


Missouri State®

THE MAGAZINE PUBLISHED FOR THE ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY ■ VOL. 21 ISSUE 2 ■ JUNE 2026



Screenwriting programs get a closeup

When you think about writers for film, television, plays or other well-loved forms of media, California or New York City might be the hubs that come to mind. But there's a plot twist — Missouri State's screenwriting and dramatic writing programs, in the heart of the Midwest, are winning no. 1 honors.

**Bears, mark your
calendars for
paws-ibly the best
Homecoming ever!**

NOV. 14



View all events, get football game tickets, sign up for reunions and more:



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

NOV. 11 | 2 p.m.

**RIBBON CUTTING AND REMARKS
FOLLOWED BY AN OPEN HOUSE**

NOV. 13 | 6 p.m.

IT'S TIME FOR THE

**BEAR NATION
CELEBRATION.**

**The ultimate
Homecoming eve party!**



MissouriState.edu/Homecoming

Missouri State

Publisher: Missouri State University office of creative services and the Alumni Association

Director of creative services: Veronica Adinegara '08

Magazine managing editor: Michelle S. Rose

Magazine art director and designer: Teri Poindexter '03

Office of creative services photographers:

Jesse Scheve '11, Kevin White

Contributing writers: Abigail E. Addae, Rina Chu, Emmy Dressler, Juliana Goodwin '02, Sewly Khatun, Taylor Ladd '21 & '23, Emily Letterman '07, Michelle S. Rose, Adair Seifert-Anspaugh, Emily Yeap

UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

Michaela Bennett '16, *Assistant Director of College and Constituency Engagement*

Debbie Branson '99, *Director of Foundation Relations*
Scott Carter '91, *Director of Development*

Jacqui Coones '07, '14, *Executive Director of Prospect Development*

Kerry Dickerson, *Senior Director of Athletics Development*

Katie Dudden '03, *Assistant Director of*

University Advancement Relations, MSU-West Plains

W. Brent Dunn '85, '91, *Vice President for University Advancement*

Nova Ewers '22, *Assistant Director of Digital Engagement*

Wendy Ferguson, *Assistant Vice President for*

Development and Strategy

Dr. Robert D. Greim, *Director of Development, West Plains*

Paige Grisham '16, '18, *Director of Athletics Development*

Alison Harper, *Director of Annual Funds*

Connor Keltner '16, *Director of Development*

Phillip E. Kovach, *Content Strategist*

Lindsey McDaniel, *Assistant Director of Prospect Development*

Kelsey Menefee '17, '18, *Director of University Advancement Relations*

Suzannah Pace '09, *Director of Leadership Annual Giving*

Angela Pinegar '92, '11, *Director of Contribution Management*

Karl Schmidt, *Executive Director of Planned Giving*

Natalie Seever, *Director of Technology and Data Services*

Stephanie Smith '04, '06, *Executive Director of*

University Advancement Relations

Ginger L. Stringer, *Director of University Advancement Communications*

Yulia Whittington '11, *Director of Development*

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS OFFICERS

Dr. William Datema '81, '85, chair, St. Louis

Caitlin (Schaefer) Reinauer '18, chair elect, Jersey City, New Jersey

Mark Campbell '86, vice chair, Lebanon, Missouri

Chloe Shauk '19, vice chair, Springfield

Aaren (Williamson) Muex '02, immediate past chair, St. Louis

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

BOARD OF TRUSTEES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Gregory A. Beck '85, Nixa, Missouri

Judy Breeding '73, Springfield

Dan D. Cobb '84, Springfield

Amelia A. Counts '94, Ballwin, Missouri

Bill Datema '81 & '85, Alumni Association, ex-officio

W. Brent Dunn '85 & '91, president and CEO of the

Missouri State University Foundation, ex-officio

Ann M. Kampeter, Board of Governors, ex-officio

Gary V. Garwitz '77, Springfield

Dr. Matthew A. Harthcock '77, Sun City Center, Florida

Beverly Miller Keltner '73, chair, Springfield

Richard H. Miller '83, Rogers, Arkansas

Eric Schick, treasurer, ex-officio

Dr. Susan S. Sims-Giddens, Springfield

Dr. Richard B. Williams,

president of Missouri State University, ex-officio

Jennifer Weter, secretary

James H. Wilson '84, immediate past chair

Phone: 417-836-4143

Fax: 417-836-6886

Email: Foundation@MissouriState.edu

Email: Alumni@MissouriState.edu

Missouri State magazine is published three times a year by Missouri State University. Postmaster: Send address changes to Missouri State University, Alumni Association, 901 S. National Ave., Springfield, MO 65897

Equal Opportunity Employer and Institution

Printed with soy ink. ALM 12-15-2025



CONTENTS

12-19

SCENE:
Mo State
wins again

Missouri State's screenwriting and dramatic writing programs are earning no. 1 honors.

FADE IN:
INT. BALLROOM - DAY

The ballroom is decked out in a glittering mess of pink taffeta, golden balloons, and curling ribbons. A banner covers the wall, reading: HAPPY 21ST BIRTHDAY TONY!

Two dozen obviously TEEN GIRLS in sequin dresses wander around, ooh-ing and ahh-ing at the decor. MORGAN (40) paces behind the group with a camera, snapping pictures.

ALYSSA MATZ (29) puts the finishing touches on the open bar in the corner while the DJ sets up his equipment beside her. CARMEN MATZ (19) meticulously places napkins folded into roses on each charger plate.

Morgan breathes a deep sigh of relief. Good, they're not all here yet.

Alyssa looks up, catches Morgan's eye, and grins. Who? You're the only one who's been M.I.A., Miss F and B.

That means food and beverage. Pretty sure the F and B manager knows what F and B means.

CARMEN Oh, really? I thought she could use the extra help.

MORGAN Looks Morgan up and down. You know, considering she's like an hour late and looks like an ill-taken prop.

CARMEN (CONT'D) Alyssa flicks her forehead. MORGAN A splash of tomato juice stains

AROUND CAMPUS



6-7

College of Business now has Mo State's first named school

Alumnus and his daughters made a gift that resulted in the Pendleton Family School of Accountancy.



8-11

Bears help the nation celebrate 100th birthday of Route 66

Students, alumni and friends, including actor John Goodman, played a big part in the National Route 66 Centennial Celebration. It was held in Springfield from April 30-May 3.

GO MO STATE! ATHLETICS NEWS



20-21

Lady Bears' season ends in first round of NCAA Tournament

The women's basketball team has now appeared in the postseason in 11 consecutive seasons. This was their first return to the "Big Dance" since 2021-22.

22-23

Former standouts enshrined in Athletics Hall of Fame

Missouri State inducted seven former athletes, an iconic sportswriter and a national championship team as part of its 2025-26 Athletics Hall of Fame class. Ceremonies took place Feb. 14.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS



24-31

Meet the alumni and friends who are 2026 Bears of Distinction

The Missouri State University Alumni Association recognized these graduates and friends during a dinner and ceremony.

The awardees were Ken McClure '72, the College of Business Executive Advisory Council, former sportscaster Art Hains, Dr. Adrienne Battle '03, Barbara Ducey Bowden '83, Julie Cromer '93, Gina Keltner '89, Dr. Maureen McCarthy '81 and Voin Todorovic '97 & '00.



32-35

Work of Ozarks expert Marideth Sisco '86 to be preserved

The new Marideth Sisco Community Education Fund at Missouri State-West Plains is named for a late alumna. Sisco was a radio personality, singer, songwriter, author, retired journalist and expert on the region. The endowment will fund speakers, and Sisco's work will be displayed on campus.

36-38

Alumnus of Mo State program in D.C. counters terrorism

Ian Platz '11 & '13 has a thriving career in defense and national security. He says it wouldn't have happened without a unique Missouri State resource — the School of Defense and Strategic Studies near D.C. — and an internship facilitated by a faculty member.

Missouri State

PENDLETON
SCHOOL
ACCOUNTANCY

“This gift strengthens every aspect of our school. By expanding access through scholarships, supporting faculty excellence and enhancing experiential learning, it ensures our accounting graduates are prepared to lead and innovate in a rapidly evolving profession.”

*Dr. David Meinert, dean of the College of Business and
David D. Glass distinguished leadership chair*

▲ Sheri Pendleton Law (from left), Sally Pendleton Phillips '94, Sally's husband Graham Phillips and their daughter Savannah Phillips represented the family as Missouri State announced the name of the School of Accountancy. PHOTO BY JESSE SCHEVE

A Mo State milestone:

Pendleton Family School of Accountancy is university's first named school

Alumnus and his daughters make a gift that will elevate teaching, learning and mentorship.

In February, Missouri State announced a new name in the College of Business: The Pendleton Family School of Accountancy.

“This milestone moment — the university's first named school — was made possible thanks to a significant seven-figure gift from alumnus Dick Pendleton and his three daughters

(Sheri Law, Sally Phillips and Tracy Myrick),” said Missouri State University Foundation President Brent Dunn.

The university announced the gift and naming during a ceremony on campus.

“We're grateful to Dick and his family for their commitment to advancing accounting education in the College of Business,” said Missouri State University President Richard B. Williams.

“It's an honor for our School of Accountancy to bear the Pendleton family name and we're excited to continue a lasting partnership with them.”

Pendleton graduated with a business finance degree in 1966 from what was then Southwest Missouri State College.

