

KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY CONTACT

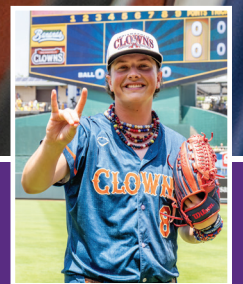
Spring/Summer 2026

**Scholarship Gala Has Record Year
Raises More Than \$4.16 Million**



Campus Ministry
receives grant to grow
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Maddock '25 plays for
the Banana Ball League
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2026

Kansas Wesleyan University
Spring/Summer 2026

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Managing Editor:
Brad Salois

Lead Writer:
Jean Kozubowski

Design:
Theresa Stevens

Writing Assistance:
Eric Brown
Bob Davidson
Skylar Nelson '21

Photo Credits:
Karen Bonar
Tanner Colvin '11
Jean Kozubowski
Skylar Nelson '21
Notre Dame Athletics
Brad Salois

Send address changes to:
Advancement Office
100 E. Claflin Ave.
Salina, KS 67401
alumni@kwu.edu
785-833-4392

A message from

President Matt Thompson

The Purpose of Higher Education

In every generation, higher education is asked a familiar question: *What is college for?* Today, that question often comes wrapped in urgency, which is driven by rapid technological change, economic uncertainty, and, increasingly, the rise of artificial intelligence. The pressure is real to make education narrowly practical, to focus only on what can be measured, automated, or immediately monetized.

At Kansas Wesleyan, we certainly care deeply about meaningful careers. Our graduates become teachers, nurses, business leaders, scientists, ministers, artists, and entrepreneurs. They put their education to work in tangible and transformational ways.

But we also believe something deeper is at stake.

The liberal arts are not a luxury or a nostalgic holdover; they are an essential preparation for this moment and the future ahead. As AI grows more powerful in its ability to generate content, analyze patterns, and perform tasks once thought uniquely human, the most important questions are no longer *can* we do something, but *should* we. Those are not technical questions. They are human ones.

The liberal arts help students develop the capacity to think critically, write clearly, listen carefully, and discern wisely. They teach students how to evaluate sources, wrestle with complexity, understand history, and grapple with questions of meaning, ethics, and purpose. These are precisely the skills and sensibilities that technology cannot replace and that society desperately needs as AI reshapes our world. These are the durable skills.

A liberal arts education does not resist innovation; it strengthens it. Employers consistently tell us they want graduates who can collaborate across differences, adapt to change, communicate effectively, and solve unfamiliar problems. The most reliable preparation is not training for a single tool, but education that forms flexible thinkers and lifelong learners.

At Kansas Wesleyan, the liberal arts are not abstract. They are experienced in small classes where students are known by name, in conversations that cross disciplines, and in experiences that connect learning to service, leadership, and faith. Whether a student majors in Biology, Business, Education, Social Work, Psychology, or the arts, they are shaped by encounters with history, literature, philosophy, science, and the creative disciplines, which are ways of knowing that deepen understanding of both the world as it is and the world as it ought to be.

Rooted in our United Methodist tradition, we believe education is about forming the whole person: mind, heart, body, and spirit. The liberal arts invite students to hold knowledge and humility, confidence and compassion, and innovation and responsibility.

As we look ahead, KWU will continue to evolve by developing new programs, credentials, and partnerships that respond to real needs. We will engage technology thoughtfully and boldly. But we will do so anchored in the enduring wisdom of the liberal arts, which reminds us that tools are only as good as the values that guide them.

The world does not need less thinking, less reading, or less understanding. It needs more. That is why the liberal arts matter and why they remain central to who we are at Kansas Wesleyan University.

Matt

Matt Thompson, Ph.D.,
President and CEO



P.S. A lifelong commitment to the liberal arts is sustained by continuous reading. Below are five books I've found especially meaningful in the last six months. Let me know what you're reading or your thoughts on these books.

- *History Matters* by David McCullough
- *From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life* by Arthur C. Brooks
- *James* by Percival Everett
- *Presencing: 7 Practices for Transforming Self, Society, and Business* by Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kanfer
- *Love, Nature, Magic: Shamanic Journeys into the Heart of My Garden* by Maria Rodale



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KWU Receives Grant to Grow Campus Ministry Internship Program



KWU leadership and local UMC clergy stopped for a photo shortly after the grant announcement. Back row: Bridget Weiser, vice president; Scott Jagodzinske, campus minister; Dr. Matt Thompson, KWU president; front row: pastors Gideon Achi; J.J. Martinez; Eric Meyer; and Cathy Fitzgerald.

Kansas Wesleyan announced early this summer that it received a two-year grant from the Council of Independent Colleges Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE). The grant will be used to grow KWU's Campus Ministry internship program beginning this fall.

"Service is an important part of everything we do at Kansas Wesleyan," said Campus Minister Scott Jagodzinske, who will lead the program. "How do we show the importance of serving others and how do we use the skills we've been given to lift others up, to better one another and to better our communities? Finding the answers to those questions is why we created this program, and we're truly excited to see it expand during these next two years."

The Campus Ministry internship program places students in a variety of disciplines – from media production to graphic design to leading Bible studies, and more – across the five Methodist churches in the Salina area: United Methodist Church of the Cross, Trinity

United Methodist, University United Methodist, First United Methodist and Grand Avenue United Methodist. Students receive a scholarship for their efforts and are trained in congregational leadership, community engagement and other important skills.

"Campus Ministry is such an important part of what we do at Kansas Wesleyan," said Bridget Weiser, vice president for student and community engagement. "It brings together service learning, spiritual development and community relationships in a way that few other things can, and it does so through inclusion and a true commitment to KWU's United Methodist heritage. The growth of this program creates a great opportunity for students to experience a new side of KWU, and we hope many of them take advantage of it."

The grant will enable the program to grow to as many as 17 students during the next two years. Other students may be connected to the churches involved through opportunities outside of the internship program.

Murape '26 Finds Silver Lining Through Campus Ministry

Injuries are never fun, but Shanya Murape '26 found the silver linings in her knee injuries from flag football.

"My sophomore year, after being injured, I needed something else to do," she said.

She took a media production class, then another. Because she loves capturing sports, she added a Communication minor to her Exercise Science major.

She used those same skills in media internships with Campus Ministry.

Murape was involved with Campus Ministry since the first day she came to KWU. She started as a ministry intern.

"What Pastor Scott (Jagodzinske) had me doing most of the time was come out to help with praying with different people," she said.

She often talks about her involvement with Kansas Wesleyan and how it connected with her faith.

"I feel like the school intersected with my faith in a good way — but

in a revealing way," Murape said. "It made me question, how Christian am I, how much do I believe without my parents saying, 'Oh, you have to go to church, you have to come with us and do this?'"

Working with Campus Ministry piqued her interest and grew her faith, she said.

"It's like slow baby steps, seeing the whole picture. Through these four years, I can honestly say it has changed from my parents being the one with the voice to I now know I am the one with the voice, when it comes to faith," she said.

As a media intern, Murape took photos at Campus Ministry events

and posted them on social media. If Jagodzinske needed a PowerPoint, he gave Murape a theme and had her put it together.

As a ministry intern, she regularly visited with athletes about their faith.

"A small thing we did at practice is just having a simple grace, praying at the start of practice or the start of games, just a small little thing for bringing us to this day," she said.

As a sophomore and junior, she used podcasting as a way to connect with athletes about their faith.

"I just love talking about my faith," Murape said.

She grew up playing sports in Toronto, Canada, but flag football is her priority.

She's been a star player here as quarterback, linebacker and sometimes screener, "a little bit of



Shanya Murape '26 poses before May's Baccalaureate service.

everything," she said. Early in 2025-26, she tore her ACL for the second time.

"Having this setback is fine," she said during the year. "I always think of it as God's plan. He always has something in mind for me. This is my time to take a break."

At press time, Murape planned to stay in Salina and, possibly, join KWU's MBA program. She'd like to get into assistant coaching — flag football, of course.

Story by Jean Kozubowski



Scan the QR code to give in support of KWU's Campus Ministry program!

KWU Celebrates
Best Fundraising Night Ever at
Scholarship Gala



KWU Fundraising Hits Next Level

Kansas Wesleyan marked the start of its latest fundraising efforts in style April 11 at its third Scholarship Gala. It was the largest fundraising event in school history, raising more than \$4.16 million in support of student scholarships and surpassing the 2024 Gala by nearly \$1.5 million.

The event took place in Mabee Arena, was catered by Martinelli's Little Italy and was highlighted by several gifts, including those from Bob Meyer '73, the late David Martin '65, David Branda '76, the late Patricia Marietta '71, Randy '66 and Mary Ann St. Clair and Steve '65 and Jewelda Scofield.

"This year's Scholarship Gala was a testament to our great supporters and the work of our Advancement staff, led by outgoing Executive Vice President Ken Oliver," said Dr. Matt Thompson, KWU president. "We are truly grateful that so many people, businesses and organizations came together to better the lives of our students."

Numerous corporate partners combined to make notable donations to the cause, led by Blue Beacon and title sponsor Mahaska. Marshall Motors, CAD Law, Nex-Tech, Ryan

Roofing, Great Plains Manufacturing, Salina Regional Health Foundation and Salina Regional Health Center were all recognized, as were five of the KWU money managers: Advantage Trust Company, Bennington State Bank, BE Wealth, Sunflower Bank and UMB.

KWU also recognized support from Kent '72 and Pat Lambert, as well as Bruce and Margaret Wyatt, in honor of their son Alex Wyatt '12. There were five new endowed scholarship gifts, coming from Linda Michaelson (in honor of her late husband, Roger '67), Phyllis Sinclair '65, Marlene Lee '61, Craig '02 and Lesley Kuder (in honor of Dr. James and Ann Neumann), and the Stanton family (in memory of Rev. Nathan Stanton '91).

