

# MGA

TODAY

SPRING 2022





## Work of Heart / 4

It's no secret that the COVID pandemic has created many challenges for healthcare professionals around the world. But many people – particularly, younger people just starting out in their professional careers – still want to serve their communities through healthcare professions. At Middle Georgia State University, prospective students continue to show interest in nursing, respiratory therapy, and rehabilitation science degrees, while current students in those programs remain committed to their choices. Meanwhile, a major innovation project now underway is transforming MGA's Dublin Campus into a healthcare degree hub.

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Dr. David Jenks, MGA's provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, talks about several initiatives, including strengthening the unique identities of the University's five campuses.

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Dr. Christopher Blake, MGA's president, highlights a successful fundraising campaign, building projects, economic outlook, and more in his 2022 State of the University address.

## MGA Launches Master's In Public Relations / 13

As one of the first students to enroll in MGA's new Master of Arts in Public Relations, Lynzee White aspires to expand her career into government public affairs. The University now offers eight graduate degree programs, plus three graduate certificate programs.

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MGA is a partner with RABF and the Houston County School District to offer dual-enrollment computer programming courses at the new R. Wayne Lowe Synergy Innovation Center in Warner Robins.

## Middle Georgia State University Foundation / 18

MGA Foundation's "Building A Legacy of Greatness" private fundraising campaign – the most ambitious in the institution's history – exceeded its \$11 million goal, coming in at more than \$11.6 million.

**PLUS:** Foundation-supported Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center opens; Legacy of Leadership and Outstanding Alumnus award recipients named; and other news and notes from the MGA Foundation.

### ON THE COVER

A few of the thousands of MGA students present and past who have majored in healthcare degree programs and found career paths in nursing, respiratory therapy, or rehabilitation science. MGA also offers a strong biology degree program for students potentially interested in going on to medical, veterinary, or pharmacy schools.

**ABOUT MGA** • Middle Georgia State University educates and graduates inspired, lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region through professional leadership, innovative partnerships, and community engagement. MGA's four core values are *Stewardship, Engagement, Adaptability, and Learning*. [mga.edu/vision](http://mga.edu/vision)

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## Dear Friends,

When I think about our tagline, “Find Your Greatness,” it strikes me that as we help our students find their greatness in their lives and careers through education, we have also been making great and significant progress as Middle Georgia State University, and finding our own true value as Georgia’s newest, most innovative, and most affordable University.

In this issue of *MGA Today*, you will read about the many diverse ways we have found our greatness, helped our students find theirs, and been able to transform individuals and the communities where they live and work with extraordinary education, as our vision statement puts it.

MGA has reached its 10th year as a consolidated institution, and that decade has witnessed powerful growth and greatness. Most recently, our accreditation status was raised by our accrediting body, SACSCOC, to that of a doctoral granting institution, launched with the Doctor of Science in Information Technology, an outcome that could not have been anticipated 10 years ago.

Similarly, in this past year, we completed our historic “Building a Legacy of Greatness” Campaign, raising over \$11.6 million to support student learning and give them the scholarships they deserve. And with nearly 1,500 students graduating with a degree each year, adding to the worldwide alumni membership of 42,000 and counting, we can say that our first decade has delivered on the promise of a great public university for the region.

This greatness is evident when I look at our students, who have shown great tenacity and resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic, enduring that disruption, and reaching their goals.

Among many other examples, there’s Symone Caldwell, the President’s Scholar for the Class of 2022, a non-traditional student and mother of two who has already begun her career as the paid teacher of record for a Bleckley County Elementary School class. A.J. Kahrman, MGA’s 2022 Academic Recognition Day Scholar, is completing his B.S. in Biology before heading off to the Dental College of Georgia. Two of our nursing seniors, Katie Poupard and Abby Dunbar, are serving leadership roles in the Georgia Association of Nursing Students while completing their degrees. Last fall, Naufal Kamaruzzaman of our Knights men’s tennis team represented his home nation of Malaysia in the prestigious Davis Cup Group III.

