

ADVANCEMENTS

A PUBLICATION OF THE MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

FALL 2026

A NEW ERA FOR
MISSOURI STATE

Missouri State
UNIVERSITY

The opening of the Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center is an extraordinary milestone. We now have a fantastic place on campus to welcome you. We're celebrating — and you're invited!

CONTENTS

6-15

A new era of advancement

The Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center opens this fall. It is the physical expression of what has always defined Missouri State: relationships. The center welcomes prospective students, current students, alumni, faculty, staff, parents, donors, friends and community partners. Whether someone is visiting campus for the first time or returning decades after graduation, the message is the same: You belong here. This is where Bears come home.

EVENTS AND EXCITEMENT

16-17

"The Office" star to speak at Public Affairs Conference

You can get tickets to meet Rainn Wilson, award-winning actor, comedian and New York Times bestselling author.

Giving Day 2026 makes an immediate impact

Bear and Grizzly alumni, students, faculty, staff, family, organizations and friends showed their generosity.



STORY OF A GIFT

18-19

94-year-old alumna supports first-gen students, food pantry

Noreen (Springer) Bednar '54 went on to teach and build a large family. She's eager to give incoming students the opportunity to earn a degree.



IN EVERY ISSUE

4-5

Brent's corner

The long-time leader of the Missouri State University Foundation, who is also an alum, will be retiring. He reminisces about his time at the helm.

20-21

Sights and scenes

Photos that capture the vibe of campus

22-23

Lightning round

Meet Michael Mardis, a campus architect involved in the creation of the University Advancement Center.

24-27

Foundation leadership

Board of Trustees spring meeting; executive committee; committee chairs

28-29

Meet a Trustee

Gregory Beck '85

30-31

Faces of the Foundation

Natalie Seever, director of technology and data services for University Advancement

Advancement staff

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ADVANCEMENTS

FALL 2026

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND INSTITUTION
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BRENT'S CORNER

As I recently shared, I will retire from Missouri State University on July 1, 2027. While this will be my final year serving the university, my focus remains exactly where it has always been — on advancing Missouri State and the incredible future that lies ahead.

There has never been a more exciting time to be a Bear.

The past fiscal year demonstrated what is possible when the Bear family comes together around a shared purpose. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of our alumni, donors and friends, the Missouri State University Foundation received nearly \$50 million in gifts, deferred gift commitments and pledges. More than 20,700 donors invested in Missouri State, helping us award more than \$5 million in privately funded scholarships and strengthening programs, faculty, facilities and experiences across our university.

Those milestones are about far more than numbers. They represent opportunity. They represent students discovering their potential, faculty pursuing innovation and a university growing stronger because thousands of people believe in its mission. Every gift reflects confidence in Missouri State and a shared commitment to creating a brighter future.

That momentum is visible across our campus, and nowhere is it more evident than in the Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center, or UAC.

In the coming months, we will open a place unlike any other in Missouri State's history. More than a new building, the University Advancement Center will be the university's ultimate gathering place — a home for future Bears, current Bears and Bears for life. It is where prospective students will begin imagining their future, where alumni will reconnect with lifelong friends, where donors will see the impact of their generosity and where the entire Bear family will come together to celebrate the university we love.

The UAC is a powerful symbol of what philanthropy makes possible. It reflects decades of generosity, vision and partnership while creating new opportunities to strengthen relationships and inspire future generations of support. It honors our traditions while positioning Missouri State for an even brighter tomorrow.



For me, one of the greatest privileges of this coming year will be welcoming our first guests to the center. More importantly, I look forward to seeing the countless memories, celebrations and life-changing conversations that will take place there. The true legacy of the University Advancement Center will not be its walls — it will be the people whose lives are touched because of the connections made inside them.

Throughout my time at Missouri State, I have witnessed the incredible generosity of the Bear family. Time and again, alumni, donors, parents, faculty, staff and friends have stepped forward because they believe in the power of this university to change lives. That spirit has never been stronger than it is today.

As we look ahead, I am filled with optimism. The Missouri State University Foundation has never been

stronger. University Advancement has never been better positioned to serve our university. And together, we are building a future that will create opportunities for Bears of all ages and stages for generations to come.

Thank you for believing in Missouri State. Thank you for believing in our students. And thank you for continuing to invest in the future of this extraordinary university.

Go Bears!

W. Brent Dunn,

*President and CEO of the Missouri State University Foundation;
Vice President for University Advancement*

Fiscal year 2026 successes: Nearly \$50 million in gifts, deferred gift commitments and pledges; more than 20,000 donors contributed

The commitment of Missouri State's alumni and friends fueled another successful year of giving.

The Missouri State University Foundation received \$49,286,346 in gifts, estate gifts and pledges in fiscal year 2026 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026).

A remarkable 20,735 donors supported the foundation with \$31,308,567 in cash and in-kind gifts, representing more than 1,000 additional donors compared with last year. Estate giving through bequests and other planned giving vehicles also reached one of its highest levels, with \$14.27 million in deferred gift commitments added to support the university's future.

In addition, the foundation processed a record 98,661 gifts and awarded more than \$5 million in privately funded scholarships to Missouri State students.

These gifts made possible a range of initiatives, such as:

- Creation of the first named school, the **Pendleton School of Accountancy**
- Construction of the **Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center**
- New academic scholarships
- 64 new endowed accounts
- Major increase of community support for **Ozarks Public Television** and **KSMU Radio**

Record of success continues

For the third time, the foundation has received more than \$30 million in cash contributions in one fiscal year. And for the first time ever, the foundation's endowment has reached more than \$140 million.

This year, Homecoming includes

A NEW HOME FOR YOU

It's finally real: The Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center is opening this fall! Here's background about this building, the people behind it and the events we hope you will attend to mark this important milestone.

WRITTEN BY JULIANA GOODWIN AND MICHELLE S. ROSE



May all who enter be reminded Missouri State is shaped by those who believe in its future, sustained by those who invest in its mission and strengthened by a community united in advancing it together.





PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

The UAC is a powerful new **symbol of connection**

Every generation leaves something behind: a lesson, a tradition, an opportunity, a door held open for someone they may never meet.

That is how universities endure.

Missouri State has been shaped by generations of Bears who believed education changes lives. They know every generation has a responsibility to leave the university stronger than they found it. Today, Bears have created more than a building — they have created a

home and ushered in a new era of advancement.

The Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center, or UAC, nearly complete at the front of campus, brings together students, alumni, donors and friends. Positioned across from the Davis-Harrington Welcome Center, the two spaces reflect the full Bear journey — from future Bear, to current Bear, to Bear for life. They demonstrate that a connection to Missouri State begins long before graduation and endures for a lifetime.

Missouri State's story comes to life in the building through digital displays, architecture, hidden designs, video, photography and personal experiences.

The UAC belongs to every member of the Bear family. Here, Bears of all ages and stages gather to celebrate the past and invest in the future.

Buildings create space. People create purpose. Together, they create legacy. This is where Bear pride lives. This is where lifelong connections grow. This is where the next era of Missouri State begins. **Welcome home.**

Latest gifts include naming support for Bears Den, custom-made piano

On a warm spring day, President Dr. Richard B. Williams stood in a large, open space in the University Advancement Center and greeted visitors. It was May 27, about 100 days before construction was finished and staff could start to move in.

"I'm excited this will soon be here to serve current Bears, future Bears and Bears for life," Williams said. "I am proud to announce new gifts totaling more than seven figures."

The gifts

- **The Garnett Family Bears Den**, a welcoming space for current students, alumni and friends to gather, reconnect and celebrate the enduring spirit of Missouri State.

The family is full of Bears: Mark Garnett '78, Diann Garnett '96, Kimberly Garnett Foht '98 and Stephanie Garnett Smith '04 and '06. Williams was gratified to name a space after "a family whose lives have been shaped by Missouri State."

More than a room, it represents a family whose legacy continues to support future Bears for generations to come. Their story reflects the impact

of education across generations and stands as a reminder that Bear pride is not simply experienced during a student's years on campus — it is carried forward for a lifetime.

- **The first-ever Missouri State Steinway piano**, which will be in the Garnett Family Bears Den. It was supported by married couple Gordon '75 and Laura Kinne '79. It's so custom-made, "we went to the Steinway factory in New York to visit our piano," Williams said.
- **An executive breakout room** named for Bart Bailey and Amelia Bailey Counts '94.
- **An advancement office** named for Clarence E. McElroy '63.
- **Two "BearMobiles"** — enclosed golf carts — named for alums Mary Asher Tearney '54 and the Curbows, Stan '59 and Ethel '60.

Combined with proceeds from the sale of the Kenneth E. Meyer Alumni Center in 2024 and additional contributions, \$20 million of this \$26 million project was made possible through private support.



Mo State broke ground for the center on

April 1, 2025

The two-story building has

28,000 square feet

Missouri State University Foundation supporters provided

\$8,590,000+
in naming gifts for the building



President Richard B. Williams in the space that will become the Kenneth E. Meyer Event Center. PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

Meet the Bears who built the center

From construction, to HVAC, to plumbing, our alumni were among those who took the UAC from dream to reality.

Fairly recent grad Demi Stockham '24, project engineer with JE Dunn Construction, is stoked she had an opportunity to work on the site. Stockham graduated with a bachelor's degree in construction design and project management. She completed two internships with JE Dunn, which helped her land a job at the company. JE Dunn employs more than 30 Bears.

Sabrina Pavlova '22 & '24 is in a similar situation. Her job with Springfield Engineering Company resulted from an internship. On the site, she reconnected with former classmates. In fact, Jacob Nelson — the mechanical engineer with True Engineering — was once her professor.

Stockham maintained relationships in the School of Construction, Design and Project Management. She coordinated tours and attended events on and around campus.

"I gave a presentation in February after graduating, and one of my former classmates asked me, 'What's it like

being back?'" Stockham said. "My response was, 'I never really left.'"

Jordan Rainey '15 & '18 earned a bachelor's degree in sport and park administration, then an MBA in management and general sports management. He was a member of the football team from 2010-14. He is now project manager with E&K.

"Walking back onto campus, everything came rushing back — the joy of big wins, the sting of tough losses, the grind of overcoming adversity," Rainey said. "I could feel the humid summer heat from fall-camp and the freezing early-morning air from winter runs all at once. But more than anything, I felt the camaraderie and pride that defined my time at Missouri State. Working on a project for my alma mater taps into all of that. It's meaningful in a way that goes far beyond construction."

His past projects include the 1587 Prime Steakhouse, which JE Dunn and E&K completed for football players Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce in downtown Kansas City.

But this build has a feature that might surpass even that one. Dubbed the Bear Head, it's a 12x25 foot custom metal coil ceiling fixture shaped like the Mo State logo.

"I felt the camaraderie and pride that defined my time at Missouri State."

Jordan Rainey '15 & '18

"Picture a woven chainmail curtain suspended from the ceiling, creating a bold, dimensional outline of the logo," Rainey said. "Paired with the intricate lighting design and the surrounding architectural details, it becomes an immediate focal point. It's bold, technically complex and visually unforgettable. This will be a must-see feature on campus."

For Clint Coberley '09, this wasn't the first time working at his alma mater. He's a senior systems account manager at Trane Technologies, which provided the mechanical HVAC equipment for this project. Right after college, he was a project manager at Rosales Masonry. In those roles he worked in different capacities at Kemper Hall, Glass Hall and Heitz House.

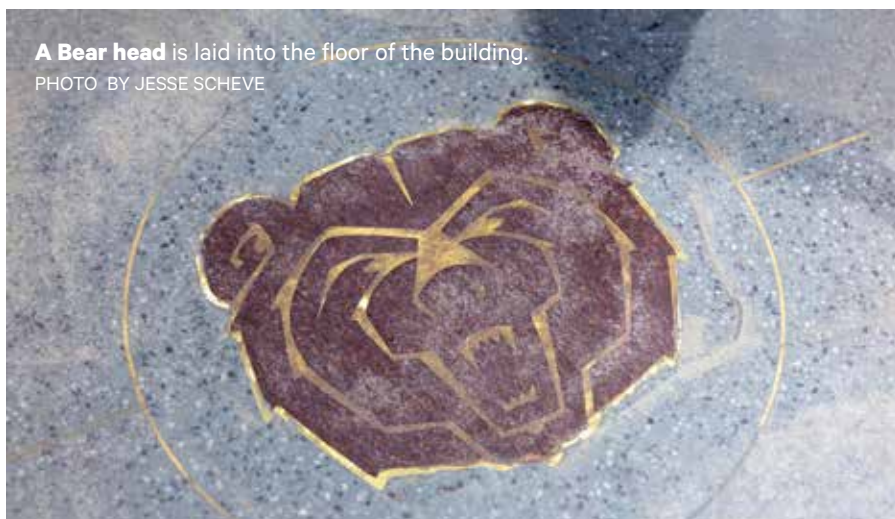
Now, he's working on both the addition to Blunt Hall and the Advancement Center.

