's path becomes clear. Instead, she challenged graduates to recognize that such certainty is often an illusion, and that life is defined by ongoing transitions requiring adaptability, curiosity and courage.

Acknowledging the complexity of the current moment, from rapid technological change to global uncertainty, Heinzekehr urged graduates not to be bystanders, but engaged participants in shaping the future. She emphasized that a Bluffton education provides not only professional preparation, but also a framework for navigating ambiguity with purpose and integrity.

Central to her message were Bluffton's four enduring values: discovery, community, respect and service. She encouraged graduates to approach the world with curiosity, to remain grounded in meaningful relationships, to uphold the dignity of others across differences and to seek opportunities to serve. These values, she noted, remain constant even as circumstances change.

Closing her address, Heinzekehr reminded graduates that they do not need to have every answer to move forward. In moments of uncertainty, she encouraged them to focus simply on taking “the next right step,” trusting that a life of purpose is built not in arrival, but in continual growth.





Commencement Speaker Hannah (Kehr '07) Heinzekehr



Hannah (Kehr '07) Heinzekehr serves as senior program director for strategic communications in the Office of the President at the University of Notre Dame. In this role, she leads communications efforts, supports major events and strategic initiatives, and manages special projects in service to the President.

With more than 15 years of experience in nonprofit communication administration, Heinzekehr previously served as executive director of The Mennonite, Inc., a print and multimedia publication connected to Mennonite Church USA. She also held roles as director of communications and convention planning associate for Mennonite Church USA.

Heinzekehr earned a master's degree in leadership and theology from Claremont School of Theology and graduated from Bluffton University with a bachelor of arts in communications and theology and a minor in peace and conflict studies.

Additionally, Heinzekehr serves as a trustee on the board of the J.A. Schowalter Foundation in Newton, Kan., and previously served on the Bluffton University Board of Trustees from 2018 to 2022.



BLUFFTON STUDENTS IN BLOOM

As Bluffton graduates step into what's next, they carry with them the knowledge, relationships and purpose shaped during their time on campus. From careers to graduate school, these new alumni are living out Bluffton's mission in meaningful ways. Their words reflect a season of growth and the promise ahead.

"After graduation, I plan to work at SumiRiko Ohio, Inc., in Bluffton, Ohio. I will be an accounts receivable specialist. Bluffton has helped me prepare for interviews, how to interact with co-workers, and given me lots of practice with a variety of software systems. I look forward to the continuous growth of myself and my career."

JAMES CLINGMAN '26, ACCOUNTING AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



"I will be teaching kindergarten at Pandora-Gilboa Local Schools, the same school I attended from K-12, which makes this opportunity incredibly meaningful to me. This position aligns closely with my goal as an educator to make learning hands-on, engaging and fun. I am most excited about building meaningful relationships with my students and creating a classroom where they feel genuinely loved, supported and excited to come to school each day."

LACIE FENSTERMAKER '26, INTERVENTION SPECIALIST AND P-5 EDUCATION



"I have wanted to go into dentistry since I was very young, but the more I was exposed to the field through shadowing and dental assisting, my decision to pursue dental school was confirmed. I really want to help people feel more confident and improve their overall well-being by giving them a smile they're proud to share, while also helping reduce the fear and anxiety around dental care. Bluffton has provided me with a strong academic foundation while also helping me develop essential skills like critical thinking and communication."

ADELINE HILDEN '26, BIOLOGY



"I will be in Bowling Green, Ohio, at White Water Car Wash, where I'll be the store manager, managing about 10 people and overseeing day-to-day operations. Bluffton has shown me how to lead and help make meaningful connections. I'm most excited to have an opportunity to lead others and help people grow."

WILL NISSEN '26, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



"The Secret Service, even though they are mostly known for protecting current and former presidents, do much more behind the scenes than people realize. From a young age, I always enjoyed investigative shows. This, along with a passion for the sciences and history, is why I chose to pursue forensics. I am extremely excited for this opportunity, especially the idea of a new and unique opportunity to meet and engage both the public and members of the government every day."

