

MCGA

TODAY

SPRING 2024

KNIGHTS LEVEL UP

.....
MGA ATHLETICS
SET TO JOIN
NCAA DIVISION II



Game On / 4

With a new director, an ambitious strategic plan, and an invitation to join the Peach Belt Conference, MGA continues to transform the athletics program and move the Knights toward NCAA Division II membership.



Milestone / 13

Christopher Blake, Ph.D., reaches a decade of service as University president.



ON THE COVER - With Knights baseball and other spring sports underway, MGA's athletics program continues momentous moves toward transformation, including the pursuit of membership in NCAA Division II and the Peach Belt Conference.

IMAGE: JASON VORHEES

ABOUT MGA • Middle Georgia State University educates and graduates inspired, lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region and the state. MGA's four core values are *Stewardship, Engagement, Adaptability, and Learning*. mga.edu/vision

Middle Georgia State's Path To Excellence / 14

A new strategic plan highlights MGA's vision to champion student success, lead innovation and economic opportunity, build culture and identity, and sustain fiscal resilience and brand value.



Lasting Legacy / 16

A gift to MGA from the estate of Carolyn Wynn Smalley, whose passions included conservation, horseback riding, and Georgia history and culture, will substantially impact the University and the region.

Sidebar: A portion of the Smalley gift will benefit MGA's equestrian team, based in Cochran.

Profiles in Greatness / 22

A look at some of the people and events that make MGA great.

SPECIAL SECTION

The Middle Georgia State University Foundation / 26

Legacy of Leadership, Alumni of the Year, & President's Gala

MGA Alumni Make Special Impact

Donor Profiles

Meet Some MGA Scholarship Recipients

Your Impact On MGA

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Dear Friends,

I invite you to join us in commemorating the remarkable strides Middle Georgia State University (MGA) has made over the past year. In the pages ahead, we proudly showcase a celebration of our collective accomplishments and milestones, each story reflecting the goals outlined in our new Strategic Plan, *Middle Georgia's Path to Excellence*.

Discover the remarkable journey of Middle Georgia State University athletics as we transition to NCAA Division II, a testament to our unwavering dedication to excellence both on and off the field. This milestone not only marks a significant achievement for our athletics program but also signifies a pivotal moment in the ongoing evolution of our University's culture and identity.

Learn how we at MGA are leading innovation by partnering with industry leaders such as Delta, United, Gulfstream, and Amazon. Across our dynamic campuses, we cultivate student engagement and highlight the distinctive strengths of our programs, including aviation in Eastman, our healthcare hub in Dublin, and the new Houston Healthcare nursing suite in Warner Robins.

We are honored to share the inspiring story of Carolyn Smalley, whose generous gift, alongside that of the Peyton Anderson Foundation, has profoundly impacted our institution. These two transformational gifts will help the University build a new future program of engagement with the community, titled the Center for Middle Georgia Studies, which will be launched and publicized in the coming months. This kind of support has enabled us to expand our mission of providing exceptional educational opportunities to students from all backgrounds. While maintaining our status as the best value state university, Middle Georgia State's academic quality continues to thrive as we champion student success. Our retention rate for first-year students has surged by 7%. That's an extra 60 students on the path to graduation.

As we celebrate our growth and achievements, I am reminded of the countless individuals who have contributed to our success – from our dedicated faculty and staff to our loyal alumni and supporters. Each article in this magazine serves as a testament to the power of collaboration, innovation, and the pursuit of excellence that defines our University community.

Go Knights,

Christopher Blake, Ph.D.

MGA President



McCall Wolf, a player on the Knights volleyball team, is an early enrollment freshman who potentially could still be playing for MGA when the University transitions to NCAA Division II.
SHERON SMITH

ate University



KNIGHT

Under a new leader and an ambitious strategic plan, MGA charts a course toward the Peach Belt Conference & NCAA Division II membership for the University's athletics program

A BOLD PATH

For MGA Athletics

As a standout volleyball player at Ola High School in McDonough, McCall Wolf had several colleges recruit her as she considered where she would take her talents after graduation.

Ultimately, she chose Middle Georgia State University (MGA), where the Knights compete – for now – in the Southern States Athletic Conference of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA).

“I liked that the gym where we play was for volleyball only and not shared with other sports,” said Wolf, a health sciences administration major, referring to the volleyball gym on the Macon Campus. “I also got to practice with the team and I really liked how all the players got along. They had good chemistry with each other.”

One thing did give her pause as she was fielding college scholarship offers. The MGA Knights athletics program was not a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, or NCAA, and she had her heart set on playing for a “D2” school. Wolf had heard that MGA was pursuing the possibility of transitioning to the Peach

Belt Conference of NCAA Division II but wasn't sure that anything would take place during her time at the University.

But then came a series of events that made Wolf and other Knights athletes who are freshmen or sophomores realize that they could be impacted by coming changes.

In early 2023, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia gave MGA permission to take the necessary steps toward potential membership in NCAA Division II and the Peach Belt Conference. In January 2024, the Peach Belt Conference invited MGA to join pending approval of the University's acceptance into the NCAA Division II provisional process. MGA plans to apply for NCAA Division II provisional membership in early 2025 and, if accepted, join the league that fall.

“When I heard we would become D2, that made a big difference,” Wolf said. “I think a lot of athletes are looking to go D1 or D2, where the competition is stronger, so this should help Middle Georgia State attract more athletes.”

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 —



Michael Brown, MGA's new athletics director, is leading efforts to transition the Knights to NCAA Division II competition and boost the visibility of Knights athletics. He is shown on the Cochran Campus at Knights Field, MGA's softball facility. TYLER WHITE

Michael Brown, 40, Middle Georgia State's new athletics director, is key to the University's athletics transformation. Coming to MGA last fall from Purdue University Fort Wayne, an NCAA Division I institution, where he was associate athletic director for operations, Brown has more than 15 years of experience in collegiate sports administration. Before his time at Purdue University Fort Wayne, Brown helped Palm Beach Atlantic University athletics make the transition from NAIA to NCAA Division II.

In a conversation with *MGA Today*, Brown talked about what the transformation means for the future of the Knights and for the University in general.

