

The background of the entire page is a photograph of students in a computer lab. In the foreground, a young man with a beard is looking towards the camera. Behind him, a young woman with long dark hair is focused on her computer screen. Further back, another student is visible. They are all wearing green sweatshirts with 'Methodist University' printed on them. The lab has multiple computer monitors and keyboards on desks, with windows in the background showing blinds.

# MU *today*

M A G A Z I N E

Spring 2025

## COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY, & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

*First of a four-part series highlighting the  
Colleges of Methodist University*

**INSIDE** ➤ *Student/Faculty/Staff/Alumni Features, News, Events, Class Notes, and More!*





# Hope Swin



## *PGM Serving Those Who Served*

Methodist University's PGA HOPE (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere) initiative allows military veterans to learn the game of golf at Downback (MU's on-campus, 18-hole golf course for students) at no cost. Each semester, the MU Professional Golf Management Program works directly with the Fort Bragg Service Recovery Unit to find more than two dozen military veterans interested in participating in the program. Once they are selected, the veterans come each week during an eight-week stretch to receive quality one-on-one instruction from the PGM Program's premier faculty and staff. "Sometimes, vets feel alone and often misunderstood," said peer mentor and U.S. Army Veteran Courtney Brown. "This is a way for us to be with other vets, maybe someone who has the same type of disability, others who understand where we're coming from."



# Aggs Eternal



"Though we're different ages and served in different ways, we all have that same bond and can share similar stories. It's more than golf. Honestly, I don't know where I'd be right now if it weren't for PGA HOPE and MU."

– U.S. Army Veteran Marcus McNear



(Learn more about PGA HOPE graduate and current PGM student Julian Mitchell '26 – page 18).

# A Message from Our President



Stanley T. Wearden, Ph.D.  
President of Methodist University

**D**ear Methodist University Alumni, Students, Faculty, Staff, and Friends,

One of the joys of leading the Methodist University community is the opportunity to observe how the history and tradition of MU serves as a strong foundation for the numerous accomplishments of today and for the strategies that will move our beloved University forward in the future. I'm fortunate on a daily basis to witness and participate in this intersection of what was, is, and will be.

Each time I sit down to write my "Welcome" for the alumni magazine, that wonderful mix of past, present, and future comes to mind. MU Today is a great place for all of us to read about alumni from decades ago, those who graduated just last year, and those who will get their diplomas this May during Commencement 2025 at The Crown Coliseum in Fayetteville.

We also get to read about events on campus, important gatherings off campus, and the many departments of caring and dedicated faculty and staff who devote their work lives to the success and advancement of our students and University.

In this issue of MU Today, we introduce the first of a four-part series about Methodist University's colleges, which house all our academic programs and faculty. The Cover Story (pages 14-17) will focus on the dynamic College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies.

Home of some of our most popular departments and majors, the College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies is synonymous with tremendous achievement in the classroom and remarkable accomplishment after graduation.

Examples of students, faculty, and alumni from this College are shared as "Spotlights" throughout the following pages, including:

- Student Julian Mitchell '26 is not just advancing in his goals, he's assisting others as they face hurdles in their lives (page 18).

**“It's easy to find that commitment to caring and sharing time, talent, and treasure throughout the pages of this MU Today Magazine. After all, it's what we're known for.”**

- Dr. Shivappa Palled has affected hundreds of MU lives as a Math professor since 1988 (page 20).

- Alumni Phil Mullen '74 (page 22) and Earl Leake '73 (page 24) continue to share their passion, talents and time for the betterment of the University they love.

When I think of these four people, the word “service” comes to mind immediately. They exemplify the “others-before-self” character that is the hallmark of MU.

It's easy to find that commitment to caring and sharing time, talent, and treasure throughout the pages of this MU Today Magazine. After all, it's what we're known for.

From hosting events such as Special Olympics (page 11) and serving members of our community through PGA HOPE (inside front cover) to raising funds to battle cancer through Play4Kay (page 11) or generously supporting our students and University through gifts during Loyalty Day (page 8), the MU spirit of serving and giving is ever-present, and it fills me with Monarch pride.

Thank you for all the care and service that you offer our MU Community in so many different ways. If I don't see you at Commencement in May, I hope you can visit or that our paths cross at one of our Alumni Regional Events (page 26) sometime very soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stanley T. Wearden'.

Stanley T. Wearden, Ph.D.





# 14

COVER STORY

This issue of MU Today features the first of a four-part series that highlights the academic colleges at Methodist University and the departments, programs, and majors in each. The College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies is the first to take center stage.

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### Features

Student Spotlight: Julian Mitchell '26.....	18-19
Donor Spotlight: Phil Mullen '74.....	22-23
Alumni Spotlight: Earl Leake '73.....	24-25

### Departments

Presidential Welcome .....	2
Monarch Minutes .....	4-7
Athletics: Where Monarchs Rule .....	10-12
Alumni Regional Events .....	26
Class Notes, Engagements, Weddings, Births .....	27-29
In Memory: Honoring Alumni & Friends.....	30-32
Then & Now .....	Inside Back Cover
MU Online (Lifelong Learners) .....	Back Cover

### GIFTING SPOTLIGHT

POWER AND PRIDE | 8-9

### ATHLETICS SPOTLIGHT

INSPIRING LEADERSHIP | 12

### FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS | 20-21

**MU**  
*today*  
M A G A Z I N E

**President**  
Dr. Stanley T. Wearden

**Vice President for Institutional Advancement**  
R. Gregory Swanson

**Senior Director of Advancement Services**  
Kirbie Dockery '03

**Director of Alumni Relations**  
Catherine Okafor

**Marketing & Communications Director:** Brad Johnson

**Sr. Graphic Designer:** La'Won Williams

**Digital Media Coordinator & Director of Photography:** Karalee Scouten

**Webmaster:** Michael Molter '94

**Other Contributors:** Arleen Fields; Wendy Hustwit; University of the District of Columbia

**MU Today Magazine** is published for friends and alumni of Methodist University by the Alumni and Marketing & Communications offices. To be added to our mailing list, call 910.630.7200 or email [alumnioffice@methodist.edu](mailto:alumnioffice@methodist.edu).

### New Address?

One call or email will update your University record.  
Email: [alumnioffice@methodist.edu](mailto:alumnioffice@methodist.edu)  
Phone: **910.630.7200**

# MONARCH

## Minutes

MU News, Notes, and More

### MU Students, Faculty, Staff Attend Annual MLK Brunch Held at The Crown



Methodist University once again served as an event sponsor as hundreds braved a cold day in January to attend the 32nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Brunch at Crown Expo Center. With nearly two dozen MU students, faculty, and staff in attendance, the Cumberland County Ministerial Council hosted the event that featured public officials, singing, a drum line, artwork, prayer, and more to honor the prominent leader who played a crucial role in the fight against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States.

### Holding Foundation Supports Nursing Students & Initiatives



The Robert P. Holding Foundation has donated \$25,000 to Methodist University. This recent, generous contribution directly supports students and initiatives in MU's Nursing program. The Robert P. Holding Foundation is named for Robert Powell Holding Sr., who served as president and chairman of the First Citizens Bank in Smithfield, N.C. from 1935 to 1957. The Robert P. Holding Foundation was incorporated in

Smithfield in 1955 and has since contributed millions of dollars to support healthcare and higher education in North Carolina's rural and urban communities.

*Pictured are Methodist University Provost Suzanne Blum Malley and First Citizen Bank's Tim Richardson (Senior Vice President / Manager of Commercial Banking and member of the Methodist University Board of Trustees).*



### Late-Night Exam Breakfast Fuels Student Success

One of the great traditions near the end of every semester, just as those ever-crucial exams are the focus of campus, is the Exam Breakfast in the Green & Gold Dining Hall (2024 fall event pictured here). It's more than just delicious food from Sodexo late in the evening, as faculty and staff come together and help serve the students who get a chance to take a break from their studies and share some unique camaraderie before getting back to business.



# 20 NATIONAL 25 STEM FESTIVAL

presented by EXPLR



## MU Sponsors National STEM Festival held in D.C.

Methodist University has a great reputation for providing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programs that inspire students and lead to successful careers. MU is also a great champion for these “STEM” programs and took its dedication to the national level as a sponsor of the 2025 National STEM Festival (March 19-22 in Washington, D.C.). The festival invited students in grades 7-12 from across the U.S. and its territories to conceive and submit STEM innovations, inventions, and research across six categories.

## Prominent Online Program

Methodist University is garnering national and international attention for its prominent online programs as Higher Education Digest, an independent higher education magazine with a widespread international audience, recently featured Methodist University as a “Prominent Online Program to Watch in 2024-25”. The publication points to a variety of factors that allow MU to combine academic excellence with the convenience of online learning.

*Learn more about MU Online on back cover of this MU Today.*



## School of Medicine Receives Gift as Building Takes Shape

Just five months after the groundbreaking ceremony, beams were already in place (*pictured here*) and the vision-becoming-reality that is the Methodist University Cape Fear Valley Health School of Medicine is taking shape at the CFVH Medical Center. In April, a “Topping Off” ceremony was scheduled to honor the builders and acknowledge the amazing progress. In addition, MU recently received \$50,000 for the medical school’s 2025 educational pipeline development from the Camber Foundation.

## Did You Know?

Ruth Carter Stapleton (1929-83), the youngest sister of U.S. President Jimmy Carter (who died in December of 2024 at the age of 100), was a 1964 graduate – having earned a Bachelor’s Degree in English – from then-Methodist College.



# MONARCH *Minutes* (cont.)

## ► For Al-Names, MU Was Truly Home Away from Home

Methodist University graduate **Fadhil Al-Names '24** was featured in the Fayetteville Observer, which highlighted his determination to get a college degree and appreciation for his opportunities at MU. His road from Yemen to that degree in America, and now employment at a local financial institution, is inspiring. "I escaped death three different times before even coming here to MU," Al-Names said. Al-Names double majored in Business Analytics and Financial Economics with a minor in Business Administration. "I'm very thankful for Methodist University," he said. "Not only did it provide an education for me, but it gave me a sense of home. I will forever be grateful to Methodist University for saving my life."