Of additional note were another 26 gifts ranging from \$10,000-\$25,000. These were led by Ken and Karen Ebert (Alumni by Choice '17), the Elden V. Miller Family Trust and the Hon. Ben Burgess '66.

Gus Applequist '14 and his wife, Hannah '16, were recognized during the event for their support of numerous university projects and initiatives during

the past 24 months. Gus Applequist is the current chair of the KWU Foundation Board, which also includes voting members Jandrea Blumanhourst '89 (vice chair), Tim Ault-Duell '76, Mike Baumberger '96, Branda, Michael Hastings '82, Jenell Hulse, Steve Scofield and Stan Smith '74.

"I, and the rest of the KWU community, appreciate the leadership of Gus Applequist and the KWU Foundation," said Thompson.

"Their efforts have not only improved the stewardship of our endowment, but they've inspired numerous individuals and businesses to support our mission and better the future of our students. Their commitment and dedication has strengthened KWU in ways that will be felt for years to come."

The announcements were the first since the launch of the fourth phase of The Power of AND Campaign. To learn how to be a part of the campaign, visit www.kwu.edu/give.



*Enjoy the videos from the Scholarship Gala!
A heartfelt thank you to all of our supporters for
making this incredible event possible.*

Jackson '26 Sets a Path Forward

Kevia Jackson '26 is many things: a singer, a student, a wife, a mother of four and now, a graduate of Kansas Wesleyan University. Like a lot of nontraditional students, her educational journey didn't always look like that of the rest of her student cohort. Despite the challenges she faced along the way, Jackson received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice and Sociology this May.

Originally from Tennessee, Jackson moved to Salina when she was in middle school. Her first encounter with KWU was in high school, when she took part in the university's annual Christmas by Candlelight concert alongside her fellow Salina Central High choir members.

When she graduated high school in 2014, life took her in a few different directions and to a few different states: Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, to name a few, and it was choir that brought her back.

"I became familiar with KWU by being in the choir at Central and through the different events we would do here," she said. "And then I got offered a scholarship and sang here."

Her main goal on campus, though, was to get her degree and continue to law school. She doesn't know yet what type of law she'd like to specialize in, but she knows her reasons for continuing her education.

"It's about who I can help and advocacy, community and transparency," she said. "People often don't understand legal jargon. People will roll over and take something that they don't have to take because they don't understand they can stand up and do something about it, helping them learn is important to me."

Kansas Court of Appeals Judge Angela Coble '94 was a mentor for her during

her time as a student, facilitating and fostering relationships in the community.

"This semester, I had 30 hours with the sheriff's office. I had some hours with Clark, Mize and Linville. They're a private law firm with a variety of specialties," Jackson said. "And I did the bulk of my time at the district courthouse with Judge (Jacob) Peterson."

In the last portion of her semester, she also spent time with the county attorney and Community Corrections.

If she scores well on her Law School Admission Test (LSAT), she'll need to figure out where to study next: close to home in Topeka, Nebraska or in her husband's home state of Michigan.

Finding balance wasn't always easy for Jackson as she navigated her schooling. On top of being a student, mother and wife, she was also grieving the loss of her own mother, who passed away the same day her fourth child was born in 2024.

"It was challenging having a baby and then my mother passing," she said.

Still, as she navigates her busy life and chases her goals, her mother's wisdom stays with her.

"If you mess up, don't think that you're dumb, because those moments are there to build you. That's what my mom would say to me: 'You're fully capable, and this time you just learned a lesson, so just keep going with that lesson in mind.'"

In April, Jackson spoke about her student experience at KWU at the Scholarship Gala, giving insight into her experience as a nontraditional student and the power of scholarships.

"It's very challenging being a nontraditional student. You have to really want it. You have to really have that determination," she said. "It's so rewarding, though, because my children are watching me. I see them aspiring, so it feels really good."

Story by Skylar Nelson '21



Jackson speaks at the 2026 Scholarship Gala.



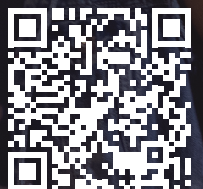
Kevia Jackson pictured with her family at this year's Scholarship Gala.



MORGAN PARKER '20

Scan the QR code to hear from Morgan Parker '20, an alum whose lifetime love of music and percussion took her from small stages in Salina all the way to New York City!

She received her Master of Music in Percussion Performance from New York University in 2022 and has been involved with multiple off-Broadway and Broadway productions since graduating from Kansas Wesleyan.



Branda '76 Gives Back to KWU

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Life provides us with very few constants. The people, places and ideas we encounter all change and evolve. Yet, for David Branda '76, the Kansas Wesleyan community has remained a steadfast companion through much of his life. That staying power began with his time as a student, which led to the dedication he has shown to the university and its mission through continued giving and service.

Growing up in Goodland, Kan., Branda was introduced to KWU at a young age. The university maintained a presence in his church, making his attendance at the university something of an inevitability.

He majored in Elementary Education and took on minors in German and Music. His varied interests meant that there were few parts of campus he left unexplored.

He was employed in Memorial Library for seven semesters and, for three years, maintained the tower clock in King Gymnasium.

"I might be the last person who ever wound the clock," Branda said. "One summer after the tornado that caused the building to be condemned, the maintenance department allowed me to enter the building and wind the clock."

The building was destroyed by a fire a few years later.

"There were quite a few notable faculty," he said. "I took Greek and Roman Philosophy with Thomas Durkin. Harry Huber taught me piano and organ. I'd always wanted to take lessons and never did until college."

He crossed paths with many other professors now considered to be KWU legends, from Dr. Albert Nelson '50, who headed the Teacher Education Department for over 30 years, to Consuelo Diaz, a much-loved Spanish professor, to Paul Stucky, a longtime professor of Physics, to name a few.

"My sophomore interterm, Mr. Stucky took us to Mexico for a geology and archaeology class," he said. "Wesleyan had an old school bus called Daffy, and we lived on that bus for a month."

His interterm experiences opened his eyes to new ways to learn, and its incorporation of other schools in Central Kansas created what he called a "melting pot" of people all learning together.

Everyday classroom experiences shaped him, as well.

"The professors I carried with me, and I incorporated some of their personalities into my teaching and the way I lived my life," he said. "Mr. Stucky was such a neat teacher. He would come in, and he would take off his coat jacket, and there'd be strapped to his back a quiz. He was famous for quizzes."

He would take the fun and engagement they brought to their classrooms with him to his tenure as a third grade teacher in Goodland.

"I had no intention of going back to Goodland," he said. "When I graduated, there were far more teachers than jobs. My former fourth grade teacher arranged an interview over spring break, and I took the job."

Roughly a year after graduation, he began donating money to the university annually, and he quickly found other ways to give back, too.

On top of forming the High Plains Alumni Chapter in Goodland and serving on the alumni council, which included a stint as president, Branda spent 10 years on the Board of Trustees and currently holds a seat on the Foundation Board, which is responsible for the financial stewardship of the university.

Just as his role at the university has changed over time, so has his calling in his personal life. After 16 years of teaching, Branda shifted gears and became the owner and operator of the Sherman Theatre, an independent movie theatre, in Goodland.

"I got a job there that I thought was just going to be a summer job after my first year of teaching," he said. "And the only reason I applied there was because the theatre was air-conditioned and my apartment was not."

He grew to be an integral part of the business and ultimately purchased it in November 1990, when a movie theatre chain decided to sell it.

For nearly 36 years, Branda has kept the Sherman Theatre alive in the Goodland community, even through challenges like COVID-19. With nonessential businesses forced to close and few new movies hitting theatres, he had to get creative and, fortunately, the community rallied around him.

"Once a week, we'd have popcorn night, where you drove up and ordered popcorn. One night, I popped over 70 pounds of popcorn," he said. "The Sherman probably wouldn't have survived without the community's help."

Whether he was navigating an unforeseen pandemic, finding new roles to play at his alma mater, pivoting in his career path or taking classes that were a little outside of the box, Branda has always found a way to adapt to change and growth.

Now, at 71 years old, he's embracing a new stage of life and has decided to pledge his entire estate to the university.

"I'm in the fall, if not winter, of my life. What I can give back – I hope that a student, many students, can have the experiences and feelings that I have toward this institution and carry those feelings on into their lives," he said. "This institution impacted my life in a very beneficial way, and I want others to have that experience."

Story by Skylar Nelson '21



Originally published in April's Scholarship Gala program.

Photos, top to bottom: A portrait of Branda included in the 1973 Coyote Yearbook. Branda pictured in the 1976 edition of the Coyote Yearbook. Branda stands in front of the Sherman Theatre, which he owns, in Goodland. Branda and classmates in front of Daffy, KWU's old travel bus.

Congratulations, Class of 2026!





KWU's class of
2026 graduated
on Saturday,
May 16, at
Tony's Pizza
Events Center.



Demetrius '26 Reflects on Journey to Graduation

An interest in medicine has long been at the core of Rebekah Demetrius '26's academic goals.

That path began for her earlier than most. From an early age, she knew she wanted to deliver babies, but it was in middle school when she made her first foray into pre-med studies. That was when she went to a magnet school in Fort Lauderdale that offered a more focused curriculum for students interested in medicine and the law.

By the time she was in high school, she'd already taken many of the requisite science and health classes for her grade level and was placed into healthcare classes by her sophomore year. This way, she became a certified medical assistant.

In May, she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.

While her ultimate goal is to become a doctor, working as a nurse is her first stop along the way.

"I want to spend as much time as I can with my patients," she said. "I will get the experience of bedside care in, and then I'll go back to school and get my medical doctorate."

Demetrius plans to apply to be a labor and delivery nurse at The University of Oklahoma and transition directly into OU's medical school in a few years.

As she's completed her clinicals, her passion for working with mothers and their babies has remained the same.

"I want to create a better experience for mothers going through labor," she said, referencing challenges some women face from their healthcare teams during their labor and delivery experiences.