What attracted you to the MGA athletics director's job?

"Middle Georgia State jumped off the page to me, partly because of its past athletics success, like the baseball national championships, but also because

of where we're going in the future. That was laid out from the moment I set foot on campus. The NAIA is a tremendous organization that helped us develop an athletics brand as a four-year institution, but I am excited to have an opportunity to help MGA take the next step to NCAA Division II membership. Our leadership and our campus community have fully bought into this process. It won't be without challenges, but at the end of the day the result should be something we can be really proud of."

What are some of the advantages MGA would gain with NCAA Division II and Peach Belt Conference membership?

"The Knights' current conference schedule in most sports stretches from New Orleans to Tennessee and throughout Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia. Not only will Peach Belt membership reduce our travel, which means more time for our athletes to spend in the classroom, but there's an

opportunity for us to establish rivalries with similar institutions, many of which are also in the University System of Georgia. It'll be great for the parents of our athletes, who won't have to travel as far to see their kids play, and it'll be great for our alumni base."

And transformation of the Knights athletics program also should impact the overall student experience.

"Absolutely. MGA athletics plays just a small part in the overall student experience. One of the University's core values is engagement. It helps build school spirit among students and our other constituents, including faculty and staff and community members. As with music, fine arts, academic and other events that take place on our campuses, athletics is an excellent way for all of us to engage with each other."

How will you address challenges that come up during this transformation?

"We know there will be challenges, but we have a great strategic plan in place that was, frankly, largely in place prior to my arrival. Now I'm tasked with carrying it out. Lucky for me that adaptability is another of the University's core values. We have to be able to pivot when necessary, and I think we have the resources and people in place to turn any challenges into success stories. Collaboration really is key and we already have buy-in from all areas of the University, from academics to enrollment management, student affairs and others. Our coaching staff certainly knows the work we have ahead of us but they have not shied away from it. They understand that this is the best thing for the University and that in a few years we're really going to see the fruits of that labor shining through."

What can students, faculty, and staff and all interested constituents do to support this effort?

"Learn what the differences NCAA Division II affiliation will mean for the student experience. That's something our coaches are talking about now

as they recruit the next class of Knights athletes. I also encourage our local communities to view MGA athletics similar to what minor league sports offer, which are free, family friendly entertainment options. Competition at the NAIA and NCAA Division II levels is very high. I am happy to host anyone interested in attending a game or match on our Cochran or Macon campuses. I also encourage everyone to support our athletes as they engage with our local communities through service projects and other opportunities."

You and your wife, Jessica Brown, and your 1-year-old daughter, Bethany, have made your home in Cochran. How are you settling in?

"I'm back and forth between MGA's Cochran and Macon campuses for my job but we've enjoyed the opportunity to live in a smaller community and really engage with our neighbors and friends. It's a really exciting time for us, and this community has been nothing but welcoming." ■



MGA has been invited to join the Peach Belt Conference in fall 2025, pending the University's acceptance into the NCAA Division II provisional process.

Follow MGA's path to NCAA Division II at <https://www.mga.edu/Athletics-transition>

KNIGHTS

ATHLETICS



MGA ATHLETICS STRATEGIC PLAN – HIGHLIGHTS 2023-2028

STRATEGY 1

Champion student-athlete success. MGA will support retention and graduation of student-athletes, develop success in competition, and review the structure of the athletics department to support success.

STRATEGY 2

Ensure resource sustainability in athletics. MGA will develop new revenue streams for athletics and develop a long-term facilities plan.

STRATEGY 3

Build MGA athletics culture and identity. The University will achieve NCAA Division II status according to an established time frame, add women's long-distance track, and build athletics brand identity and communication in regional communities.

MGA ATHLETICS VISION

The Department of Athletics provides a healthy, wholesome atmosphere for the growth of its student-athletes as people of character, outstanding students, and talented athletes. Our student-athletes will graduate to become tomorrow's leaders by having persevered and achieved success through rigorous challenges in the classroom and on the playing and practice fields.





**2023-2024 MGA
INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORTS**

- Baseball
- Basketball
(Men & Women's Teams)
- Cross Country (Women)
- Soccer
(Men & Women's Teams)
- Softball
- Tennis
(Men & Women's Teams)
- Volleyball (Women)



FACILITIES

**Georgia Premier
Cross Country Course**
(Macon Campus)

Knights Tennis Courts
(Macon Campus)

Knights Field
(Softball, Cochran Campus)

Morris Gym
(Basketball, Cochran Campus)

NeSmith Field
(Soccer, Cochran Campus)

Stuckey Field
(Baseball, Cochran Campus)

Knights Volleyball Gym
(Macon Campus)



A Brief History of **MGA ATHLETICS**

What is now Middle Georgia State University (MGA) was created in January 2013 by the merger of the former Middle Georgia College and Macon State College. At the time of the merger, Middle Georgia College, based in Cochran, Ga., competed as the Warriors in the National Junior College Athletic Association and had a track record of success, including four baseball national championships. Macon State College did not offer intercollegiate athletics at the time of the merger but competed in club sports as the Blue Storm or, earlier in the institution's history, the Mustangs.

Voting online after the merger, students from both former institutions chose Knights as the new mascot and purple, black and silver/gray as the new school colors.

For the Knights' inaugural year of competition, Middle Georgia State remained with the NJCAA membership it inherited from the former Middle Georgia College. But MGA officials immediately began making plans to seek admission into an athletic conference more suitable to four-year colleges and universities.

In 2014, MGA accepted invitations to join the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and that league's Southern States Athletic Conference.

As part of the NAIA, Middle Georgia State fields teams in baseball, men and women's basketball, men and women's soccer, men and women's tennis, softball, women's volleyball, and women's cross country. Baseball, basketball, soccer, and softball are based on the Cochran Campus, while the other sports are based on the Macon Campus.

In early 2023, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia gave MGA permission to seek membership in National Collegiate Athletics Association Division II and the Peach Belt Conference. In January 2024, the Peach Belt Conference invited MGA to join pending approval of the University's acceptance into the NCAA Division II provisional process. MGA is expected to apply for NCAA Division II membership in early 2025 and, if accepted, join the league that fall.