DEREK MOORE '26, INDEPENDENTLY DESIGNED MAJOR: FORENSIC CRIMINAL JUSTICE



"After graduation, I'm pursuing a master's in business administration while working as a graduate assistant in Bluffton University's public relations office. Bluffton has prepared me by giving me hands-on experience and helping me grow my skills. I'm most excited to keep learning on the job, grow my photography business, and stay involved on campus by volunteering with the volleyball team."

JENNA WOODS '26, GRAPHIC DESIGN



FACULTY CITATIONS

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW EMERITI FACULTY!



KATHLEEN AUFDERHAAR, EMERITUS LIBRARIAN

From cataloging to leading Musselman Library's 21st-century system migration, Kathleen Aufderhaar's career reflects decades of dedication to libraries and the people they serve. Joining Bluffton in 1994, she contributed extensively to cataloging, technical services, and student mentorship. Kathleen also held leadership roles in Ohio Private Academic Libraries (OPAL), earning the 2000-2001 OPAL Appreciation Award. She retires in June as technical services and systems librarian, leaving a lasting foundation for Bluffton's library services.



DR. DANIEL BERGER, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY

Dr. Dan Berger earned bachelor's degrees in chemistry and music drama from North Dakota State University before completing his Ph.D. in chemistry at Washington University in St. Louis. Joining Bluffton in 1996, he taught organic chemistry, general education labs, and climate change education for 30 years, integrating experiential learning and innovative teaching methods. A prolific scholar with 10 peer-reviewed publications and numerous articles, Dan also served students, the local church, and community organizations with dedication.



DR. MARTINA CUCCHIARA, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

Dr. Martina Cucchiara has enriched Bluffton's history program since 2012. An accomplished scholar of Nazi Germany and Catholic history, she has published three books and presented at international conferences. Martina has been an outstanding teacher and mentor, often offering extra study sessions and structured learning aids. She also served in leadership roles on campus, including faculty chair and co-director of the honors program, while co-organizing an international conference in Berlin. Her work has been grounded in Bluffton's mission of peace and justice.



DR. GAYLE TROLLINGER, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION

Dr. Gayle Trollinger has been a valued presence at Bluffton University since 1996, shaping the education program through leadership, teaching, and service. With a Ph.D. in education from Penn State, she brought prior experience as a special education teacher to her work preparing future educators. Gayle has served as department chair, director of teacher education, and associate dean, and has secured grants to strengthen educator preparation across northwest Ohio. Her dedication, leadership, and generosity have left a lasting impact on Bluffton.



DR. PAUL NEUFELD WEAVER, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION

Dr. Paul Neufeld Weaver joined Bluffton in 2006 and serves as professor of education and director of global education. Paul has advanced bilingual, multicultural and peace-focused education, in addition to recent leadership at The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center. His scholarship and teaching address immigration, global conflict and Anabaptist principles of peace. Paul's work has shaped generations of educators and will continue to inspire Bluffton's global community.



ALONG THE RILEY

MSW Program Accreditation

Bluffton University, in partnership with Goshen College, has received eight-year initial accreditation for its online Master of Social Work (MSW) program from the Council on Social Work Education. The program emphasizes social justice, trauma-informed and evidence-based practice, integrating classroom learning with hands-on field experiences. Students gain clinical skills, cultural responsiveness, and ethical foundations through mentorship, small classes, and evening Zoom sessions.



Affordability Expanded

Bluffton University is enhancing access and affordability with expanded financial aid programs. The Be a Beaver Program now guarantees full tuition for first-time freshmen with a 0 Student Aid Index (SAI) and a 3.1+ GPA, renewable up to four years. The County Connect Grant now includes six Ohio counties, providing \$1,000 automatically to qualifying students. These initiatives, effective fall 2026, reinforce Bluffton's commitment to high-quality, affordable education that prepares students for meaningful careers.