Shortly, as we start our second decade, we shall create a new plan and strategy for the next few years.

We will conclude our first Strategic Plan, “Elevating Middle Georgia,” with the confidence that we have indeed elevated our work, promise, and impact. Now we will consider – with the help of our stakeholders – on what the next stage of our journey will look like. We will be seeking your input and reaching out to our communities and our alumni to help us shape the next chapter in our story of greatness.

Thank you for your support, interest, and inspiration. You help us each day do our work to educate our students to find their greatness, and to become a great University for the people of Georgia. I hope to hear from you in the months ahead at [president@mga.edu](mailto:president@mga.edu).

Yours,



Dr. Christopher Blake, *President*







THE PANDEMIC CREATED CHALLENGES FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONS BUT CAREER OPPORTUNITIES STILL ABOUND. STUDENT INTEREST IN MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S NURSING, RESPIRATORY THERAPY, AND REHABILITATION SCIENCE PROGRAMS REMAINS SOLID AND GRADUATES CONTINUE TO FILL CRITICAL WORKFORCE NEEDS IN THE REGION AND BEYOND.

## WORK OF HEART

For 21 years, Freeman Shepard has made his living cutting hair.

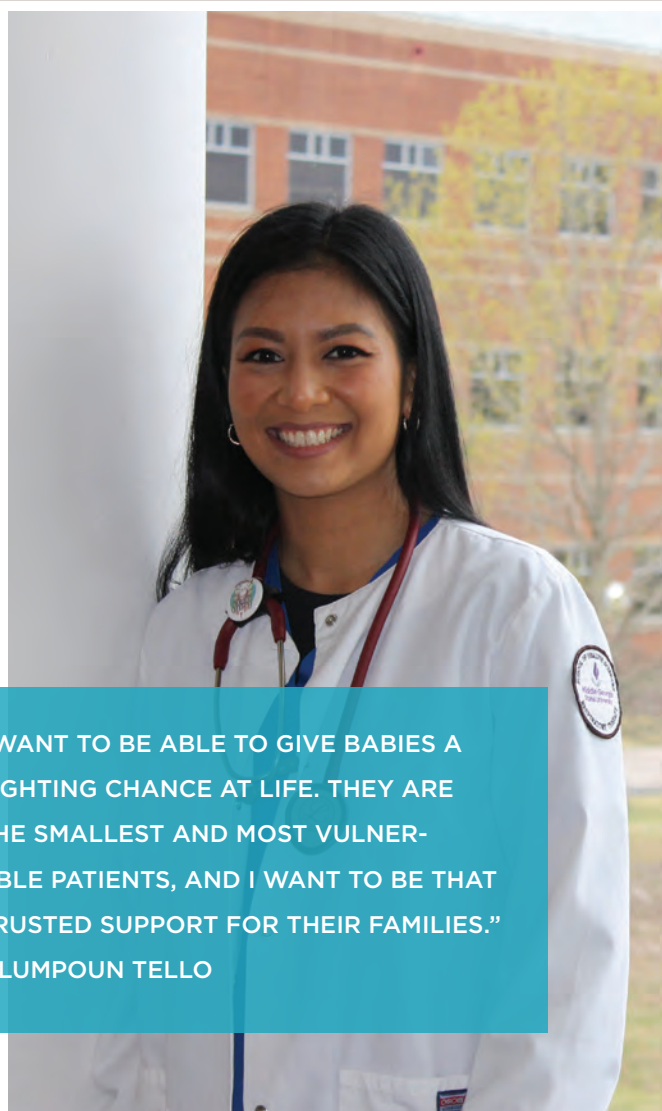
He and his brother own Shepard Bros. Barber Shop – what they describe as a “classic, two-chair” operation – in downtown Dublin.