When Demetrius came to KWU, the Miami, Fla., native had never so much as set foot in Salina.

"I just had a feeling I'd really enjoy it here and that this was the path I'm supposed to be on," she said.

"I loved my rotation last semester in labor and delivery and NICU," she said. "I don't think I've ever been so happy in clinicals before. Even my preceptor said, 'I don't think I've ever seen you smile so much.'"

Despite a challenging class schedule and clinicals, Demetrius found a variety of ways to get

involved on and off campus during her time at KWU.

She was a campus ambassador, a resident assistant and a media work study student for football. She also worked at Chick-fil-A and Chipotle.

"I had to get really good at time management," she said. "But they are very understanding here in the community when it comes to working with students."

In addition to support from the community and faculty, she had a host family for her entire duration on campus, who helped her navigate being far from home. They've spent some holidays together, had family dinners, and they've turned out to campus events to support her. They met her family for the first time at Commencement.

"I didn't think with the complete contrast in cultures between Miami and Salina, I'd find many people who were like me or had the experiences I've had," she said. "But I've made a lot of friends here, and the support system here is really good. They won't let you give up."

Story by Skylar Nelson '21



Demetrius '26

MOORE '26 KEPT BUSY WITH DOUBLE MAJOR AND MUSIC

Luke Moore '26 came to Kansas Wesleyan on a music scholarship. He graduated this May with a double major in Chemistry and Physics.

He's as active on the music side as he was with his science activities — he's played the cello for 10 years, including four years at Kansas Wesleyan.

It's common, he said, for scientists and musicians to share those interests.

"I've spoken to plenty of musicians who would have done science if they weren't musicians, and I've talked to plenty of scientists who would have done music if they weren't scientists," Moore said.

He played the cello in the string orchestra, and as a junior and senior, sang in the Philharmonic Choir as a bass. He hadn't sung in a choir since middle school in Garden City, but he found he really enjoyed that aspect of his college career.

Also as a junior, Moore helped re-activate the STEM Club as vice president. For two years, he helped build the club's battlebot. Last year the bot came home from battles in Kansas City

in pieces, lots of pieces. This year it came home with the first-place trophy.

He helped make frozen nitrogen ice cream at Homecoming and other events and helped organize the STEM Club's

first gingerbread house competition for the holidays.

Willing to get his hands — and face — dirty for science, he encouraged fellow musicians and scientists to smash him in the face with whipped cream pies

on Pi Day (March 14) as a fundraiser for the STEM Club.

His capstone project involved collecting previously unknown data about a metallic organic framework (MOF) that takes a methylene blue dye out of water.

"I don't actually have time for everything," Moore said. "I have to prioritize things. Things inevitably fall through the cracks, but it's hard for me to choose one over the other, because I like a lot of things. And I don't want to not do music, and I don't want to not do science."



Moore '26

Moore said that Kansas Wesleyan, as a smaller university, gives students the opportunity to try things.

"If I were to want to be in a music ensemble, it would probably be a bit harder in a larger school.

One nice thing about this school is that everyone's involved in something," he said. "Professors know that you have other things going on, and they are flexible and understanding."

Moore will attend grad school in San Francisco, with a goal of earning his Ph.D. and landing at a university big enough to allow for a small research team that also gives him an opportunity to teach.

He's off to a good start. Moore received the award for Outstanding Research in the Math, Physics and Computer Studies Department at Commencement this year.

Story by Jean Kozubowski



**SCAN THE
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STORY!**

*Read the feature
story on
Madison Lambert '26.*



KWU DECA Excels Once Again at International Competition



Members of the KWU DECA team pose after they all placed in the Collegiate DECA International Competition in Louisville, Ky., in April.

Kansas Wesleyan's DECA team continues to excel at the international level, led by a trio of top-three finishes and eight top-10 results at the International DECA Competition held April 18-21 in Louisville, Ky. More than 1,200 students competed from more than 100 colleges and universities.

Courtney Auld '26 (Collinsville, Okla.) and

Jordan Grimes '26 (Rapid City, S.D.) were KWU's top competitors, finishing second in Digital Marketing Strategies and third in Entertainment Marketing. Oriana Botz '26 (Salina, Kan.) and Madelene McVey '27 (Wichita, Kan.) earned a runner-up finish in International Marketing to record the Coyotes' other podium result. Both Botz and Auld wrap up their DECA careers with three

podium results during their three years as a part of the program.

Other top-10 results include the teams of Paige Chauncey '26 (Junction City, Kan.) and Shelby Davidson '27 (Delphos, Kan.) in the Advertising Campaign category; Botz, McVey and Emily Stamper '27 (Plainville, Kan.) in Business Research; Stamper and Davidson in Event Planning; and the individual effort of Michael Purkey '27 (Montreal, Quebec, Canada) in Professional Sales.

The effort gave KWU six podium results and 13 top-10 finishes during the past two international meets.

"Maintaining our presence as one of the premier DECA teams in the world is a testament to the students' dedication and motivation; their high-level projects and overall creativity continue to set a global standard," said Dr. Trish Petak, professor of business and accounting and DECA team coach. "I'm incredibly proud of the nine who competed this year and am truly blessed to witness the professional development of these future leaders."



For more information on Kansas Wesleyan University, visit www.kwu.edu/news.

For more information on Collegiate DECA, visit www.deca.org/collegiate.



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New Life at the Heartland RIFT Farm

KWU's favorite heifer, Brownie, is now a mother! She had her first calf in late May.

She'll have to get used to some other changes with this second cohort of the Heartland-Rodale Institute Farmer Training (H-RIFT) program. H-RIFT is a nine-month certificate program offered through Kansas Wesleyan's Community Resilience Hub (CRH) that runs from March through October.

This is the first cohort led by H-RIFT director Dr. Jacob Miller-Klugesherz, who holds the Joe Hale Chair in Regenerative Agriculture. Miller-Klugesherz earned his doctorate in May in Sociology from Kansas State University.

Brownie and her calf have a new home, moving from 12 acres at Dr. Wes Jackson's '58 property to 30 acres at the H-RIFT Educational Farm at Ingermanson Farms. The H-RIFT cohort worked hard this spring to fence that property. It took about 8 miles of wire for the six-string fence, mostly courtesy of Ingermanson Farms, Miller-Klugesherz said.

Brownie and her calf won't get to roam all 30 acres. The students then assembled moveable fences to create temporary paddocks so the livestock can be moved to fresh pasture every so often.

Traditional Kansas Wesleyan students have shown interest in the program, and some signed up to take Introduction to Regenerative Agriculture and Soil Science and Agricultural Humanities during the first trimester. Those two courses are direct extensions of his Ph.D. dissertation, *Heal Soil, Heal Soul*, Miller-Klugesherz said.

There also is a summer trimester and one in the fall. The educational component is a major part of H-RIFT, he said.

"We are an educational farm that does production," Miller-Klugesherz said. "We are not a production farm that does education. It's an important order of operations. Our 'product,' so to speak, is our students and their experiences, first and foremost."

The new cohort, all from the East Coast this time, chose Kansas over the Rodale program in Pennsylvania because livestock training is offered here and not at the Pennsylvania program.

James Bowden is the new farm manager. Brownie will like him; he's a fifth-generation rancher and farmer in Saline County. He teaches Animal Husbandry.

Brownie and her calf will have company, chickens and sheep.

The chickens have been outstanding at producing eggs, Miller-Klugesherz said. Even after

giving some to Salina Rescue Mission, Catholic Charities, Salina Food Pantry, and various other food pantries (\$1,700 worth in 6 months), he has eggs left to sell. They are washed, labeled and meet all necessary standards from the Kansas Department of Agriculture. The students also processed 80 whole chickens to give away at KWU auctions and games with a donation to the program.

"We want to feed our community, especially those experiencing homelessness," he said. "At the same time, we put a lot of money into our feed and we need some return."

When the garden starts producing, the meat and five or six varieties of vegetables will be vacuum-sealed and frozen for sale throughout the year.

"We are pre-authorized

through the Kansas Department of Agriculture for wholesale and retail sales," Miller-Klugesherz said.

H-RIFT is using the Temple Innovation commercial kitchen for processing foods.

One thing Brownie is used to is the noise of a tractor, but this one might be quieter. It's new and has an enclosed cab, a gift from Jeff Bieber '71, with the help of Bieber's old track coach, alumnus and professor emeritus Dr. Jackson. It can be used to pull the 10-foot grain drill on loan from Kubota. The program also purchased an 8 x 12 Sturdi Bilt lofted shed.

The chicken trailers, used to move the hens from paddock to paddock following the cattle, are owned by Ingermanson Farms. As with the fence, H-RIFT uses some of the farm's equipment.

"It's a fantastic partnership with JRI and Ingermanson Farms," Miller-Klugesherz said.

Story by Jean Kozubowski



CRH heifer Brownie with her calf



Farm Manager James Bowden (far right) stops for a photo with current H-RIFT students.

Smith Named Interim Director of CRH

The Rev. Dr. Allen Smith became the interim director of the Community Resilience Hub (CRH) in March.

Smith is also pastor of St.



Dr. Allen Smith

John's Missionary Baptist Church in Salina. He joined Kansas Wesleyan in 2020 and

has served in

a variety of roles, including the advisor for strategic initiatives, where part of his role was to share insight and counsel to the Community Resilience Hub team.

"CRH is continuing the mission to be able to create a healthy soil, which makes healthy food, which makes healthy people, which makes a healthy community," Smith said. "We're trying to build a resilient community through collaboration and relationships."

CRH is doing this through the three prongs of education, advocacy and action focused on regenerative, organic and sustainable agriculture.

One new project on campus is the Hale Family Garden, made possible by the families of H.D. "Joe" and Joyce Vanier Hale. The five raised beds outside Bieber Dining Hall will supply vegetables and herbs.