Science of Reading

Bluffton University has been recognized by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) for strong alignment with the state's Science of Reading standards. The findings highlight Bluffton's ongoing commitment to preparing future educators with research-informed reading instruction practices.

2026 Keeney Peace Lecture

Bluffton University welcomed alumni Dr. Jonathan Moyer '02 back to campus as the featured speaker for the university's 48th annual Keeney Peace Lecture, an event that invites the campus community to reflect on faith, justice and peacemaking in today's world. 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.

19th Annual Stinner Summit

Bluffton University was honored to welcome farmers, food system professionals, environmental partners and community members from across Ohio as the 19th Annual Stinner Summit convened on campus on Friday, Dec. 12, 2025, in Marbeck Center.



Hosted by The Ohio State University's Agroecosystem Management Program (AMP), this year's Summit invited participants to explore the theme "Finding Common Ground: Connecting Farms, Food, and Community in the Western Lake Erie Watershed."

Best Colleges Ranking

Bluffton University is pleased to announce that it has been honored with multiple distinguished awards from Research.com, recognizing the institution's commitment to academic quality, affordability, and meaningful career outcomes for students.

Bluffton University received recognition in the 2026 Most Affordable Speech Pathology Degree Programs in Ohio ranking, highlighting its outstanding programs and value in the field of speech pathology. In addition, Bluffton University earned distinction in the 2026 Most Valuable Education Degree Programs in the USA ranking from Research.com, spotlighting the strength and impact of its education offerings on nationwide career trajectories.



Athletic Awards Recipients

Bluffton University recognized outstanding student-athletes, campus supporters and welcomed a featured speaker during its annual Athletics Awards Forum on Tuesday, April 14.

The Larry Jones Memorial Award, which honors a non-athlete who has made significant contributions to Bluffton athletics, was awarded to Greg Wannemacher '77. The Kathryn E. Little Award, presented to an outstanding senior woman athlete for excellence in athletics, academics and leadership, was awarded to Madison Brown '26. The A.C. Burky Award, given to the senior male athlete who best exemplifies leadership, character and athletic achievement, was presented to Nevin Robson '26.



MEET THE CAMPUS PASTOR

Eli Tracy '12, Bluffton University's new campus pastor, brings both personal passion and a clear vision for how spiritual life can evolve to better serve today's students. Tracy graduated with a bachelor's degree in Bible and theology from Bluffton University and a master's in theology from Conrad Grebel University College on the campus of the University of Waterloo in 2016.

He describes faith as something that has always been central to his life.

"I am a lifelong church kid. My mom was the kids' pastor at our church, and my dad ran our sound and sang in the praise band. My life, the culture of my family, was church."

That deep-rooted connection now shapes how he approaches ministry on campus, with a focus on inclusion and relevance for a diverse student body. At the heart of his approach is a commitment to whole-person formation.

"I want to send students out into the world being formed as a whole person," he says, emphasizing that spiritual life should complement, not compete with, academic and career preparation.

"My hope is to reimagine campus ministry in such a way that it is actually beneficial for all of the students here," Tracy says. By grounding programming in the university's core values of service, community, discovery and respect, he aims to create opportunities where every student can explore purpose, ask questions and find connection—regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey.

All are welcome to join Chapel at 11 a.m. on Thursdays in Yoder Recital Hall during the semester—an open space for reflection, connection and exploring faith together.



ALUMNOTES

1970-79

Diane (Schrock '71) Hertzler,

Goshen, Ind., married David Janzen on Sept. 28, 2025, in Goshen, Ind. Diane is a retired music educator, and Dave ('69 graduate of Bethel College) retired from human resources management at Goshen College.

Walter F. Nickeson '78, Rochester, N.Y., retired in May after almost 43 years as a librarian at the University of Rochester Libraries.

Scott J. Smith '78, Crossville, Tenn., after 47 years in education split between K-12 and Higher Education,

Scott has recently retired from full time work. He will continue to teach university courses part time online and also continue to work with the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association.