If MGA is able to join the league, the University will add women's outdoor track and field (distance) to its athletics lineup beginning in 2025-2026. Full membership in NCAA Division II would come in 2028.

As a member of the Peach Belt Conference, MGA would be able to compete and develop rivalries in Georgia and adjacent states. In Georgia, current members of the Peach Belt Conference are Augusta University, Clayton State University, Columbus University, Georgia College & State University, Georgia Southwestern State University, and University of North Georgia. ■



MGA



HOME OF THE
KNIGHTS

Milestone

Christopher Blake, Ph.D., Looks Ahead
After Passing 10th Anniversary As President

Ten years ago, at the start of the spring semester 2014, Christopher Blake, Ph.D., began his tenure as the first permanent president of what was then Middle Georgia State College – soon to become Middle Georgia State University.

In the fall of 2014, the MGA community, regional leaders, and presidents of other University System of Georgia institutions gathered for Blake's formal investiture, performed by then-Chancellor Henry M. "Hank" Huckaby. A variety of celebratory events, including the first President's Gala, took place during the days surrounding the ceremony.

The institution – the result of a then-recently completed consolidation of Middle Georgia College and Macon State College – was already on a trajectory of excellence. MGA has achieved much success over the past decade and is on track for even greater accomplishments.

At his investiture, Blake spoke of the

importance of leadership in any profession for which students enroll in college. "Individuals able to look into the past and learn from it but also anticipate the future and adapt to it are going to be leaders," he said. "They are going to be the ones that head up their professions. They are going to be the ones making the decisions."

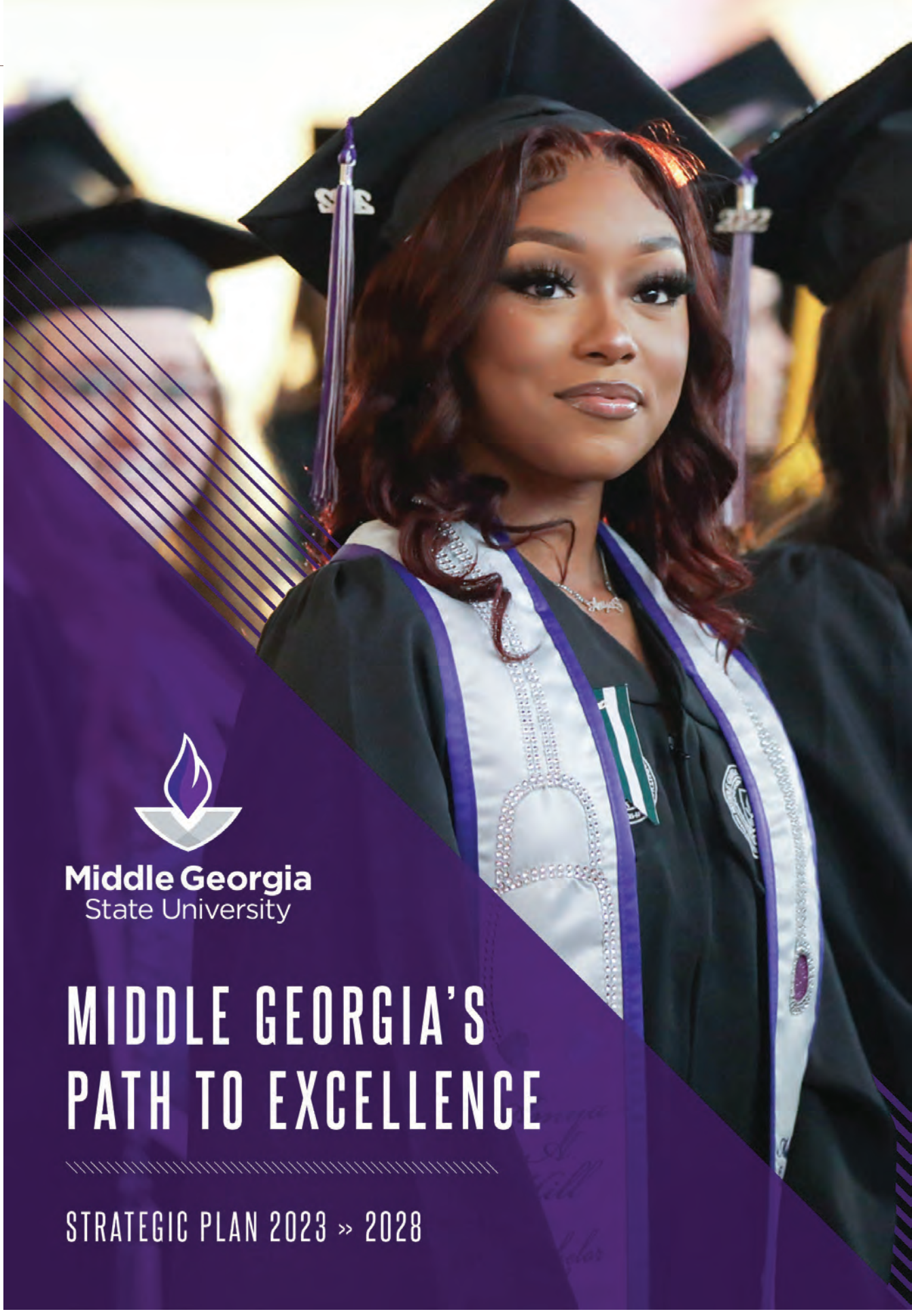
The language invokes MGA's eventual mission statement: Middle Georgia State University educates and graduates inspired, lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region and the state.

During the investiture, Huckaby presented Blake with the MGA mace, a ceremonial emblem. Huckaby passed away in 2021, and to the MGA community Blake expressed his gratitude to the man that entrusted him with the University presidency.

"He supervised my work and our institutional fortunes with such consideration, elegance, and acumen," Blake said. ■



University System of Georgia Chancellor Henry M. "Hank" Huckaby presents the MGA mace to Christopher Blake, Ph.D., during Blake's fall 2014 investiture as president of what was then Middle Georgia State College.