He began his career at Baird, Kurtz and Dobson in Springfield, a relatively small Certified Public Accountant (CPA) firm with three offices. There, he put his accounting education to work in meaningful ways and became a CPA in 1970 and a tax partner in 1974.

The firm later became known as BKD, growing to 34 offices. After a merger in 2021 and the formation of a global network in 2024, it is now Forvis Mazars,



**THE PENDLETON
FAMILY
SCHOOL OF
ACCOUNTANCY
HAS:**

Nearly 600
undergraduate and
graduate students

12
faculty
members,
including
its director,
Dr. Kimberly
Church

a top 10 global professional services network. Missouri State accounting graduates have played a significant role in the growth of BKD/Forvis Mazars.

“My education at Southwest Missouri State gave me a strong foundation — not just in accounting, but in discipline, ethics and problem-solving,” Pendleton said. “The degree I earned opened doors throughout my career, and I’ve always felt fortunate and proud to be a graduate of the university.”

He said seeing two of his daughters go on to become CPAs has been

rewarding, and speaks to their family’s value of the profession. Two of his granddaughters are also on track to become accountants.

“Leaving a family legacy is especially meaningful to me,” he said. “Supporting the accounting program at Missouri State allows me to give back in a way that matters — by investing in future CPAs, supporting the school’s faculty and helping ensure every student who chooses accounting at Missouri State receives a high-quality educational experience.” ■

Mo State Celebrates The Mother Road

**BEARS PLAYED A BIG PART IN THE NATIONAL ROUTE 66
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION, HELD APRIL 30-MAY 3 IN SPRINGFIELD.**

NBC'S "TODAY" SHOW

Alum John Goodman, Boomer, the Pride Band and Spirit Squad joined Al Roker, Dylan Dreyer and Laura Jarrett for a filming of the show's third hour on April 30.





PARADE PRE-PARTY

University friends and community members gathered at The Old Glass Place for classic cookout eats including free hot dogs, Hiland Dairy ice cream treats, cold beer from Mother's Brewery and hand-spun cotton candy. The event also featured live entertainment from the Luce Cannons, outdoor yard games and a customizable Route 66 T-shirt pop-up shop.





CELEBRATE AMERICA ON ROUTE 66 PARADE


It wouldn't be Route 66 without classic cars, and the parade delivered. Autos of all types made their way through the path along with floats and public figures. Mo State's float was built on a 1954 GMC pickup truck on loan from alumni couple Mark and Diann Garnett. The float was constructed by students in the School of Construction, Design and Project Management. Alum John Goodman and Boomer were on the float, which had a nostalgic drive-in movie theme.



EATING COMPETITION

Four Mo State Football Bears took on the Big Texan Steak Challenge against competitive eater “Big Sam” (left). The challenge made a stop in Springfield as part of a Route 66 tour to celebrate the Amarillo, Texas-based restaurant’s 100th anniversary. Competitors must finish a 72-ounce steak, baked potato, fried shrimp, side salad and dinner roll. Our Bears shared the massive steak, and cleaned their plates in just 14 minutes! ■ — photo captions by Taylor Ladd

Executive Producer: **Dr. Deborah Larson**
Director: **Richard Amberg**
Director: **Cristina Pippa**
Director: **Nathan Patton**

A large black and white photograph of a young woman with long hair and glasses, laughing joyfully while holding a script. The background is a blurred library or study area with bookshelves.

At Missouri State, screenwriting programs play a starring role

Stories of the true events of our
no. 1 ranked program

Written by Taylor Ladd • Photos by Jesse Scheve and Kevin White



ACT I: THE SCRIPT READ

INT. CREDO ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

On a chilly Sunday evening, an audience takes shape in the community performing arts center. The energy immediately shifts upon entering the glass front doors of the building – from the cold, dark night outside to a warm, welcoming group. Professors, parents and other community members mingle as they wait for the event to begin. Students excitedly chat and laugh together.

NARRATOR

Tonight is a big night for Missouri State's Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program. Scripts written by MFA students are performed by undergraduates studying acting and musical theatre. It's a chance for writers to see their work come to life.

LILI HAYES, MFA STUDENT

I normally write more horror-y things, but instead I brought a comedy tonight. We're reading Act I, the buildup. It helps me a lot with dialogue. When I see somebody stumbling on a word, I think, "Oh, that's just how I speak, so I need to edit there." It also helps imagine character relationships – how they might interact and flourish.

BRETT JONES '23 & '26, MFA student

Last year, I specifically chose a scene where characters are fighting with each other. Watching the theatre students and professors watch it live for the first time was the most exciting thing. I got such a huge reaction that I was like, "Oh my gosh, I have potential." I still remember Cristina (Pippa, screenwriting professor) turning to me saying, "They loved it." It makes you realize you're in the right career path.



“Screenwriting is about trying to inspire other people. You’re inspiring the actors to want to play this part. You’re inspiring the director, the set decoration, the costume. These projects are meant to have multiple hands on it, as opposed to almost every other form of writing. That makes it great for classes because it is a great way to get students collaborating.”

Nathan Patton,
assistant professor in communication, media, journalism and film

NARRATOR

Acting students take their places in chairs on the stage. The MFA students whisper encouragements to each other as they settle, prepared to watch their writing transform into a performance. Over the course of an hour, the auditorium fills with laughter, applause and engaged silence. The scripts tell stories that range from witty to spooky to serious. LaDonna Goodman, a graduate student from Louisiana, reflects on her experience in the program after her script is read.

LaDONNA GOODMAN, MFA STUDENT

I was in the workforce and started taking classes again. I found Missouri State’s screenwriting program, and after a couple of semesters, I was like, “This is what I want to do.” So I packed up all my stuff and moved to Missouri. It’s an up-and-coming place for film.

ACT II: AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

EXT. MISSOURI STATE’S CAMPUS – DAY

NARRATOR

When you think about writers for film, television, plays or other well-loved forms of media, sunny California or bustling New York City might be the first hubs that come to mind. But there’s a plot twist – Missouri State’s screenwriting and dramatic writing programs, located in the heart of the Midwest, are winning no. 1 honors.

DESIGN NOTE

A bulleted list appears on screen, maybe with glitter or stars for dramatic effect.

NARRATOR

In recent years, the program, faculty and students have received multiple honors from the Broadcast Education Association, or BEA, including:

- No. 1 ranking in screenwriting from BEA five years in a row, which includes both the undergraduate and graduate programs.
- A dominating year at the 2026 BEA Festival of Media Arts.
 - Assistant Professor Nathan Patton won Best of Festival and Best of Competition for his original TV series pilot.
 - Student screenwriter Cooper Johnson won Best of Festival in the undergraduate scriptwriting competition and first place in the original TV pilot series category. Missouri State swept the top awards in the same category with a second-place win for Arden Dickson and third place for Evalee Lowry.



- Emma Habert placed third in the graduate student competition for scriptwriting and earned the Award of Excellence in the film and video category. (Habert's film also won a college Emmy Award from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.)
- Tristan Upp placed third individually in the undergraduate narrative feature category.

This screenwriting program has gone from a few classes and an undergraduate minor option to a major, a minor, certificate options at the undergraduate and graduate level and a Master of Fine Arts degree. Quick growth and major recognition are points of pride for faculty. The BEA is the premier international organization for academics in media, and Mo State is one of more than 300 international members. Our number-one ranking was first earned in 2022 when the organization introduced the ranking system for screenwriting programs. We've held on to that title every year since.

PROFESSOR RICHARD AMBERG

When they started ranking programs in schools, it was based on the past five years. It's not just based on one script; it's based on student success and a lot of data rather than just a reputation.

ACT III: WHAT'S OUR SECRET TO No. 1 SUCCESS?

EXT. MISSOURI STATE'S CAMPUS

NARRATOR

The screenwriting faculty members worked together to craft a program that offers unique learning experiences. It's also not difficult for students to find inspiration and motivation from professors who are so actively involved in the industry.

- Associate Professor Cristina Pippa won the Josephson Entertainment Teleplay Award for screenwriting at Austin Film Festival in 2025 for an hour-long drama created as a TV pilot.
- Assistant Professor Nathan Patton recently sold a short film to Early Media Production.
- Professor Richard Amberg is a member of the Writers Guild of America and has sold work to major companies including Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and Disney Channel.

LaDONNA GOODMAN, MFA STUDENT

The professors are so talented and encouraging. They all have their own careers in film. It's real-life experience.

PROFESSOR RICHARD AMBERG

When I came to Missouri State from Los Angeles, I hoped we could have a program that prepared students for the demands of the film and television industry. A lot of other schools teach screenwriting as an elective where students write the first act of a screenplay and that's it. I wanted to build a program where students developed the kinds of full-length features and pilots they could use in the real world. Even if they didn't sell that script, I wanted them to have writing samples that could help them get agents and managers.

NARRATOR

Given the creative nature of the subject matter, it's not uncommon for many classes to be a fun change from a typical lecture. The faculty's industry connections sometimes mean special guests for classes. Some recent visitors include a Missouri State alum and assistant on Netflix's "Wednesday," a producer for the upcoming live-action adaptation film "Voltron," and Sofya Levitsky-Weitz, a writer-playwright working on FX's Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winning series "The Bear."