This is the second year for the Heartland Rodale Institute of Farmer Training (H-RIFT), but it's the first year the classroom instruction part of the training has been open to traditional KWU students as well as the H-RIFT cohort.

Bowden Joins CRH as Farm Manager

James Bowden is the new Heartland Rodale Institute Farmer Training (H-RIFT) farm manager — among many other things — as of April. He



James Bowden

also teaches a course on Animal Husbandry to this year's H-RIFT cohort.

Bowden is the fifth generation on his family's mixed farm — beef, wheat, milo, soybeans, oats — in Saline County since 1871. Among his other activities, he's the president of the

board of directors of The Temple, the restored and revised Salina Masonic Temple. He's a member of the Local Food Works Foundation Board and the Alumni Council Board for Bethany College, where he earned his degree in Chemistry.

He is involved in a variety of projects, including working on innovative poultry diets funded by a grant from the University of Minnesota, where

he earned his master's degree in Agroecology. He is involved locally and nationally with Kansas Farmers Union and National Farmers Union and advocates for the family farm and rural economies.

Most recently, he worked with Sustain-A-Grain, a Moundridge, Kan., company that distributes Kernza products and promotes its use. Kernza is a perennial wheatgrass that has been domesticated to have a larger grain. Developed through The Land Institute in Salina, it can often be blended with other cereal grains in things like bread, beer and chicken feed, which H-RIFT is using for its flock.

Kernza is among a very short list of regenerative crops that help land regenerate through reducing erosion and chemical inputs.

Regenerative agriculture comes naturally to him, Bowden said, because of his work with Kernza. He works with the land to make sure that his herd — and H-RIFT's — is grazing in a sustainable way. H-RIFT students took a trip to

his family's ranch to see how a farm and ranch can adapt to different iterations.

"What I hope the students see is, or what I hope they get out of it, is a positive first-person experience with animals," Bowden said.

"This (position) is just a natural fit for all of those things together." And a fit for Bowden.

"All these things I do intertwine," he said. "I pull everything together into things that complement each other."

Jacob Miller-Klugesherz, Joe Hale Chair of Regenerative Agriculture, agrees. "This is a perfect job for James," he said. "We're lucky to have him."

Story by Jean Kozubowski

KWU Students Present at River Symposium



Connor Kirby '26 displays the solar-powered LiDAR river-depth monitoring system that he presented at the Smoky Hill River Research and Education Symposium in May.

The Friends of the River Foundation partnered with Kansas Wesleyan University and Sacred Heart High School to encourage local students to engage in field studies in Saline County and along the Smoky Hill River. Students participated in field work, gathering data and experience, the results of which were seven presentations at the 2026 Smoky Hill River Research & Education Symposium (SHRRES) in May.

Connor Kirby '26 led the symposium with his construction of a solar-powered LiDAR river-depth monitoring system to collect environmental data on the river. LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is a remote sensing technology that uses pulsed lasers to measure distances. The small unit can be attached under a bridge to send river depth information to a computer monitor via solar power.

Kirby, a Financial Math and Physics major, was mentored by Dr. Mazen Nairat, KWU assistant professor of Mathematics and Physics.

Dr. Stephanie Welter, KWU associate professor of Biology, was the mentor for nine other Kansas Wesleyan students, who spoke about how sunlight affects fish response to bait color, fish sampling, and the effects of water flow and turbidity on microbial life.

Sacred Heart Biology students went on and in the water to clean up trash and sample river life.

SHRRES returned this year after a hiatus due to COVID-19, with the help of a Greater Salina Community Foundation grant.

Kansas Wesleyan's Community Resilience Hub and the Education Transformation Project hosted several nationally known educational leaders in a May conference at KWU.



Dr. Matt Thompson, president of Kansas Wesleyan, opens the Liberal Arts Education Transformation Project convening, hosted by KWU's CRH and the Education Transformation Project.



A team of conference participants takes part in a visioning exercise.

A story on the project is planned for the next edition of Contact.

KWU Hosts Local Business AI Training

FACULTY-LED EVENT BRINGS LOCAL LEADERS TO CAMPUS

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing rapidly, said Dr. Suman Kundu, KWU assistant professor of mathematics and physics, as it also becomes more and more prevalent.

Kundu led an AI Boot Camp for the community on May 21, with the help of several KWU professors and staff members.

The aim was to give local business professionals a very basic introduction to AI, Kundu said, what it is, how you use it for your own good, in your own work, and how it can help you.

The boot camp covered such topics as foundations, how to prompt, virtual assistants, being creative, ethical use, safety and human contexts.

“And the dark side of it, what you should be aware of, like putting any personal information out there or when you are talking about sensitive issues like health,” he said.

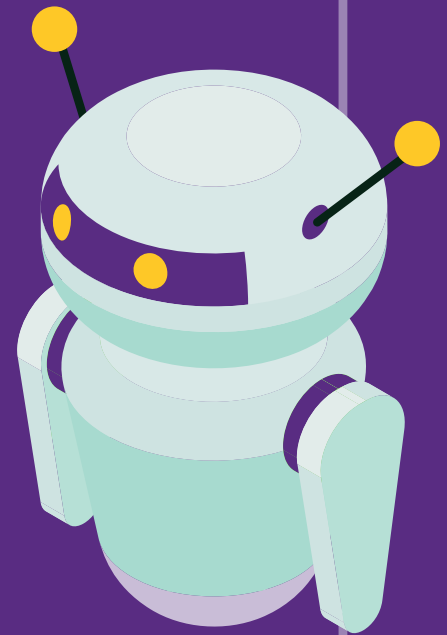
Kansas Wesleyan began looking into AI a couple of years earlier.

“I think we have done a really good job of proactively starting to think about it before it really comes and hits us as a surprise,” Kundu said.

KWU president Dr. Matt Thompson and Provost Dr. Damon Kraft created a small AI workshop working committee to talk about how AI would effect education and how students need to be familiar with the tool so that they don't get surprised in the workplace.

“This year, what we really want to do is to engage with the community,” Kundu said. “From the discussion with the business leaders and business professionals, we got the feeling there is a need for the basic understanding of AI. There is a lot of misconception around AI going on. I'm more excited about this conference compared to a technical one because I think this is a great opportunity for us to have some impact to the community. We benefit from the community in so many ways. It's a great opportunity to give something back.”

Story by Jean Kozubowski



Biology students study in Amazon Rainforest



The nine students who went to the Amazon Rainforest in Peru over spring break on a research trip pose with Dr. Kiley Hicks, third from right, at the poster session at which they presented their data in May.

While some Kansas Wesleyan science students did impressive work in laboratories this spring, nine others did their research way out of the lab. The nine went to the Amazon Rainforest in Peru with Biology assistant professors Liz Tharman and Dr. Kiley Hicks, over spring break.

J.D. Koons, assistant vice president for student engagement and success, served as additional chaperone.

The group spent two days traveling and five days studying at a research station, Tamshiyacu Tahuayo Regional Conservation Area, that Tharman had been to as an undergraduate herself.

“We had early morning excursions before breakfast, we had morning excursions after breakfast, we had afternoon excursions after lunch, and then even after dinner we were out

in the boats again, or we were doing hikes into the jungle at night to see what we could find,” Tharman said.

For the three-credit-hour course, each student designed a research experiment before leaving for Peru, with the guidance of Hicks and Tharman. The students collected data in the rainforest. They reported their results to the KWU community at the annual poster session in May.

Student presentations ranged from water quality, soil pH and temperature to bird surveys, giant river otter vocalizations and the use of medical procedures at the rural clinic in a nearby village.

“They each created something unique,” Tharman said.

Both professors helped the students summarize the data for the department’s poster session and in oral presentations, because, Tharman said, that’s a huge part of science – being able to share your information.

It was also important, she said, for the students to adapt to other ways of living.

“It was certainly eye-opening for all of us, seeing other cultures, other communities,” Tharman said. “There aren’t too many people up there and definitely no public transit. So it’s really quite a look into the more preserved Amazon Rainforest of Peru.

“I think we were all pretty astounded at the sounds, the lack of sounds, maybe the lack of hubbub and motors. All you hear are birds and monkeys and the occasional motor of a boat.”

The professors plan to offer the course next in Spring 2028.

Story by Jean Kozubowski

BATTLEBOT CAPTURES CHAMPIONSHIP



Quasar, the Kansas Wesleyan battlebot, has a few battle scars in its housing, but it still brought home the university’s first first-place trophy from the collegiate division of BotsKC in Kansas City late this spring. Even though it was without its main rotor weapon much of the time, the bot’s aggressive driving carried the day. The KWU MECHACOYOTES defeated Garden City Community College and Oklahoma State University in round-robin battles. Congratulations go to the STEM Club, which sponsored the battlebot, and the team, from left: Sebastian Welter ’26, Elijah Resano ’26, Connor Kirby ’26, Kayden Moline ’27 and Luke Moore ’26.

SENIOR CAPSTONE PRESENTATIONS



Elijah Resano ’26 demonstrates his fire extinguisher on a very small house fire at the Science Department senior capstones presentations in May. Resano’s extinguisher uses sound waves to put out the flames. He will be working on a master’s degree in Engineering Leadership and Innovation at Johns Hopkins University in the fall.

BASEBALL

Defends KCAC Title; Hosts Opening Round for First Time



Riley Gwin '25, G'26
First Team All-American;
signed professional
contract in mid-June



Carter Allen '26
First Team All-American;
KCAC Player of the Year



Baseball recorded its first 50-win season and hosted an NAIA Opening Round for the first time in 2026! The Coyotes saw two players, Riley Gwin '25, G'26 and Carter Allen '26, record First Team All-American honors, with Allen earning KCAC Player of the Year laurels; Chris Finocchario '27, who ranked 10th in NAIA in homers, was named Third Team All-American, while Fernando Ruvalcaba '26 (Second Team All-KCAC) and Blake Dale '26 (Third Team All-KCAC) earned conference Gold Glove honors. Along the way, Head Coach Bill Neale earned his 400th victory and another KCAC Coach of the Year honor.