Middle Georgia
State University

MIDDLE GEORGIA'S PATH TO EXCELLENCE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 » 2028

MGA's New Strategic Plan Champions Student Success, Innovation, Fiscal Resilience & More

Middle Georgia State University's path to excellence continues with solid plans for championing student success, leading innovation and economic opportunity, building culture and identity, and sustaining fiscal resilience and brand value.

Those are the University's top goals for the next five years, according to its latest strategic plan – “Middle Georgia's Path To Excellence.” The plan maps out a vision of where Middle Georgia State (MGA) wants to be by 2028 and how to get there.

“We are confident that as we approach MGA's 10th anniversary as a state university, this plan will reflect what we have done well and what we can do even better as we move forward,” said University President Christopher Blake, who reviewed the plan with faculty and staff last fall.

“The University has already demonstrated that it is a change agent in the state of Georgia,” Blake said. “Our new strategic plan builds on that and helps us become an even greater force for progress and innovation in the communities we serve.”

The new plan includes four strategic essentials:

- **Champion student success.** MGA plans to accomplish this multifaceted goal by, among other things, achieving specialized accreditation in certain academic programs, most notably Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business accreditation for the School of Business. MGA will increase faculty scholarship outcomes and develop instructor expertise in A.I. and other emergent technologies. The University will also grow student engagement at all degree levels and boost enrollment (to 8,750 students by 2028) and numbers of graduates. The plan envisions growth in career-ready degree programs across all five campuses.

- **Lead innovation and economic opportunity.** Priorities include ensuring high-demand programs for workforce and career alignment, using the newly developed Center for Middle Georgia Studies to drive University outreach, and coordinate faculty scholarship and grant awards to build the institution's reputation.

- **Build culture and identify.** MGA will refine the roles and strengths of each of its five campuses (Macon, Cochran, Dublin, Eastman, and Warner Robins) and emphasize the University as a destination workplace for employees. The University will pursue an official great-place/college-to-work designation, and will transition athletics to NCAA Division II while positioning teams to succeed at that level.

- **Sustain fiscal resilience and brand value.** Middle Georgia State will apply data-driven accountability to all operations and maintain access, affordability, and value for all students. The University will also grow and diversify streams of revenue.

Blake noted that the plan as a whole reflects Middle Georgia State's institutional values of Stewardship, Engagement, Adaptability, and Learning. MGA's updated mission statement is “Middle Georgia State University graduates inspired, lifelong learners whose knowledge and careers enhance the state.” The University's updated vision statement is “We transform individuals and our communities through extraordinary higher learning.”

The strategic plan was developed, after input from all University constituents, by an ad hoc committee of faculty, staff, Student Government Association representatives, administrators, and members of the MGA Foundation Board of Trustees. ■

The complete “Middle Georgia's Path To Excellence” strategic plan is available to read at mga.edu/strategic-plan. Questions and comments are welcome and can be emailed to strategicplan@mga.edu.



DuBose Porter holds a portrait of Carolyn Wynn Smalley that was displayed in her home for many years. Porter, an attorney and newspaper publisher who knew Smalley from his childhood, served as executor of her estate. RICK DEVENS

Carolyn Wynn Smalley Estate Gift To MGA

A Lasting Legacy To A Remarkable Woman

ASIDE FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS, THE BIG LOVES OF CAROLYN WYNN SMALLEY'S LONG LIFE WERE NATURE, HORSEBACK RIDING, AND GEORGIA HISTORY AND CULTURE.

A conservationist at heart, she refused to clear cut most of the timber on the 1,200-acre Wilkinson County homestead her family called "Licksillet," a rolling landscape on the Georgia Piedmont. A devoted animal lover, she regularly rescued abused horses and dogs and cared for them on the property that had been in her family for more than 200 years.

Smalley was an avid horseback rider well into her 80s. She regularly invited friends to bring their horses to enjoy the riding trails that shot through her land. (Some trail rides were organized as fundraisers to benefit the Paws and Claws animal rescue organization.) Days on the trails were often followed by lively parties in a pavilion she had built for that purpose. With her veterinarian husband, Frarie, and sometimes alone, Smalley swam in the creek that flowed through her property and canoed the Oconee River.

"She was truly a remarkable woman," said DuBose Porter, an attorney and newspaper publisher from Dublin who served as executor of her estate. "She loved sharing her place with others."

Today, the proceeds of her estate are benefiting Middle Georgia State University (MGA) in extraordinary ways that reflect her many passions.

Smalley died in 2016 at the age of 93, six years after her husband. As her estate was settled, the proceeds of her property's sale were left to a trust. Through the trust, \$1.2 million was gifted to the MGA Foundation.

Porter and Boone Smith IV of Macon, an estate planning attorney, worked with the Foundation to manage details of the gift, which is funding the creation of two special professorships, as well as scholarships and other support for the University's equestrian team.

Porter announced the gift, the largest ever to the Foundation, last fall. The MGA Foundation is a nonprofit organization that raises and manages private donations to support the University's mission and goals.

"This gift serves as a wonderful extension of Carolyn," Porter said. "I think she would be very happy."

One of the two endowed chairs/professorships MGA is funding with her gift is based in the School of Health & Natural Sciences. The faculty member who holds the Carolyn Wynn Smalley Distinguished Chair in Biology and Environmental Sciences will teach biology courses that cover

ecology, the native species of Georgia, and the importance of preserving natural lands.

The other professorship, based in the School of Arts & Letters, is the Carolyn Wynn Smalley Distinguished Chair in Georgian Studies. The faculty member holding this chair will teach courses in Southern studies, with content covering Georgia-specific topics in history, literature, culture, geography, and structural design.

An endowed chair or professorship is a prestigious position at a university and is typically funded by gifts from benefactors. The endowed funds support the professor's salary and academic research and activities.

"The gift from Mrs. Smalley will leave an indelible mark on the academic mission of Middle Georgia State University," said MGA President Christopher Blake. "These endowed chairs will provide transformative instruction and research into rich areas of study that will expand and nurture our understanding of our region and our state. Through our Center for Middle Georgia Studies, which is now under development, and by other means, we will be able to share remarkable achievements that will result from this most visionary of gifts from a most visionary woman.