(Read the full story at [methodist.edu/al-names](http://methodist.edu/al-names))



## ▲ Thank You Old Friends

The demolition of the Cumberland and Sanford Residence Halls – which housed thousands of students since opening in the mid-1960s – began in February. Be sure to share your favorite memories of the Halls at [methodist.edu/cumberland-sanford](http://methodist.edu/cumberland-sanford) and we'll post highlights of those on that page, via social, or in our alumni newsletter.



## Flickr Fun

Scroll through the albums on MU's Flickr page ([flickr.com/kingmonarch/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/kingmonarch/albums)) to find familiar faces in MU spaces.



## Campus and Local Community Experience "The Passing"

MU's Division of Fine & Performing Arts hosted multiple screenings of "The Passing" by the late video artist Bill Viola at the David McCune International Art Gallery. "The Passing" hauntingly travels the terrains of the conscious, the subconscious, and the desert landscapes of the Southwest, melding sleep, dreams, and the drama of waking life into a stunning masterpiece. Funding for this program was provided by The William Frederick Bethune Fund for the Arts of Cumberland Community Foundation, Inc.



From "Who would you invite to Thanksgiving dinner?" to "Who is going to win the Super Bowl?" the MU Asks social media videos are a hit. Check out the "What do you love most about MU?" video and others on multiple Methodist University platforms listed to the right.

## Follow Everything MU On the Platform that Fits You Best

- @MethodistUniversity
- @MethodistUniversity
- @MethodistU
- YouTube.com/MethodistUMonarchs
- LinkedIn.com/school/methodistu
- Flickr.com/KingMonarch

### Alumni-Specific Social Media

- @MethodistUAlum
- @MethodistUAlum
- @MethodistUniversityAlumni

Feature Stories Every Week at [Methodist.edu/news](http://Methodist.edu/news)



## Cannon Charitable Trusts Offers Meaningful Gifts to Build On ▼

Methodist University has received three substantial grants from the Cannon Charitable Interests, which continue the legacy of founder Charles A. Cannon's giving across the state of North Carolina. These most recent grants to MU from the CCT are for capital improvements on campus and include a \$290,000 grant from the Charles A. Cannon Charitable Trust No. One to partially cover costs for the Player Center Bridge replacement (pictured at right) and two grants totaling \$250,000 from The Cannon Foundation and the Charles A. Cannon Charitable Trust No. One to partially fund the roof replacements on the Hendricks Science Complex (original building) and also the Riddle Physical Activities Center.



## MU Hosts Regional FBLA Conference ▼

Hundreds of young students boosted their business and leadership skills while visiting Methodist University's sprawling campus. MU's Reeves School of Business hosted the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) Southeastern North Carolina Regional Leadership Conference – welcoming more than 500 middle and high school students from Cumberland, Hoke, Scotland, Robeson, Bladen, and Columbus counties. Students had an opportunity to participate in workshops and competitive events, all while walking around and getting a glimpse into life at Methodist University. Read more about the Reeves School of Business in our Cover Story (*pages 14-17*).



## Futures Fair is All Business ▲

Students in the College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies and the College of Arts, Humanities, & Sciences had the opportunity to network with business representatives from across Fayetteville and Cumberland County in February as the MU One Stop hosted its first Future Fair event. A second Future Fair, focusing on employers of interest to students in the College of Health Sciences & Human Services, was held the next week.



## MU Grad Crowned Miss Fayetteville

Methodist University graduate **Katie Strain '21** won the Miss Fayetteville 2025 Pageant (*Photo: THOMPSON photography+design*). Now an elementary school teacher in Spring Lake, Strain was very involved as a student at MU, including serving as a student ambassador for student scholarships and being a member of the cheerleading squad that won the Cheerleading Canam Nationals in 2019. ■



methodistuniversity  
Fayetteville, NC



Liked by king\_monarch and 315 others

methodistuniversity 🍀🍀 Let's celebrate together!—strike a pose to share your #MULoyaltyDay moment. #LoyaltyDay

Just now

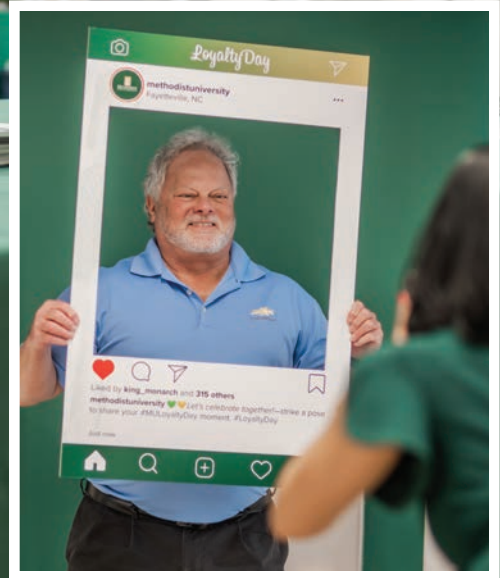
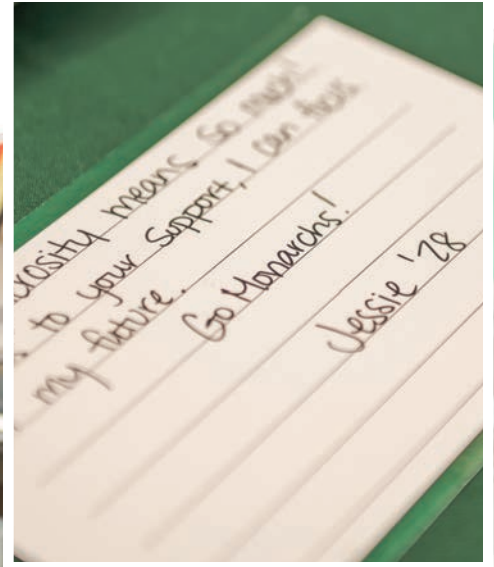


**L**oyalty Day – a treasured tradition at Methodist University since before MU opened its doors in 1960 – was held on February 27 this year. During this one-day, 24-hour opportunity, dozens of MU students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University once again offered contributions that symbolized the strength and unity of our University and local communities.

The theme this year was “Power in Giving, Pride in Legacy,” and supporters came together to make a profound impact by contributing to the University’s Loyalty Fund. This fund directly supports scholarships for 97 percent of Methodist University’s undergraduate students, giving them the resources they need to excel academically, athletically, and personally.

“Loyalty Day is more than a fundraiser – it’s a celebration of our shared values and our commitment to building a brighter future for Methodist University and its students,” said Mitch Guy of Southern Trust Mortgage in





Fayetteville, who serves as president of MU's Founders Council. "Together, we can empower the next generation of leaders and innovators in our community."

The MU Founders Council is made up of approximately 30 business leaders in the area who aid, foster, and promote the growth, progress and general welfare of MU, Cumberland County, and North Carolina. It stems from a tradition of local support that began when MU was founded by the community in 1956.

While Loyalty Day was a one-day event, it's certainly not too late to contribute to its success (*see the URL and QR code at right*). This year, MU is pursuing minimum gifts of \$19.56 in honor of the year in which the University was founded. The contribution will support scholarships, faculty development, and initiatives that enhance the Methodist University experience. ■

## Your Loyalty Pays Off for MU Students



It's not too late to support MU students through Loyalty Day (visit [methodist.edu/loyalty](http://methodist.edu/loyalty) for that opportunity), or your gifts can make a difference all year through the Loyalty Fund (utilizing the QR code at left). Without these gifts and your generosity, MU couldn't recruit, retain, or graduate so many amazing Monarchs. *Thank You!*



# MU ATHLETICS *WHERE MONARCHS RULE*

## Women's Soccer Nets Tourney Title



The Methodist University women's soccer team captured its second USA South Tournament title in the last three years with a 2-0 victory over Southern Virginia University in a late-fall championship match at Duggins Stadium. The win secured a spot in the national tournament.

The Monarchs (11-8) were led this season by all-conference selections Carolina Simpkins '26 (goalkeeper), defenders Alexa Armour '28, Amanda DeDomenico '25 and Brooke Hunter '27, and forward Kelsey Burge '25. Representing the Monarchs on the league's All-Sportsmanship team was Charly Oldham '25.

MU – which fell to 14th-ranked Emory University in Atlanta in the first round – made its 13th appearance in the NCAA Tournament.



## Monarchs Bring Home the Gold, Plus All-Conference Selections, Milestones, and More

**TRACK & FIELD** – MU's Jeremiah Freeman '26 (at right) was named Men's Field Athlete of the Meet after capturing first place in the men's triple jump with a leap of 13.69m at the USA South (USAS) Indoor Track & Field Championships. He also earned bronze in long jump and Logan Wade '27 claimed gold in the 60m, with a time of 6.98 seconds. Treasure Rosario Watson '26 earned four medals, including gold in both the long jump (5.31m) and triple jump (11.39m) for the Monarchs women's team.



**MEN'S SOCCER** – MU All-USAS honorees were Steven Floyd '27 (first team), Casey Atwell '25 and Matthew Manzano '26 (second team). Cortez Herring '26M earned All-Sportsmanship team honors.

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL** – Kiley Hicks '25 (who passed the 1,000-career point mark this year) was named to the USAS second team, and Alyssa Shazer '25 was named to the league's All-Sportsmanship team.

**MEN'S BASKETBALL** – Derrion Hicklen '26 was named second-team All-USAS, and sophomore Ron Jones '27 earned All-Sportsmanship honors.

**VOLLEYBALL** – Jeanana Fowler '25, Hannah Hewett '24, and Jamie Holton '26 garnered first-team USAS honors, while Savannah Hovander '27 and Blake O'Brien '25 both made the second team. Madyson Loberger '28 made the All-Sportsmanship team.