While Shepard loves his work, he's on the path to a second career. In his early 40s, the married father of two daughters enrolled at Middle Georgia State University (MGA) to pursue his associate's degree in nursing on the Dublin Campus. Once he begins working as a nurse, he plans to complete a bachelor's degree through the University's RN-BSN program. CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

**Freeman Shepard**, 43, who co-owns a barber shop in his hometown of Dublin, had long felt led to pursue a second career in the medical field. He is enrolled in MGA's nursing degree based on the Dublin Campus, where this photo was taken. The University is transforming the campus into a healthcare program hub.

“For some time I just felt led to go into the medical field,” said Shepard, now 43. “I pray every night for guidance and for God to send me where he needs me to be, and I just kept coming back to nursing. The next thing I knew I had driven to the Dublin Campus to start the process of getting into the program. It was just something I couldn’t say ‘no’ to.”

Shepard is thrilled he can pursue his calling in the city where he grew up and still lives. And he is enrolled at MGA during one of the most exciting eras in the history of the Dublin Campus.



“I WANT TO BE ABLE TO GIVE BABIES A FIGHTING CHANCE AT LIFE. THEY ARE THE SMALLEST AND MOST VULNERABLE PATIENTS, AND I WANT TO BE THAT TRUSTED SUPPORT FOR THEIR FAMILIES.”  
—LUMPOUN TELLO

MGA respiratory therapy major **Lumpoun Tello**, 33, is among the students in the program’s unique neonatal track. She hopes to begin her career working in neonatal intensive care.

Thanks to a combination of substantial state and private funding, MGA is transforming the Dublin Campus into a healthcare degree program hub. Once a major renovation is completed later this summer, MGA will add the pre-licensure Bachelor of Science in Nursing to the Dublin Campus offerings. The School of Health and Natural Sciences hopes eventually to expand the Bachelor of Science in Respiratory Therapy to the Dublin Campus, as well as add a new program in physical therapy.

Meanwhile, MGA’s healthcare degrees in general are going well, despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic that forced the School of Health and Natural Sciences to adjust teaching and clinical instruction. Most students seem to have adapted well, and interest in the healthcare degree programs remains strong, said Dr. Tara Underwood, the school’s dean.

“Based on my conversations with students they still have a desire to serve, despite the pandemic,” she said. “Over the last few years, many of them have personal experiences in which they witnessed how life-changing a healthcare provider can be for their loved ones. They understand how vital the presence of healthcare services is in communities and they want to use their knowledge and skills to help.”

Katie Poupard, a senior pursuing MGA’s B.S. in nursing and president of the Georgia Association of Nursing Students, noted that more than half the time she and her classmates have invested in their degree program has taken place during the pandemic.

“We don’t really know what nursing school was like pre-COVID,” she said. “We’re going into this with our eyes open, and I feel like MGA has prepared us well to deal with it.”

Besides nursing, MGA’s School of Health and Natural Sciences offers healthcare degree programs in respiratory therapy and rehabilitation sciences. In addition, the school’s bachelor’s degree in biology is designed for students interested in going on to medical, veterinary, or pharmacy schools.



“There have been a lot of exciting developments for our healthcare degree programs over the last few years,” Underwood said. “Besides the Dublin Campus expansion, there are more scholarships available for students pursuing our degrees. Our facilities are better than ever, with major upgrades to all of our healthcare labs in nursing, respiratory therapy, and rehabilitation science, thanks to state funds and community partners.”

Read on for a closer look at MGA’s healthcare degree programs.

## NURSING

Registered nurses (RNs) provide and coordinate patient care, educate patients and the public about various health conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their families. Nursing includes many specialties, such as oncology, critical care, neonatal, and public health.

In the U.S., employment of RNs is expected to grow 9 percent between 2020 and 2030. “There are so many opportunities in nursing,” said Dr. Donna Ingram, MGA’s chair of the Department of Nursing. “In my 34 years in the field, never have I wondered if I would have a job. Also, the fact that you get to help people is very rewarding.”