1990-99

Theresa (Sickmiller '92) Marie Bush, Jacksonville, Ore., is the co-owner of Western States Environmental, an environmental services company they have operated with their partner for 10 years. They enjoy life in Southern Oregon alongside their spoiled cat and 19 equally pampered chickens.

Rodney Collins '93, Madison, Ohio, is retiring from teaching high school health/physical education for the Cleveland Public School District after 25 years (32 total). Rodney's teaching career started in Kenton, Ohio, teaching adapted PE before moving to Northeast Ohio. Rodney's plans for retirement include traveling with his spouse and spending time with their four grandchildren. Rodney will also continue working part-time, driving the Bookmobile for the Madison Public Library.



KEEP BUILDING
CONNECTIONS
SHARE YOUR
UPDATES!

We'd love to share your news in *Bluffton magazine*! Whether it's career wins, family milestones, adventures, or hobbies, your fellow Beavers want to hear from you!

Tell us about:

- New jobs or promotions
- Awards or recognitions
- Marriages or births
- Travel or vacations
- Hobbies or passions
- Volunteer work

Submit your update at www.bluffton.edu/alumnote

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YOUR CONTACT
INFO!

Moved or changed your email?

Update your info at www.bluffton.edu/update

2000-09

Steve Evans '01, Sandusky, Ohio, recently published his second novel, "Degree of Separation." Steve is a mental health therapist and lives in Sandusky with his wife Jamie (Windau '00) and their two children.

2010-19

Alexi (Parsons '15) Gordon, MAEd '25, Millersport, Ohio, has remained in education since graduating, teaching in a variety of settings while developing a passion for psychology and trauma-informed care. She earned a master's degree in teaching from Bluffton University and recently opened her own business, Remnant Collective. Beginning as a dance studio, the space reflects a broader vision to foster creative connection, freedom, wholeness, and healing in body, mind, soul, and spirit. She welcomes alumni and friends to be part of this growing community.

IN MEMORIAM

Betty Jean Pannabecker '49, Surprise, Ind., passed away Jan. 5, 2026, at the age of 98.

Helen (Knoke '51) Martin, Mansfield, Ohio, passed away March 5, 2026, at the age of 97.

Carlton Sauder '51, Grabill, Ind., passed away March 15, 2026, at the age of 96.

Naimeh (Mukarkar '54) Jernigan, Chapel Hill, N.C., passed away March 9, 2026, at the age of 97.

Ronald Krehbiel '54, Hesston, Kan., passed away Dec. 9, 2025, at the age of 94.

Margaret "Peg" (Ridge '55) Stuckey, Centerville, Ohio, passed away Dec. 17, 2025, at the age of 92.

Joanne (Plank '56) Burkholder, Lima, Ohio, passed away Oct. 15, 2025, at the age of 91.

Mary (Hilty '56) Marcum, Dayton, Ohio, passed away Nov. 2, 2025, at the age of 92.

George Bailey '57, Snellville, Ga., passed away Oct. 12, 2025, at the age of 90.

David M. Speicher '58, Marysville, Ohio, passed away Feb. 28, 2026, at the age of 89.

Gene "Geno" Orsdall '59, Bellevue, Ohio, passed away Oct. 15, 2025, at the age of 87.

Harold "Tubby" Garverick '60, Goodyear, Ariz., passed away March 2, 2026, at the age of 88.

Loretta (Hilty '61) Baumgartner, Hesston, Kan., passed away Dec. 1, 2024, at the age of 85.

Larry Raid x61, Denmark, Iowa, passed away Jan. 9, 2026, at the age of 87.

Edward Springer '62, Goshen, Ind., passed away Oct. 12, 2025, at the age of 86.

James Fannon '63, Lima, Ohio, passed away Jan. 2, 2026, at the age of 86.

Janis (Lantz '63) Stover, New Philadelphia, Ohio, passed away Oct. 25, 2025, at the age of 84.