**WOMEN'S GOLF** – MU Head Coach Kelsie Warren '14, '16M was named the 2024 Kim Evans Award winner. The award is presented annually to the college coach and Class A PGA Professional whose support of the game through teaching, coaching and involvement in the community has helped ensure the continued growth of golf, and who represents the finest qualities the sport has to offer.



# MU ATHLETICS *WHERE MONARCHS RULE*



## Compiling Big Wins One Assist at a Time

Talent on the courts, fields, courses, and tracks is at a premium for the Methodist University Athletics Department, but the student-athletes, coaches, trainers, student workers, club and association members (and others associated with the Monarchs) are much more than winners in competition, and they make that abundantly clear every semester, every year. That championship character may not be more obvious as when Monarchs come together in service to those in the MU community, the local community, and even communities of people they'll likely never have the opportunity to meet.

Below are some of the places and spaces Monarchs have selflessly stepped in to be a positive force for others since the Fall Semester of this school year – a list certainly not inclusive of all athletic-related events, sponsorships, or community involvement activities.

### FULL OF FIGHT IN BATTLE AGAINST CANCER

For the 19th-consecutive year, MU hosted Play4Kay week and raised well more than \$10,000 for the Kay Yow Cancer Fund and Cape Fear Valley Health Foundation: Friends of the Cancer Center. In addition to the annual 5K and women's basketball game (which featured the cancer survivor walk), this year the campus was seeing pink at a bake sale, dodgeball tournament, a Lunch & Learn (about different cancers affecting women), chili cookoff, three-point shooting contest, flower sale, and other gatherings and events. A "Flock An Office" fund-raiser (featuring dozens of plastic flamingos) and a P4K softball game kept the theme going even after the traditional week-long events.



### MONARCH (DONATION) NATION

Members of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) at Methodist University began collecting canned goods and other non-perishable items in the fall as part of the USA South Athletic Conference's annual Cans Across The Conference food drive competition. When the competition concluded, the Monarchs had amassed a total of 5,630 items to be given to three different causes.



### HELPING HANDS & HEARTS

MU student-athletes (plus other students and alumni) spent multiple weekends this spring assisting special needs athletes who play in local Parks & Rec "Buddy Ball" programs (top of page right) or Special Olympics competitions across the state (top left). MU Athletics also plays a significant role in planning and hosting the Cumberland County Special Olympics Spring Games each year at Monarch Stadium (left).



# MU ATHLETICS WHERE MONARCHS RULE



## More Than a Great Student-Athlete and Coach



**Z**hané Ruffin '16 is making a big difference for others on and off the field like so many current and former Monarchs are known to do.

Ruffin is in her fourth season as the head women's lacrosse coach at The University of the District of Columbia in Washington, D.C., where she served as an assistant coach since 2018. From Day 1, she's had a positive influence on the team's recruiting, results, and the student-athletes, but she's also gone outside of her university to help others succeed.

"Any opportunity I have to introduce lacrosse to others, especially youth, I'm going to take," Ruffin said.

*My goal is to use lacrosse as a means to create opportunities for youth to develop leadership, teamwork, and life skills. Learn lacrosse, yes, but they deserve more than just lacrosse.*

– Zhané Ruffin '16

In addition to her coaching duties at UDC – which is one of only four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) with an intercollegiate women's lacrosse team – Ruffin is active in the Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA) and engaged in her local community through an organization called WINNERS Lacrosse (since 2019).

As the director of communications and operations for WINNERS Lacrosse, Ruffin oversees initiatives, meets with stakeholders, does after-school programs, and focuses on the direction and impact of the organization. In addition, she's taken on the responsibilities of coaching a local middle school team.

It begs the question, "Does she sleep?!"

"Actually, I'm about to start a training program for girls that's diverse and inclusive, right here in Prince George's County (Md.) where I live," she said. "I want to get them excited about playing but also train them and their parents about the recruiting process as so many players and parents have no idea that even if you're a great player, you need to know how recruiting works to get noticed."

Ruffin was noticed and recruited by MU when she was playing for Laney High School in Wilmington, N.C. (well known for another great athlete, Michael Jordan). She played other sports growing up, but after an injury playing basketball – and parents who pushed her hard to continue in athletics – she learned (at times via YouTube videos) a new sport, lacrosse.

Ruffin was one of only two minority lacrosse players on her Laney team, and she says that's one of the many reasons she immediately knew Methodist University was going to be a home away from home for her.

"I'll never forget my campus visit to MU. It was in May, and it was so beautiful and bright, the flowers

were blooming, the sun was hitting that grass field; it was amazing," she said. "Then everybody was just so welcoming, and MU was, by far, the most diverse team I had ever seen. I wanted to be a part of a team where I could totally be myself and feel comfortable playing the game I love."

At MU, Ruffin scored 40 career goals on just 73 shots on goal. She was team captain in 2016, and awarded USA South All-Academic and All-Sportsmanship team honors. She also served on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

"MU is always going to be a special place for me because even though I didn't know then that I wanted to be a coach, MU allowed me to combine my passions for business and sports," said Ruffin, who majored in Sport Management and went on to get a master's in Sports Industry Management from Georgetown University. "The collaborative environment helped me to enhance my skills on and off the field. It helped me to become a better person and a better coach."





WHERE *EXCELLENCE*  
& *AFFORDABILITY*  
COME TOGETHER

# 80+ AREAS OF STUDY

*MU offers Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees.*

**97%** RECEIVE FINANCIAL AID

MU offers more than \$25 million  
in scholarships every year.

ON CAMPUS & **ONLINE**

MU offers flexible schedules perfect for working  
adults, active military, veterans, and their families.

Ranked Annually as a  
"Military Friendly" and  
"Best for Vets" University



**75+** STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

MU has students from across the U.S.  
and more than 50 countries.

**No. 1** Most Diverse  
University in N.C.  
(Two of the Past Three Years!)

Niche National Rankings  
and Reviews

**20 NCAA** INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORTS

MU students have won nearly 80 team and  
individual national championships.

**"2025 Prominent  
Online Program"\***

**1 of 10** "Must Watch  
Universities in North America"\*

\*Higher Education Digest

5400 Ramsey Street,  
Fayetteville, NC 28311  
[methodist.edu](http://methodist.edu)  
910.630.7000



# College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies

*The first of a four-part series highlighting the Colleges of Methodist University*

Nearly 20 years ago, as then-Methodist College was celebrating its 50th anniversary, a special convocation was held and a major announcement was made by President M. Elton Hendricks. On that day (Nov. 1, 2006), Hendricks shared that the MU Board of Trustees had voted unanimously to change the name of Methodist College to Methodist University.

From that point on, “University” would be on the logos, the letterhead, the T-shirts, and the uniforms. One of the reasons was that, while “colleges” across the country typically focus on undergraduate programs, it’s the “universities” that most commonly feature both undergraduate and graduate programs. And that was (and remains) the strategic future of MU.

The word “College,” however, remains extremely important at MU. It represents the academic divisions within the University, grouped with very intentional organizational purposes to enhance efficiency, research, and most importantly, the highest-quality of study possible in a student’s pursuit of a degree.

At Methodist University, there are currently four of these Colleges that house more than 80 areas of study leading to associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees; professional

“ *Dividing into Colleges has been very successful at MU. It invites cooperation and teamwork that benefits the students, faculty, and staff.* ”

– Dr. Tat Chan, Dean  
College of Business, Technology,  
& Professional Studies

certificates and licensure; and more. In this issue of MU Today, we’ll examine the College of Business, Technology, and Professional Studies. In subsequent issues, we’ll delve into the other three: College of Arts, Humanities, & Sciences; College of Health Sciences & Human Services; and the recently added College of Medicine.



## The Structure Within

The College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies at Methodist University is comprised of divisions, departments, and programs that include the Computer Science & Computer Information Technology Department, the Reeves School of Business, the Mathematics & Data Science Department, the Teacher Education Program, and the Engineering & Environmental Studies Division.

Dr. Tat Chan, a professor of Computer Science who has been a faculty member at MU since 2001 and a dean since 2011, has served as the dean of this College since 2020. Chan assisted in the founding of MU's Engineering Program and started the MU STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) Camp that continues to this day.

"It's an honor to work with so many talented professors and students," Chan said. "Dividing into Colleges has been very successful at MU. It invites cooperation and teamwork that benefits the students, faculty, and staff."



Dear Alumni and Friends,

I am delighted to connect with you through this edition of MU Today. As the Dean of the College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies at Methodist University, I am honored to share the remarkable progress and dynamic initiatives unfolding within our College.

Each department and program within our College that you will read about in this article is dedicated to fostering academic excellence and nurturing the next generation of leaders and innovators. The integration of these departments within our College is both strategic and synergistic.

Since assuming the role of dean, I have been privileged to witness and contribute to the growth and transformation of our programs. Our faculty members are deeply committed to providing rigorous and supportive learning environments, engaging students in meaningful research, and preparing them to excel in their chosen fields.

Our alumni play a pivotal role in our College's ongoing success and evolution. Your achievements, support, and engagement serve as a testament to the quality education provided at MU and inspire current students to strive for excellence. We are eager to strengthen our connections with you, celebrate your accomplishments, and explore collaboration opportunities that will benefit our students and the broader community.

I invite you to stay connected with us, share your experiences, and participate in the vibrant life of our College. Together, we can continue to build a legacy of excellence, innovation, and service that defines the College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies at Methodist University.

Warm regards,

Tat W. Chan, Ph.D.

Dean, College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies  
Professor of Computer Science



## Computer Science & Computer Information Technology

Exemplifying Methodist University's strategic goal of preparing students for professional success after graduation, the Computer Science & Computer Information Technology Department at MU opens the door to some of the world's fastest-growing and in-demand career opportunities.