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CRISTINA PIPPA

Sofya was a great guest because she is a playwright, TV writer and screenwriter. Another unique thing about our MFA program is students learn all three kinds of writing in the same graduate program. Usually, you would be pushed to choose one over the others. Sofya talked about how to get focused on creative work when the world is so chaotic.

ACT IV: FEEDBACK THAT ENCOURAGES FEATURES

Ext. MISSOURI STATE'S CAMPUS AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY

NARRATOR

Classes are designed to build on each other as students work through the program. They start writing their feature-length film in an intermediate screenwriting class. Then, they have a chance to finish the script in an advanced-level class. They can revise that work in a rewriting course. Students aren't just confined to traditional films, either. Scripts might also be produced for radio shows, plays, television series or video games.



ASSISTANT PROFESSOR NATHAN PATTON

I always say the best ways to learn, that taught me more than almost anything, are reading scripts, watching movies and writing. We get students writing immediately. I always tell my students, “The only thing you can’t fix is a blank page.” You could write the worst 10 pages anyone’s ever written, and you can always make that better, but you cannot fix 10 blank pages.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CRISTINA PIPPA

Our screenwriting classes really build on each other. Students have chances to incorporate feedback and make a stronger script to submit.

NARRATOR

That format helps Missouri State stand out. The process of receiving feedback is another important piece of the student experience. Typical writing classes include workshop days. These require students to read each other’s work before class and share their notes as a group.

In the screenwriting program, workshopping takes a different approach. Students come to class for “table reads,” not too different from the way things are done in Hollywood. Students are assigned characters and the group reads through the script just as actors would run through lines. The process results in genuine first impressions on projects.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR NATHAN PATTON

If you read something at home, there’s theoretically time to sit down and reflect. But there are so many distractions at home. We’re engaged together at the table read, and I think that’s honestly a key to how scripts get made. My teaching philosophy comes down to three words: support, but challenge. For workshops, we start with the positive. What’s working? What do we love? What gets us excited? Then we can go to things that we’re confused by. I always want to support them because writing is tough, but I also challenge them in saying, “Well, what if you thought about it this way?”

HAILEY BROWN '22 & '24, SCREENWRITING ALUM

We had a class in which we had to pitch a project or a production we had conceptualized. I decided to write a short film, and then I had to pitch it to the department. They greenlit my project, which is always exciting. The MFA program is good at putting you in real-life situations. As soon as you graduate, in the real world, you’re going to be expected to pitch your work.



“My favorite thing about the classes and assignments is they are so hands-on. Our professors are real with you about which scripts have potential, and they genuinely want to see all of us succeed. They want to see us bring these stories to life. I never would have thought I’d have the opportunity to direct a play, let alone direct a feature film.”

Brett Jones,
bachelor’s in film studies ’23;
Master of Fine Arts ’26



▲ Students have many opportunities to run through scripts, get feedback, incorporate notes and try new versions of their work.

NARRATOR

After her project was greenlit, Brown got a cast and crew ready. They filmed the 20-minute short film, and she showed it to her senior thesis class. Brown's classmates immediately encouraged her to take the film concept and run with it. At first, she hesitated. Producing can involve a lot of fundraising and fine-tuned scheduling.

HAILEY BROWN '22 & '24, SCREENWRITING ALUM

My class said, "But if not now, when? You have so many resources at Missouri State. You have so many people who are still living in Springfield who are totally willing to help you with this."

NARRATOR

A similar experience kept Brett Jones in the program for one extra year when he could have graduated early. It was not hard for him to be convinced to stick around.

BRETT JONES '23 & '26, MFA STUDENT

I was set to graduate last spring, but the faculty were like, "Hey, we want you to stay to make your feature film." I said, "Okay, you don't have to tease me with a good time."

NARRATOR

Brown started her feature while finishing the MFA program. She is now working to complete the film as a post-grad project. Jones was wrapping up filming weeks before his spring 2026 graduation.

BEARS ARE MAKING CONTENT FOR SCREENS BIG AND SMALL

Your favorite movie or TV show may have ties to our screenwriting alums.

- **Sean Thiessen** wrote the feature "What Rhymes with Reason" (2023).
- **Carter Breaux** wrote and directed the feature "Kings" (2026).
- **Jackson Lierz** wrote and directed the feature "Seeing Someone Else" (2024).
- **Caleb Hearon** didn't earn a degree in screenwriting, but he did take a comedy writing class and co-created a sketch-writing club mentored by Professor Rich Amberg. Hearon has become a recognizable name with an acting career. He was also a staff writer for the animated series "Human Resources" (Netflix). Hearon also co-wrote an upcoming feature that he's starring in, "Trash Mountain," hosted multiple podcasts and recently released his first HBO comedy stand-up special.
- **Chance Nichols** also didn't earn a degree in screenwriting, but he took the same comedy writing class in the program and co-created the sketch comedy club with Hearon. He's gone on to produce multiple podcasts and is the director of network creative strategy at Bill Burr's company All Things Comedy.

ACT V: FROM SCRIPT TO SET TO SCREEN

INT. A SUBURBAN HOME IN NIXA, MISSOURI – NIGHT

Actors are running lines for the film “I’m a Terrible Person.” Laughter and chatter is instantly halted with the magic words: “Quiet on set!”

Then, it’s showtime. The silence is quickly filled with an actor stomping up stairs. The scene includes a heated exchange of words. The moment replays with each take. Before the clapperboard clicks, someone says: “I’m a Terrible Person,’ take number...”

BRETT JONES '23 & '26, MFA STUDENT

This is our third weekend, day 12 or 13. Next weekend is our last weekend of filming. We’ve been working really hard. Shoutout to my three leads: Ryan Moore, Sav Jordan and Charlie Wehde. They’re on set almost every single day.

If you want to write, direct or produce, this is the department you should strive for. There are so many opportunities.

NARRATOR

By the end of the semester, Jones and his film production team wrapped filming. The film is in the editing process and will premiere in Springfield soon.

PROFESSOR RICHARD AMBERG

Our program’s rankings are based on student achievements, which is the most important metric. There’s nothing better than helping our students take a rough idea all the way to a finished project. As a teacher, it’s amazingly rewarding to go into a movie theatre and see a past student’s film – sometimes one they wrote in our classes – on the big screen. ■

- **Daan Jansen** is a producer on “The Bachelor” TV series.
- **Jessica Larson** was a staff writer on the “Single Drunk Female” TV series.
- **Max Pratt** was a showrunner’s assistant on the Netflix series “Wednesday” and “Thumblite.”
- **Willow Onken** is a video game writer with Gunfire Games.
- Multiple students have taken jobs at film studios: **Lauren Johnson, Shyla Shank and Madison Auten** with Warner Brothers, just to name a few!



◀ Students in screenwriting and film studies write short screenplays, feature-length scripts and episodic series.

Lady Bears in the Big Dance

The women's basketball season ended in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Missouri State's women's basketball team captured the Conference USA Tournament title in its first year in the league.

This meant the team earned an appearance in the NCAA Tournament.

The Lady Bears have now made a postseason appearance in 11 consecutive seasons. This was their first return to the NCAA Tournament, or "Big Dance," since 2021-22. It also marked the first appearance there for Mo State under Head Coach Beth Cunningham.

The Lady Bears defeated the Stephen F. Austin State University Ladyjacks in a First Four game, 85-75. Mo State then faced the No. 1 University of Texas at Austin Longhorns in the First Round.





WINNING THE CUSA TOURNAMENT: MARCH 14

- Missouri State women's basketball punched its ticket to the NCAA Tournament with a 43-38 victory over Louisiana Tech in the CUSA Women's Basketball Championship title game. The game was held at Propst Arena in Huntsville, Alabama.
- Kaemyn Bekemeier (left) earned the MVP title. She averaged 17.7 points, 9.3 rebounds and 2.7 assists.
- Lainie Douglas posted 15 points, 11 rebounds and a career-high 7 blocks.

WINNING THE FIRST FOUR GAME: MARCH 18

- The Lady Bears defeated the Ladyjacks from Stephen F. Austin State University in the NCAA Tournament First Four play-in game. It was held at the Moody Center in Austin, Texas.
- Bekemeier led with 22 points and 13 rebounds. Douglas tallied 14 points and 10 rebounds.
- Two freshmen, Maiesha Washington and Kendal Brueggen, also turned in impressive performances. Faith Lee rounded out the double-figure scorers.

APPEARING IN THE NCAA FIRST ROUND: MARCH 20

- The Missouri State Lady Bears played against the Longhorns of the University of Texas at Austin in front of a crowd of 7,938 at the Moody Center. The game aired on ESPN.
- The Lady Bears fell 87-45 to the Longhorns to bring Mo State's season to a close. This was the 18th NCAA Tournament appearance in Lady Bear history, and the team's 11th straight postseason appearance.



Enshrining elite Bears into the

Mo State Athletics Hall of Fame

Missouri State inducted seven former athletes, an iconic sportswriter and a national championship team as part of its 2025-26 Athletics Hall of Fame class. Ceremonies took place Feb. 14.

FORMER ATHLETE HONOREES



Chenille Bayless Gaumer, volleyball, 2000-03

The standout setter was a four-year All-MVC performer

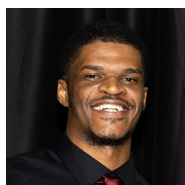
and remains Mo State's career assists leader (5,431). Bayless helped lead the Bears to an MVC championship and NCAA Tournament appearance in 2003.