She considers the Dublin Campus expansion to be the most exciting development for the University’s nursing program in recent years.

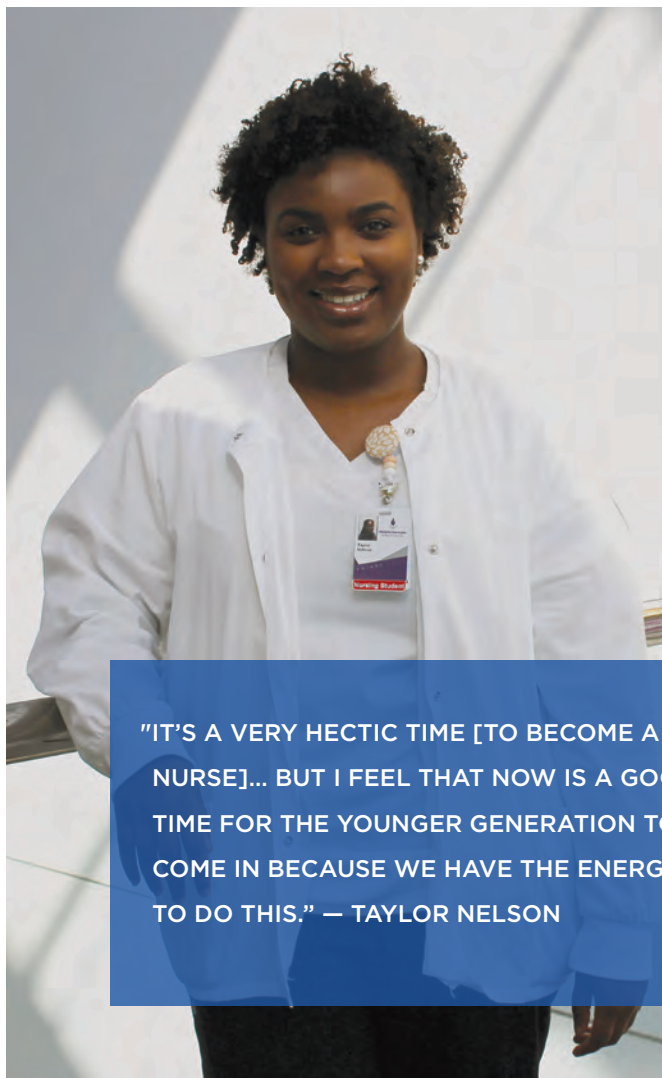
“We’ve had the associate’s degree in nursing there for years, but the community has long asked that we add the pre-licensure BSN program,” Ingram said. “We’ll finally be able to grant that request in the renovated space that includes a 20-bed nursing lab and simulation area.”

MGA currently offers the Master of Science in Adult Gerontology/Acute Care; the pre-licensure Bachelor of Science in Nursing; the RN to BSN; and the Associate of Science in Nursing.

## RESPIRATORY THERAPY

Respiratory therapists care for patients who have trouble breathing, often due to chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma or emphy-

**Taylor Nelson**, 23, of Macon, said she hopes to help bridge the gap of Black people in the healthcare field by becoming a nurse. Nelson, primarily based on the Dublin Campus, is finishing up her MGA associate’s degree in nursing and is the class representative for her cohort.



“IT’S A VERY HECTIC TIME [TO BECOME A NURSE]... BUT I FEEL THAT NOW IS A GOOD TIME FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION TO COME IN BECAUSE WE HAVE THE ENERGY TO DO THIS.” — TAYLOR NELSON

sema. In the U.S., employment of respiratory therapists is projected to grow 23 percent between 2020 and 2030.

MGA offered the associate’s degree in respiratory therapy for years but recently transitioned the program to the bachelor’s degree level, a change consistent with the movement within the profession toward advanced degrees. MGA is one of the few colleges and universities in Georgia with a four-year respiratory therapy degree.