Learning in small class sizes and lab settings from expert faculty who have extensive experience, MU graduates from this department have pursued a wide-range of career paths, including software engineer, web developer, gaming developer, system software developer, quality assurance engineer, and IT security analyst. Many also pursue advanced degrees in Computer Science.

"Although the introductory sequence in the curriculum for Computer Science is programming, Computer Science involves a great deal more than programming," said Dr. Terry House, chair of the CS & CIT Department.

One of the great advantages for MU students in their Computer Science studies is the opportunity to utilize two different computer labs (both located in D. Keith Allison Hall).

The computer labs house more than 40 high-speed computer units to support instruction and research. All computers in the labs are upgraded regularly and installed with up-to-date software/applications.

The Computer Science Department offers majors (Bachelor of Science) and minors in Computer Science and Computer Information Technology. Students majoring in CIT must focus on one of three available concentrations, and the Business Information Systems and Cybersecurity & Information Systems concentrations are available 100% online. The department also offers an associate of science degree in Computer Science.

**Learn more about the Computer Science & Computer Information Technology Department by visiting: [methodist.edu/computer-science](http://methodist.edu/computer-science).**

### Did You Know?

*Several College of BTPS undergraduate programs (plus the MBA) are offered via MU Online? Learn more at [online.methodist.edu](http://online.methodist.edu).*

## Reeves School of Business

With more than 700 students from nearly 20 different countries studying in the Charles M. Reeves School of Business (both on campus and online), it's obviously home to some of the most popular and successful majors at MU.

The business leaders of tomorrow from Methodist University are studying Accounting, Business Administration, Business Analytics, Financial Economics, International Business, Marketing, Sport Management, and more. The highly regarded PGA Golf Management and Professional Tennis Management Programs are within the RSB as is the highly sought-after Master of Business Administration (which is available online).



Dr. Mary Kirchner is head of the RSB and a professor in the Accounting & Financial Economics Department. It's one of three departments in the School, along with Business Management & Marketing, and Sport Management.

"We are truly dedicated to the development of the entrepreneurial spirit that is the driving force behind the U.S. economy," Kirchner said. "We want to fashion and nurture the spirit of entrepreneurship and creative economic endeavor by developing students' understanding of the American economy, appreciation of its power and institutional structure, and an ability to function effectively in it."

Opportunities for students abound in the RSB, including internship and other experiential learning experiences, research projects, and amazing career-driven networking.

As one example of the Reeves School of Business leading students to professional success, the PGA Golf Management Program began in the mid-1980s and continues to have a 100 percent job-placement rate for graduates of the program who seek a career in the golf industry.

**Learn more about the Reeves School of Business by visiting: [methodist.edu/rsb](http://methodist.edu/rsb).**

### **Engineering & Environmental Studies**

Engineering & Environmental Studies continue to be some of the fastest-growing areas of study and MU offers undergraduate majors in both within the College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies.

The Engineering major is offered with a concentration in Industrial Engineering, and the Environmental Health & Safety major offers concentrations in Regulatory Compliance or Regulatory Compliance & Management of Natural Resources.

Dr. Denise Bauer is founding director, chair, and a professor of Engineering at MU and is head of the Engineering & Environmental Studies Division. She also leads the annual STEM Camp at MU.

Bauer said having a personal approach, being student-centered and having classes as two-way conversations, is something that sets MU's programs in this division apart from other universities.

"We embrace a community-learning environment where students work closely together as well as experience one-on-one contact with the Engineering faculty in and out of the classroom," she said.

**Learn more about the Engineering & Environmental Studies Division by visiting: [methodist.edu/engineering-environment](http://methodist.edu/engineering-environment).**

### **Mathematics & Data Science**

Mathematicians have vast, diverse occupational opportunities, and data scientists utilize math, computer science, and statistics to fuel artificial intelligence, machine learning, and more. The combination makes the Mathematics & Data Science Department one of the most intriguing on campus.

Led by Professor of Math and Chair Kathleen Fick, Ph.D., the department offers a bachelor's in Math, Data Science, plus minors in Math, Data Science, and an associate of science in Math. With these options, Math and Data Science are poised as perfect partners in this data-driven world with all other areas of study.

In addition to the above listed degrees, the department works with the Engineering Department to offer a popular double major. The Math Department also partners with Teacher Education to offer a concentration in middle grades (6-9).

"Students who graduate with a major in Mathematics or Data Science will be prepared to pursue advanced degrees or pursue careers in industry, government, healthcare, and education fields," said Fick. "Math is a high-impact major focused on complex problem solving, and mathematicians and data scientists are the core of computer science, cybersecurity, data science, engineering, and artificial intelligence teams. We make data available, actionable, and insightful for all."

**Learn more about the Mathematics & Data Science Department by visiting: [methodist.edu/mathematics-data-science](http://methodist.edu/mathematics-data-science).**

#### **Formula for Success**

*Check out the feature on MU Math Professor Shivappa Palled (page 20)*

## **Majors/Programs in the College of BTPS**

#### **Computer Science & Computer Information Technology (CIT)**

Computer Science, CIT with Business Information Systems concentration, CIT with Cybersecurity & Information Assurance concentration, CIT with Interactive Multimedia Application Development concentration

#### **Reeves School of Business**

Accounting, Business Administration, Business Analytics, Financial Economics, Management, Marketing, Sport Management, (PGA Golf Management and Professional Tennis Management concentrations)

**+ Master of Business Administration**

#### **Engineering & Environmental Studies**

Engineering with Industrial Engineering concentration, Environmental Health & Safety with Regulatory Compliance & Management of Natural Resources concentration, Environmental Health & Safety with Regulatory Compliance concentration

#### **Mathematics & Data Science**

Data Science, Mathematics

#### **Teacher Education**

Elementary Education (K-6), Middle Grades Education (6-9), Physical Education & Health Education (K-12), School Social Work, Educational Studies



## Teacher Education Program

Throughout the city of Fayetteville, Cumberland County, North Carolina, and the Southeast, you'll find Methodist University graduates working as talented, dedicated teachers who are making a difference in our schools and lives of young students. They are byproducts of an amazing Teacher Education Program that believes the primary purpose of teaching is to provide every child with the opportunity and instruction needed to maximize his or her talents, ability, and ethical potential.

MU offers six undergraduate majors that lead to N.C. licensure: Elementary Education (K-6), Middle Grades Education (6-9), and Physical Education & Health Education (K-12).

"Teacher education is an institution-wide responsibility," said Dr. Courtney Samuelson, co-chair & assistant professor of Education. "The unifying theme for all of the Education programs is the development of professional educators as facilitative teachers who understand and value the process of learning."

MU offers undergraduate non-licensure programs as well, and if someone has a degree in something other than education, but is looking to change careers and become a teacher, MU has the pathway. The Residency Licensure Program is 100 percent online – perfect for working adults, military members, their spouses, and veterans. With an increased demand in education for leaders who are proficient in the use of instructional technology, another popular, 100 percent online offering, is the master's in Educational Leadership: Instructional Technology.

**Learn more about the Teacher Education Program by visiting: [methodist.edu/teacher-education](http://methodist.edu/teacher-education).** ■

Learn more about MU's College of Business, Technology, and Professional Studies ([methodist.edu/CBTPS](http://methodist.edu/CBTPS)) and see how you can take classes and also support MU students by visiting [methodist.edu/stay-connected](http://methodist.edu/stay-connected) or scanning this QR code:



*Be sure to follow our four-part series on the Colleges of Methodist University, which will continue in subsequent MU Today Magazines.*

## Second-Annual President's Society Reception

Methodist University hosted its annual President's Society Reception Nov. 14, 2024, at the Cape Fear Botanical Gardens for alumni and friends who have given \$1,000 or more to the University in a fiscal year.

Right: Trustee Mary Lynn Bryan and Trustee Emeritus Loleta Foster

Top Left: President Stanley T. Wearden and Board of Trustees Chair, Dr. Rakesh Gupta

Upper Middle Left: Mary Wright '68, Trustee Mac Healy, and Trustee Emeritus Harvey Wright '70

Lower Middle Left: Trustee Tim Richardson, Trustee Gil Wise '83, and School of Medicine Trustee Walt Tippet

Bottom Left: Steven Faircloth '87 and Grace McGrath







# BATTLEFIELD to FAIRWAY

*Julian Mitchell's Journey from  
Soldier to PGA HOPE Mentor*

*By: Wendy Hustwit*

In Goldsboro, North Carolina, a young Julian Mitchell '26 spent his childhood immersed in sports – football and basketball were his first loves. It wasn't until a friend nudged him to join the high school golf team that he discovered his true passion, setting the stage for a remarkable journey that would take him from the battlefield to the fairway.

Mitchell excelled in golf and dedicated his high school years to honing his game. After graduation, he traded his golf bag for a rucksack, enlisting in the military. For eight years, he served as a U.S. Army engineer, while the sport that ignited his passion slipped into the past.



A turning point came during his final deployment in 2019 when Mitchell sustained severe injuries that left him struggling with mobility challenges. “I could barely walk... I was in a dark place,” he recalled, reflecting on the solitude he felt as he began his rehabilitation at Fort Bragg’s Medical Unit. But encouragement came in an unexpected, yet familiar, form – the Fort Bragg Stryker Golf Course was within walking distance from his rehabilitation unit.

At Stryker, Brock White, now director of the PGA Golf Management program in the Reeves School of Business at Methodist University, was leading a golf class for military

veterans. Mitchell hesitantly joined the class and then quickly reconnected to the game that he loved growing up. Joining the class marked a turning point for Mitchell. Just like he did in high school, he “focused on that little white ball,” he says, emphasizing how golf reminds him to be patient, to find joy in nature, and in the company of others.

Mitchell’s passion and skill for the game stood out to White, who remembers Mitchell’s ability to pick up instruction quickly and his dedication to improving. When White founded Fayetteville’s first PGA HOPE (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere) program in 2021, he encouraged Mitchell to join.

In PGA HOPE chapters around the country, certified PGA instructors offer free golf lessons to support veterans’ and active

duty military participants’ physical health, mental, social, and emotional well-being.