**FIRST
EVER
50-WIN
SEASON!**

FROM PLAYER TO COACH: CODLIN '22 FINDS MEANING IN MENTORING

Legendary tennis player Arthur Ashe once said, "Success is a journey, not a destination. The doing is often more important than the outcome."

Former Kansas Wesleyan defensive back Jevaughn Codlin '22 is experiencing early success in his collegiate coaching career. After serving as a defensive analyst for the University of Notre Dame's football program last season, he enters the 2026 campaign as the team's safeties coach.

But Codlin's journey into coaching wasn't something he initially mapped out for himself. A four-year starter at KWU (2016-19, graduated in 2022), he helped guide the Coyotes to back-to-back conference championships in his final two seasons. After playing for a year in the Indoor Football League, (IFL), he received a phone call from then-KWU head football coach Myers Hendrickson, who pitched the idea of coaching the team's cornerbacks.

"No, I do not want to coach the corners," Codlin replied. "I have no desire to coach football."

Hendrickson eventually convinced Codlin to return to Salina, where he reunited with some of his former teammates. The Coyotes finished the 2021 season with an 11-2 record and their third Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference championship in four years.



Codlin '22

Codlin then returned to the IFL for another season. In 2022, he took off the jersey and accepted a graduate assistant (GA) position with Division II program Emporia State.

"It made me realize how much I love coaching — how much I love putting on my cleats to go out there and help those guys achieve goals that they have for themselves," he said.

From there, Codlin joined West Virginia as a GA for the 2023 season before being promoted to assistant secondary coach. The entire Mountaineers staff was let go after the 2024 campaign, forcing Codlin to look for a new gig.

While he struggled with the questions of the unknown, a friend suggested Codlin read the Book of Job. Soon after he examined Job's hardships and restoration, his phone rang. It was Notre Dame defensive coordinator Chris Ash.

Now heading into his second season with the Fighting Irish, Codlin is appreciative of all the mentors who helped him get to this point — from close family members to coaches at every stop. Looking to pay their generosity forward, he relishes the opportunity to mentor collegiate athletes.

"I always tell my players, the two things I really care about are relationships and results," he stated. "And I don't think you can get the best results out of a player without having a great relationship with them."

Codlin looks back fondly on his time at Kansas Wesleyan — the relationships he built and the life lessons he learned. He remembers the sting of being benched in the NAIA semifinals while battling through injuries his junior year.

"I share that story all the time," Codlin said. "I talk to my players about controlling what you can control and understanding that things will get greater later."

Codlin views his current role as a conduit, relaying information from the veteran coaches and making it relatable to the players. As a young coach, he knows there is room for growth, which is why he tries to glean wisdom from those around him.

"You learn a lot when you listen and ask questions," he noted. "I never try to be the smartest in the room. I think that's what has helped me continue to climb in this profession."

Story by Eric Brown

ELLIOTT NAMED NEW SOFTBALL COACH



Elliott

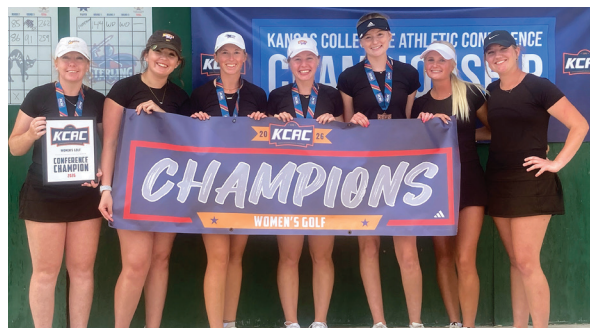
Kansas Wesleyan announced the appointment of Megan Elliott as the university's newest softball coach in May. Elliott comes to KWU after spending the last two seasons as an

assistant coach at Mayville State University in Mayville, N.D.

While at Mayville, Elliott served as the primary recruiter on the coaching staff and also worked with hitting and the infield.

Elliott is originally from Simi Valley, Calif., and completed her master's degree in Education from Mayville State University in the spring of 2025.

Golf wins third straight KCAC title



(L to R) Chaney Littell '26, Magen Dow '26, Emily Stamper '27, Ryann Warren '26, Savanna Nickum '27, Kelsey Essex '26 and Abby Day '26.

Women's golf continued its recent run of success by winning its third straight KCAC title in late April, besting the field by 10 shots at Newton's Sand Creek Station. KWU bested the five-team field with a score of 989 for the tournament, winning by 10 shots over Evangel. Friends was third with 1057, Bethany was fourth with 1157 and Ottawa was fifth with a score of 1397.

The Coyotes placed fourth in the Top 10 at the championships led by Chaney Littell and Ryann Warren tying for fifth with a score of 244. Emily Stamper tied for seventh (251) and Savanna Nickum finished tied for 10th (255) and won a playoff hole to secure all-tournament team honors. Warren and Littell both earned All-KCAC honors after the tournament.

The Coyotes went on to compete at the NAIA National Championships, placing 30th.

KCAC Softball Championships Hosted in Salina



KWU hosted the KCAC Softball Championships at Salina South High School in late April, marking the first time the Coyotes had served as the tournament's host since the improvements to the school's fields in recent years. KWU won six of its final seven regular season games, helping it enter the tournament on a high note, but fell victim to back-to-back losses during the tournament.



FLAG FOOTBALL

RECORDS HISTORIC THIRD-PLACE NATIONAL RESULT

2026 marked a new chapter in NAIA women's flag football, as the sport jumped to invitational status and KWU was at the forefront. The Coyotes stormed through the loser's bracket to reach the invitational tournament's semifinals and record a third-place finish nationally, one of the best results ever for a KWU program! Four players — Aliyah Wood '26, Chihiro Iwata '26, Jazmine Whitfield '26 and Khylie Douglas '27 — earned All-American honors.



Wide receiver/defensive back Aliyah Wood '26 became the first Coyote to earn First Team All-American Honors in women's flag, as the NAIA named its initial squad at the conclusion of the season.



Second Team All-American **quarterback Chihiro Iwata '26**



Second Team All-American **wide receiver Jazmine Whitfield '26**



Second Team All-American **rusher Khylie Douglas '27**

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JRI STADIUM AT
GRAVES FAMILY SPORTS COMPLEX



FOOTBALL
SCHEDULE!

KWU WOMEN'S

VOLLEYBALL



VOLLEYBALL
SCHEDULE!

 HOME OPENER!

SEPT. 23

KWU VS. YORK

MABEE ARENA



New Head Coach
Aubrey Wilson

Banana Ball

MADDOCK '25 THRIVING IN BANANA BALL LEAGUE

Brett Maddock figured his baseball career had ended in 2025 with his last game as a member of the Kansas Wesleyan Coyotes.

Having earned a degree in Nursing, he was working at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita and focused on his new career. Baseball was a fond memory, or so he thought.

Andrew Bartman, former head coach at Bethany and now a coach with the Texas Tailgaters of the Savannah Banana Championship League, recommended Maddock after talking with KWU coach Bill Neale.

Maddock got a tryout in May 2025. He was drafted in November by the Indianapolis Clowns, quit his nursing job in January, and became a member of their pitching staff.

The wildly popular Bananas are described as a barnstorming exhibition team known as the “Harlem Globetrotters of baseball,” famous for their high-energy choreographed dance routines and “Banana Ball” rules.

Six Banana League teams tour the country playing a 60-game schedule that goes from February through October.

“I was definitely shocked, because it’s pretty cool,” said Maddock, who compiled a 21-6 record with a 4.90 earned run average while playing for KWU during the 2024 and 2025 seasons.

Banana Ball is legitimate baseball but fast-paced with numerous twists. There are 11 Banana game rules, starting with how the winning team is determined. Teams get a point based on who scores the most runs in an inning: Win the inning,

of our entertainment bits,” he said. “You have to do tricks like outfielders making behind-the-back catches, flipping the ball between their legs, making catches in midair and doing backflips. Everything we do is for the fans, everything truly is fans first.”

In turn, fans have flocked to watch Banana Ball nationwide, including an astounding 102,000 who packed Texas A&M’s Kyle Field on May 2 for their biggest crowd to date. More than 12,000 fans packed Equity Bank Park in Wichita to watch the Bananas on May 8 — the largest gathering in stadium history.

Neale knew Maddock would succeed.

“(Bartman) said they didn’t need someone who throws 90 miles an hour but, ‘Do you have a mid- to upper-80s guy and all he does is throw strikes, and does he have some charisma and character to him?’” Neale said. “The whole time he’s talking I’m like, ‘I’ve got a



Maddock '25 warms up in the bullpen at the Banana Ball game in Kansas City at Kauffman Stadium. The match-up featured the Savannah Bananas and the Indianapolis Clowns, the newest team added to the Banana Ball tour.

guy for you.” If teams are scoreless or score the same amount, that inning is even and they go to the next one. The team with most points after the mandatory two-hour time limit wins the game.

Other rules include no bunting (batter is ejected if he does); no mound visits by coaches; no walks, but batters can steal first base at any time on a wild pitch or passed ball; batters cannot step out of the batter’s box (a called strike if they do); and fans can record an out by catching a foul ball on the fly.

Banana players spend considerable time in the stands interacting with fans. “We’ll be out in the crowd entertaining them, literally in the middle of the game,” said Maddock, who transferred to KWU after one season at Merced College (Calif.). “We played at Angel Stadium (in Anaheim). I was in the nosebleed (top of the stadium) entertaining the crowd the first three innings, and then in the eighth inning I was pitching.”

Maddock, who hails from Oakdale, Calif., said Banana players continually work on dance moves, trick plays and other hijinks during practice.

“There’s an Instagram post of me in a pig costume because that was one

guy for you.”