Curt Brand, track and field, 1985-87

Brand is the school record holder in the indoor (6-foot-10) and outdoor

(7-foot-0) high jump. He was a two-time Mid-Continent Conference high-jump champion in 1986 and '87, both indoors. He also claimed the Mid-Continent outdoor high-jump title in 1986 and finished third in the triple jump that year.



Alize Johnson, basketball, 2016-18

Johnson was Mo State's second NBA draft pick of the Division I era.

He was selected in the 2018 draft by the Indiana Pacers. Before that, he was a two-time NABC All-District and All-MVC first-team selection. He finished second in the 2018 MVC Player of the Year voting. He also earned MVC Newcomer of the Year and MVC All-Tournament Team laurels in 2016-17.



Andi Rojas, swimming and diving, 2004-08

A four-time All-MVC honoree, the Venezuelan

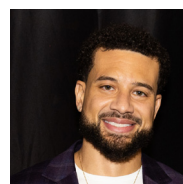
sensation was the 2005-06 Missouri Valley Conference Swimmer of the Year. She won seven individual MVC championships, including three in the 200-yard individual medley, two in the 100-yard butterfly and two in the 200-yard butterfly. She was part of MVC team championship runs in 2005, 2006 and 2008 and was a four-time MVC Scholar-Athlete Team honoree.



Tyonna Snow, basketball, 2012-16

Snow became the first player in MVC history to earn

Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year and Tournament MVP in the same season. She did so en route to an NCAA Tournament run in her senior season. She was also a three-time All-MVC player and three-time member of the MVC All-Defensive Team.



Kyle Weems, basketball, 2008-12

Weems had a 13-year professional career after his collegiate career. He was an AP

All-America honorable mention selection in 2012 and a two-time All-MVC first team selection. Weems was also named the 2011 MVC Larry Bird Player of the Year after leading the Bears to a 28-9 record, the MVC regular-season title and an appearance in the NIT. He led the Bears in scoring, rebounding, steals and blocked shots each of his last three seasons. He is still Missouri State's all-time leader in games played (134). Weems ranks



▲ Awardees were recognized Feb. 14 with an event held at The Old Glass Place.
PHOTO BY KEVIN WHITE

No. 2 all-time in program history in scoring (1,868) and No. 4 in rebounds (844) and is also the Great Southern Bank all-time leader in both categories.

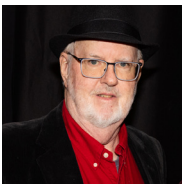


**Bob Zimmermann,
baseball,
2001-03**

Zimmermann played a significant role in the Bears' 2003

NCAA College World Series run and went on to be drafted by the Los Angeles Angels that year. In 2001, he earned Collegiate Baseball Freshman All-America, ABCA All-Region and MVC Freshman of the Year honors. In his junior season, he earned NCAA All-Regional Tournament honors.

1979 to 2015, covering local and regional sports stories. He became Missouri State's primary beat writer in 1989 and served in that capacity until his retirement. He has since become the public relations director for Lucas Oil Speedway and a contributing sports reporter for the Springfield Daily Citizen.



**DON PAYTON
AWARD**

Lyndal Scranton

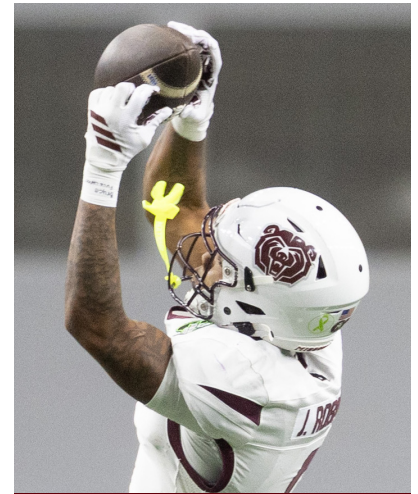
The Payton Award honors people whose accomplishments

related to Mo State athletics fall outside the realm of coaches or athletes. Scranton is an Ozarks area journalist and long-time Bears beat writer. He worked for the Springfield News-Leader from

TEAM INDUCTEE

1963 men's golf squad

Under legendary Head Coach Andy McDonald, the Bears won their first-ever NCAA College Division (now Division II) national championship. Team members Bill Lucas, Larry Gooch, John Henage, Dick Baxter, Jim Wheeler and Bruce Hollowell guided Mo State to victory. The Bears hosted the national championship meet that year. ■



Get your game plan together for fall sports, and **GRAB YOUR FOOTBALL TIX**

Mo State went all the way to a football bowl game last season! What does 2026 have in store? Find out with tickets for the season or single games!

Also, find schedules for all fall sports, including men's and women's soccer, volleyball and cross country.

**MissouriState
Bears.com**





Meet the 2026 Bears of Distinction

The Missouri State University Alumni Association recognized these graduates and friends during a dinner and ceremony held April 25.

WRITTEN BY JULIANA GOODWIN,
TAYLOR LADD, MICHELLE S. ROSE

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION HONORS
AWARDED THIS YEAR

The Alumni Award for Excellence in Public Affairs recognizes graduates who have exceptional achievements in professional endeavors, while demonstrating outstanding commitment to public service.

The Volunteer of the Year Award honors alumni who have made extraordinary efforts to advance the reach and impact of Missouri State. This award celebrates individuals or groups who have demonstrated exceptional dedication, leadership or service to the Missouri State community.

The Award of Appreciation honors retired faculty and staff members for achievement in their professional or academic field and loyalty to the university. Nominees are not required to be graduates.

The Bear of Excellence Award recognizes alumni who have made a difference in big and small ways through their commitment to community and the pursuit of excellence. They are uniquely accomplished alumni from diverse academic, professional and personal backgrounds.



KEN McCLURE

Missouri State degree:

Bachelor's in history, 1972

Other degree: Master's in history, 1974,
University of Missouri-Columbia

Career: Retired from public service;

former mayor of Springfield

Ken McClure built a career defined by civic leadership.

Though music was an early passion — he still plays trombone and sings — he chose to dedicate his professional life to serving others. He has left a lasting impact on Springfield and Missouri State University.

After graduating, McClure began his career as a budget analyst for the Missouri Senate Appropriations Committee. He describes this role as a “dream job” that laid the foundation for his future in public affairs.

He spent nearly a decade as deputy director of administration for the Missouri Department of Economic Development. He later held the roles of chairman, vice chairman and commissioner of the Missouri Public Service Commission.

A U.S. military veteran, McClure was an associate general manager for City Utilities of Springfield from 1998-2005.

Next, he served as chief of staff for Gov. Matt Blunt from 2004-06. In that role, he championed legislation to change the name of Southwest Missouri State to Missouri State University.

“That had been an effort for several years and it had always died in the Senate,” McClure said. “When Blunt entered in 2005, he said, ‘Get it done.’ We did.”

It required him to end a filibuster at 3:30 a.m. His involvement with the name change is the first of his proudest professional accomplishments. The second is his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, since he was mayor of Springfield from 2017-25.

“March 2020 was a difficult time, and I am proud of the way we went through that,” he said.

Another significant accomplishment was in 2023 when the city purchased then-Hammons Field (now Route 66 Stadium) and entered into a long-term lease with the Springfield Cardinals.

“We were very close to losing them. The city bought the ballpark and kept them here,” he said.

He also worked for Mo State as vice president for administrative and information services from 2008-15. For several years, he was a per-course instructor in the department of political science. Through his relationships and connections, McClure supported IDEA Commons, the Grant Avenue Parkway Project and other projects that have been transformative for the university and the community.

Music has remained a constant through his life. Since 1997, he has performed with the Missouri State University Community Band. Earlier in his life, he performed in a semi-professional quartet and recorded three albums with his late wife, Joey.

His contributions have earned numerous honors, including the 2025 Harold K. Bengsch Award from the Springfield-Greene County Health Department and the 2020 Missouri State University Government Excellence Award.

McClure is a widower with two daughters — both Bears — and four grandchildren.

He is currently writing four books, including his memoirs.



“I have had a good career and opportunity to be part of a lot of things.”

—Ken McClure

VOLUNTEER GROUP OF THE YEAR

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COUNCIL

About: The council comprises 28 business leaders, employers, community partners and alumni spread over 17 cities in six states.

History: The college has had an advisory board since at least the early 1990s, but the Executive Advisory Council was officially established in 2005.

The positive impact of the Executive Advisory Council on Missouri State's College of Business cannot be overstated.

The contributions of these volunteers are found in named spaces on each floor of Glass Hall: team rooms, interview rooms, executive classrooms and learning labs.

But the group's significance goes way beyond spaces. These members help ensure the continued success of Biz Bears.

“We have to ensure our curriculum remains relevant and our graduates are career-ready,” said COB Dean Dr. David Meinert. “It's critically important we engage with the external stakeholders that rely on Missouri State

University and the college to source talent to grow or maintain their organizations.”

Those stakeholders provide guidance to the college’s leadership team by sharing emerging industry trends. That advice helps shape the curriculum so it aligns with workforce needs.

They also provide insight into new technologies that business students will need to master to be competitive in the job market.



“EAC members share a common goal: the continuous improvement of the College of Business.”