Every Friday morning – for eight-week sessions during different seasons of the year – Fayetteville-area veterans from all backgrounds and branches gather Downback (the on-campus golf course at MU) to share their stories, skills, and laughter on the course. From vision-impaired veterans to those in wheelchairs, all participants are provided clubs, instruction, and adaptive equipment free of charge, allowing them to enjoy the many benefits of the game.

During Mitchell’s time in the PGA HOPE program, White encouraged him to enroll in the PGM Program and consider a career in golf. Beyond Mitchell’s technical ability, White saw that Mitchell had the personality and professionalism needed in the golf industry.

“Whether it’s teaching, coaching, golf operations, or even tournament management, [Mitchell] has the qualities that make a great PGA professional,” White said.

In 2022, Mitchell started his journey at MU for his degree in Business Administration and concentration in PGA Golf

“ *Whether it’s teaching, coaching, golf operations, or even tournament management, [Mitchell] has the qualities that make a great PGA professional.* ”

– Brock White, PGM Director

Management. As a non-traditional student, he faced his share of challenges adapting to college. He credits golf and MU’s Military and Veterans Services program with helping ease the transition into student life and the rigors of pursuing a degree.

Thanks in part to Mitchell’s influence and mentorship, MU’s PGA HOPE program has grown from the original six participants in Mitchell’s cohort to about 35 each session. Many of MU’s PGM staff and faculty are certified PGA HOPE instructors, allowing the program to grow larger than others in the state. Mitchell has already recruited a number of his fellow MU student veterans into the PGA HOPE program. He thrives on helping participants gain the same benefits from the game that he does.

In 2024, Mitchell earned the Reeves School of Business’s prestigious David G. Wilson Community Service Award for his PGA HOPE mentorship. This honor, established in 2002, is presented to a student in the business school who has shown an outstanding level of service to the wider Fayetteville community.

Currently a junior at MU, Mitchell optimistically plans his next move as a PGA Pro after graduation. His professors are excited too.

White said, “[Mitchell’s] ability to connect with people, especially other veterans, combined with his leadership skills and military background, makes me believe he will have a strong career in golf, whether as a head pro, director of golf, or even working in player development.”

Mitchell’s current post-graduate plans involve expanding PGA HOPE programming even further to meet growing demand in the community. He is also considering earning a master’s degree in counseling or social work – vowing to empower even more veterans through mentorship.

The golf industry is evolving and growing, increasingly popular with more women, girls, and people of color who join on-course and off-course opportunities around the country. Mitchell said he does not seek the spotlight, but as a veteran, future PGA professional, and instinctive mentor and coach, he stands at the forefront of the industry. He sees golf not just as a sport, but also as a powerful tool for fostering healing, connection, and community. ■



# The Perfect Equation

## Palled + MU Students = *Decades of Success*



In May 2025, Dr. Shivappa Palled will wrap up his 37th year teaching at Methodist University. Undergraduate Mathematics may not have changed much in those 37 years, but students and the methodologies used to teach them certainly have.

While current students and 21st-century alumni know Palled from teaching Math, it may surprise some to learn that, although his Ph.D. is in Mathematics, it was the opportunity to teach Computer Science that led him to then-Methodist College in 1988 from the State University of New York at Potsdam, where he had held an assistant professor position in Mathematics for six years.

"They were looking for people to teach Computer Science [in higher education] at the time," he said.

Since Computer Science was a developing field in the mid-to-late 1980's, there was a shortage of qualified bachelor's-level Computer Science instructors. To meet this need, Palled enrolled at the Institute for Retraining in Computer Science at Clarkson University in Potsdam. Once his continuing education program was complete, he joined the faculty at Methodist University.

Beginning his career as an assistant professor, he taught two Mathematics and two Computer Science courses each semester until 2001, when he transitioned to teaching Math full time. Although he enjoyed teaching Computer Science, the

regional accrediting body, now known as SACSCOC, required MU to have more faculty with terminal degrees in Computer Science. Around that time, the Department of Mathematics & Computer Science split into two departments. He had become department chair in 1996, and he remained chair of the Mathematics Department until 2020.

One of the things Palled is most proud of concerning his tenure as department chair is that the department faculty suffered little turnover through the years. Two of his retired colleagues also had tenures of 30-plus years – Patricia Jones (30 years) and Dr. Lewis Walston (33 years) – and his current colleague, Dr. Peggy Batten, has been in the department for 32 years and counting.

Palled recalls that the generation of students coming through the University in the late 1980s and early 1990s had different

**“** *I just want students to learn, and especially understand concepts... and not merely just try to get a grade.*

– Dr. Shivappa Palled **”**

By: Michael Molter '94



*Dr. Shivappa Palled*

demands on their attention than today's students do, as today's students' phones connect them to the Internet 24/7.

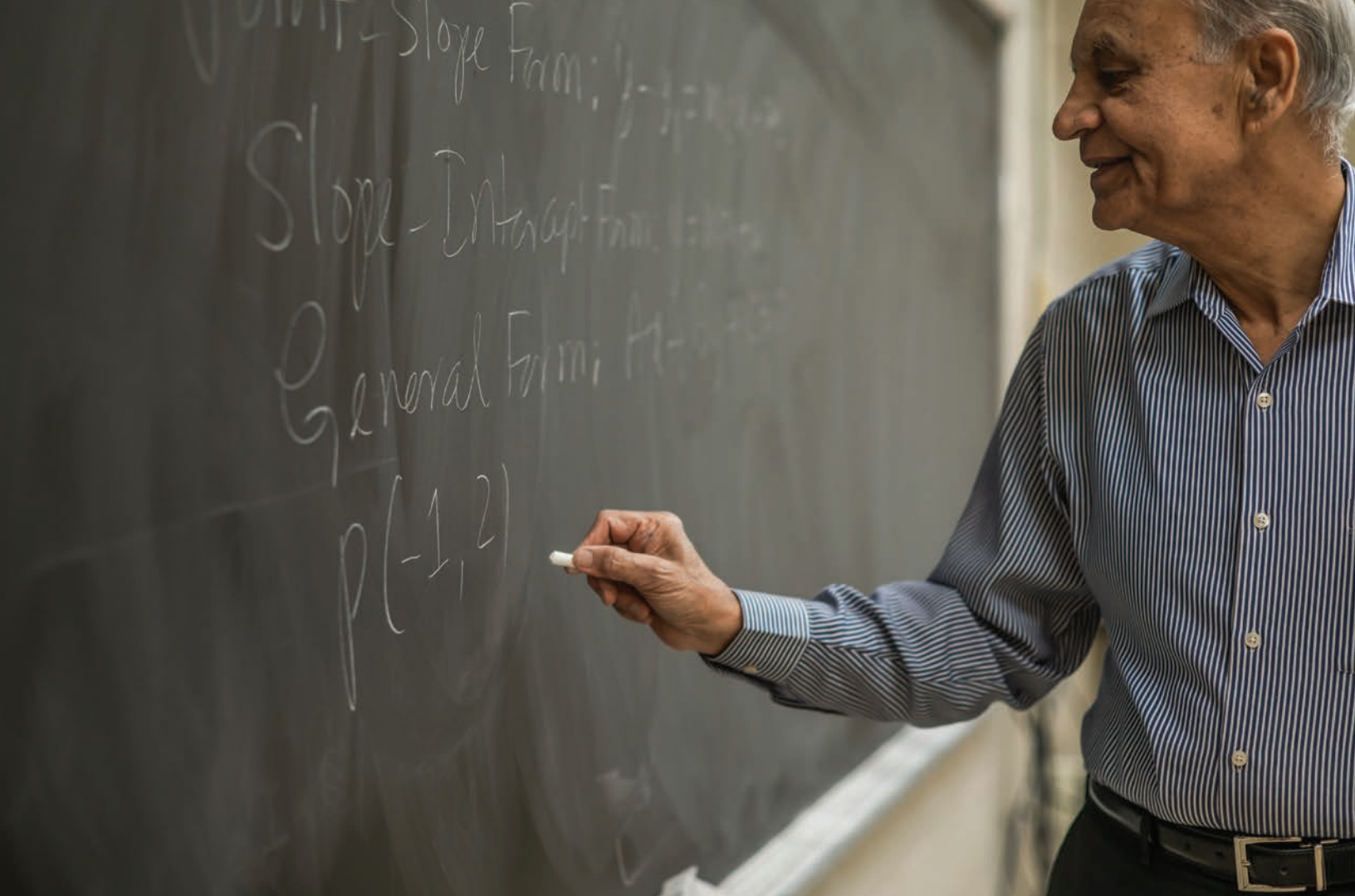
"At that time, students didn't have as many distractions," he said. "They paid attention during class lectures, took notes, and asked questions in a different way than they do now."

Times changed, technology upgraded, and a new generation of students who had grown up with technology in school and home began enrolling at MU. Palled has adjusted his approach accordingly, including technology-integrated assignments in his courses on the Canvas learning management system.

"Today, students are visual learners," he said. "They don't learn like previous generations; they much prefer to learn on their own."

Palled teaches most students core classes, such as College Algebra and Finite Mathematics, and for students going into Engineering and Computer Science,





*Dr. Shivappa Palled (standing second from right) with one of the many Math and Computer Science clubs (this one from 2004) he has helped advise or assist through his career at Methodist University.*

Calculus and Discrete Mathematics. For Mathematics majors, he has taught Modern Algebra, Differential Equations, Linear Algebra, and Advanced Calculus. Although the department is as busy as ever, there are not as many pure Mathematics majors as there once were.

"There used to be a great many Mathematics majors," Palled said. "At this time, most of the current students that we are teaching at Methodist University are going into Engineering, Data Science, Computer Science, or Computer Information Technology."

Data Science is the newest among these particular majors at Methodist University, and all of which are housed in the College of Business, Technology, & Professional Studies. Although Data Science shares the department with Mathematics, Palled teaches just the foundational Math courses needed for the program, and that's just how he likes it.