"I have been fortunate enough to work on projects at Missouri State University throughout my entire career," Coberley said. "I love watching my alma mater grow, and I look forward to supporting more campus projects in the future!"

"As an alum, I'm excited to see Missouri State investing in a space that keeps alumni connected and involved."

Sabrina Pavlova '22 & '24

A Bear head is laid into the floor of the building.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE



OTHER BEARS WHO WORKED ON THIS PROJECT INCLUDE

- **David Atkisson '99**, Springfield office leader with JE Dunn Construction
- **Zach Blanton '08**, project superintendent with JE Dunn Construction
- **Olivia Roush**, current student and intern with JE Dunn Construction
- **Dustin Brown '99**, senior account executive at Johnson Controls



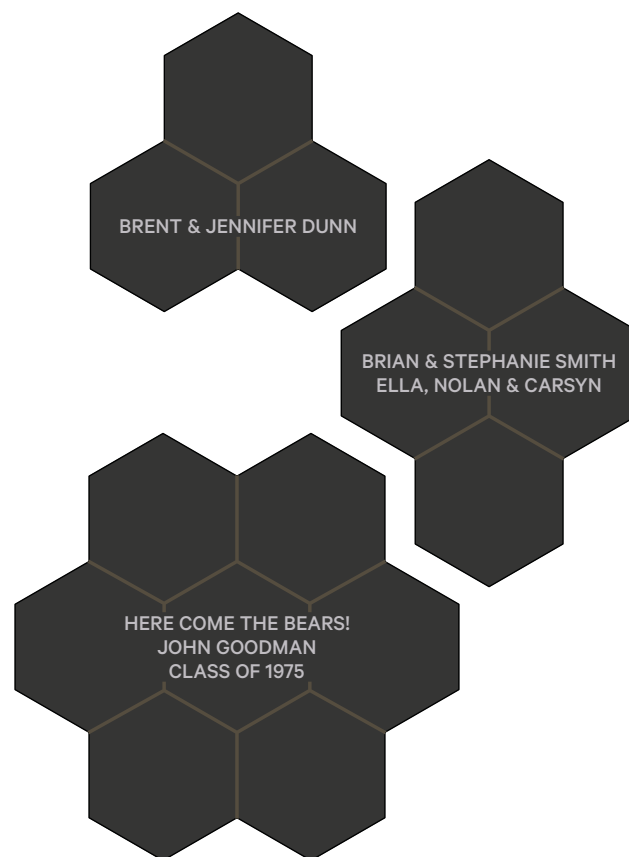
“It’s going to be super cool seeing, and maybe even attending, some events in a space I was a part of creating.”

Demi Stockham '24

Demi Stockham (left) gave a tour during the construction.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

We're **buzzing** over the

HIVE OF BEAR PRIDE



Bears shared their reasons for representing family, mentors and loved ones on the University Advancement Center's honeycombs.

BRAD THOMAS '84 & '87

Today, Brad Thomas is president of Silver Dollar City Attractions. But his senior year of high school, he was just a young man applying for scholarships.

"My dad was a pastor, so he didn't have a lot of money," Thomas said. Throughout the years, Thomas would visit with the counselor at Central High School. His senior year, she pulled several scholarships for him to consider — including the Alice Graves Lind scholarship at then-Southwest Missouri State University. Alice was a teacher in Springfield, and had raised her niece, Ora Dale Gillette '73, who established the gift in her honor.

Thomas was awarded the scholarship. It covered 100% of his tuition for his first two years. Frank and Ora Dale Gillette flew from southern California, where they lived, to Springfield to be there the day the award was announced at Central High School.

"They were incredibly kind and supportive," said Thomas.

His sophomore year, they told him they had decided to continue paying his tuition through his senior year.

"I'm so appreciative of their generosity. They made sure this young kid from the Ozarks had a shot at an education," he said.

Thomas purchased six honeycombs in honor of his parents, the College of Business, Silver Dollar City employees and, of course, Frank and Ora Dale Gillette and Alice Graves Lind.

"When the center opens, they will be on the wall," he said. "It makes my heart sing because in a very small way I have been able to celebrate what they did in my personal life."

SALLY NAPIER BUENO '74

When Sally Napier Bueno purchased a large honeycomb, it represented her family's long history with Missouri State.

Four generations have attended the university, and their names are honored.

"I thought it was special that I had that many generations connected with Missouri State from the very beginning of the school," she said.

Her grandmother, Tennessee Jackson, was born in 1888 in Webster County. Jackson attended the Fourth District Normal School in 1914 to earn her teaching certificate.

Sally's mother, Jane Hartley, and two of her uncles enrolled during the World War II era.

Her mom also earned a teaching certificate, and later earned a bachelor's degree in music education in 1956. She established the Napier Family Scholarship, which benefits students majoring in musical theatre, violin or cello performance.

Then Sally earned her bachelor's degree in Spanish in 1974.

Her daughter, Nicole Bueno, earned a master's degree in instructional media in 2005 and was part of the first class to graduate under the Missouri State University name. She is a teacher/librarian.

Through almost all names of the university, someone in their family has been enrolled.

"I thought that was cool," she said. "This was a fun thing to do."

BOB AND JEANNE BOEHMLER, BOTH '77

Bob Boehmler and his wife Jeanne bought three honeycombs, sizes small, medium and large. This represents their family's robust history of being Bears: Seven members have attended.

Bob is the oldest brother. He enrolled in 1973. His two younger brothers followed.

"They both graduated. I met my wife Jeanne at Missouri State and my younger brother met his wife Judy there," Boehmler said.

His niece and a great niece are also alumnae.

Bob and Jeanne established the Jeanne M. Prochaska Boehmler Special Education Scholarship Fund and are faithful supporters of the university.

"We don't have enough money to name a building, but we thought it would be great if we could find some way to highlight and celebrate the Boehmler Bear family," Boehmler said. "We thought it would be a fun way to have something after we are gone."

BLANCA MALLONEE '19

When Blanca Mallonee heard about the hive of Bear pride, she knew she wanted a honeycomb.