Sally (Inbody '65) McDougle, Rawson, Ohio, passed away Dec. 26, 2025, at the age of 82.

Michael S. McConnell, Wooster, Ohio, passed away May 8, 2025, at the age of 81.

Margaret "Peg" (Hostetler '67) Bird, Yellow Springs, Ohio, passed away Jan. 30, 2026, at the age of 80.

Joyce (Angstadt '68) Bryant, Lansdale, Pa., passed away Feb. 3, 2026, at the age of 79.

Carol (Diller '69) Calhoun, Wilmington, N.C., passed away Feb. 8, 2026. At the age of 77.

A. "Jeanne" Beery '72, Green River, Wyo., passed away Dec. 6, 2025 at the age of 75.

James M. Butti '72, Scottdale, Pa., passed away Feb. 14, 2026, at the age of 75.

Robert Biesemeir x75, Elyria, Ohio, passed away Nov. 18, 2025, at the age of 73.

James Walther '75, Maineville, Ohio, passed away Dec. 9, 2025, at the age of 73.

Anne (Gates '76) Heimann, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Feb. 7, 2026 at the age of 71.

Keith Oder x77, Leland, N.C., passed away Dec. 18, 2025, at the age of 72.

Eric Kuenning '79, Westerville, Ohio, passed away April 5, 2020, at the age of 62.

Vera (Wilson '84) Sheets, Arlington, Ohio, passed away Feb. 14, 2026, at the age of 85.

Beth Ann Schroeder '09, Leipsic, Ohio, passed away Jan. 23, 2026, at the age of 39.

Friends:

Cynthia Buckland, Carey, Ohio, passed away on Jan. 4, 2026, at the age of 97.

Dale Devene, Findlay, Ohio, passed away on Feb. 14, 2026, at the age of 94.

Employees:

Amy Craven, Findlay, Ohio, passed away Dec. 30, 2025, at the age of 63.

Von R. Plessner, Bryan, Ohio, passed away March 2, 2026, at the age of 76.



STUDENT PROFILE

HANNAH WOOD

CLASS YEAR: 2027

MAJOR: PRE-PHYSICAL THERAPY

TRANSFORMING CARE THROUGH COMPASSION

For Hannah Wood '27, a pre-physical therapy major with a psychology minor from Wapakoneta, Ohio, the decision to pursue physical therapy stems from a desire to help people reclaim parts of their lives affected by illness or injury.

"Physical therapy is more than just exercises," Wood said. "Sometimes you're that person's safe space for 45 minutes. You're helping them through one of the hardest things they've experienced."

Her passion for the field became deeply personal during her senior year of high school, when she was diagnosed with a soft tissue Ewing's sarcoma, a rare form of soft tissue/bone cancer. Throughout her treatment, the care and encouragement she received from her own therapists revealed the transformative potential of rehabilitation.

Wood reflected on that experience, realizing that the support and guidance she received from her therapists went beyond the physical, inspiring her to want to help others in the same way. "Seeing how they supported me through that process made me realize I wanted to be part of that kind of transformation for others," she said.

Wood's passion for physical therapy began even before college. During her senior year of high school, she participated in the Wapakoneta Internship/Networking (WIN) Program, which allowed her to spend part of the school day observing professionals in clinical settings. These early experiences gave her hands-on insight into the field and reinforced her desire to help patients through rehabilitation.

A CALLING IN NEURO-PHYSICAL THERAPY

Wood has focused her academic path toward neuro-physical therapy, a specialty that helps patients improve movement, balance, and independence when neurological conditions affect the communication between the brain and body.

Neurological physical therapists work with individuals recovering from strokes, traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and other neurological conditions.

Wood's interest deepened through early clinical exposure and



observation experiences. She recalled one particularly meaningful moment; watching a patient who had suffered a stroke gradually regain pieces of their independence. "I saw them become who they were again," Wood said. Witnessing this progress reinforced her commitment to the field.