Getting students to understand the fundamentals has always been what's inspired Palled's teaching philosophy.

"I just want students to learn, and especially understand concepts," he said, "and not merely just try to get a grade."

One thing, he said, that was just as true when he began at MU as it is now is that, while there are students in his classes that don't plan to pursue a career in math, there are always students who are, and he wants to keep them motivated to succeed. It's what has kept Palled motivated and successful, as well, for nearly 40 years at MU. ■



## The Mullens: *An Enduring Impact on N.C. Education*

By: Wendy Hustwit

From an early age, Phil Mullen '74 dreamed of playing professional baseball. He was an excellent pitcher, so his coaches and other local baseball officials encouraged him to pursue college as a way to stay in the game.

Mullen was quickly drafted to the pros but remained focused on life after baseball. After completing the Teacher Education program at MU, Mullen held a long career in K-12 education. For the past 25 years, he has found purpose in supporting future educators at MU.

Mullen was the first person in his family to attend college when he enrolled in Southwood College in Salemburg, N.C., after high school. He played for Southwood's baseball team and while he still dreamed of playing professional baseball, he began thinking of alternative careers if going pro didn't pan out.

Then-Methodist College was the ideal next step for Mullen in 1971, where he could pursue a teaching credential and continue playing baseball. While he pursued a degree in History and his teaching credential, his performance on the pitcher's mound earned him widespread recognition.

One of Mullen's classmates in the Teacher Education program was Janet (Conard) Mullen '72. Janet had followed her older sister, Judy (Conard) Gum '69, to the University from their hometown in Northern Virginia to pursue her own teaching career.

As it happens with many students, Phil and Janet fell in love and stuck together. Janet was hired after graduation to teach English at Douglas Byrd High School in Fayetteville. She quickly became a well-loved teacher with a reputation for holding her students to a high standard.

Before Phil finished his degree, he was drafted into the Chicago White Sox's minor-league system, the first of the 12 MU baseball players (so far) to be drafted by a Major League Baseball franchise. Phil and Janet married in 1973 during his first year playing in the minors, but two years later, Phil hung up his cleats to begin his teaching career.

Early on, Phil and Janet both held rewarding teaching posts in Cumberland County Schools (CCS). Janet stayed with high school English for 10 years. During that time, Phil taught middle school Health, Language Arts, and Social Studies. He coached three different sports and handled daily bus duty.



Outside of work, Janet and Phil were dedicated parents to their son, Corey, and stayed active with Methodist University alumni and athletics programs. Janet served on the Alumni Association Board for many years and Phil participated in Methodist University Booster Club activities and fundraisers.

After Phil and Janet earned their master's degrees in the 1980s at East Carolina University, they both moved into administrative roles at CCS: Phil was at Cliffdale Elementary School, then at Seventy-First Elementary School, and finally as CCS transportation director; Janet was at W.H. Owen Elementary School, then at Cliffdale Elementary School, and finally she served as the founding principal at Bill Hefner Elementary School.



In 1993, Janet was diagnosed with the heart condition, aortic stenosis, but she didn't discuss her condition with colleagues. After a scheduled valve-replacement surgery in 1999, Janet's heart failed and she never recovered. Janet was just 49 years old. Naturally, her death was a devastating shock to the CCS and MU communities.

Just before her death, Janet told Phil that she wanted to give back to Methodist University in some way. Knowing her passion for education, for MU, and for the teachers and students in Cumberland County Schools, Phil and Corey created a new scholarship and named it the Janet C. Mullen '72 Endowed Scholarship.



**From left to right:**

*Phil Mullen in 2024 with Art Education Major (and All-USA South First-Team Lacrosse player) Kennedy Martin;*

*Janet Mullen at Homecoming (1995) with Johnny Lipscomb '68.*

*Corey Mullen with his father at a Methodist University Endowed Scholarship Luncheon at the Matthews Ministry Center.*



"Corey and I are extremely grateful for the love of the donors [to the endowed scholarship]," Phil said. "A teacher affects eternity; they never know where their influence ends."

Much like Janet, her scholarship is an infinite source of support for MU students, for the students they will teach, and so on.

Since establishing Janet's scholarship in 1999, Phil remarried and "retired" from full-time administration in 2005. He continued working at CCS in multiple part-time roles until his final retirement in 2017. Phil also volunteered for the Cumberland County Parks & Recreation Board, for Cumberland County Communities in Schools, and for the Optimist Club. And of course, he has continued his and Janet's enthusiastic participation in annual MU events.

As endowed scholarship founders, Phil and Corey meet recipients of Janet's scholarship at the annual Endowed Scholarship Luncheon. Each year, MU students are inspired by Janet's passion for education and her deep impact in Cumberland County Schools. Phil loves learning how the scholarship has impacted each student and their education at MU.

The very first recipient of Janet C. Mullen '72 Endowed Scholarship was Lisa Johnson Tak '01.

"I was thrilled to get those funds," she said. "It was an honor to receive the scholarship named for someone so well-known and liked in the community."

Since graduating, Tak has taught for 21 years. She and her military spouse have moved many times, and she credits her alma mater for her career preparation.

"I am confident Methodist University prepared me very well for my teaching career," Tak said. "I am doing what I am today because of my MU education."

Now, Lisa is in her longest teaching tenure as a second-grade teacher at Friedberg Elementary School in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Phil Mullen is a lifelong Monarch. He hopes his story inspires others to forge their own life of meaning and to support future generations of students. Creating an endowed scholarship is just one way to support MU students, and Phil describes it as "absolutely one of the most moving expressions of appreciation" one can make for Methodist University. ■

## Financial Foundation for the Future

It is a testament to Janet Mullen's impact that more than 100 individuals have contributed to the Janet C. Mullen '72 Endowed Scholarship at Methodist University and built a foundation of financial support for future teachers.

*If you would like to donate to the scholarship, please visit [methodist.edu/giving](http://methodist.edu/giving).*





# POWER in PROMISES



By: Wendy Hustwit

Woven throughout the Methodist University mission and promises to students is the belief that the most fulfilling life is one driven by a sense of purpose.

Methodist University's four promises to students are that, by the time they graduate, MU will have helped them become:

- 1.) ready for a career or for graduates study.
- 2.) prepared for a lifetime of reflection and purpose.
- 3.) both moral and ethical agents in the world.
- 4.) engaged citizens.

Earl D. Leake '73, who hails from Mount Gilead, N.C., and graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration from

Methodist University, proves that MU has delivered on these promises for decades.

In fact, when Leake returned to campus 27 years after graduating to deliver the May 2000 Commencement speech, he offered these valuable insights to the graduates:

- 1.) Common sense is often the best and simplest strategy.
- 2.) Always keep learning. The knowledge you have today will not be the knowledge you will need tomorrow.

Leake was an engaged and thoughtful student at Methodist University from the time he arrived in 1969. He was named to the dean's list, and he played on the basketball team. By his





*From being a member of the MU Board of Trustees to involvement in so many different ways on the Alumni Board and at alumni events (such as this 2023 gathering above where he is seated far left), Earl Leake has been a long-time champion for the mission of MU.*

junior year, Leake was serving on the Student Judicial Council and the President's Council. As a senior, he was named Chief Justice of the Student Judicial Council.

After graduation, Leake began his 35-year corporate career with the Charlotte, N.C.-based Lance, Inc. snack foods company. Founded in 1913 in Charlotte, Lance is known for its Toast Chee® peanut butter sandwich crackers and a range of other popular snack foods. When Leake started full-time as a trainee manager in the finance department in 1974, Lance employed 4,500 employees in 34 states and reported \$80 million in annual sales.

The snack food industry is highly competitive. By the time Leake was promoted to vice president in 1995, Lance had expanded into grocery store product packaging and acquired bakery operations in Iowa.

Then, in 1999, the company acquired operations centers in Massachusetts and Ontario, Canada. By the early 2000s, Leake oversaw Lance's workforce of 4,623 employees, with revenues of \$600 million.

Leake retired in 2010 as a senior vice president just as Lance and Snyders of Hanover completed a merger. In 2018, Snyders-Lance was acquired by The Campbell's Soup Company. Now, the same Charlotte plant produces 215 million pounds of Lance sandwich crackers, cookies, and chips each year.

While he advanced professionally, Leake kept learning, and his moral compass continued pointing him toward what was right and just. In his 2000 speech to graduates, he advised, "you truly are your brother's keeper; it's not giving back, it's giving and it's caring."

Recognizing a need among entrepreneurs in the Charlotte area, Leake co-founded and steered two commercial banks dedicated to serving small businesses in the area. He has held long-term volunteer leadership roles with the Crisis Assistance Ministry, Neighborhood Housing Services, Alexander Children's Home, NAACP of Montgomery County, the Harvey B. Gantt



*"I had help with my educational journey and it feels right to help those in need with their journey."*

*– Earl D. Leake '73*

Center for African-American Arts+Culture, the West Charlotte Emerging Leaders Institute Board, and the Mecklenburg County ABC Board.

A few years after retirement, in 2012, Leake founded Friends In Focus with six of his first-grade friends. It is a non-profit organization focused on improving education in their home county of Montgomery. As president of Friends In Focus, Leake states, "I had help with my educational journey and it feels right to help those in need with their journey."

In 2008, Leake received the Methodist University Alumni Association's Distinguished Alumni Award for his service to his community as well as to the MU community. His countless donations of Lance snacks for annual University Homecoming and Hall of Fame events would be enough to merit this award!

In addition to his decades of giving personal and corporate gifts to MU, Leake served six years on the Alumni Association board and on multiple campaign committees. As a member of the University's Board of Trustees since 2001, Leake has been an expert, common-sense presence on finance, investment, audit, and personnel committees.