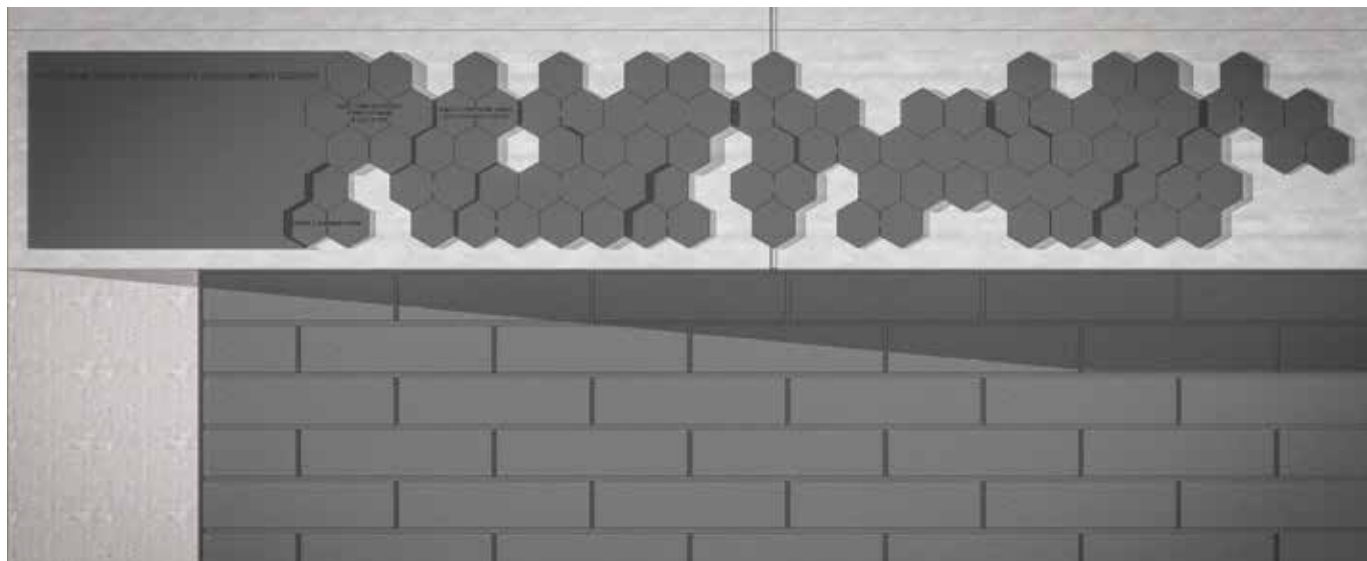
Mallonee is the executive assistant to the office of associate provost for student success. She met her husband Andy '95 at Missouri State, and her daughters Ashley '24 and Haley '26 are recent graduates.

"It's kind of like a milestone for us that we get to share this. We love Missouri State," she said.

Mallonee was a first-generation student who attended in the 1990s, then stopped going. She got married, raised her kids and then was hired at Mo State. While working in the office of student success, they asked her if she had graduated. She said no, but that it was her goal to do so before her daughter earned her degree. Turns out, Mallonee actually had enough credits to earn a degree in general studies.

Their entire family is excited to see the honeycomb.

"I'm glad that they are doing this. You leave your legacy somewhere, then everybody will be able to see it," Mallonee said. "Maybe our grandkids will see it one day!"



Renderings of the honeycombs.



**ORDER A
HONEYCOMB**



Your Missouri State story belongs in Traditions Hall

The new **Mercy Traditions Hall** inside the **Advancement Center** is a digital display that celebrates the people who make Missouri State special — and we'd love to include you.

Share your favorite Missouri State photo for a chance to have it featured on the display during the center's grand opening and beyond. Whether it's:

- Graduation day
- Homecoming
- A campus tradition
- Your favorite classmates
- A family legacy of Bears
- A student organization
- A championship moment
- A favorite campus memory

Every photo helps tell the story of the Bears!



PHOTO BY KEVIN WHITE

**SUBMIT
YOUR
PHOTO**



Save the dates: Meet us at the UAC!

The grand opening of the University Advancement Center will be part of Homecoming festivities.

2 p.m. Nov. 11

RIBBON CUTTING

The official dedication

6 p.m. Nov. 13

BEAR NATION CELEBRATION

The ultimate Homecoming eve

Paint the town maroon and white as we host the block party of the year, full of one-of-a-kind surprises, entertainment and fun!



RENDERING BY DAKE WELLS ARCHITECTURE

**LEARN MORE ABOUT 2026
HOMECOMING EVENTS**



MissouriState.edu/Homecoming



What is the Division for University Advancement?

How does it propel Missouri State?

The UAC is the new home for all staff members of the Division for University Advancement. The Division for University Advancement stands at the heart of Missouri State's progress, purpose and promise. Through meaningful relationships, shared generosity and enduring stewardship, University Advancement strengthens the university's mission and expands opportunities for generations of Bears. The division unites the Missouri State University Foundation and the Missouri State University Alumni Association. These groups honor Missouri State's proud history while investing in its future. Together, these partners inspire philanthropy, foster lifelong engagement and cultivate a community dedicated to student success, academic excellence and service beyond Missouri State.

**We connect a
global network of**
**176,000+
alumni**

Advancement includes:

- The Missouri State University Foundation (established 1981).
- The Missouri State University Alumni Association (founded 1907).
- Development (major gifts, planned giving, annual giving and more).
- Data and technology.
- Contribution management.
- University Advancement relations.
- Engagement and alumni relations.
- Athletics development and The Bears Fund.

You may not always see University Advancement at work, but you see the impact.

Our team secures support for scholarships, faculty positions, programs and campus projects. We're behind:

- Scholarships that make college possible. We develop guidelines, maintain software, train selection committees and ensure our awards align with the intent of their donor.
- Spaces that feel like home. We advocate for private support of physical improvements, like new buildings and renovations.
- Experiences that build community and traditions Bears carry with them. We're behind events like Homecoming, reunions, the Bears of Distinction awards, Founders Club recognition, public affairs events and many other gatherings that inspire pride, volunteerism and philanthropy.
- Connections that launch careers and further Bears' futures.
- Endowments for faculty members who enhance our academic excellence.
- Assets and resources that position Missouri State University for long-term success. ▼

In academic year 2025-26:

\$4.7 million

in private scholarships was
awarded to 1,902 students on
the Springfield campus

\$455,000+

was awarded to 196 students
on the West Plains campus

This means privately funded
scholarships awarded to
Mo State students totaled

\$5 MILLION+

for the first time

Fiscal year 2026 highlights

98,661

gifts processed (a new record!)