— COB Dean Dr. David Meinert

Members have created internship programs and placed Bears in job opportunities. They’ve even managed to provide the college with access to specialized software at little or no cost.

It was the council’s feedback that led the college to make hands-on, experiential learning a strategic priority more than a decade ago. With that priority, the college needed specialized labs. This was a driving factor behind the 2016-17 renovation and expansion of Glass Hall.

Another legacy of the group: They were instrumental in the establishment of the Student Managed Investment Fund, or SMIF. Through SMIF, students gain real-world experience in portfolio management. They analyze stocks and present investment recommendations.

“EAC members reached out to university leadership regarding the importance and value of a SMIF for finance majors. They pledged their support to ensure its success,” Meinert said. “They also made the lead gifts to establish the SMIF.”

The EAC also plays a role in the college’s accreditation with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, or AACSB, which is the global standard-setting body for business education. EAC members meet with review teams. They validate the relevance of Mo State’s programs, as well as the quality of students and faculty.

But that’s not all. They also give back as guest lecturers and panel participants.

Members have also assisted with fundraising and have established scholarships.

“They generously share their time, talent and, in many cases, treasure,” Meinert said. “They demonstrate their commitment not only to the College of Business but the next generations of Bear business leaders.”

AWARD OF APPRECIATION



ART HAINS

Affiliation with Missouri State:
Retired athletics broadcaster

As the longest-running sports play-by-play announcer in Missouri State history, Art Hains is well-known as The Voice of the Bears.

He built a career calling more than 3,000 athletic events during 45 years with Mo State.

At age 21, Hains moved to Springfield to work at station KGBX with established Bears announcer Vern Hawkins.

“He was very good to me, became like a second father,” Hains said. “For four years we shared the play-by-play.”

When Hawkins retired, Hains took over as the university’s athletics broadcaster.

His commentary became the soundtrack to some of Missouri State’s biggest celebrations in football, basketball and baseball.

From 1995 through 2022, Hains expanded his reach to listeners as the host of Sports Talk, a daily radio show.

His career also includes serving as studio host for the Kansas City Chiefs Radio Network for 16 years.

In 2022, Hains battled devastating health effects from West Nile virus. He spent eight months between two rehab facilities in Nebraska. He returned to the booth as Mo State kicked off the 2023 football season.

“I was determined to get back on the air,” Hains said.

Hains has been inducted into the Springfield Area Sports Hall of Fame (2003), the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame (2017) and the Missouri State University Athletics Hall of Fame (2022).

He retired from broadcasting in 2025.

His final sign off with Missouri State was Sept. 13 at the football home opener against his alma mater, Southern Methodist University.

“I’ve been passionate about Missouri State and still am — always will be,” Hains said. “I hope that has come across on the air.”

Hains and his wife, Lisa, live in Springfield. He is still active in local athletics and continues to attend Missouri State and Kansas City Royals games.



“I’ve been blessed to receive some nice awards, but I am truly humbled to be recognized in this way by the university that has been central to my life for 50 years. To join these ranks is a great privilege!”

— Art Hains

BEARS OF EXCELLENCE



DR. ADRIENNE BATTLE

Missouri State degree: Bachelor’s in elementary education, 2003

Other degrees: Master’s (2004), education specialist (2006) and doctorate (2008), all Tennessee State University

Job title: Superintendent of Metro Nashville Public Schools

Dr. Adrienne Battle has been in charge of one of the nation’s largest school districts since 2019.

She is the first Black woman, first woman and first graduate of the district to lead Metro Nashville Public Schools. Under her guidance, the Tennessee district focuses on continuous improvement and personalization of education. Battle established a district mission and mantra: Making Every Student Known.

“We want to make sure every student is perceived as an individual, cared for, supported, valued and on a guaranteed path to success,” Battle said.

This means clear goals, mentoring programs, scholarship opportunities and stronger routes to college and careers.

Her success has led to many acknowledgments for both her and the district. Just a few of her recent honors:

- Professional Educators of Tennessee 2022 Superintendent of the Year
- Midsouth Emmy Award, 2025
- 2026 Mid-Cumberland Superintendent of the Year

This is despite her tenure happening during both COVID-19 and devastating tornadoes.

She led recoveries for both, helping public schools meet educational and humanitarian needs.

Metro Nashville earned national recognition in the Education Recovery Scorecard, put together by researchers at Harvard and Stanford universities, for work on post-pandemic academics. It had top 10 rankings among large urban districts for growth in reading and math in both 2022-23 and 2023-24.

The district also earned a Level 5, the highest rating, in the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 — a historic four-year run.

Before she was superintendent, Battle was a teacher and administrator in Nashville for 16 years.

“I’ve known I wanted to teach since I was in third grade — or even earlier, according to my parents,” she said.

She chose Mo State’s College of Education for its faculty and reputation.

“Missouri State is where I was first exposed to so many new people and ideas that would influence my way of thinking and of moving through the world.”

She has fond memories, including running track and cross country as a student-athlete — “bonding and traveling with my teammates and coaches as we competed and won multiple meets and conference championships.”

She lived in Hammons House with people who are “some of my best friends still to this day.”



“It has been more than 20 years since I graduated, but I still carry Missouri State with me every day. I use the lessons from my program in my role leading a district of more than 11,000 employees and 81,000 students.”

— Dr. Adrienne Battle

She knew she wanted to return to Nashville after college, and “give back to the schools that had given me so much.”

Now, Battle and her husband have two sons, both of whom are students in her district.

“That’s where my focus is,” Battle said. “We love watching them play sports, doing activities together around Nashville and traveling with them.”

When she thinks of being a Bear, she thinks of lifelong friendships and her very first field experiences and opportunities to teach.

“I’m grateful for everything I learned, both in and out of the classroom, at Missouri State.”

BEARS OF EXCELLENCE

BARBARA DUCEY BOWDEN



Missouri State degree: Bachelor’s in recreation and leisure studies, 1983

Job title: Area managing director of Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando

Barbara Bowden’s first job in high school at Six Flags sparked her interest in the hospitality industry.

Her bachelor’s degree and two internships gave Bowden the foundation to pursue that passion.

As a college student, she was part of Walt Disney World’s first college internship program. She also completed Silver Dollar City’s Management Training Program.

“These experiences shaped my leadership philosophy and career direction,” she said. “I was drawn to the hospitality industry because it brings together leadership, service and the opportunity to create meaningful experiences for others.”

On campus, the Saint Charles, Missouri, native was an officer in the Recreation and Leisure Studies Association as well as a member of Sigma Lambda Sigma and Omicron Delta Kappa.

“Our professors were incredible, always challenging us to gain different experiences in the industry and to volunteer to support our community,” Bowden said. “We were encouraged to stretch beyond our comfort zones.”

She started her career in guest services at Buena Vista Palace near Walt Disney World, which is where she met her husband, David.

Today, Bowden is area managing director of Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando. She is responsible for the operation of Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando’s Signature Collection hotels, including Loews Portofino Bay Hotel, Hard Rock Hotel, Loews Royal Pacific Resort, Loews Sapphire Falls Resort and Universal Helios Grand Hotel, a Loews Hotel.

Previously, she was the general manager of the Orange County Convention Center and vice president of The Peabody Orlando, a Forbes Four-Star/AAA Four Diamond award-winning convention hotel.

She has been with Loews since 2014.

“The most rewarding aspects of my career have been both



“My time at Missouri State was formative and deeply meaningful.”

— Barbara Ducey Bowden

the relationships formed and having the opportunity to assist in developing people,” she said.

Bowden is also board chair for Visit Orlando, the area’s tourism agency. She’s on the board of the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association and past chair of the Central Florida Hotel & Lodging Association. Bowden is also an adjunct professor and serves on the dean’s advisory board at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

She is well known in Florida’s hospitality industry and has received several prestigious awards, including:

- Central Florida Hotel & Lodging Association Hotelier of the Year 2025
- Florida 500 Most Influential Business Leaders 2024/25
- UCF Rosen College Hospitality Hall of Fame 2023

Bowden and her husband have two married children, Matthew and Rachel, two granddaughters and are awaiting the arrival of their first grandson, who was due this spring.

BEARS OF EXCELLENCE



JULIE CROMER

Missouri State degree: Bachelor’s in communications management, 1993

Other degrees: Master of public education in policy analysis, Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs

Job title: Executive deputy athletic director and chief operating officer at Louisiana State University

Julie Cromer is a nationally recognized leader in intercollegiate athletics.

Cromer, a graduate of the Honors College at Missouri State, built a distinguished career marked by leadership, competitive

excellence and national impact. She credits opportunities she found at Missouri State for her success.

“In each phase of my academic career, there was a complementary practical experience that was driven by the people on campus,” Cromer said. “It made for an extraordinary undergraduate experience, better than I could have hoped if I had designed it myself.”

Cromer got her start on campus many years before she was an official Bear. Her parents were Missouri State students when they got married, and when she was born.

All members of her immediate family are Bears. Cromer’s father was a student-athlete; her mother came back to finish her degree as a nontraditional student; and her brother came to Missouri State as a transfer student.

“We’ve experienced Missouri State from all angles. It’s had a significant impact on not just my life, but my entire family’s life,” Cromer said.

Before her role at Louisiana State University, Cromer served as director of athletics at Ohio University. Her tenure was defined by championship success, record-setting graduation rates and historic philanthropic growth.