Leake truly demonstrates the power in MU's four promises to students. The next time you enjoy a satisfying Lance snack, think of how your life reflects the four promises; how you can be like your fellow Monarch, Earl Leake. ■



# Bringing **MU** to You



**Join us as we continue to bring together alumni, parents, and friends of Methodist University to celebrate our shared connections.**

These events are perfect for expanding social and professional networks, staying updated on campus news, and showcasing pride in our alma mater. Reflect on memories from Wilmington, Pinehurst, Greensboro, the PGA Show, and Charlotte, and mark your calendars for the spring events!

For more information about these events – or to host one in your area – please contact Catherine Okafor (Director of Alumni Relations) at 910.630.7485, 800.488.7110 (ext. 7485), or [alumnioffice@methodist.edu](mailto:alumnioffice@methodist.edu).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**New York, N.Y.**  
May 13

**Washington, D.C.**  
May 15

**Fayetteville, N.C.**  
June 12

## GREENSBORO, N.C.



## PINEHURST, N.C.



## PGA SHOW



## WILMINGTON, N.C.



## CHARLOTTE, N.C.





# CLASS NOTES

## STAYING ENGAGED WITH OUR CLASSMATES

**Diane “Dani” Eichenlaub ’78** retired as a Speech-Language Pathologist on June 4, 2024, having completed 39 years as a private practitioner in the Bangor/Ellsworth (Maine) areas.



**David Lindsay ’79** and his wife, Sharonda Lindsay, were featured on the front page of The Richmond Times-Dispatch newspaper for their work on the David D. Lindsay Foundation. David is now retired and dedicates his time as founder of the foundation.

**Gil Wise ’83** serves as the Vice President of the Fayetteville/Cumberland County Ministerial Council. The organization hosts the annual Martin Luther King Jr. brunch for the Southeast Region of North Carolina. Record attendance was noted this year, and Methodist University had a notable presence. Gil is the pastor at Salem Methodist Church of Eastover.



**Roger Pait ’85** recently celebrated his eight-year work anniversary with his employer Bosch. He currently serves as a senior expert and enjoys traveling around the world to all the manufacturing sites and corporate locations in the appliance division.



**Dr. Miranda (McCall) Brand ’88** has been appointed dean and vice president of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and School of Aviation at Purdue University Global. As dean and vice president, she will oversee more than 700 faculty members across 45 academic programs and five academic departments. Brand previously served as associate dean, a role she held since 2011.



**Nona Fisher ’88** is the Managing Partner at Bottom Line Accounting and offers internships to the Accounting and Business Administration students enrolled in the Reeves School of Business. For the spring 2025 semester she is hosting three interns from Methodist University.



**Joy Bonhurst, ’89**, teaching professional at Blue Mash Golf Course in Laytonsville, Md., and owner of Joyland Golf Studio, was awarded the 2024 Middle Atlantic PGA (MAPGA) President’s Award by MAPGA President, Lynne Hunter. Joy’s recognition stems from her endless support of the Section, her fellow PGA professionals, and the advancement of golf.



**Diedre Windsor ’94**, founder & CEO of Windsor Group LLC, has been recognized with the prestigious Entrepreneur Leadership Award at the 2025 BEYA (Becoming Everything You Are) STEM Conference. This distinguished honor celebrates her exceptional leadership in the professional services industry.



**Kimberly (Campbell) Franklin ’97** was recently named the new Mid-Atlantic Special Education ISS Supervisor for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).

**Joseph Ulatowski ’98** was appointed assistant vice-chancellor for Sustainability at the University of Waikato, Aotearoa in New Zealand.



**MyTrang Dang ’99, ’04M** of KidzCare Pediatrics received the Nurse Practitioner/Physician Assistant Award at the Greater Fayetteville Business Journal HealthCare Heroes awards. The award honors a nurse practitioner or physician assistant whose performance is considered exemplary by patients, peers and other healthcare providers.



**Michael Jacobs ’99**, a Metropolitan PGA Section Member and head professional at Rock Hill Golf & Country Club in Manorville, New York, is the 2025 PGA of America Professional Development National Award recipient. The award recognizes a PGA of America Member who displays commendable contributions to the education of PGA of America Golf Professionals.



**Michael Picciano ’01** was elected the 31st president of the Illinois PGA. He will serve a two-year term as president. Michael currently works as the head golf professional at Bull Valley Golf Club.



**Crystal Dickerson '02** accepted a position as supervisory budget analyst, budget execution chief with the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General in Alexandria, Va.



**Bryan Bing '15** was named assistant defensive line coach for the Dallas Cowboys after serving in the same capacity for the Chicago Bears. He previously spent the 2023 season on a coaching fellowship with the Indianapolis Colts.



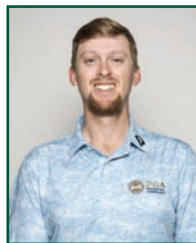
**Lindsey Huckbody '07M** joined FirstHealth Gynecologic Oncology. She will serve alongside **Michael J. Sundborg, M.D. '83**. Lindsey previously served patients in gastroenterology, general and bariatric surgery, and family medicine.



**Isabella Graf '16** was promoted to director of Racquet Sports at The Landings Yacht, Golf & Tennis Club (Fort Myers, Fla.) in May 2024. She started her journey as the assistant tennis professional there in 2018 and was quickly promoted to head tennis professional in 2019.



**Sharon (Whited) Hundley '08** recently published her first children's book, "Sunny Bird's Special Nest," a story about gratitude, love, and finding joy in the little things.



**Larkin Gross '19**, assistant PGA professional at Westwood Country Club, in Vienna, Va., is the 2024 Middle Atlantic PGA (MAPGA) Section Open Division and Assistant Professional Association Division Player of the Year. Larkin earned Top-4 finishes in five of seven qualifying events. In the APA division, Larkin had an extremely strong year

including two victories – in the APA Assistant Championship and the APA Assistant Stroke Play @ Williamsburg GC – and three other Top-3 finishes.



**Kimberly (Rauscher) Strickland '11** graduated from Walden University last year with her Doctor of Business Administration degree. Kimberly currently works as a senior consulting manager at SAS Institute.

**Hannah King '23** recently accepted a role at the Guilford County Sheriff's Office as a Latent Print Examiner.



**Lindsey Kinch '14** received her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree in December 2024. She now works as a family nurse practitioner.



**Eleanor (Mangum) Letson '94** is excited to announce the engagement of her daughter, Sarah Letson, to Kenneth Ganey on March 4, 2024. Their wedding will take place on March 30, 2025.

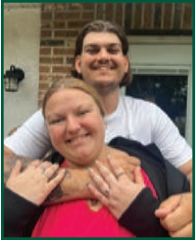


**Kyle Combs '13** proposed to Sydney Adams on Nov. 28, 2024. They are planning an April 4, 2026 wedding. Kyle is a territory manager for Magnolia Medical Technologies and Sydney is a registered nurse at Levine Children's Hospital.

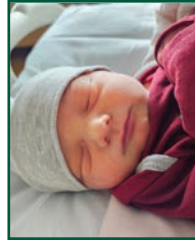
## ENGAGEMENTS



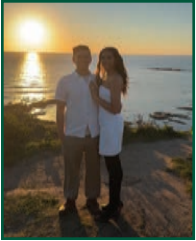
# ENGAGEMENTS, WEDDINGS, & BIRTHS



**Jordyn Propst '21** and **Jack O'Malley '21** got engaged on Dec. 25, 2024. Jordyn currently works as a juvenile probation officer for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and Jack works in sports marketing.



**Megan (Tingler) Wagner '14** and her husband, Daniel Wagner, welcomed their son, Latham Wagner, on Sept. 26, 2024. Their son weighed 6 pounds, 14 ounces and measured at 20.5 inches. Megan works as a Chemo RN at Maryland Oncology Hematology.

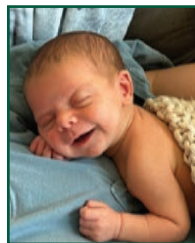


**Ethan-James Stolmeijer '21** proposed to Dorothy Rose-Miller at Pillar Point Bluff in Moss Beach, Calif., on Jan. 27, 2025. The couple plans to have their wedding in the summer of 2026. EJ works as a tennis professional at Claremont Club and Spa.



**Dwayne Johnson '16** and Kayla Johnson got married in June 2022 and recently welcomed their daughter, Makenzi Johnson, on Jan. 23, 2025. Their daughter weighed 8 pounds, 11 ounces.

**Charles Teachey '22** proposed to Megan Jacobs on June 10, 2023. The couple's wedding is scheduled for April 18, 2025. Charles works as an occupational health and safety officer at MCIEAST Safety - MCB Camp Lejeune and Megan is a childcare program assistant at Marine Corps Community Services - Camp Lejeune.

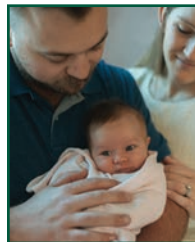


**Faith (Bowen) Pittard '18** and her husband, **David Pittard '17**, welcomed their son, Walker, on Aug. 20, 2024. Walker weighed 7 pounds, 4 ounces. Faith is a physician for the University of Alabama.

## WEDDINGS



**Daniel Smith '17** married Chantelle Jamison on Oct. 25, 2024. Daniel and Chantelle both work as intelligence analysts.



**Alyssa (Coffey) Goodwin '19** and **Bryant Goodwin '19** welcomed their daughter, Catherine Goodwin, on Nov. 21, 2024. Their daughter weighed 7.6 pounds and measured 20.5 inches. Alyssa is the membership coordinator at Charlotte Country Club.

## BIRTHS

**Maurice Washington '05** and his wife, Marquita Washington, welcomed their son, Kenzo Washington, on Jan. 9, 2025. Kenzo weighed 7 pounds, 9 ounces.



**Brittney Leggett '14** and her husband, Alexander Rabre, welcomed their daughter, Luna Rabre, on Jan. 6, 2024. Their daughter weighed 7 pounds, 7 ounces. Brittney is a project controls cost analyst at Google Fiber.