\$49+ million
raised

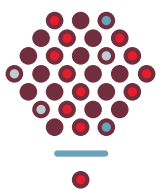
20,735
donors

EVENTS

Bears. Beliefs. Building connections.

Actor Rainn Wilson headlines Public Affairs Conference 2026

THE WE FACTOR Building Connections That Matter



Missouri State University
Public Affairs 2026-2027

Award-winning actor, comedian and New York Times bestselling author Rainn Wilson is the Public Affairs Conference 2026 keynote speaker.

He brings his unique blend of humor, storytelling and insight on the human connection to Missouri State University.

Wilson's presentation will take place at 7 p.m. Sept. 29 at Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts. The keynote event kicks off the conference, scheduled Sept. 29-Oct. 1.

The conference theme, "The We Factor: Building Connections That Matter," explores the role relationships and community play in creating meaningful lives.

Best known for his portrayal of Dwight Schrute on NBC's "The Office," Wilson has built a career that extends beyond entertainment. He is the co-founder of media company SoulPancake, and has spent years exploring the ways we all seek connection, hope, truth, identity and purpose. Wilson and the SoulPancake team were dedicated to stimulating your brain, sparking your soul and figuring out what it means to be human.

Wilson is the author of "The Bassoon King" and the bestselling "SoulPancake: Chew on Life's Big Questions." His newest book, another bestseller, is "Soul Boom: Why We Need a Spiritual Revolution."

His work aligns with the conference's focus on connection and community. Through storytelling and humor, Wilson challenges audiences to engage more deeply with one another and the world around them. ▼

MEET WILSON BEFORE HIS TALK

The Missouri State University Foundation will host a **VIP experience** with Wilson at 5 p.m. at The Old Glass Place. Tickets are \$150 per person. Guests will:

- Have a photo opportunity with Wilson.
- Receive an autographed copy of "Soul Boom: Why We Need a Spiritual Revolution."
- Enjoy cocktails, beverages and hors d'oeuvres.
- Get special reserved seating at the keynote presentation.

GET TICKETS

 **MissouriState
Foundation.org/
VIPexperience**

 **417-836-5138**



PROVIDED PHOTO

Giving Day 2026 makes an immediate impact

In 36 hours, members of the Missouri State community came together during the university's fifth-annual Giving Day.

From March 25 to 26, Bear and Grizzly alumni, students, faculty, staff, family, organizations and friends showed their pride and generosity as part of Missouri State's 121st birthday.

Giving Day gifts fuel scholarships, student organizations, academic programs, athletic teams and other initiatives, ensuring every student has the tools to thrive both in the classroom and beyond.

This year's success was driven by a united campus-wide effort and the passion of individual ambassadors who inspired others to give.

"Every gift helps strengthen our campus and sustain our programs," said President Richard B. Williams. ▾

SOME STANDOUT MOMENTS FROM GIVING DAY 2026

- More than \$21,660 was raised for scholarships.
- More than \$56,700 was raised for athletics.
- 1,000+ gifts were made.
- A special bandana with a Mo State design was given to those who got two people or more to support Giving Day.

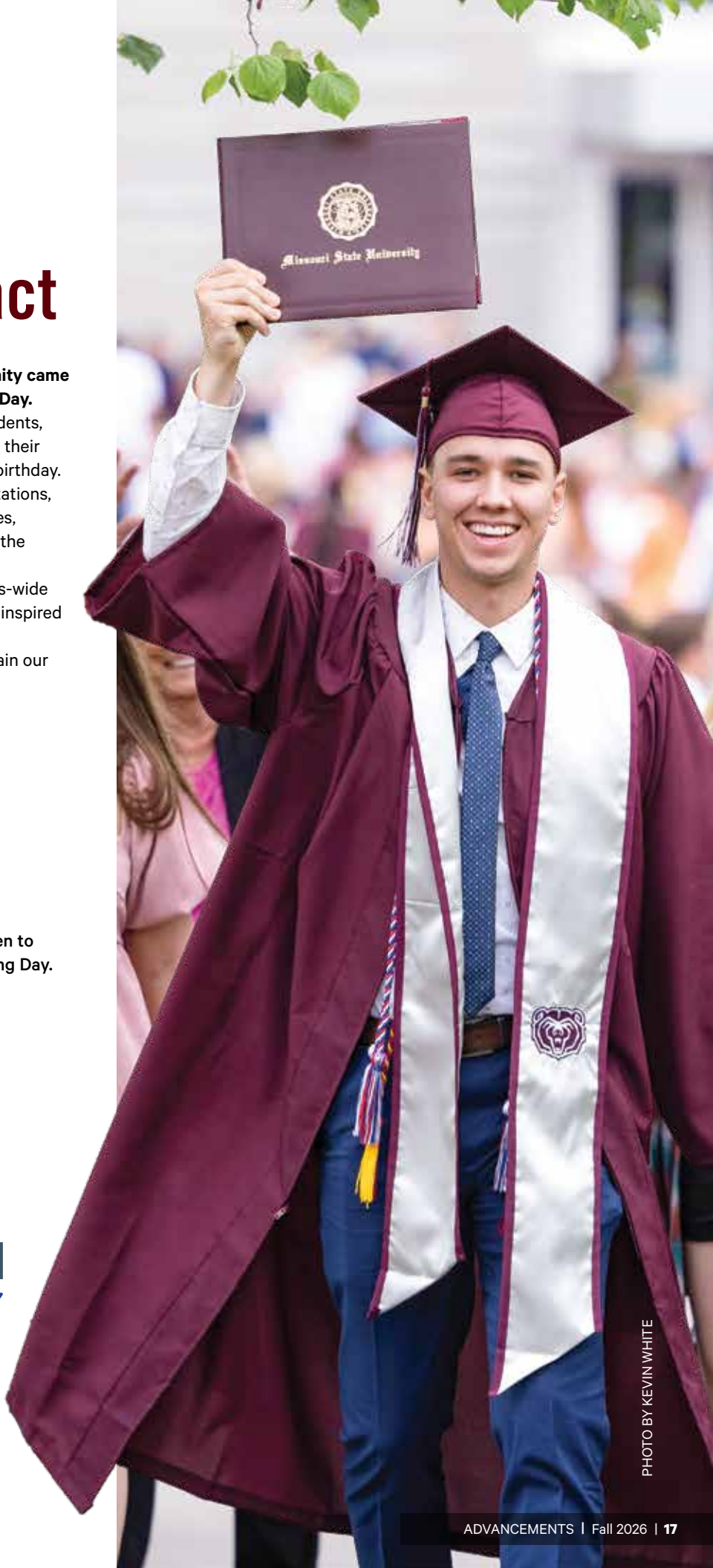


PHOTO BY KEVIN WHITE

THE STORY BEHIND A GIFT

94-year-old alumna gives to food pantry, scholarships

“If a student is having trouble financially, then I’d like to help”

WRITTEN BY TAYLOR LADD



OZARKO
1952

When Advancements magazine called for our interview with Noreen (Springer) Bednar '54, she paused a basketball game on TV.