"In the coming year we shall unveil more news about the Center for Middle Georgia Studies, which is also benefiting from a \$1.2 million gift from the Peyton Anderson Foundation," Blake continued. "These two foundational, major gifts are paving the way for one of MGA's most innovative initiatives."

As a reflection of Smalley's love of horseback riding, her estate gift will provide scholarships to some MGA students who are part of the University's equestrian team. Based in Cochran but open to students from all five of MGA's campuses, the equestrian team is part of the University's athletics program as a club sport. The team is a member of the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association and competes in shows in Florida, among other places. In addition to funding scholarships, the Smalley estate gift will help cover expenses associated with competing and provide a stipend to the team's head coach. (*More about the equestrian team below.*)

MGA is using some special pieces from Smalley's historic home for the history department's material culture studies class, where students consider objects and artifacts from everyday life. Among the objects from Smalley's home that are

By Alexandria Brooks

MGA Knights Equestrian Team Saddles Up for the Spotlight

Throughout history, Knights have mounted horses, dressed in chainmail, and ridden fearlessly into battle. Although the stakes have changed and chainmail is a thing of the past, the MGA Knights are most certainly still saddling up for battle—in the arena, of course.

MGA's equestrian team was established on the University's Cochran Campus in 2017 by longtime head coach, Allie Arrington. After being on an equestrian team during her collegiate years, Arrington "saw a vision" to share her passion with the community and bring the sport to the Middle Georgia area.

Continued on page 20

“She was an absolute spitfire. She loved animals and she loved that land. It was her lifeblood.” —Boone Smith IV

currently in the material culture studies collection are a settee, secretary, corner cabinet, trunk, wooden bowl, and century old almanacs.

Finally, part of her gift is helping to fund – along with the Nathaniel J. Wynn Charitable Trust – the positions of scholar in residence and faculty fellow, whose work will intersect with that of the Center for Middle Georgia Studies. On another project, a faculty fellow will complete work on the architectural history of Stephenville, an historic intersection and hamlet of Wilkinson County, where Smalley lived.

Porter knew Smalley from his childhood because his parents were good friends with her and her husband. Smalley loved to talk politics and spent many hours doing so with Porter.

“She was an old-school, Grand Old Party Republican,” Porter said. “She would make fun of me for being a Democrat, but it was always in good spirits.”

After her husband’s death, Smalley – who had no children – asked Porter to serve as executor of

her estate. Smith came on board to advise Smalley of various estate planning options.

“She was an absolute spitfire,” Smith said. “She loved animals and she loved that land. It was her lifeblood.”

Besides her main home (a clapboard-sided house that lacked central heat and air because Smalley steadfastly refused to install it), structures on the property include a barn, stables, the pavilion, and a small house where her mother once lived. There is also a log cabin dated from the early 1800s where her great grandparents had lived that Smalley moved to her property from its original location.

Porter said the generational neighbors who bought the property plan to leave most of it in its natural state. They developed the barn into a wedding venue and had plans to renovate the main house into visitor lodging.

“The property will be almost exactly as it has been for another generation or three,” Porter said. “I think we’ve arranged things in a way that fit Carolyn and her wishes almost perfectly.” ■



Allie Arrington is coach of MGA’s equestrian team, a club sport offered through the University’s athletics department. TYLER WHITE



“We are forever grateful for their dedication and athletic ability for taking both themselves and the University far during their collegiate career.” —Allie Arrington, head coach

The equestrian team is part of the University’s athletics program as a club sport and is a member of the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA). Although the team calls the Cochran Campus home, students from all MGA campuses are welcome to join the team and represent the University in the arena.

Since its establishment nearly a decade ago, MGA Equestrian has competed against several established universities, such as University of Florida, Florida State and Georgia Southern, winning numerous competitions, both as a team and individually.

Past riders Jamie Wilder, Sarah Andrews Rucker, and Gavin Wright were exemplary student athletes for MGA, contributing significantly to putting MGA Equestrian on the map during the team’s formative years. Rucker helped MGA gain attention on a national level, competing not once, but twice at the IHSA National Championship Competition in 2019 and 2022.

“We are forever grateful for their dedication and athletic ability for taking both themselves and the University far during their collegiate career,” praises Arrington.

The Knights are excited to have an influx of exemplary equestrian athletes join their team for the 2023-2024 season. New riders Erin McLeod, Allie Ramey, Mikayla Smith and Kaila Stinehelfer have recently joined and, although only freshman, have shown they are a force to be reckoned with.

McLeod has fearlessly taken the reins, proving herself by winning Most Outstanding Player for her performance at Berry College in October 2023 and qualifying for the Regional Championship in March 2024. If successful, she may qualify to represent MGA in Tryon, North Carolina at the IHSA National Championship in May.

As the team gallops ahead in 2024, MGA Equestrian’s goals have grown larger.

In 2023, the team received a sizable gift from the late Carolyn Wynn Smalley’s estate. As a reflection of Smalley’s love of horseback riding, the gift will provide scholarships to some MGA students who are part of the University’s equestrian team. In addition to funding scholarships, the Smalley estate gift will help cover expenses associated with competing and provide a stipend to the team’s head coach.

This year, the team hopes to have riders attend the post-season semi-finals competition in Findlay, Ohio, and later, the IHSA Nationals in May 2024. Arrington’s second, long-term goal is to gain traction and increase in numbers to become a more formidable team in the years to come.

“Many people are not aware that, although we spend time diligently recruiting top athletes in the sport, we have specific levels throughout the team that represent the beginner and rookie levels,” says Arrington. “These equestrian athletes may have very little competition history, but through coaching, they are representing MGA and competing with riders at their level.”

New riders Emma SanteVecchi, Elise Bounds, and Adrienne Murray have bravely held their own against MGA’s competitors at the beginner and rookie levels, with SanteVecchi receiving most valuable player for the most points earned over a series of competitions.

“Although they are rookies, these riders are imperative contributors,” says Arrington. “So, we always try to promote the sport to, not only seasoned riders, but also student athletes that are new to the sport.”