She has also developed a strong interest in working with patients experiencing Parkinson's disease and balance disorders such as vertigo. Wood explained that helping someone recover aspects of their life after a condition like Parkinson's is incredibly meaningful.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHERS

Having benefited from opportunities like the WIN Program in high school, Wood recognized that many Bluffton students interested in therapy could use greater access to observation hours. "I wanted other Bluffton students to have that same chance to explore and use those opportunities how we saw fit," she said. This motivated her to establish a process connecting students with observation experiences at Mercy Health St. Rita's Medical Center, spanning outpatient, pediatric and inpatient settings.

"My foundation for observation hours, getting into grad school, is far above what most people get; I wanted other Bluffton students to have that same chance to explore and use those opportunities how we saw fit," Wood said.

The initiative gives students the chance to gain hands-on experience, confirm career interests, and form professional relationships that can support their graduate school applications.

LOOKING AHEAD

After graduating from Bluffton, Wood plans to pursue a doctoral degree in physical therapy and specialize in neurological and vestibular rehabilitation. Her goal remains simple but powerful: helping others move forward.

"YOU MIGHT NOT CHANGE THE WHOLE WORLD," WOOD SAID. "BUT IF YOU CAN HELP ONE PERSON REGAIN PART OF THEIR LIFE, THAT CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING."



SIMEON TALLEY

CLASS YEAR: 2006

MAJOR: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES

DESIGNING A PATH WITH PURPOSE

As a student at Bluffton University, Simeon Talley '06 didn't want to be confined to a single academic lane. Instead, he designed his own interdisciplinary major—one that allowed him to explore politics, society, and the systems that shape how people live and interact.

"I wanted to create a major that allowed me to explore all of those discipline areas in an interdisciplinary way," he added. "It allowed me to really dive into areas that were of deep interest to me."

That decision became the foundation for a career defined not by a single profession, but by a mindset—one rooted in curiosity, adaptability and purpose.

A CAREER WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

After Bluffton, Talley's path didn't follow a straight line—and that's exactly the point.

He began in politics, interning in the Toledo mayor's office, working on local campaigns and even running for office himself. That momentum carried him to work on a 2008 presidential campaign, where he initially believed he had found his long-term calling.

"I realized that politics is one vehicle to achieve change," he said. "But there are lots of different ways to make a difference."

That realization opened the door to a wide-ranging career that has included work in nonprofits, entrepreneurship, media and small business ownership. Rather than specializing in one narrow field, Talley embraced building a diverse skill set and remaining open to new opportunities.

The result? A career that has never felt stagnant.

CREATING SPACES THAT MATTER

Across every role, one theme has remained constant: a commitment to inclusion and representation.

"What I was really passionate about was this idea of creating spaces and opportunities and platforms for people that have historically been left out," he said. "That could be race, class, gender, geography, education—it could be lots of different things."

That mission came to life through one of his most personal ventures, a retail storefront called Basic Goods in Iowa. More than just a shop, the space combined sustainable products, a coffee shop and community-centered design to create an environment where people felt welcome and connected. "What we were really focused on is how can we create a space that people always want to come back to," he said.



BUILDING WITH AGENCY

Today, Talley works in real estate development, where he approaches projects with the same interdisciplinary lens he first cultivated at Bluffton. For him, development is about more than buildings—it's about people, history and community impact.

"It's not just thinking of it as how to build something and how to make something financially feasible, but what are the more important, compelling community elements at play?" he questioned. In one current project, he is helping revitalize a long-vacant building in downtown Waterloo, Iowa, transforming it into a mixed-use space with commercial and residential opportunities.

This work also reflects a deeper belief shaped during his college years: the power of personal agency.

"I was able to really explore and lean into this sense of agency—your life, your ideas, your energy can be exerted in a particular direction and it matters, and you can make a difference," he said.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

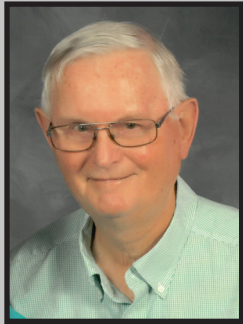
Looking ahead, Talley isn't focused on a fixed destination. What motivates him is the opportunity to keep building, solving problems and exploring new challenges.