“I’ve got my scorecards all set for March Madness,” Bednar said.

Bednar loves keeping up with college sports, including the Bears when she can catch a game from her home in Los Angeles.

She also loves Missouri State, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in educational administration in 1954. Now, at age 94, she credits choosing this place as one of the most important decisions of her life.

What was your first year at Missouri State like?

My family moved from Rochester, Minnesota, to Buffalo, Missouri, when I was a teenager. There were lots of new things and adjustments. I came from a Catholic high school in Minnesota. At Missouri State, I was vice president of the Newman Club (organization that serves Catholic students) at my church and would hold meetings on campus.

I also had a new friend who was trying out for the Bruin Boosters (now called the Pride Band). She wanted me to go with her. We both made it, which was fun. We played the drums at football games as freshmen.

State College Library

Future Teachers

A project of the National Education Association, the SMS chapter is four years old. Membership serves to connect students who plan to teach with educational associations which will aid them during their professional career. Activities include monthly meetings, field trips, sponsorship of educational conferences, and observance of American Educational Week.



Noreen (Springer) Bednar, third from left in the front, was in the Future Teachers organization during her time on campus.

OZARKO 1952

How was the rest of your college experience?

My second year, I worked for the university's room and board office (now residence life) way over on the south side of Springfield.

Then, my third year I got a wonderful deal. About three students at Missouri State were going to be chosen to teach in Springfield schools. I was fortunate enough that the superintendent came to observe me (as a student teacher), and I got one of those jobs that was more full-time.

Their principals taught in the morning; we would come teach in the afternoon. I was teaching at a brand-new elementary school.

I would go to college in the morning, take a full course, get on the bus and teach a combination of fourth and fifth grade in the afternoon.



Noreen (Springer) Bednar was among the Bruin Boosters in the yearbook from 1950. OZARKO 1950

On the last day of school, one of the fifth-grade boys said, "Ms. Springer, we kids couldn't have stood it this year if you hadn't come in the afternoons."

What did you do after you graduated?

I moved to Stockton, California, near Sacramento. I taught kindergarten for about four years and then first grade.

I got married when I was 28, and by then I had my "life diploma" from teaching quite a bit.

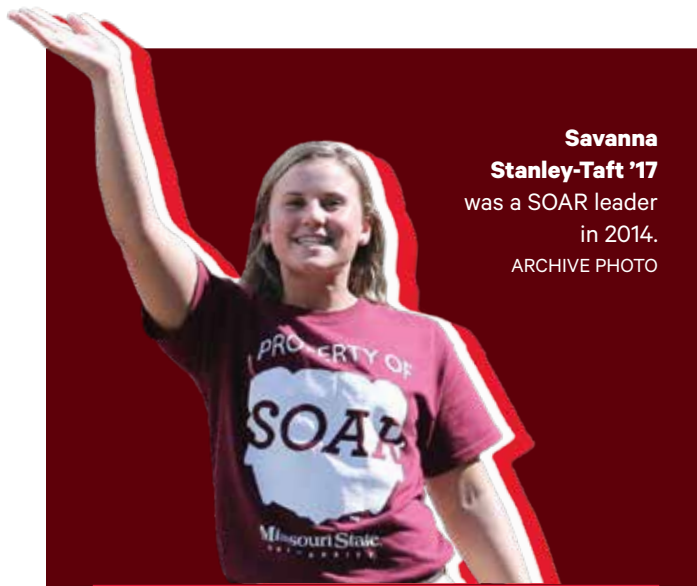
Tell me about your family life.

My husband's job allowed me to be home with my seven babies. I loved it.

He passed away when we were both 51. I went right back to teaching in Los Angeles schools. The people I had started teaching with were tired of it by the time I was 51. It still felt new to me.

I was able to substitute teach and keep my family together from the ages of 51 to 74. You can see why I adore my college degree. I could keep my family all together, do something that I knew how to do and I was paid very well.

One of the greatest compliments of my entire life was when the substitute teaching office said, "We can't believe it. We've had a few calls this morning, and most of them have been schools requesting you."



Savanna Stanley-Taft '17 was a SOAR leader in 2014. ARCHIVE PHOTO

Her granddaughter is also a Bear!

Noreen's granddaughter Savanna Stanley-Taft '17 grew up in California, but decided on Missouri State University for college. She graduated from the Darr College of Agriculture, and her husband Bruce Taft studied in the McQueary College of Health and Human Services.

What are some of your other favorite teaching memories?

After my husband died, I got myself to Mexico to take Spanish classes. Now I speak it quite well.

One day, I was substituting in a fourth-grade class, 9-year-olds. Half of them only spoke Spanish, and they could not subtract in math. I said to the English-speaking children, "I'm going to teach the class in Spanish, so please excuse me."

When those children left that day, all of the young boys and girls shook my hand on their way out. I'll never forget it.

You paid it forward in recent years. Tell us about that.

As soon as they started the Bear Pantry on campus, that appealed to me because the year I worked for room and board, they provided breakfast and supper. I had no money during the day and never went to the cafeteria on campus.

When I heard about the pantry opening, I thought about how I could have gone and gotten an apple, a couple of cookies. That would have been nice because I was hungry that year. I was so thrilled to hear they were doing this.

I also set up a living trust scholarship for first-generation freshmen students. If a student is having trouble financially, then I'd like to help them.