“We all knew right away that personality-wise he was going to fit in because he’s that guy. He’s loud at practice, he’s loud in the hotel rooms, loud on the bus, he’s loud everywhere. He just has that character to him.”

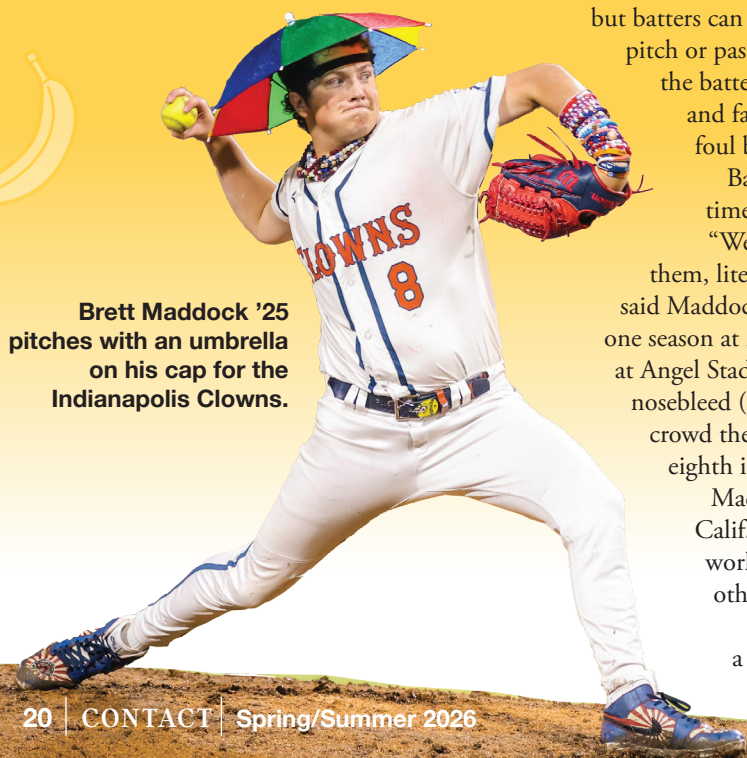
Maddock has a deep appreciation for his time at KWU as a student and athlete.

“(Neale) is a great coach,” he said. “I know he just got his 400th win; that’s awesome. He just really sets a winning mentality, and he recruits winners. A nursing program alone is not easy. When you add baseball on top, it definitely gets harder, but that’s one of the reasons that I picked Kansas Wesleyan coming out of junior college. They allowed me to do the nursing program and play baseball, and they worked with me a lot.”

Neale and Maddock have stayed in contact.

“He’s one of their top pitchers,” Neale said. “He set a record for getting three outs in like, 49 seconds. He’s doing some incredible things and is obviously representing Kansas Wesleyan tremendously.”

Story by Bob Davidson



Brett Maddock '25 pitches with an umbrella on his cap for the Indianapolis Clowns.

WHITEHAIR '17

REFLECTS ON JOURNEY THAT LED TO THE NFL

Kaleb Whitehair '17 has reached a remarkable point in his career, having been hired in April as a physical therapist for the San Francisco 49ers.

It's been a nine-year journey to the National Football League that began at Kansas Wesleyan when Whitehair received a bachelor's degree in Health Science in 2017.



Whitehair '17

Since then, there have been stops in Knoxville, Tenn., Hays, a return to Salina, then Lawrence and a year in Texas at the University of Houston.

Yet along the way Whitehair has not forgotten the advice he got from Matt Drinkall, his football coach during his three years at KWU. "I remember sitting in offensive line meeting, and he was talking about find work, find work, keep finding work," Whitehair said. "That's something that's really stuck with me. From an athletic standpoint, and just in my life, you keep finding work and keep finding ways to add value to what you're doing. You can find the problems, but not everyone can solve them. Be someone that can apply themselves to solve those problems."

Whitehair's football experience was his impetus to become a sports physical therapist, someone who helps athletes and sports-minded people remain competitive or recover from injuries.

Whitehair, who attended Ell-Saline High School, had a difficult athletic career at KWU, where he played wide receiver, tight end and finally H-back (blocking tight end).

"You go from getting the ball all the time to never getting the ball, and it puts your ego in check," he said.

Each of his seasons ended or was interrupted by injuries — fractured wrist, hamstring and a fractured hand that required career-ending surgery.

It also pointed him toward his career path.

"I wanted to do something with science and related to the body with anatomy and physiology," Whitehair said. "I wanted to find a career where I could do that and help people."

After graduating from KWU, Whitehair spent two years at South College in Knoxville, Tenn., where he earned his doctorate in physical therapy.

He had hoped to do a residency, but COVID-19 intervened, so he moved to Hays, where he spent three months working in a rural outpatient hospital. He returned to Salina for a

year and a half, working at the Salina Regional Health Center physical therapy clinic.

Once COVID had subsided, he attained a residency at Lawrence Memorial Hospital that partnered with the University of Kansas analytics department and Lawrence High School, where he honed his skills.

He then landed a fellowship that sent him to the University of Houston, where he was the physical therapist for the football team during the 2025 season.

Today, Whitehair is learning the ropes at the professional level. The 49ers are currently building a new training and rehab facility.

"Report cards come out every year, and you get graded on training room, training room staff and all those things. They felt like they needed to make some improvements," he said.

Whitehair works for the head athletic trainer, the director of rehabilitation and five other trainers/therapists.

"I'm more of an assistant physical therapist," he said. "They're not going to give me the big all-star guys right off the get-go. It's one of those things you kind of got to prove yourself again and learn the 49er way. My goal is to help injured athletes return to sport at a high level, if not better than they were before."

Whitehair said his job often involves more than just the physical recovery from an injury.

"Sometimes it's the mental aspect that can be the most challenging," he said. "Maybe it's a contract here, a guy's trying to prove that he's still worth his livelihood, so there's a lot of things that go into it. It can be taxing both mentally and physically."

Whitehair credits KWU for setting him up for success.

"The biggest thing was the relationships," he said. "Athletically, did I have the best career that I was hoping to have? No. But when you're surrounded by good human beings, you still find avenues where you can make meaningful memories and lasting experiences. I was a student



Whitehair's career path led him to being a physical therapist for the San Francisco 49ers.

government president, I was a (resident assistant) in the dorm, I was a student assistant in the Student Development Office, I was part of FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes). I was part of so many more things than just football."

"He was focused on both academics and his athletics," said Lesa Dunn, assistant professor for sport and exercise science. "You don't see that a lot, but he was 100 percent driven in the academic arena as well as on the field. I knew he was special."

Whitehair is proud of his Sunflower State heritage.

"I take pride in being from Kansas; there are a lot of good hard-working people," he said. "I like showing people that you can be someone who went to Ell-Saline, a small 2A school, and graduated with 32 people in your class and still make it to the NFL if you work hard and you're a good human."

Story by Bob Davidson

Retiring Salter Reflects on Student Success Program

This past year, Leticia “Tissa” Salter taught the past, present and future.

Her Student Success class learned to write using cursive script. Her Digital Rhetoric class produced



Leticia “Tissa” Salter

a quick-start guide to AI that was so good that she used it in a community AI workshop KWU hosted.

Salter, now-former assistant professor of English and department chair, was hired in August 2021 to teach English three-quarters of the time and coach student success the other quarter.

That separation was always something of a myth, she said.

“How do you measure 25% of anything, especially when you’re just talking about teaching time?” she asked.

But she’s always been adaptable and creative when it comes to teaching.

Last year, she wrote something in cursive on the board, and her students told her they couldn’t read it. So this year, she worked with her Student Success class, all first-year students on the football team, to teach them cursive writing. They all received old-fashioned, black-and-white, composition books and prompts for a journal.

“I want you to write for 15 minutes about your friendships, right now, or how am I feeling about myself, or whatever,” Salter suggested to them.

“They’ve had two semesters of writing in that book, so they have a little journal of how they were feeling as a freshman, a nice little takeaway.”

Books are important to Salter, both as a teaching tool and personally.

A couple of years ago, she was faced with a group of composition students who had noticeably struggled with the subject previously.

What can I do, she asked them, to make this class better for you? No essays and no homework,

they said. She thought about it, then threw out the syllabus, not for the first time. The bargain she struck: She’d agree to their terms if they would agree to come to every class. And instead of essays, they’d write a book.

Salter gave them prompts every week and showed how them AI could help — if used intelligently. She compiled the biographies and prompts into a self-published book, *We Came to College to Play a Sport, And ...* (See story in Spring/Summer 2024 Contact).

Most of the students had told her at the start of the semester they weren’t coming back next year, and Salter expected they wouldn’t.

But two years later, a little more than half of them walked across the stage to graduate this May, she said.

“I don’t credit the book with keeping them here, but somehow or another, they found a reason to stay,” she said.

It’s no wonder that Salter was named KWU’s Exemplary Teacher of the Year for 2025-26.

Salter has a strong background in books and writing.

“Recently, I have published a memoir titled *The Deep Blue Sea Between Alabi and Me*, Alabi being her Scottie terrier stuck in China during the COVID quarantine, as well as children’s early learning books,” Salter said.

Her master’s degree from Texas A&M is in technical writing, but she has a lot of experience with student success programs.

“When I was in Qatar and I worked there, I got to create a learning center,” she said. “I worked for Texas A&M over in Qatar, and they came to me, they said we really need to do some learning support.”

Salter was an integral part of building the student success program from the ground up, but she didn’t want it to just be a place students came where they struggled. That’s not enough, she said.

So she had a bottomless coffee pot on and comfortable couches, to make it a place students wanted to be.

“It’s way more than tutoring,” Salter said. “It’s way more than just come and let us help you make an ‘A’ in math or whatever. It’s this whole thing, this encompassing thing of the whole student. We’ve really

done a good job here, I think, of realizing we’ve got to look at all of the stressors that a student has on them.

“What I’ve seen happen is that we just had a tutoring center that has now evolved into a whole person center.”