Under her leadership, Ohio captured Mid-American Conference titles across multiple sports, doubled football season ticket revenue and secured the largest gift to women’s athletics in school history.

“I understand the importance of storytelling in college sports because of an internship I did at Missouri State with play-by-play announcer Art Hains and various local TV personalities,” she said. “I was just an undergraduate student with little knowledge or experience, and those opportunities were extraordinary.”

Cromer’s influence extends nationally. She was named the 2024 NACDA Athletics Director of the Year, 2023 Nike Executive

of the Year by Women Leaders in College Sports and a Sports Business Journal Game Changer.

She has served in leadership roles at the NCAA, Indiana University and the University of Arkansas. She also co-chaired the NCAA Division I Transformation Committee to help modernize college athletics.

Cromer and her husband are looking forward to new adventures in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and living closer to family.

“While I’m honored and happy, this award really is a reflection on other people,” she said. “My undergraduate advisor was Dr. Holt Spicer. He was an outstanding professor who took an interest in me. I use the skills that he, David Dollar and others in the communication department taught me in every stage of my career, and particularly now in executive leadership.”

BEARS OF EXCELLENCE



GINA KELTNER

Missouri State degree: Bachelor’s in administrative management, 1989

Job title: Associate producer of talent at the Grand Ole Opry

Gina Keltner has spent more than a quarter of a century with the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee.

She’s living out her dream at the world’s longest-running live radio show.

As associate producer of talent, Keltner is tasked with booking artists for each show. That translates into 2,000 slots to fill each year.

Keltner has been a country music fan and Elvis lover since she was a child growing up in southwest Missouri, later settling in Eldon, Missouri, and attending countless concerts.

Keltner comes from a long line of Bears, including her dad.

“I don’t really remember ever thinking I would go anywhere else,” she said.

After graduating from college, she moved to Nashville and worked for Dick Clark Productions on the television series “Prime Time Country.”

In 1999, she joined the Grand Ole Opry and worked her way up over the years.

Her career has hit some high notes, but also had its challenges. In 2020, devastating floods closed the Opry House, but the shows went on. Keltner booked artists who performed around the city while the building was renovated.

During the pandemic, live shows ceased — but Keltner didn’t stop. She continued to book guests for star-studded Saturday shows that were broadcast on the Circle Network without a live audience. The Opry was named Pollstar’s no. 1 livestream, surpassing 30 million views that year.

All of this helped her earn three Nashville Business Journal “Women in Music City” nods. She was a Pollstar “Women of Live” honoree in 2021 and 2026, which celebrates excellence in the live entertainment industry.



“I had such an opportunity to be around extraordinary people who cared deeply about students. Every stage of my career has been shaped by an interaction from those four years at Missouri State.”

— Julie Cromer



“Missouri State was an enriching experience that laid groundwork for heading out into the real world.”

— *Gina Keltner*

In 2025, she was inducted into the Source Hall of Fame, which recognizes accomplished women professionals in the Nashville music industry.

Keltner is a member of the 2019 Leadership Music class, 2023 L’Evate class, Country Music Association, Academy of Country Music, Americana Music Association and The Recording Academy.

But what Keltner is most proud of is her daughter, Eden, whom Keltner adopted in 2010 as a single mom. Eden was raised behind the scenes at the Opry and is a couple of years away from college.

Keltner has also helped encourage Mo State students.

“I’m proud to be a Bear,” she said. “I’ve enjoyed mentoring and hosting entertainment management students over the years when they visit the Opry.”

BEARS OF EXCELLENCE



DR. MAUREEN MCCARTHY

Missouri State degree: Bachelor’s in psychology, 1981

Other degrees: Master’s in counseling, PhD in research and evaluation; both Oklahoma State University

Job title: Dean of the College of Sciences and Humanities at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana

Dr. Maureen McCarthy started from humble beginnings: a kid from south St. Louis with nine siblings and no real hopes of attending college. That changed when she was working at a camp in Willow Springs, Missouri, one summer and met a counselor who was a Bear.

“She thought college was possible for me,” McCarthy said. The counselor talked up then-Southwest Missouri State University, and even helped McCarthy fill out a form.

“I didn’t know to do things, like take the ACT, and I had not-stellar grades as a high schooler. I was helping raise little

ones,” McCarthy said. As she learned about Mo State, she saw a world of options.

“The fact that I went to college changed the trajectory of my siblings,” she said. “All 10 of us went, six to Missouri State. I believe Missouri State changed my entire family.”

She not only went to college, she earned advanced degrees.

She began working in higher education, starting in advising. She was a pioneer after the Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1990 — she launched an office dedicated to the needs of those students at one of her institutions.

She had a two-year stint at the American Psychological Association, and was awarded a National Science Foundation grant for an online lab still in use today.

She next served on the cabinet of a university president, helped two universities merge and was awarded an American Council on Education fellowship, working alongside the leader of a large land-grant university.

Now, she is in her ninth year as a dean at Ball State. Her college has 13 department chairs, 300 faculty members and 4,000 students. “A lot of my time is spent ensuring we are retaining students and helping them succeed, making sure academics translates to careers.”

It’s an apt role for someone who once “didn’t understand the unwritten rules of going to college. I showed up on campus with \$20. I got a job in food service and worked my way through.” She “loved everything about campus and the community.”

She lived in Wells House for three years and was involved in residence hall governance.

She and her partner are now endowing a McCarthy family scholarship to help other St. Louis students become Bears.

“Missouri State provides hope and opportunities for so many people. It changes their futures.”



A FAMILY OF BEARS

Dr. Maureen McCarthy is one of 10 siblings. More than half are Bears, or have children who are.

Patrick
(didn't attend, but both children graduated from Mo State)

Leo*
Richard*
John
Michael*



James
Bridget Fahy*
Thomas*
Daniel

*Bears!



VOIN TODOROVIC

Missouri State degrees: Bachelor's in finance, 1997; MBA, 2000

Job title: Chief financial officer with Build-A-Bear Workshop

Voin Todorovic grew up in Montenegro, and first came to Springfield in 1992 as an exchange student during his senior year of high school.

Todorovic formed a tight bond with his host family, the Paffs. With their financial support, he enrolled at Missouri State in fall 1993.

"I will always cherish my time there — the education, the friendships and the strong sense of community," he said. "I was fortunate to have tremendous support from my host family, fellow international students and fraternity brothers."

Todorovic met his future wife, Ljubica (Petrova), at Missouri State while getting his MBA.

After graduate school, Todorovic joined Payless ShoeSource in their finance department. There, he started to build a foundation in corporate leadership while learning the retail business.

During more than a decade with the company, his responsibilities increased.

Payless expanded through acquisitions, including Stride Rite Corporation in the Boston area. He led a significantly larger team as a vice president within a multibillion-dollar organization.

Wolverine Worldwide, a company with strong international and wholesale business, later acquired that company. The division continued to perform exceptionally well, and he was promoted to head of finance for a \$1 billion division.

All these experiences and successes positioned him to become chief financial officer at Build-A-Bear Workshop before the age of 40. "I am extremely proud of my journey at



"While completing my MBA, I met my wife and we have been together ever since — another reason Missouri State holds a special place in my life."

— Voin Todorovic

Build-A-Bear Workshop and the accomplishments our teams achieved," he said.

Since he joined the company, it has delivered some of the strongest results in its history — including the last five consecutive years of record revenue and profitability and significant stock price appreciation.

In addition to leading finance and investor relations, he oversees information technology, merchandise planning and sourcing areas.

Aside from business, he gives back. Todorovic has served as president of the Build-A-Bear Foundation for eight years.

He's been involved with the Wells Fargo Advisory Board at Washington University, and treasurer of The Toy Foundation for many years, a national organization that supports children in need. He's also a board member for the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

Todorovic lives in St. Louis with his wife and two children and enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends. ■



NOMINATE FOR NEXT YEAR

You can recommend a worthy Missouri State graduate, or a retired faculty or staff member, to be a Bear of Distinction. Submit online by Dec. 1, 2026.

Alumni.MissouriState.edu



Honoring the life's work of an

OZARKS FOLKLORIST

WRITTEN BY JULIANA GOODWIN





The new Marideth Sisco Community Education Fund at West Plains is named for an alumna who passed away this May. Sisco '86 was a radio personality, singer, songwriter, author, retired journalist and expert on this region. The fund will bring in speakers, and her work will be displayed on campus.

Editor's note: Sisco passed away as this issue was being produced. We were able to speak with her prior to her passing.

Marideth Sisco '86 had captivated audiences since she was 3.

As a toddler in 1946, she stood on an ice cream freezer at an auction and sang to a crowd for the first time.

Sisco grew up to be a well-known journalist, radio personality and singer based in West Plains, Missouri. She was known for her storytelling and ability to capture the flavor of the Ozarks.

The Butterfield, Missouri, native also appeared in the movie "Winter's Bone" — which was nominated for an Academy Award — and sang on its soundtrack.

Through writing and music, Sisco preserved local history up until her passing this May.

In 2018, Sisco received the Quill Award for lifetime achievement from the Missouri Writers Hall of Fame. In 2025, she received the Living Traditions Fellow Award from the Missouri Folk Arts Program.

Now, her own story is being preserved by Missouri State University-West Plains with the Marideth Sisco Community Education Fund.