"You wake up and there's always something new and interesting to work on that you have to figure out or a problem to be solved," he said. His advice to current students and fellow alumni is simple: lean into that same sense of possibility.

"YOUR AGENCY AND YOUR ABILITY TO HAVE AN INTENTION AND HAVE AN IDEA AND CREATE SOMETHING TANGIBLE FROM THAT STILL EXISTS AND STILL MATTERS."



IN MEMORY OF DR. STANLEY "STAN" CLEMENS '63



Dr. Stanley "Stan" Clemens '63, former vice president for advancement and emeritus professor of mathematics, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Jan. 11, 2026, at the age of 84. A

dedicated educator and advocate for lifelong learning, Clemens earned his undergraduate degree in mathematics from Bluffton College, where he met his wife, Joenita (Shetler '63) Clemens. He later earned a master's degree from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of North Carolina.

Clemens began his career teaching at Illinois State University before returning to Bluffton College, where his student-centered approach emphasized learning how to learn. He co-authored several innovative mathematics textbooks adopted by schools nationwide. Beyond the classroom, he applied his problem-solving skills to real estate and construction projects, including the volunteer-built Meetingplace of the Mennonite Church of Normal, Ill.

He later served as vice president for advancement at Bluffton, where he combined his passion for education and philanthropy. In his final months, he helped establish the Bluffton College Foundation, guided by his belief in philanthropy as "voluntary action for the common good." Clemens and his wife shared 63 years of marriage and made Bluffton their home for more than four decades. He is survived by four children and six grandchildren.

IN MEMORY OF HOWARD BAUMGARTNER '46



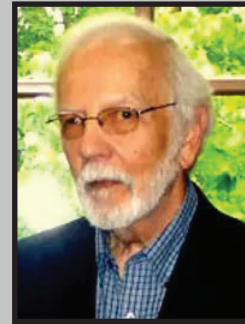
Howard Baumgartner '46, former honorary trustee, Berne, Ind., passed away Oct. 30, 2025, at the age of 101. A lifelong learner and servant leader,

Baumgartner received his undergraduate degree from Bluffton and went on to earn business and law degrees from Indiana University.

He practiced law in Berne for more than four decades, founding Baumgartner Law Office in 1950 and later Baumgartner & Beitler, now Baumgartner Attorneys PC. His distinguished career focused on real estate, corporate, estate and municipal law. He served 16 years as Berne City Attorney, 25 years as attorney for Berne-French and South Adams Schools, and was active in numerous professional associations.

Deeply devoted to his community, Baumgartner served on the Berne Rotary Club, Berne Chamber of Commerce, and the First Bank of Berne Board of Directors for 40 years. His faith was central to his life. At First Mennonite Church, he sang in choirs, taught Sunday School for 25 years and served in many leadership roles. He also held leadership positions within the broader Mennonite Church, including on the Schowalter Foundation Board, Mennonite Mutual Aid Board, and Bluffton University Board of Trustees, where he served for 30 years. Baumgartner and his wife, Phyllis (Hartzler '47), shared 76 years of marriage, a love of travel and a deep commitment to family and faith. He is survived by 5 children, 13 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

IN MEMORY OF DONALD PANNABECKER '58



Donald Pannabecker '58, former vice president and dean of academic affairs emeritus, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Jan. 17, 2026, at the age of 89.

Pannabecker spent his early years in China before growing up and graduating from high school in Peoria, Ill.

He earned his undergraduate degree from Bluffton College, where he met his wife, Romaine (Clemens '58). He went on to receive a master of divinity from McCormick Seminary and a doctorate from the University of Toledo. From 1964 to 1997, he served Bluffton College as both a faculty member and administrator, influencing generations of students. He preached more than 1,000 sermons, primarily within Presbyterian congregations. A man of wide-ranging interests, Pannabecker enjoyed exploring computer applications, the arts and church work. He remained deeply committed to his faith and community, serving as an ordained Presbyterian minister. Pannabecker and his wife, Romaine, were parents to three children and grandparents to five.