Salter was in Qatar from 2008 to 2015, then she went to Kansas State University Polytechnic (now K-State Salina) for a couple of years, then Wenzhou-Kean University in Zhejiang, China, for almost three years before coming to KWU. She’s also done workshops in Thailand, India, Singapore, China, Ireland and Russia.

“I’m kind of a rolling stone,” she said. “I didn’t mean that to be, but I kind of am. I stay involved in ideas and things, but my physical presence may be here, there and yon.”

Salter retired this spring, although she won’t cut ties with Kansas Wesleyan. She plans to teach an English class or two remotely.

“I hope I don’t lose touch,” she said. “I hope there’d be a way that I can remain involved somehow or another with what’s going on.”

Story by Jean Kozubowski



A student takes part in Salter's student success course.

CHECK OUT THE LATEST FROM KWU!

There’s always something exciting happening at KWU! To check out the latest from campus, whether it’s news that happened after press time or photo galleries from Salina, scan the QR codes below!



Athletic News



KWU.edu/News



Join us for KWU's Homecoming 2026 and share in the 140th anniversary of Kansas Wesleyan!



YEARS

Thursday, Oct. 15

5:30 p.m. **Downtown Pep Rally** | *Campbell Plaza, Downtown Salina*
7:30 p.m. **Theatre Production** | *Fitzpatrick Auditorium*

Friday, Oct. 16

10 a.m.-5 p.m. **Homecoming Headquarters** | *Student Activities Center*
10 a.m. **Coyote Golf Outing** | *Salina Country Club*
10 a.m.-5 p.m. **Art Gallery Display** | *The Gallery in Sams Hall of Fine Arts*
10 a.m.-3 p.m. **Alumni College**
11 a.m.-Noon **Campus Tours** | *Student Activities Center* | Check out what's new and exciting since you graduated.
11 a.m. **Theatre Production** | *Fitzpatrick Auditorium*
11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. **Kickoff Luncheon** | *Students and Alumni* | *Bieber Dining Hall*
1-2 p.m. **140th Anniversary Version: 7x7x7 Lecture Series** | *Peters Science Hall 201* | KWU Students will share about their experiences – seven speakers, seven minutes and seven different topics. Q&A after the seventh speaker.
2:30 p.m. **Homecoming Kickoff Worship Service** | *Student Activities Center*
3 p.m.-5 p.m. **Self-Guided Campus Tours** | *Student Activities Center* | Check out what's new and exciting since you graduated.
3:30 p.m. **KWU Women's Basketball Scrimmage** | *Mabee Arena*
4:15 p.m. **KWU Men's Basketball Scrimmage** | *Mabee Arena*
5:30-6:30 p.m. **Golden W 50 Year and Beyond Alumni Social** | *TBA*
7 p.m. **Music Concert and Hall of Fame Induction** | *Sams Chapel* | Don Donaldson '60, Jake Montoya '05, Beverly Salmon '57
8 p.m. **KWU Alumni and Friends Social** | *The Library Bar & Grill* (1307 S. Santa Fe Ave., Salina)
Class Reunions: 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021, 2026

Saturday, Oct. 17

9 a.m. **Jerry Jones Athletic Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony** | *Muir Gym*
Daryl Hoelting (softball), Bruce Santerre '70 (baseball), LaCole (Wilkinson) Armstrong '13 (women's basketball), Kamie (Rash) Crawford '14 (women's golf), Kathleen Benton '93 (women's soccer), 2014 and 2015 softball teams
Alumni Association Awards | *Muir Gym*
Dr. Sharneice Pierce '11 (Alumni Achievement Award), Jakob Provo '15 (Young Alumni Award), Hannah Holt '14 G'16 (Alumni Service Award), Mary Ann St. Clair (Alumni by Choice Award)
Tickets cost \$20 adults/\$10 children under 10 years.
10 a.m.-2 p.m. **Homecoming Headquarters** | *Student Activities Center*
10 a.m. **Coyote Preview Day**
10 a.m.-3 p.m. **Art Gallery Display** | *The Gallery in Sams Hall of Fine Art*
11 a.m.-3 p.m. **Self-Guided Campus Tours**
11 a.m. **Alumni Flag Football** | *Laha Practice Field*
11 a.m. **Baseball Alumni Game** | *East Crawford Recreation Area*
11 a.m. **Softball Alumni Game** | *Bill Burke Recreation Area*
11 a.m.-Noon **Alumni Council Meeting** | *Stanton Conference Room*
11 a.m.-1 p.m. **Lunch** | *Bieber Dining Hall*
Noon **All-Alumni Photos** | *Pioneer Hall Steps*
Noon **Volleyball vs. Oklahoma Wesleyan** | *Mabee Arena*
1 p.m. **Women's Developmental Volleyball** | *Mabee Arena*
2 p.m.-4 p.m. **KWU Tailgate** | *The Library* (The Howl to perform at 3:15 p.m.)
4 p.m. **Football vs. Saint Mary** | *Graves Family Sports Complex*
After the game **KWU Alumni and Friends Outdoor Social** | *The Library Sports Bar & Grill*
Class Reunions: 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021, 2026

Sunday, Oct. 18

10:30 a.m. **Worship Service** | *University United Methodist Church*
1:30 p.m. **Developmental Football Game** | *Graves Family Sports Complex*

Scan the
QR Code to see
the complete
HOCO schedule.





Pioneer Society and Major Gifts KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

For 2024-25 and '25-26 fiscal years through June 1, 2026.

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Kent '72 and Pat Lambert
Gregory Lamkin '01
Brad Lancaster
Derek and Maegan Lee
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Barbara Livergood '74
Steven Love '82
Wayne Lowen and
Brigid Jensen-Lowen
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 Gordon Reimer
 Karen Rice-Ratzlaff
 and James Ratzlaff
 Emily-May and Jim Richards*
 Janice Rundle-Marshall '61
 Sacred Heart Junior-
 Senior High School
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 Health Foundation
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SCAN THE QR CODE
 TO SEE THE FINE ARTS
 EVENT SCHEDULE
 WHEN AVAILABLE



In Memoriam

KWU lost several luminaries during the past several months, including Dr. Meredith Drees, longtime Trustee Jerry Norton '59 and Dr. Ginny Bevan '56, a KWU legend who served as administrator, faculty, and groundbreaking representative for the creation and expansion of women's sports in the 1960s and '70s. We are thankful for everything they meant to KWU's mission, its students and the entire Coyote community.

QR codes are below that link to Facebook posts about each of them, and we encourage you to read the memories found there and leave your own recollections, as well.

Dr. Meredith Drees

Dr. Meredith Trexler Drees, longtime KWU assistant professor of Philosophy and a true light for the institution, passed away March 28, 2026, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. She was 41.

Drees' academic accomplishments were significant, from a research fellowship at University of Notre Dame's Center for Philosophy of Religion to her internationally recognized scholarship. Yet what defined her most was not her résumé but her deep care for students: their questions, their work and their search for purpose.

As a teacher, she created new classes, interdisciplinary projects, a travel abroad program and a campus-wide Socrates Café. Students voted her the 2019-20 Exemplary Teacher of Year.

As a scholar, she wrote essays, papers and books, and was invited to speak about Immanuel Kant, Plato and Iris Murdoch.

She tried to make her research and her teaching "all holistic and make it work together," Drees had said.

A third-generation daughter of her family's farm near Hill City, she brought a grounded, practical wisdom into the classroom, always focused on the well-being of her students and a commitment to this university she loved.



Scan the QR code to read about Dr. Meredith Drees

Jerry Norton '59

KWU lost one of the pillars of its community in late December 2026, when Trustee Emeritus Jerry Norton '59 passed away in Oak Park, Ill. Norton, 88, was a longtime member of the KWU Board of Trustees, having served since 2014. Alongside his wife, Margaret (Williams) Norton '61, he launched the Norton Faculty Excellence Fund to enhance faculty development opportunities, with particular attention to undergraduate research opportunities.

Jerry Norton's professional career was highlighted by 48 years at Loyola Chicago's School of Law, where he achieved faculty emeritus status. Norton also spent time at Chicago-Kent's Law School, where he organized the Police Law Institute and served as editor of the Chicago Kent Police Law Reporter.

It was at KWU, however, where he developed his love of learning. Norton credited professors like Dr. Felix Wasserman, Dr. Jack Vanderhoof and Thomas Durkin with awakening him to the possibilities of intellectual thought. That love led to many journal articles relating to national and international interests, including a decade of research with the American Bar Association's Central and East European Law Initiative (CEELI).

Norton was the third member of his family to attend Kansas Wesleyan, joining his mother, Helen, and brother Frank '54, a past member of the university's Foundation Board.

Jerry was honored with KWU's Alumni Service Award in 2010 and was recognized at the university's Scholarship Gala in 2024.

In addition to the Norton Faculty Excellence Fund, the Nortons have given to many projects across campus, including the Nursing Education Center and the Sams Chapel renovation.



Scan the QR code to read about Jerry Norton

Dr. Mary Virginia "Ginny" Zook Bevan '56

Ginny Bevan, 91, passed away peacefully surrounded by her children and family on Feb. 1, 2026. She was born in Flora, Ill., the oldest of six children. Her family moved to Salina, Kan. when she was in secondary school. Bevan completed her degree in Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER) from Kansas Wesleyan University in 1956. She received her Master of Science degree from Kansas State University in 1965. In 2011, she received an honorary doctorate from KWU.

Bevan taught in the HPER Department for 40 years, from 1957-97; served as head coach in women's track and field, tennis, softball, volleyball and basketball; and held various positions at the university, including dean of women and interim academic dean. She was the first woman to be inducted into the Jerry Jones Athletic Hall of Fame (1987).