HER FRIENDS ESTABLISHED THIS FUND THAT WILL BENEFIT THE OZARKS

This endowed fund was made possible by the generosity of West Plains married couple Mary Bischoff and John Kaiser. The two, who have an antiques and

book shop, befriended Sisco more than two decades ago.

"We think she's a fantastic person and are so glad she's getting this recognition," Bischoff said. "We appreciate the work she has done preserving things that would be lost otherwise."

The endowment will be used primarily for the Ozarks Heritage Research Center's monthly speaker series.

A display case in the center on the West Plains campus will also house Sisco's work, including books, news articles, CDs, awards, paintings and "Winter's Bone" materials.

Sisco was honored by the gesture.

"I am very happy with that," Sisco said. "It surprises me that my name would have an effect but I am glad it does."

MUSIC WAS AN EARLY LOVE; SHE FOUND JOURNALISM AT MO STATE

Sisco's dad's family were gospel singers. They'd burst into song at gatherings.

Her mom sang harmony, so her parents would drive down the road and sing together. Those are some of her earlier music memories.

"I grew up like that, just singing, not really knowing much about instruments," she said.

She moved around as a kid. Sisco tells it like it is — a trait she shared with her

father. More than once it cost him his job, so they had to move as he changed work.

Roughly around middle school, she lived in California and went to the symphony in San Francisco.

"Had I heard a symphony? No. I hadn't heard an orchestra. I had no idea. I sat down and that music just came over me and I thought, 'Oh, my, I have to live in this world. Somehow, I have to find a place in this world,'" she said.

Sisco carved out her own place singing folk music.

In her 20s, she would return to California and eke out a living by singing.

Her father died a year after she moved there, so she moved her mom to California. Soon after, her mom was diagnosed with bone cancer.

She took her mom home so she could pass away in the Ozarks. Her parents died four months apart.

Sisco then returned to the West Coast and worked in a factory.

In 1976, she returned to the Ozarks when other family members became ill.

"I didn't intend to stay, but somehow I did," she said.

A teenage injury to Sisco's left hand increasingly limited her ability to do manual work. Surgery a decade prior had failed to help her, and it got to the point that she had to deliver newspapers for a living.



▲ Marideth Sisco (second from right) often performed with other artists as a singer and musician. In 2023, she was a featured artist at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, where she performed both in song and as a storyteller. PHOTO PROVIDED

Sisco sang at a church on Sunday, but she didn't know how she'd support herself long-term.

Then she met with a vocational rehab counselor who offered to help send her back to college. Sisco studied design and photography at then-Southwest Missouri State University.

Her last semester in college, she took a journalism class with Dale Freeman.

"Ten minutes in the class, I said, 'This is what I want to do.'"

RETIRING FROM NEWSPAPERS; STARTING A REGULAR RADIO SHOW

After graduation in 1986, she applied for journalism jobs and landed one at the West Plains Daily Quill.

"If I had landed right straight in heaven, I couldn't have landed a better job," Sisco said. "I had more fun than I ever had in my whole life. I understood the culture that I was going into because I'm out here in the deep Ozarks. The pay wasn't much. But after a while, you just didn't care."

She worked at the Quill until her retirement in 2005 after a quadruple bypass the year before.

In 2007, she debuted a new radio program on KSMU called "These Ozarks Hills."

Originally, the idea was for her to interview people in the Ozarks. However, a few months in Sisco ran out of people to interview — so she just talked and told stories.

The format was a hit. The monthly program had run ever since at 7:45 a.m. on the first Friday of the month.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER LEADS TO HER HOLLYWOOD STORY

In 2008, movie producers were in town scouting locations for "Winter's Bone." The film was based on the novel by West Plains author Daniel Woodrell.

Woodrell's wife suggested they go see some local music.

Sisco was there singing with people she calls the "right folks." She sang a sad ballad called "Wind and Rain."

Two years later, the producer called Sisco.

"She said, 'We just can't get that one song out of our heads. Could you do that for the movie?' I said, 'God, I'd love to record it for the movie.' She said, 'No, no. We have a little part written in the movie.' I said, 'No, wait, wait, wait. I'm not an actor,' and she said, 'It's OK. You just have to sing.' I can do that. So, they signed us up," Sisco said.

She and the other performers with her named themselves the Blackberry Winter Band for the soundtrack.

After the film, audiences were fascinated with the Ozarks. Sisco and the band performed in New York City, Dallas, Los Angeles and the Torino International Film Festival in Italy.

CENTER CONSIDERED "A PERFECT LOCATION FOR HER MATERIALS"

Bischoff and Kaiser moved to West Plains in 2004 and first heard Sisco perform at the Yellow House Community Arts Center.



▲ Sisco hosted “These Ozarks Hills,” a monthly radio essay on KSMU Ozarks Public Radio. She covered the unique traditions and traits of this region. PHOTO PROVIDED

About the Ozarks Heritage Research Center

The center seeks to build a collection not available anywhere else. Staff members collect documents and visual sources that represent the history and culture of the Ozarks.

The center:

- Sponsors speakers, professional conferences and workshops.
- Promotes educational resources, particularly for the region’s communities.
- Collaborates with partners from outside the university, including other institutions focusing on the Ozarks.
- Serves as a repository for scholars and authors, especially those who focus on the eastern Ozarks.

PLAN A VISIT OR LEARN MORE



At first, Bischoff was starstruck: Sisco is a local celebrity. But once Bischoff talked to her, she realized how down-to-earth the artist was.

The couple loved hearing her sing and tell stories. They sought out her performances.

“I could sit and listen to her for hours,” Bischoff said. Kaiser added: “You never hear the same story twice. There are so many.”

Their friendship grew over the years. They have spent a lot of time together, including Thanksgiving dinners.

Sisco and Kaiser shared a mutual interest in gardening.

And when Sisco was seriously ill recently before her passing, the couple organized food delivery for her. The storyteller had her share of medical issues, but she faced it with Ozarks grit. Sisco had previously survived car accidents, uterine cancer, failed surgeries, a quadruple bypass and more.

In honor of their friendship, Bischoff and Kaiser wanted to support a fund to acknowledge Sisco’s contributions to the area.

“She was a woman of many talents. Writing. Singing. Storytelling,” Bischoff said. “We loved her and considered ourselves lucky to be in her circle.” ■

FIND EPISODES OF PAST RADIO SHOWS

Each month, Sisco hosted “These Ozarks Hills” on KSMU Ozarks Public Radio, which is housed on campus in Strong Hall. Sisco’s show focused on stories relevant to Ozarks culture and history. You can find audio and transcripts online.

**KSMU.org/People/
Marideth-Sisco**

A man with a mustache and glasses, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a white button-down shirt and dark blue jeans, stands in a grassy field. He has his right hand near his chin in a thoughtful pose. The background shows a wooden fence and rolling green hills under a bright sky.

FROM THE OZARKS, TO CONFLICT ZONES, TO D.C.:

How this Bear built a career in national security

Ian Platz has a thriving career in defense and antiterrorism initiatives. He says it wouldn't have happened without a unique Missouri State school and an internship facilitated by a faculty member.

WRITTEN BY JULIANA GOODWIN

At 2 a.m. one night in February 2024, Ian Platz was in his hotel room in Ukraine when his phone alerted him to suspected drone and rocket strikes from the Russian military.

Jumping up from his bed in the darkness, he grabbed his two most important items: his American passport and a faded maroon tote, with the letters peeling off and a faint outline of a bear.

It was from the Missouri State Bookstore, and once held heavy textbooks. Now, it had his phone charger, journal and a tactical medicine kit. The tote had been with him at every class on campus, and was now with him in every war zone he entered and border crossing he made.

"I always liked bringing Missouri State with me," he said.

He scurried to the basement to meet his colleagues. As he waited for the barrage to end, he sent a text to his wife telling her he was OK.

Platz, '11 & '13, has been in national security for more than a decade. He has worked in irregular warfare (conflicts in which combatants are not regular military forces), strategic communications, security cooperation and defense governance. His work has taken him to Europe, the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Looking back, Platz sees a life that still feels a little improbable. What began in southwest Missouri became a career engaging in some of the hardest security challenges of the past decade, often at close range. Platz says his Missouri State mentors helped make that life possible.

TWO BEARS MARRY, THEN START THEIR NEXT STEPS IN D.C.

Platz, who grew up between Buffalo, Missouri, and Springfield, was interested by foreign policy when he was younger, but it seemed like a distant prospect.

While working part time at a retail store to help pay for school, he met his future wife, Allison Ackland-Coletta '11. She was pursuing education. Her sense of purpose and commitment to serving others left a deep impression on him.

He decided to earn a bachelor's degree in education. But as graduation

approached, Platz began seriously considering what might come next.

That's when he learned about Missouri State's School of Defense and Strategic Studies, or DSS, located near Washington, D.C. It offered something he had not seen before: a direct path from the Ozarks to the heart of national security policy.

He and Allison married and moved to Virginia, where he began his studies and she was an elementary art teacher.

"We made some big sacrifices to get Ian to D.C., but I knew it would be worth it if he was doing something he truly enjoyed," Ackland-Coletta said. "I was lucky enough to discover my calling in college, and it felt important that Ian would have an opportunity to find his."

FACULTY CONNECTIONS OPENED DOORS FOR HIS FUTURE

Retired Army Brigadier Gen. John P. Rose, then-director of DSS, stressed the importance of internships and professional connections for students hoping to build careers in national security.