To expand their reach, the team will host an MGA Invitational in April 2024 to both invite and highlight excellent equestrian athletes from surrounding areas. Both the team and Arrington hope the showcase will bring more light to the MGA Equestrian athletics program both University and statewide. ■

Profiles in Greatness

MEET SOME OF THE NEWEST KNIGHTS CHAMPIONING STUDENT SUCCESS!

Over the past year, MGA welcomed several smiling faces to the University in senior leadership positions to invigorate the campus community and champion student success: **Angela “Angie” O’Neal**, registrar; **Randy Thompson**, director of Campus & Community Engagement; **Michael Brown**, director of athletics; **Carl Woods**, director of Recreation and Wellness; **Nancy Elizabeth White**, vice president for University Advancement; **Gibson “Kelly” Pope**, director of Development and Planned Giving; and **Leslie Davis**, director of Internal Audits.



Angela O’Neal



Randy Thompson



Michael Brown



Carl Woods

Leading innovation and economic opportunity are new MGA partnerships and investment in the University by corporations and other outside entities:

Amazon selected MGA to join its Career Choice program, which eases access to college degrees for hourly employees of the multinational technology company. Career Choice is an education benefit that empowers full-time and part-time Amazon employees to learn new skills for career success. The company provides pre-paid college tuition for credit-bearing courses, which covers the cost of tuition and fees and reimburses Amazon employees for the cost of textbooks.



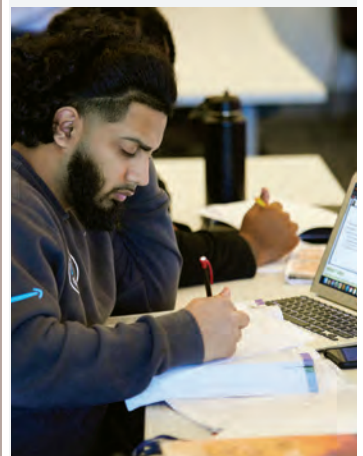
Nancy White



Gibson Pope



Leslie Davis



Amazon's Career Choice Program

A LOOK AT SOME OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PEOPLE, & EVENTS FROM THE PAST YEAR THAT MAKE MGA GREAT!



MGA and the City of Eastman took to the skies with an Aviation Day Festival & Fly-In! The event was a soaring success, as pilots and aviators alike witnessed a stunning display of aircraft, thrilling aerial demonstrations, and engaging workshops.

Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation awarded \$50,000 to the Middle Georgia State University Foundation, to support technologically advanced training in composites and composite repair at the School of Aviation, which they will use to purchase Heatcon composite repair tool kits. Students in MGA's aircraft maintenance and structural technology programs will use the kits to learn state-of-the-art composite repair on aircraft.



Gulfstream Awards \$50,000 to MGA Foundation

The Delta Air Lines Foundation awarded a \$3 million grant to the MGA Foundation, the largest single contribution in the University's history, to help expand and enhance the School of Aviation. The award will be distributed over a three-year period with the largest portion of the grant, \$1.5 million, dedicated to long-term initiatives in aviation education, including the establishment of satellite flight-training locations and the expansion of partnerships with K-12 schools across the state, such as that with the Griffin Region College and Career Academy (GRCCA). MGA

recently partnered with GRCCA to offer Aviation Maintenance Technician dual-enrollment classes to high school students. The Federal Aviation Administration approved the program, which launched on August 1 with its first cohort of high school students.



Aviation Maintenance Classes

MGA and United announced a new partnership to provide a career pathway for the University's pipeline of highly qualified pilots. As a United Aviate university partner, MGA's School of Aviation will give flight students and instructors an opportunity to apply to the Aviate program and follow a defined pathway to a career at United. Aviate is United's industry-leading pilot career development program, offering aspiring and established pilots the most secure path to the United flight deck.



United's Aviate Pilot Career Program



Delta Awards \$3 Million Grant to MGA Foundation

CONTINUES ON PAGE 24

Representatives of MGA's School of Aviation attended the Georgia Aerospace Day and C-130 "Year of the Super Hercules" resolution presentation at Georgia's State Capitol on January 16.



Announcement of the Houston Healthcare Nursing Suite

In recognition of Houston Healthcare's continued support of MGA's nursing programs, the University announced the naming of the nursing suite on the Warner Robins Campus as the "Houston Healthcare Nursing Suite." For 19 years, Houston Healthcare's generosity has contributed \$1.2 million to MGA through nursing faculty line support alongside program and scholarship funding that helps ensure nursing students remain enrolled and graduate without the worry of financial burden. They have also provided vital medical equipment, which has been instrumental in preparing the next generation of healthcare professionals.

MGA partnered with the DeKalb County School Board to provide future educators with the IGNITE Teacher Residency Program. As part of the Board's ongoing initiative

to fill vacancies in Georgia's third-largest school system, the one-year program will provide educators with the necessary coursework and mentorship needed to obtain teacher

certification and a master's degree upon completion of the program with no cost to the participants. The introductory cohort began its training in January 2024.



Future Educators with the IGNITE Teacher Residency Program

The MGA community engaged in several activities that helped build culture and identity.

Developed around the theme “Reclaiming the Native South,” the **2023 Arts Festival** explored the richness and deep roots of Native American arts and culture in the South, particularly in the Middle Georgia region, home to Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park.



2023 Arts Festival

The free three-week festival featured readings and book talks, film screenings, discussion panels, musical performances and storytelling presentations, and artist displays. Events were hosted and sponsored by MGA’s School of Arts & Letters, with generous support from Georgia Humanities Council and the Georgia Council for the Arts. Additional support was provided by the MGA Foundation, the Office of Student Affairs, and the Honors Program.



Dr. Andre Nicholson and Dr. LaRonda Sanders-Senu

MGA faculty members were booked and busy—literally. **Dr. Andre Nicholson**, associate professor of media and communications and graduate program coordinator, and **Dr. LaRonda Sanders-Senu**, associate professor of English, are among the co-editors

of a new book, *Insecure*, Awkward, and #Winning: Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Works of Issa Rae. The anthology of works is based on Issa Rae, an American actress, writer, producer, and comedian and one of the few Black female media owners and influencers.