Besides serving the university as a teacher, coach and administrator, Bevan was a pioneer in Kansas in the field of women's athletics. She was instrumental in founding (1969) the Association of Kansas Women's Intercollegiate Sports. It changed its name in 1974 to the Kansas Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women and affiliated with the national organization. Bevan held memberships and served in leadership positions in several professional organizations, including the Kansas Association for HPER and Dance, the Kansas Recreation and Parks Association, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the American Association for Leisure and Recreation, as well as the NAIA, ACCK and AIAW. Honored at Homecoming 2007 for her pioneering work in women's intercollegiate athletics, Bevan was described as "a woman who embodies the spirit of KWU."

Bevan's community service included being an elder emeritus at First Christian Church, officer in PEO and Daughters of the Nile, and the Hospital Service Auxiliary. Bevan was an avid supporter of music, art, dance and theatre. As a Tri Delta member, she lived out values of truth, self-sacrifice and friendship each day on her lifelong journey of service, sisterhood and growth.



Scan the QR code to read about Dr. Mary "Ginny" Bevan

Class Notes

If you have updates for class notes,
please contact the Advancement Office at
785-833-4392 or alumni@kwu.edu.

1970s

Tracy Rietzke '77, KWU alumnus and former coach, was inducted into the American Volleyball Coaches Association Hall of Fame for 2025 and the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2026.

2000s

Michelle Webster '08, G'20 received a 2025 National Indigenous Coaching Award from the Aboriginal Sports Circle. Webster transitioned from playing KWU softball to being a member of the coaching staff in the 2009 season. She is executive director of Pacific Sport Okanagan in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.

Michael B. Tate '09 led the second annual barbershop quartet concert Brigade on the Range in Salina this June. The show included performances by Salina's *The Salad Expo* variety show troupe led by Tate and **Timothy Burns '15**.

2010s

Kati Falk-Flores '12 and a partner have composed nearly 6 hours of music for *Ground Zero*, a retro survival horror video game. The game was released this spring by Malformation Games.

Trevor Kuhlman '13 was named the Kansas Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association AD of the week on Jan. 29, 2026. Kuhlman teaches K-12 Physical Education and Weights, and serves as 6-12 athletic director, head football coach and head girls basketball coach in the Linn, Kan., school district.

Taylor (Johnson) Nguyen '17, CRCM, has been promoted to audit analyst at Commerce Bank.

Raul Neri-Sierra '18 is director of the Medicinal Chemistry Shared Resource Center at KU Medical Center and research assistant professor.

2020s

Katie Comley '22 joins the KWU faculty as leader of the Music Department's vocal area. A full press release was posted on KWU.edu after Contact went to the printer.

Ricco Moore '23 helped the Salina Liberty advance to the National Arena League (NAL) semifinals. Moore is a linebacker for the team, which plays its home games in Tony's Pizza Events Center.

Cory Kaplan '24 has played professional basketball in both Liga Metropolitana (Guatemala) and the Eurasian League. Kaplan is currently averaging more than 30 points per game in the former after a brief, four-game appearance in the latter.

In Memoriam

Long-time former Salina coach **Dennis Wahlgren** passed away Jan. 4, 2026. Wahlgren coached at Salina Central, Salina South and Buhler high schools, as well as Kansas Wesleyan University.

Susan Mary (Jenkinson) Hatfield, former History professor at Marymount College, Benedictine College and Kansas Wesleyan University, passed away Jan. 12, 2026.

Darrell D. Victory, director of KWU Plant Operations from 1986-2017, passed away Jan. 25, 2026. He was a key part in transforming and growing the buildings and grounds of the university through his tenure.

Pauline Eaton '49, Salina, Kan., passed away April 25, 2026. She was 98. She served as a Trustee at Kansas Wesleyan University and was active in University United Methodist Church, with numerous volunteer organizations and with the Central Kansas Amateur Radio Club. She provided accounting services as a volunteer to several local nonprofits. She received KWU's Alumni Service Award in 1990.

Arnold O. Grant '50, Salina, Kan., passed away May 16, 2026.

Marilyn (Stuber) Dilling '52, Salina, Kan., passed away Nov. 27, 2025. She was the 1951 Kansas Wesleyan University Lilac Fete Beauty Queen.

Jerry B. Reinhardt '54, Stilwell, Kan., passed away Feb. 21, 2026.

Todd K. Hampton '59, Greeley, Colo., passed away Jan. 25, 2026. Hampton excelled both academically and athletically, earning All-American honors in football and recognition in the Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities. He was inducted into the KWU Hall of Fame for his football achievements.

Sharon K. (Lantis) Hanson '61, Irmo, S.C., passed away Feb. 2, 2026.

Phyllis (Miles) Sinclair '65, Colorado Springs, Colo., passed away Jan. 18, 2026.

David E. Martin '65, Kansas City, Kan., passed away Oct. 14, 2025.

Madie Lyn De Santis '65, Meridian, Idaho, passed away March 27, 2026.

Allan H. Morgan '66, Fairfax, Okla., passed away Feb. 24, 2026.

Ethel Diehl '72, Brookville, Kan., passed away April 15, 2026. At 103, she was believed to be the oldest living KWU alum at the time of her passing. From at least high school on, she made a habit of regular exercise, healthy eating, hard work and a positive attitude. In 1941, she had her teaching certificate and left Kansas Wesleyan to take a job teaching all grades in Gypsum. It was still legal for her to teach elementary students with a teaching certificate, but high school teachers needed college degrees, so she decided to return to Kansas Wesleyan for hers.

Arthur W. McAnney '74, Moonachie, N.J., passed away Jan. 11, 2026.

Jane Louise Johnson '83, Hillsboro, Kan., passed away May 1, 2026.

Kenneth H. Klostermeyer '84, Salina, Kan., passed away Jan. 28, 2026.

Bobbi Hostetter '92, Hope, Kan., passed away May 1, 2026.

Leanne Mangan '93, Wellington, Kan., passed away Jan. 13, 2026.

Michael R. Rogers '94, Salina, Kan., passed away Feb. 20, 2026.

Shirley Jones '01, Council Grove, Kan., passed away Nov. 24, 2025. She was a former nursing instructor at Kansas Wesleyan University.

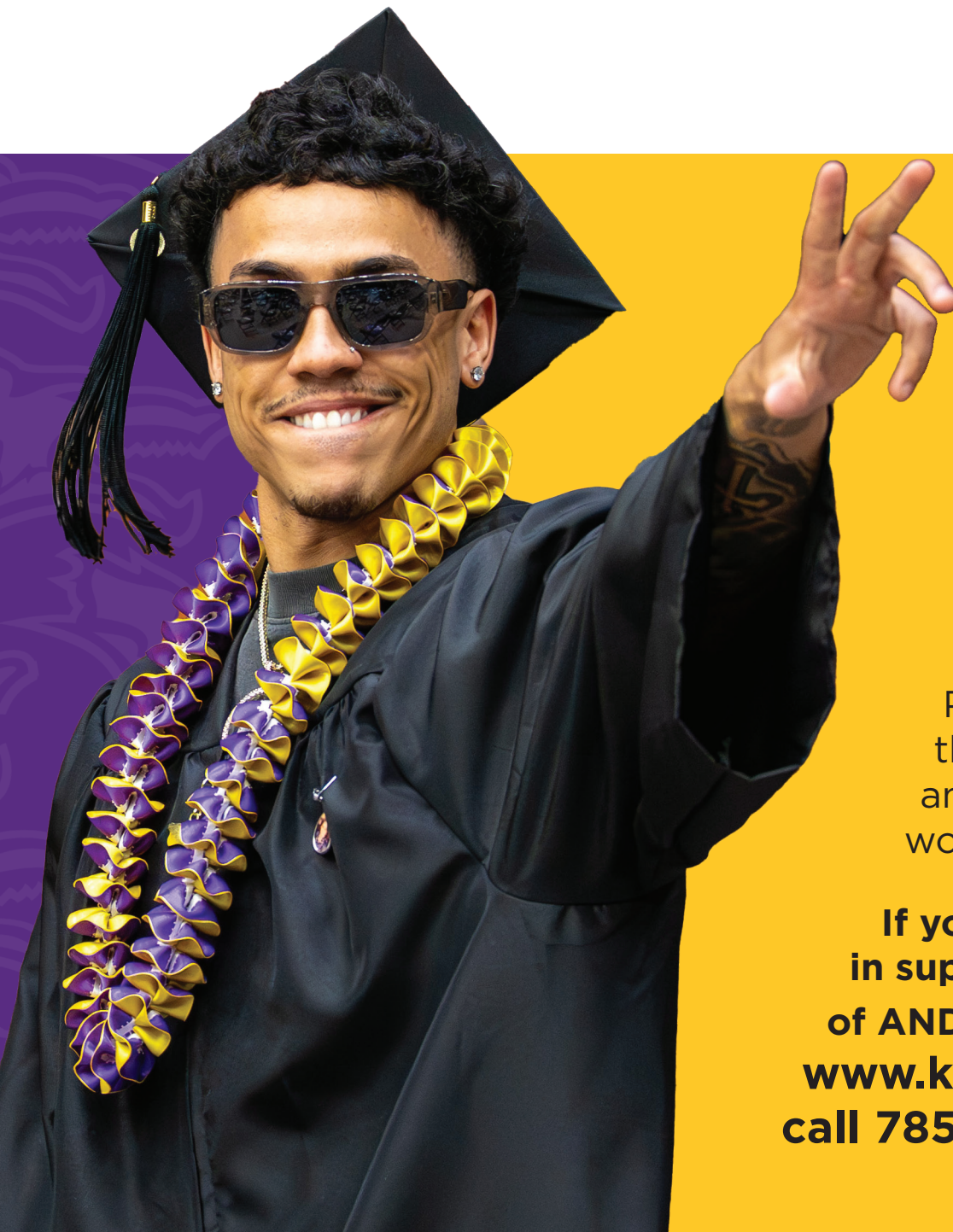
Dennis J. Cochrane '02, Salina, Kan., passed away May 5, 2026.



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