Arts AT BLUFFTON

This spring, Arts at Bluffton experienced a renewal in choral music, complemented by a timeless theatre performance and dynamic visual art from student and professional artists alike. Together, these experiences brought students, alumni and community members into a vibrant season of creativity.



The Bluffton choir returned to campus, bringing together students, alumni and community members for a series of events centered on shared singing and performance. The season began in February with a spirited Hymn Sing where voices from across campus and beyond gathered to celebrate sacred songs and shared faith traditions.



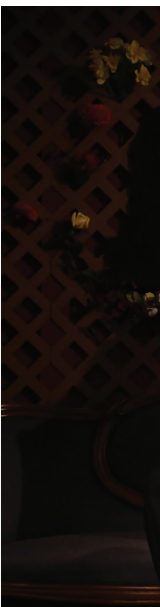
Building on that momentum, Bluffton hosted **Harmonia: A High School Choir Invitational**, welcoming high school singers to campus to experience collegiate-level choral music. Guest clinician Jaron M. LeGrain led a workshoping session before students performed for an audience, showcasing young vocal talent and strengthening Bluffton's connections with aspiring musicians across the region.

Another highlight of the spring was the return of the **Spring Choral Concert** in April. Featuring a richly varied program, the concert brought the entire ensemble together in a showcase of musical growth and artistry. The event drew students, faculty, staff, alumni and community supporters to celebrate the power of collective performance.

Central to this resurgence was the arrival of Jonathon Blake Turner as Bluffton's new choral director. Under his leadership, the choral program has re-engaged students and community members alike, blending artistic excellence with mentorship and musical exploration.



Bluffton's theatre production of "Little Women," adapted by Kate Hamill, took place this spring. Directed by Dr. Melissa Friesen, the production brought to life the beloved story of the March sisters, exploring themes of ambition, identity and the complexities of sisterhood. Set during the Civil War era, the performance highlighted strong character development, expressive costuming and the collaborative work of students and community members on stage. Audiences were invited into a heartfelt and engaging theatrical experience in Ramseyer Auditorium.





A SPRING SONG, STAGE AND STUDIO

Visual arts also played a central role in the spring season.

The **Born From Fire** exhibit showcased compelling ceramic works shaped through wood fire processes, while the senior art exhibit, **A Moment in Time**, celebrated the culminating achievements of graduating art majors, offering a deeply personal look at their creative journeys.

In addition, the **58th Annual Juried Student Art Exhibit** highlighted outstanding student work across a range of mediums, recognizing artistic excellence and fostering a culture of creativity on campus. Exhibits were displayed in the Sauder Visual Arts Center's Grace Albrecht Gallery.



As the campus reflects on a spring filled with harmony, creativity and shared artistic experience, Arts at Bluffton looks forward to continued growth in the years to come.

Your support plays a crucial role in sustaining this vibrant artistic community.

Gifts to Arts at Bluffton help fund concerts in Yoder Recital Hall, art exhibits in the Sauder Visual Arts Center, and theatre performances in Ramseyer Auditorium—providing students and community members with opportunities to explore the rich diversity of the arts.

You can give online by selecting “Arts at Bluffton” from the purpose dropdown at www.bluffton.edu/give, or send a check made payable to “Bluffton University” with “Arts at Bluffton” in the memo line to:
Bluffton University Advancement Office
1 University Drive, Bluffton, OH 45817

Every gift, large or small, ensures that the arts continue to inspire, educate and bring joy to the Bluffton community.



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1926

Bluffton University

2026

Friday, Oct. 2 – Sunday, Oct. 4, 2026

Everyone is invited for Homecoming and Alumni Weekend. Save the date to enjoy class reunions, Beaver Tail-Gating, inflatables, athletic events and friends.