“The B.S. has afforded us the opportunity to have more in-depth curriculum in neonatal

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 —

and pediatric cases, as well as clinical experience, leadership opportunities, and research,” said Teri Miller, chair of the Department of Respiratory Therapy.

Respiratory therapists have played essential roles during the COVID pandemic and many, like their peers in other healthcare roles, have faced challenging situations and workplace stress. At the same time, the pandemic has raised the visibility of respiratory therapists and introduced the profession to a new generation.

“It’s a field where you can really make a difference and one where you can keep growing professionally,” Miller said. “Upon graduation, most RTs work immediately in critical care units caring for the most vulnerable of patients – from premature babies to the elderly. RTs also work in physician offices, home care, pulmonary rehabilitation, and pulmonary function laboratories, and they may deliver care through telemedicine. More RTs are transitioning to serve as case managers, researchers, educators, and into industry.”

Respiratory therapy programs in general are largely focused on the care and treatment of

adults with respiratory issues, which makes sense because adults make up the majority of those who need RT care.

But infants and children can need respiratory care, too. A unique feature of MGA’s respiratory therapy program is its neonatal track, the only one in Georgia and one of the few in the nation. Primarily developed by Jasmine Brown, director of clinical education for the respiratory therapy program, the neonatal track gives students a chance to specifically train in caring for newborns and small children.

“This gives our students who want to specialize in neonatal care the chance to step into those roles right after they graduate,” Brown said. “We know from working with our community health

MGA’s biology degree is housed in the Department of Natural Sciences, not the health sciences. But for students interested in becoming doctors, dentists, veterinarians, or pharmacists, the biology degree coursework is aligned with medical program pre-requisites. Among the MGA students about to graduate with a biology degree and continue on in a medical program is **A.J. Kahrmann**, 22, the University’s 2022 Academic Recognition Day Scholar. He will enroll at the Dental College of Georgia in Augusta this fall. Kahrmann said, “Eventually I would love to start my own dental practice or work with some of the incredible dentists that I have shadowed.”



“I CAN SEE MYSELF RETURNING TO  
(THE REGION) TO WORK AS A DENTIST  
IN OUR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES,”  
—A.J. KAHRMANN



care partners that there is a need for neonatal RTs and I'm thankful we can produce graduates to fill that need."

MGA offers the Bachelor of Science in Respiratory Therapy and the bachelor's-level bridge/completion program for RTs with associate's degrees.

## REHABILITATION SCIENCE

Rehabilitation science is a broad term that encompasses specific fields such as occupational therapy. The rehab sciences create strategies to help individuals become more mobile and self-sufficient. Job growth in various rehab science fields varies. In the U.S., job growth for occupational therapy assistants is projected to grow 34 percent between 2020 and 2030.

At MGA, rehabilitation science programs are growing rapidly as well.

"We're admitting the first cohort to a new Master of Science in Occupational Therapy bridge program in August 2022," said Dr. Betsy McDaniel, chair of MGA's Department of Rehabilitation Science.

"This program will offer currently licensed occupational therapy assistants an affordable option for obtaining a graduate degree in occupational therapy and furthering their professional development and careers. It is the only bridge program in a public institution in Georgia, making it the most economical choice for students by far."

As the U.S. population ages, expect ongoing growth in the rehab science job market, McDaniel said.

"In some ways, the next generation of healthcare providers may have an easier time acclimating to the post-COVID environment since they will have come of age during the pandemic," she added.

In addition to the new master's program, MGA's Department of Rehabilitation Science offers the Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Science and the Associate of Science in Occupational Therapy Assistant. ■

*Sources include: Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*

[mga.edu/health-natural-sciences](https://mga.edu/health-natural-sciences)



"I WANT TO BE THE PERSON THAT AT  
LEAST ONE KID CAN LOOK BACK ON  
AND SMILE WHEN THEY THINK OF ME."  
—MATT SAMSON

**Matt Samson**, 21, of Warner Robin, is finishing up his MGA degree in the occupational therapy assistant program. He wants to begin his career in a school district working with children. "Being able to help them develop and teach them many valuable skills and coping mechanisms would be an honor!" Samson said.