I do it because I feel that the most important thing that ever happened to me was getting my college degree at Missouri State. ▼

SIGHTS AND SCENES





- 1. Bears glided into the spring semester** Jan. 12 at Ice Ice Baby in the Foster Rec Center, an evening of ice skating and free pizza.
PHOTO BY CHARLES SARGENT



- 2. The Darr College of Agriculture** held a ribbon cutting for the Ag Innovation Hub and Small Animal Education Center on March 7, which was Darr Difference Day.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE
- 3. We're 121 years old!** Mo State's birthday party was March 24. We don't feel a day older than 99.
PHOTO BY CHANDLER HARRIS



- 4. The Baseball Bears** defeated Arkansas on March 31 in front of the fourth-largest crowd in school baseball history.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE
- 5. The Route 66 Centennial** was a citywide celebration. Alums Mark '78 and Diann Garnett '96 loaned their 1954 GMC pickup to Mo State for the May 1 parade. A float was built on the truck by students, and John Goodman and Boomer rode in it during the parade.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE



- 6. Holi, a Hindu festival** of colors, love and spring, was celebrated April 11 on campus.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE
- 7. The Lady Bears** advanced to the NCAA Tournament on March 18. The win marked the 20th NCAA Tournament win in program history.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE
- 8. We made it** to the end of another school year! Mo State celebrated May 7 with Grad Bash 2026.
PHOTO BY CHANDLER HARRIS
- 9. It was a high-water moment** on April 23. We've been celebrating Fountain Day for 10 years!
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE
- 10. This is what it's all about:** Mo State awarded 931 bachelor's degrees, 632 master's degrees, 10 specialist degrees and 104 doctorate degrees on May 8.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

LIGHTNING ROUND



Michael Mardis

**PROJECT MANAGER-ARCHITECT;
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, DESIGN
AND CONSTRUCTION**

Grew up in: Vincennes, Indiana

Education: Bachelor's degree in architecture,
Drury University, 2001

Career: After college, Mardis and his wife, Natalie, moved to New Hampshire before he accepted a job at an architecture firm in Columbia, South Carolina. He worked at the firm from 2001-05. Mardis returned to Springfield to start a business with college friends, focusing on residential, furniture and construction design. After the housing market downturn, he worked as a project manager for a metal fabricator and construction company, later joining Rhoads Design & Construction before starting his role at Missouri State.

Family: His wife earned a degree in graphic design and later became a nurse. Mardis' parents moved to Springfield, and his mother briefly worked at Missouri State. He has three kids: Stella, Maebel and Wade. Their family also includes a crazy French bulldog named Nora.

What does your role with Missouri State involve?

Officially, we're managing any kind of construction on campus, working with architectural and engineering consultants and contractors. The main focus is managing projects, but we end up doing a lot more depending on what the project requires. We do what is needed to get these projects finished.

What are some campus projects you're working on?

The Judith Enyeart Reynolds Performing Arts Complex and the Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center. Within those, there's a million little projects too. I also recently refinished the Greenwood gymnasium floors and have been helping with campus exterior way-finding and interior building sign designs.

The new University Advancement Center will be opening soon. What details of that build are you most excited about?

All the little architectural and branding details that don't usually make it into these buildings. I had the opportunity to work on a lot of design features in this building, so I'm excited to see those finished and see how people experience them. This is the most design work that I've done for a campus project.

What are the "must-see" features in the new space?

The building itself is unique compared to anything on campus, and even in Springfield. The level of material and detail sets it apart. Personally, I worked on Harthcock Reception Hall, the Billy E. and Carolin J. Hixon Bear Constellation, the Pinegar Family Executive Board Room table, the exterior Bear head sculpture and helped with furniture selection.

You traveled to look at advancement and alumni centers around the country. What's your favorite memory of that?

Brent Dunn in the airport. It was just fun to travel with the team, experience each building and understand how the other schools use their buildings.

Favorite aspect of your job?

I've enjoyed having the opportunity to meet a lot of people on campus. It's never a dull moment around here. We get to do so many things and work with so many architects, engineers and contractors. I learn something every day.

Favorite building on campus?

The University Advancement Center and the Judith Enyeart Reynolds Performing Arts Complex are definitely going to be up there, but currently it's Craig Hall. It's a significant piece of architecture; it's a brutalist design. It's a fairly complicated building.

Favorite building/piece of architecture of all time?

One of my favorites is a small house my friend and I designed and built out of shipping containers. It's outside Northview, Missouri, sitting on a hill in the woods along the James River.

Best Missouri State moment/memory?

Getting the John Goodman Amphitheatre finished and having Goodman there. It was the most difficult project I have worked on, but it was cool to see it come together.

Any hobbies?

Too many and not enough time for any of them. I enjoy metal- and wood-working and golf. I am constantly working on my house and following my kids around for sports.

Pick one: live music, live sporting events, movies or gaming?

Live music.

Favorite meal in Springfield?

Cesar's Old Mexico, the carne asada.

Little-known fact about you?

I love listening to podcasts about aliens.

Biggest splurge?

My kids.

What advice would you give your college self?

Relax, things aren't as bad as they seem, and it will all work out.

What inspires you?

In architecture, well-thought-out design and clean, simple details. In general, kindness towards people. ▼



Mardis and a friend designed this house built out of shipping containers outside Northview, Missouri. SUBMITTED PHOTO



Members of the planning, design and construction team gathered at the 2025 groundbreaking for the center. PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE



Michael Mardis gave a tour to Trustees on May 27 after new gifts for the center were announced. PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Beverly Miller Keltner

Trustees experience hands-on learning spaces during their spring meeting

Supporters learned about labs in the College of Business and dined with scholarship recipients.

Foundation trustees gathered on campus April 23 for their spring meeting.

First, they were welcomed to the Jim and Pat Jones Reception and Meeting Room in Glass Hall, the home of the College of Business.

From there, they could tour some of Mo State's hands-on learning spaces for business Bears.

This includes the McDonald Entrepreneurship Labs, where Bears make and sell products and generate revenue. Students gain experience in design, marketing, communicating, managing and more — giving them a taste of running a small business.

Jack Thurman sponsored the creation of the labs to honor his father-in-law, Chuck McDonald. McDonald graduated from what was then-Southwest Missouri State College with an accounting degree.

Mo State completed the labs in fall 2022. Dana Frederick, senior instructor of management and entrepreneurship, oversees the area.

"From the design aspect, branding, name, logo, to product development, it's showcasing our students, their creativity, innovations and skill sets," Frederick said. "As they go out in the workforce, they can say 'Hey, look what I created.'"



Trustees were treated to a special pop-up event: The labs' equipment was used to create Mo State-branded apparel and gear just for them.

They also toured the student-operated Security Operations Center lab, which gives Bears the opportunity to understand hackers, track real-world cyber threats and refine their skills in cybersecurity.

Trustees could also explore the Digital Fashion and Merchandising labs, where students develop original designs using 3D design software as well as industrial embroidery and sewing machines.