Andy Davidson

Andy Davidson popular Southern gothic horror author and assistant professor of English at MGA, landed a new three-book contract for his novels with Putnam, as announced by Publishers Weekly. The first novel of the trio will be published in summer 2025.



MGA’s Pickleball Courts on the Cochran Campus

Pickleball fever has hit MGA! The University opened its first pickleball court on the Cochran Campus in fall 2023. The Bleckley Pickleball Association teamed up with MGA to bring the Cochran and campus communities together for a night of fun at the soft opening of the newly renovated pickleball and tennis courts.

AT THE 2023 MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT'S GALA, the MGA Foundation awarded the **Kruger family**, well known in the region for business and philanthropic accomplishments, the Legacy of Leadership award, while **Dr. Keith Moffett**, the current Macon-Bibb County manager who has built a career in public service, received the Outstanding Alumnus award.

The Kruger family owns and operates L.E. Schwartz & Son, Inc., a diversified company engaged in commercial roofing,



The Kruger family with Macon-Bibb Mayor Lester Miller, 2nd from left

MGA Foundation Awards

2023 Legacy of Leadership, Outstanding Alumnus



L-R, Christopher Blake, Ph.D., Dr. Melinda Robinson-Moffett, and Dr. Keith Moffett

residential roofing, industrial roofing, roof maintenance, historical roof restoration, and precision manufacturing. Melvin, Steve, and Michael Kruger are active in civic and charitable organizations in the region and have served in many leadership roles. L.E. Schwartz & Son is a long-time, loyal supporter of the MGA Foundation and its predecessors.

A U.S. Navy veteran, Moffett graduated from what is now MGA with a bachelor's degree in business and information technology and earned his Ph.D. in educational leadership from Mercer University. He has long been active in MGA's Alumni Association and served on the president's advisory board. He established a scholarship that is awarded each year to a veteran pursuing a business degree at MGA. He has been named to Macon Magazine's "5 Under 40" leadership list, as well as Georgia Trend's "40 Under 40."



Full Name:

Christopher Chippewa Tsavatewa

Age: 43**Hometown & Residence:** Macon**Employment:** Middle Georgia State University (MGA)

Degrees: Bachelor of Science in Public Service, Master of Science in Information Technology, and a Doctorate of Science in Information Technology, all from MGA. He also holds a Master of Science in Public Health from Mercer University.

MGA Alumni Profile:

DR. CHRIS TSAVATEWA

**Describe your current position.**

As the assistant provost of Institutional Effectiveness, I support the strategic development and implementation of academic programs and initiatives at Middle Georgia State University. I provide leadership in research oversight and effectiveness evaluation.

What inspired you to pursue your field of study or career path?

My journey through four degrees has been deeply influ-

enced by unique life experiences, a driving personal philosophy of self-determination, an awareness of potential organizational/community impact, and my passion for life-long learning and servant leadership. From an early age, my passion for service and support was ignited by the example of my mother, a first-generation college student and social worker. My bachelor's degree in public service helped me gain foundational skills and knowledge necessary to make a meaningful impact in the world.

As my career progressed, I recognized the variability of impact that can occur between individual advocacy work and that of broader public policy – leading me to pursue a master's in public health. I later embarked on a new chapter by delving into the realm of information technology, earning both a master's and doctorate in the field from MGA.

How did the MGA experience shape your personal and professional development?

The Middle Georgia State University experience has been transformative, shaping both my personal and professional development in profound ways. At MGA, I found a supportive and inclusive community that fostered growth, encouraged exploration, and nurtured my passions.

Why is it important to you to give back to MGA?

Giving back to MGA holds significant importance to me for several reasons. First and foremost, MGA played a pivotal role in shaping my personal and professional development. By giving back, I aim to express my

gratitude and appreciation for the impact that MGA's faculty and staff had on my life. Furthermore, I believe in the power of education to transform lives and communities.

What advice do you have for current students aspiring to follow a similar path?

For current students aspiring to follow a similar path, my advice would be to cultivate a passion for lifelong learning, embrace interdisciplinary perspectives, and prioritize building strong relationships with mentors and peers. Commit yourself to continuous learning and personal growth. Stay curious, explore diverse subjects, and seize every opportunity to expand your knowledge and skillset. The ability to adapt and evolve in an ever-changing academic and professional landscape is crucial for success. Secondly, embrace interdisciplinary perspectives and seek out opportunities to integrate knowledge and skills from different fields. Lastly, don't underestimate the power of relationships. Cultivate meaningful connections with faculty mentors, industry professionals, and fellow students who can offer guidance, support, and valuable insights.

In five years...

In five years, I envision myself continuing to make meaningful contributions in academia, leveraging my expertise in academic planning, research, and effectiveness to drive positive change and innovation. Additionally, I am committed to collaborating with local healthcare stakeholders to improve health outcomes in Middle Georgia. ■

Donor Profile:

CHARLES PARKER

Charles Parker graduated from Morgan County High School in 1968. He visited Middle Georgia College (now Middle Georgia State University) in the spring of 1968 and fell in love with the beauty of the campus. He said the “dorm space at that time was limited so he ended up living off campus.” He started off as an engineering major but after taking calculus he changed his mind. During his sophomore year at Middle Georgia, he met a freshman named Patricia Rocker from Metter. Charles and Patricia married and have been together over 52 years.

After graduating from Middle Georgia with his ABA,

he transferred to UGA to finish with his BBA. While there he began working with the Georgia State Patrol and worked his way through the ranks of GSP. He would be stationed at various locations in Georgia and eventually retired after 34 years with the Georgia State Patrol.

Parker met Earl Cheek of Perry who asked him to serve on the Middle Georgia College Foundation Board. Parker was serving as chair when the Board of Regents merged several colleges in Georgia. He served on the merger committee for Middle Georgia and Macon State. He also served on the committee that would bring Christopher Blake, Ph.D., to Middle Georgia State

University as president.