For Platz, that guidance mattered. He had no existing ties to D.C. or the broader U.S. national security enterprise, and the transition felt daunting. At DSS, though, faculty helped bridge that gap. Rose played a key role. After Platz expressed an interest in Africa, Rose personally drove him to the National Defense University for an interview with the Africa Center for Strategic Studies at Fort McNair in D.C.

"I met with them, hit it off," he said. "I ended up doing 10 months there as an intern. That opened me up to a State Department internship. Then, that opened up working in the Secretary of Defense office. It really came about because Rose facilitated the meeting. It's hard to get into a lot of these places without name recognition."

HE'S COUNTERED TERRORISM WITH AGENCIES AROUND THE WORLD

After graduation, Platz was recruited almost immediately to go to Booz Allen, a management and technology consulting firm that serves U.S. defense and intelligence agencies.



▲ Ian Platz shows his son a Soviet missile at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. PHOTO PROVIDED

He later joined the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs, where he worked on military assistance and security cooperation across Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Somalia.

Much of the work focused on aviation assistance. It's an often overlooked but essential element of security in a region where distance and terrain can define what governments are able to do, Platz said. The job meant travel to remote locations and direct engagement with partner forces.

"East Africa sits along one of the world's most important strategic corridors," Platz said. "Security there shapes access to the Indian Ocean, the movement of commercial shipping, regional stability and the ability of partners to respond to threats that can spill across borders. At the time, piracy was also a major concern, which only reinforced the importance of maritime and regional security."

He later moved to the U.S. Bureau of Counterterrorism. Platz helped partner governments investigate terrorist networks, coordinate intelligence, build cases and prosecute terrorists through their own legal systems.



▲ Ian Platz (right) in Ukraine in 2024 with colleagues, including former U.S. Ambassadors Karl Eikenberry (middle) and William B. Taylor Jr. (second from right). PHOTO PROVIDED

Platz played a role in shaping the State Department's support for Kenya's Joint Terrorism Task Force, working with the U.S. Embassy in Kenya, the FBI and the Kenya Anti-Terrorism Police Unit.

The Kenyan-led task force began producing investigations, cases and arrests tied to terrorist activity in Kenya and internationally.

His work also extended into detention and prison rehabilitation, reflecting the broader challenge of building durable counterterrorism systems.

MOVING BACK TO D.C. FOR PEACEBUILDING JOB

Around that time, with their first child on the way, Platz and his wife were ready for him to stay closer to home. He joined the United States Institute of Peace, a congressionally established, nonpartisan organization.

His work reflected a broader shift in national security itself, from security cooperation and counterterrorism toward questions of resilience, resistance and the strength of partners' defense industrial bases.

He oversaw a wide range of work across Europe, Asia and Africa, helping translate complex security challenges into research and recommendations for policymakers.

Among the most significant pieces of that work was a sustained research and engagement effort on Ukraine's

defense sector. He led initiatives focused on emerging technology, irregular warfare and the wider question of how the United States and its partners prepare for a new era of conflict.

While working at the institute, Platz was named to the Aspen Security Forum's Rising Leaders program, a selective year-long initiative.

He spent three years as a senior program officer for security sector governance and reform before that chapter was abruptly interrupted in 2025, when the institute was temporarily shuttered amid a legal fight that remains unresolved.

Today, he serves as chief communications officer for the Irregular Warfare Initiative. It is a leading nonprofit focused on irregular warfare and contemporary conflict. He helps shape their voice and strategic messaging.

Platz also recently stepped into a full-time role supporting the United States Air Force.

He and his wife live in Arlington, Virginia, with their two children, Malcolm, 4, and Cameron, 18 months.

Even now, one of the old Missouri State totes remains in the mix. Ackland-Coletta still laughs about the time one of the many maroon bags went through the wash and turned Ian's white undershirts pink.

He kept the shirts — and, of course, the tote. ■

WHY IS A MISSOURI STATE SCHOOL LOCATED IN WASHINGTON, D.C.?

About the School of Defense and Strategic Studies

The School of Defense and Strategic Studies, or DSS, was established in 1971 by Dr. William R. Van Cleave, a political scientist and advisor to President Ronald Reagan.

He started it as part of the University of Southern California.

He moved it to Missouri State in 1987 when he was appointed as a professor in the then-SMSU interdisciplinary studies program.

In 2005, DSS relocated classes to Virginia under the leadership of Dr. Keith Payne. It was now part of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and could take advantage of resources near the nation's capital.

Payne started out with roughly 35 students. DSS has grown to more than 300 students from around the world.

DSS offers doctoral and master's programs. The student body is diverse, with a mix of traditional students, mid-career professionals and active-duty military. All programs are offered 100% online. Students can also take seated classes, or a hybrid of seated/online classes.

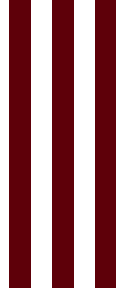
Dr. John P. Rose, a retired Army brigadier general, has been the department head since 2020. He is retiring this July.

The new department head will be Dr. Christopher Ford. A Rhodes Scholar with degrees from Harvard (summa cum laude), Oxford and Yale, Ford has been a professor with DSS since 2023.

LEARN MORE ABOUT DSS:
DSS.MISSOURISTATE.EDU



Leave your mark.
Be part of the



HIVE OF BEAR PRIDE

in the new
Missouri State University
Advancement Center!



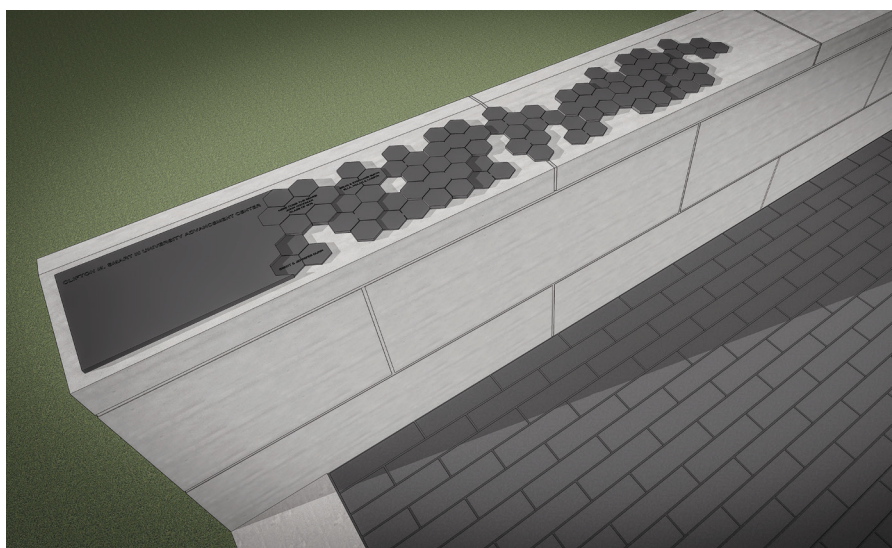
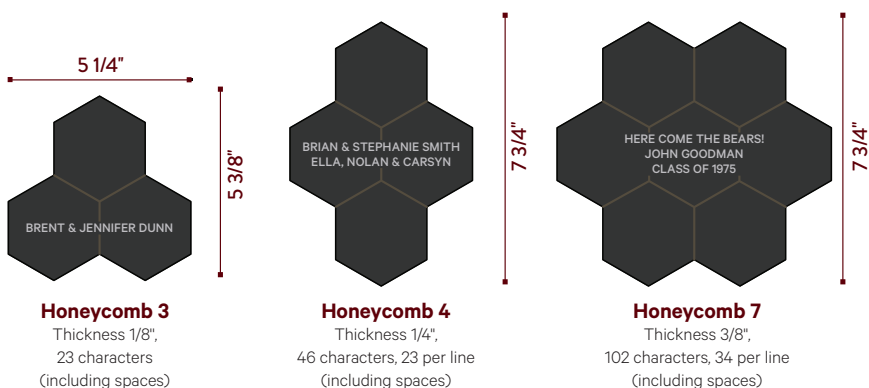
It's your chance for the
Advancement Center
to "bear" your name.

We all know bears love honey, and you love the Bears. Now, you can be part of something that celebrates your sweet connection!

Anyone can purchase a honeycomb plaque to be displayed outside the Clifton M. Smart III University Advancement Center. As the wall grows, the honeycombs will become a symbol of shared commitment, spirit, generosity and pride.

Each honeycomb can be customized with your name, your family's name or a message of support.

**PURCHASE FOR YOURSELF
OR AS A GIFT**



CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Parents or guardians: If this issue of Missouri State is addressed to your daughter or son who has established a separate permanent address, please notify us of the new address: 417-836-5654 or Alumni@MissouriState.edu



JOIN US IN AUGUST AT THE STATE FAIR!

The State Fair in Sedalia, Missouri, presents the best of our region in agriculture, the arts, culinary creations and more.

Mo State is excited to be part of it and spread maroon and white cheer! Join us Aug. 15 for our very own Missouri State Day. We'll host a special booth on Main Street for one day only!

We'll also have a booth in the Agriculture Building throughout the whole fair, Aug. 13-23.

Get all the details!
[Alumni.MissouriState.edu/
StateFair](http://Alumni.MissouriState.edu/StateFair)