From there, they were shuttled to the construction site of the Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center and took a tour to catch up on the building's progress.

Next, they had lunch at Garst Dining Center with students who earned private scholarships.

They headed back to Glass Hall to discuss governance of the Missouri State University Foundation, as well as the organization's finances and development.

They wrapped up the day with a reception at Brick City, where they were able to take guided walks in the art galleries.

"We are grateful for the leadership and commitment of our Board of Trustees who joined us for our spring meeting," said Brent Dunn, president and CEO of the Missouri State University Foundation.

"Your time, insight and guidance truly cannot be overstated," he said. "Thank you for your thoughtful participation in committee meetings and for the leadership you provide to the Missouri State Foundation. Because of you, we're building a stronger future together." ▽



Trustees toured the high-tech digital labs used by fashion design, merchandising and branding students.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE



Dr. Xiang Guo, head of the information technology and cybersecurity department, explains how students learn using real-time cybersecurity-tracking technology.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

Trustee Callie Swafford '13 & '19 was among the visitors who created Mo State-branded apparel and gear in the McDonald Entrepreneurship Labs.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE



MEET A TRUSTEE

Gregory Beck



Gregory Beck had several firsts on campus: He was a first-generation student from Aurora, Missouri.

He was in the first pledge class of Alpha Kappa Psi, a business fraternity, and still stays in touch with members.

Because of this tendency to go first, he felt pressure to show other people — like his younger brother — that college was a better path than finding a job out of high school. His younger brother went on to graduate from Mo State.

When Beck graduated in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in computer information systems, it propelled his career. He retired a few years ago after high positions with a Fortune 500 company.

Beck's first job was with Keltner Enterprises automotive wholesale distributors, and he earned an MBA during that time from another university.

After a decade with Keltner, he bought local bakery Julie's Chewies Gourmet Cookies.

"It was a good learning experience and prepared me to work for a larger company," he said.

Beck sold it five years later. In 1999, he joined the information technology department at O'Reilly Auto Parts. He later became a purchasing manager.

"I was responsible for replenishment of our distribution centers at O'Reilly, which back then, there were just five distribution centers and about 800 stores," Beck said. "I grew with the company over the next 21 years and ended up as vice president of purchasing. I was responsible for inventory management, logistics, supply chain and for all of our distribution centers."

He retired in 2020 and now enjoys golfing and traveling. He and his wife will visit their seventh continent in November when they go to Asia.

What do you enjoy about being a Missouri State University Foundation Trustee?

Seeing the impact of the foundation and giving back to the university. It's especially needed for the students who might not be able to attend if they didn't have a support structure.

Also, seeing how gifts mean we can get good professors in place who continue to raise the quality of education Missouri State offers.

What is your favorite Missouri State moment or memory?

Just knowing that if I worked hard, Missouri State would give me the opportunity to go as far as I wanted and be the best I could be.

All my instructors were very supportive. That was a big plus as I was

coming from a small town as a first-generation student.

What would you like to see for Missouri State's future?

I'd like to continue to see it grow, especially growing its influence and reputation in Missouri. Mo State is just as important as the other large institutions in the state. I'm especially partial to the College of Business. I think it's one of the best in the area. I would put that college up against almost any mid-level school in the United States.

I want to ensure Missouri State continues to have a lot to offer for all those who come here — not only for people from the region, but from throughout the country.

— Interview by Juliana Goodwin



Gregory Beck (right) and Bill Rowe talk during a tour of the University Advancement Center on Nov. 13, 2025.
PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

Gregory Beck walks around the Darr Agricultural Center during a Trustees event showcasing agriculture education at Missouri State.
PHOTO BY KEVIN WHITE



FACES OF THE FOUNDATION



Natalie Seever

**Director of Technology and Data Services
for University Advancement**

Hometown: Nixa, Missouri

Career: Worked as a project analyst at Sprint after college; was first hired at Missouri State in 2004.

Family: She and husband Mike '99 have two kids. Their daughter will start her journey as a Bear this fall! Their furry family members are three dogs: Carly, Teddy Murphy and Gus.

What is your role?

To ensure donor and alumni confidentiality and data integrity for the foundation. My area does that in several ways:

- We monitor and manage access to our system of records for alumni and donor information.
- We maintain the data systems. If there's an upgrade or new features coming out, we're staying on top of those so data is entered correctly.
- We set standards for the way data is entered. When new people are hired, we provide the training and documentation for how data is stored.
- We also communicate directly with our campus partners, like the staff of computer services.

What is your favorite part of the job?

I'm a big organizer and love to standardize processes for efficiency. I really like figuring out how information will flow in and out of our system for its best possible use. It sounds so nerdy!

How do you spend time out of the office?

My kids are getting older, so spending time with them is important to me. We love the ice hockey Bears. We also go to Missouri State football games.

I'm an outdoor person. I look forward to hikes, planting, doing things in my garden. I don't have a green thumb though, so I'm still trying to figure out which plants work in the shade, and which don't. We would not survive if I was planting vegetables.

What's something not many people know about you?

I'm an adventure seeker. I've been skydiving by myself seven or eight times. One of my last jumps was at sunset. I've never seen anything more gorgeous. My husband and I went skydiving before we got married. We do other adventurous things, like whitewater rafting.

What's something you're looking forward to right now?

Having my daughter on campus! She's going to live in the residence halls, and my office will be on campus. I'm hoping she'll come over and say, "Mom, take me to lunch."

What are you most excited about as you move to the new Advancement Center?

Being more connected to campus as we move there from downtown. Our physical location will help us get our story out, help people understand what we do and why we're here for the university. Being closer to the students and seeing them is a good reminder for us of why we're here.

What do you want Missouri State supporters to know?

Any gift, big or small, really helps. I gave to Missouri State's stunt team for Giving Day because I used to be a cheerleader. It wasn't a huge donation, but I still got a card in the mail that said, 'Thank you for giving to stunt.' Just getting that personal message, it was like, wow, any gift, any size, makes an impact.

— Interview by Taylor Ladd

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We love hearing how alumni and friends of the university are doing. Help us keep our records up to date by letting us know if you have a name change or new address. Email, call or come by!



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**Bears, mark your
calendars for
paws-ibly the best
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NOV. 14



Alumni and friends: You are invited to Homecoming week events surrounding the grand opening of the University Advancement Center, your new home on campus.

2 p.m. | Nov. 11

Ribbon cutting and remarks
followed by an open house

6 p.m. | Nov. 13

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