When asked about why he gives back, Parker said that he was the recipient of a college scholarship from Madison for two years. He said had it not been for the scholarship that he might not have been able to attend school. Parker said, “I want to continue to support someone else’s desire to chase and fulfill their dreams.”

He said Middle Georgia State University has grown and continues to grow. He has seen it grow from a school of 1,200 in 1968 with Dr. Louis Alderman to a larger school with vision under Dr. Richard Federinko to a University with great diversity and an even greater vision today.

Parker is a great ambassador for Middle Georgia State University and gives back in so many ways. He said, “I just tell folks my story, which is the story of Middle Georgia.”

“I want to continue to support someone else’s desire to chase and fulfill their dreams.”

—Charles Parker



Patricia and Charles Parker

Donor Profile:

JUDGE CRYSTAL JONES

Judge Crystal Jones is a native of Macon-Bibb County and attended Middle Georgia State University, then known as Macon State College, where she was a member of the first group of students to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Public Service, graduating cum laude. She would continue her hard work through law school and receive her Juris Doctor from Mercer University School of Law. Her persistence and hard work ethic would pay off when she became the first African American female chief Municipal Court judge of Macon-Bibb County and took to the bench on November 1, 2019.

Why does the MGA mission work and matter to you?

The MGA mission is near and dear to my heart. MGA provided me with an excellent education and student experiences that not only benefited me academically but also socially.

Why do you give to Middle Georgia State University?

It is a means of giving back to the university that gave to me. I attended university as a single mom. This was possible due to a substantial scholar-

ship and working on campus. I even became great friends with the wife of the person in whose memory the scholarship was established. I hope that by giving back, it will help students and allow students to realize you can accomplish your goals regardless of what hurdles or difficulties you perceive you have in life.

Middle Georgia State University cares about its students and wants students to succeed. You are more than just a number here. As a result, I try to support the University financially and with my time whenever possible. I previously served on the MGA Alumni Board and MGA Trustees Board.

What do you tell others about MGA?

MGA is a significant and important destination on your individual road to success, whatever you deem that to be. It offers excellent academic programs at a reasonable cost. The professors, staff, and administration genuinely care and go the extra mile to assist students in not only achieving their goals, but also by helping them recognize opportunities they may have never considered.

“The MGA mission is near and dear to my heart. MGA provided me with an excellent education.”

—Judge Crystal Jones



Judge Crystal Jones

Meet Some of MGA Foundation's Recent Scholarship Recipients



Hannah Brown

Aviation Science & Management (B.S.)

**Flint Energies Foundation
Jack Hunnicutt Memorial
Scholarship**

Brown, Middle Georgia State University senior and commercial pilot, is pursuing a bachelor's degree in aviation science and management. Her scholarship allows her to focus on academics and reach her goal of becoming a flight instructor before beginning her career as an airline pilot. Hannah shares her passion for flying by volunteering at local aviation events in Warner Robins, Perry, and Houston County.

"Thank you! Your generosity helps me continue to pursue my educational goals."



Troy Carroll

Nursing (B.S.)

**McAulay-Kalish
Endowed Scholarship**

Carroll, a retired US Navy Veteran, decided to start a second medical career as a nurse and is currently working in the ICU at Piedmont Hospital. Troy was inducted into the Sigma Theta Tau Nursing Honors Society this year. He continues serving his community through his work with his local Marine Corps League, Toys for Tots, Young Marines, homeless shelters, and assisted living facilities.

"I am very grateful for your generosity and support in my nursing endeavors. I will continue to produce top quality grades and provide top quality care in the future as a nurse."



Devony Whitehead

*Business Administration (B.S.)
Minor: Information Technology*

**John & Mary Franklin
Foundation Scholarship**

Whitehead, Middle Georgia State University junior, returned to college in 2021. She is majoring in business administration. Devony shares her message of "anything is possible" with middle school and high school students while being a role model for "Girls to Pearls" and "Baby Pearls" in Macon.

"By awarding me this scholarship, you have lifted my financial burden. This allows me to focus on learning and completing my degree. Thank you!"

To support more #MGA students like these, go to giving.mga.edu and make a gift to scholarships today!

**Oct. 25
2024**

President's Gala • Join us for a spectacular event with proceeds benefiting MGA students.





YOUR IMPACT

BECAUSE OF YOUR GENEROSITY,
WE HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE POWERFUL IMPACT
OF PHILANTHROPY ON OUR STUDENTS.

\$3.6 MILLION
scholarships
awarded in the last 10
years

371 students
received life-changing
scholarships totaling more
than
\$460,000






80% alumni
Live and work within 100 miles of
Middle Georgia, which has a huge
impact on the region's economy

Alumni activities and programs not
only raise the profile of the
University, but also **increase
contributions that directly benefit
students.**

supporting **HUNDREDS**

Foundation funding supports
faculty, staff, programs, events,
schools, community initiatives,
alumni programs, career fairs,
study abroad, summer camps,
executive lecture, experiential
learning, commencement, and
the list goes on and on.

\$9.8 MILLION
invested in the last 10 years in the
University and student scholarships

COUNTLESS
students and families benefit
from your gifts each year

Gift Impact

Alumni contributions not only fund scholarships and financial aid programs, making education more accessible to deserving students who may face financial barriers, their gifts enhance academic programs, allowing MGA to attract top-notch faculty, develop innovative curriculum and stay current with industry trends. Alumni contributions play a vital role in charting a path to excellence by providing an enriching educational experience for current students, ensuring that MGA continues to thrive and evolve.



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1884 Giving Society

Middle Georgia State University has a history that is unlike most other institutions of higher education in the United States. Not only is it one of Georgia's newest institutions, but it is also one of Georgia's oldest institutions, established in 1884.

Join our 1884 Giving Society to honor our rich heritage. With \$18.84 a month, \$226 a year, your gift will directly impact our areas of greatest needs for MGA. Join other alumni as we work together for Middle Georgia State University students to challenge every student to become lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region and the state.

There are over 13,000 alumni who graduated between 2013-2023. If each graduate joined the 1884 Giving Society, it would generate \$3M in support of our students. Just imagine the impact we could have. For more information, visit giving.mga.edu/1884/.



Middle Georgia State University

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