**Brook (Such) Smith '19 '22M** and her husband, **Chris Smith '19**, welcomed their daughter, Avery Smith, on Jan. 21, 2025. Avery weighed 8 pounds and measured 22 inches long. Brook works as a physician assistant at Cape Fear Valley Health.

## SHARE YOUR NEWS



Share/Submit your life updates at [methodist.edu/class-notes](http://methodist.edu/class-notes) or scan the QR code!

# IN MEMORY



**Gary Graham '65**, 81, of Summerfield, N.C. passed away Nov. 16, 2024. After college, he moved to Greensboro to work for Burlington Industries as an accountant. In 1971, he founded Graham & Associates Employment Consultants, Inc., which was one of the first temporary staffing services in Greensboro. He served as president of the North Carolina

Association of Personnel Services and was inducted into the North Carolina Staffing Hall of Fame.



**Owen Charles "Charlie" Owen '67**, 82, of Satsuma, Fla. passed away Nov. 9, 2024. He was a Boy Scouts of America executive for 25 years in charge of the greater Orlando metropolitan area division. Following that, Charlie did another 25 years with the National Association of Small Trucking Companies (NASTC, Inc.) in Hendersonville,

Tenn., as its first field representative. He was honored several times as their Salesperson of the Year.

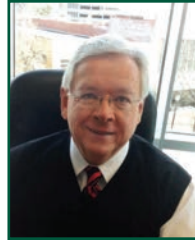
**Horace "Tim" Peeples '69**, 77, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Feb. 13, 2025. After graduation, he found employment with the Cumberland County School system, teaching at Lewis Chapel and Westover Middle Schools. Tim was also a coach with the athletic departments of those two schools, and taught Driver's Education for many years.



**William Baker "Bill" Carstarphen '70**, 79, of Tarboro, N.C. passed away Jan. 31, 2025. He began his career in banking and later worked with Parkway Agriculture as their treasurer for the last 24 years. He was a lifelong member of the Calvary Episcopal Church.



**Marylin Gayle (Etheridge) Simons '70**, 76, of Chesapeake, Va. passed away Feb. 3, 2025. After college, Gayle began working for the Virginia Beach Department of Social Services. She eventually became the supervisor of her own unit and for a time was in charge of adoptions. Gayle later worked with foster children.



**Jerry Lane Clemmons '72**, 74, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Dec. 30, 2024. Jerry spent most of his career in the car business. He became general manager at Patrick Ford in the 1990s. Since getting out of the car business, Jerry succeeded and achieved almost every accolade you can in the insurance industry.

**Paul N. Reinhard '72**, 78, of Bluffton, S.C. passed away Feb. 2, 2025. He had a successful career in public relations and management consulting. In his retirement, he enjoyed model-building and serving as first vice commander for American Legion Post 205.



**Belinda Branch Howard '74**, 72, of Winterville, N.C. passed away Dec. 29, 2024. She began and ended her 32-year teaching career at Contentnea Elementary School in Kinston. Belinda retired from her career in education in January 2006. She gained professional success as the owner/operator of Belinda's Veils and Tails in Kinston, N.C.



**Rosemarie Brantley Cunningham '79**, 66, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Dec. 7, 2024. Rosemarie dedicated 26 years to teaching, touching countless lives through her passion and commitment. Beyond the classroom, she served as a cheerleader, Girl Scout leader, and Sunday preschool teacher for her church.



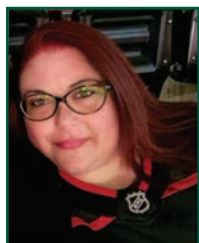
**William "Bill" Morgan '81**, 89, of Charlotte, N.C. passed away Nov. 2, 2024. He was a patriot who proudly served 20 years in the U.S. Army with the Finance Corps. During his career he received the bronze star medal and several Army commendations. After retiring from the military, he lived with his family in Fayetteville and worked as Controller for then-Methodist College (1977-89).



**Alicia Aguirre Ruiz '87**, 71, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Nov. 17, 2024. She taught school until her retirement.



**Maurice B. Robertson '92**, 75, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Dec. 27, 2024. Maurice was a self-employed accountant and a long-time member of the Fayetteville Area Shag Association.



**Amanda Wales Post '96**, 50, of Greensboro, N.C. passed away Jan. 22, 2025. She spent her career working for the NC Department of Corrections and later as a special education teacher. Her final employment was as an elite customer service representative for United Healthcare, where she particularly enjoyed helping people understand and receive the benefits to which they were entitled.



**Bettye Jean (Johnson) Hyde '97**, 82, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Jan. 31, 2025. She graduated from Methodist University with her degree in Social Work and was pursuing her master's degree in Social Work prior to her passing. She was a member of Tabernacle of Faith Ministries.

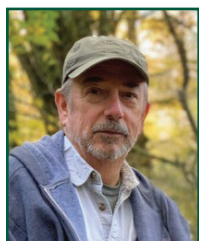


**Hope Ann Davey Thomas '04**, 58, of Pinehurst, N.C. passed away Jan. 19, 2025. She was a PGA professional and dedicated many years of her career working at the Pinewild Country Club in Pinehurst. She was known for her kindness and deep love for her family and friends.

## Former Students



**Dianne Marie Johnson**, 75, of Lillington, N.C. passed away Dec. 10, 2024. Dianne taught at Boone Trail School and Western Harnett Middle School for 30 years as a Special Education Teacher.



**Donald "Fred" Tornow, Jr.**, 72, of Burgaw, N.C. passed away on Dec. 25, 2024. He attended Methodist University while enlisted in the North Carolina Army National Guard. After an honorable discharge in 1977, Fred had a 40-year career in industrial maintenance. He loved the outdoors and nature photography.



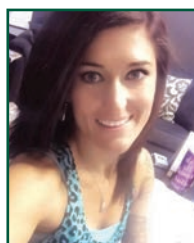
**Earl Simon Jones Jr.**, 65, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Jan. 15, 2025. He started his career as an art teacher and later began a career in financial services. He started Jones Financial Group with his sons.



**Stuart T. Priest**, 57, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Oct. 14, 2024. He attended Methodist University for four years before enlisting in the Army.



**Chad Earl Hathaway**, 51, of Daytona Beach, Fla. passed away Nov. 6, 2024. He played baseball at Methodist University and was ultimately recruited to pitch for Marshall University. Chad played minor-league baseball and had a successful career in district loss prevention before returning to baseball as a coach.



**Brittany Nicole Edwards**, 35, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Oct. 16, 2024. She was a veteran of the U.S. Army and was the only female in her Airborne training class of 25 to finish the course at Ft. Benning, Ga. She graduated in the top 10% of her Basic Training class at Ft. Sill, Okla. Brittany had a love for animals and worked as a veterinary

tech for several local veterinary offices, most recently at the Blessed Oasis Pet Resort.

## Former Board of Trustees



**The Reverend Dr. John Kenneth Bergland**, 94, of Davidson, N.C. passed away Dec. 9, 2024. Dr. John served in pastoral and extension ministry for over 70 years. He was a beloved pastor, theologian, and spiritual leader, known for his passionate commitment to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and serving

others. Dr. John served as a member of the Board of Trustees from 1991 to 1995.

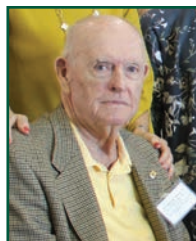
# IN MEMORY

## Former Faculty/Staff



**Dr. Gloria Bader Merchant**, 100, of Elberton, Ga. passed away Jan. 24, 2025. She served as the Dean of Women and History professor at Methodist University. She later retired as a faculty member from Piedmont College.

## Friends



**David Ray Nimocks Jr.**, 96, of Fayetteville, N.C. passed away Dec. 29, 2024. After serving in the Korean War, Dave settled in Fayetteville working alongside his father-in-law to grow the family's Terminix franchise. He began working at Terminix in 1953 and helped grow it into one of the largest family-owned pest control service providers in the country over his 71 years of service. Dave was a long-time supporter of Methodist University, establishing two endowed professorships and giving a substantial gift to name the Nimocks Fitness Center.



## Meet **Catherine Okafor**, our new Director of Alumni Relations!

Please welcome Catherine Okafor as our new director of Alumni Relations. Catherine comes to MU from UNC Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School where she was assistant director of the Career Team. She holds a bachelor's degree from Barton College and a master's from Penn State University. "I am excited to contribute to advancing the mission of MU by cultivating meaningful, long-lasting relationships between students, leadership, and alumni that enhance the University's impact on the broader community."



# SAVE THE DATE

**HOMECOMING 2025 | NOV. 7-9**

Check for additional details soon at  
[methodist.edu/homecoming](http://methodist.edu/homecoming)





# Then & Now

While some board games may have been replaced with video games, and texting may have replaced some walks across campus for a discussion, MU students still gather on a daily basis for important fellowship and games in their residence halls, on the outdoor courts or fields, and certainly in the Berns Student Center.





Marketing & Communications  
5400 Ramsey Street  
Fayetteville, NC 28311  
methodist.edu

Address Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Progress Printing  
Plus



*PERFECT FOR MU ALUMNI.*  
YOUR SCHEDULE.  
YOUR PACE.  
YOUR SUCCESS.

## ONLINE AT MU

**Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral  
Degrees (and Certificates) that  
employers want you to have.**

Perfect for working adults, active military, veterans,  
and their families, our online programs allow you to  
study on your schedule and where it works best for you.

Learn more to achieve more at [online.methodist.edu](https://online.methodist.edu).



**Ranked Annually as a "Military  
Friendly" and "Best for Vets" University**

**97%**  
Receive  
Financial  
Aid

## Excellence & Affordability

**100%**

**Online Programs**

You don't have to  
be on campus to  
thrive at MU.

**12:1**

**Student-to-Faculty Ratio**

Learn from experts in  
their field who know  
you by name.

**24/7**

**Dedicated Support**

All the help you  
need at any time  
you need it.