## DUBLIN CAMPUS HEALTHCARE PROGRAM EXPANSION

To address the regional rural nursing shortage, MGA is transforming the Dublin Campus into a healthcare degree program hub. The vision is to increase both healthcare training and healthcare delivery through experiential learning in Dublin-Laurens County and the surrounding region. The Dublin Campus expansion will allow MGA to graduate 67 percent more nurses each year, 40 of whom will be BSN-prepared, adding 100 additional nurses to the workforce pipeline each year.

To date, the Georgia Legislature and governor's office have supported the expansion with \$6.4 million in funding. The MGA Foundation also has received gifts for this important project from:

**THE ALLGOOD FAMILY**  
**BANK OF DUDLEY**  
**THE CURRY FAMILY**  
**TRACY GREEN**  
**MORRIS BANK**  
**RENEE & FRITZ MCPHAIL**  
**DR. STEPHEN CHARLES SVONAVEC &**  
**DR. KARA SMITH SVONAVEC**

Through the MGA Foundation, there are opportunities to publicly honor individuals, companies and organizations who want to support the Dublin Campus expansion project. Donors also have the opportunity to support nursing scholarships. To date, the following scholarships have been established:

**THE KAREN L. CORE NURSING SCHOLARSHIP**  
**THE ALLGOOD FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP**



**The MGA Foundation**  
**welcomes ongoing support for**  
**the Dublin Campus expansion project.**

Learn about naming opportunities  
 and establishing scholarships  
 at [mga.edu/DublinHSE](http://mga.edu/DublinHSE)

**(478) 471-2732 • [development@mga.edu](mailto:development@mga.edu)**



**D**r. David Jenks joined Middle Georgia State University in summer 2021 as provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. The provost is the University's chief academic officer and serves as the chief executive in the absence of the president.

Formerly the vice provost at the University of West Georgia, Jenks brings more than 20 years of teaching and higher education administrative experience to MGA. He began his career in higher education in 1994 as a graduate teaching assistant at his alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC). He later accepted a similar position at another alma mater, Florida State University (FSU), before making the move to California State University, Los Angeles, to join the faculty of the School of Criminal Justice and Criminalistics. During his time there, Jenks served leadership roles in the University Advising Center, University Judicial Affairs, and Law Enforcement Leadership, and in other programs or departments.

He left the West Coast in 2005 to join the faculty of the University of West Georgia, where he held a number of leadership positions before becoming vice provost. He was director of Graduate Studies, Institutional Review Board chair, founding chair and professor of criminology, and associate vice president of Academic Affairs.

Jenks received his Ph.D. in criminology from FSU and his master's in criminal justice from UNCC. He also earned bachelor's and associate's degrees from the University of Akron.

Originally from Ohio, Jenks has also lived in Hawaii, North Carolina, Florida, and California and has spent considerable time in the Czech Republic. He and his wife, Cathi, have two children.

**Have you always wanted a career in higher education? What brought you into the profession?**

*Higher education was never really a focus for me or my family. I was interested in learning and enjoyed it enough to enroll in college, but I was working full-time and paying for it as I went. Connecting with faculty along the way who encouraged me to continue and showed me how to navigate higher education led me to this career. Without their mentoring I likely would have stayed in one of the other professions I worked.*

## ENHANCING CAMPUS IDENTITIES AMONG NEW PROVOST'S TOP PRIORITIES



**"ALWAYS FEEL FREE TO ASK US QUESTIONS AND REACH OUT IF YOU HAVE IDEAS. WE STRIVE FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND TOGETHER WE ATTAIN THAT GOAL."**

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 —

**What attracted you to the provost's job at Middle Georgia State?**

*Middle Georgia State University is a school on the rise with good leadership and a strong reputation in the communities it serves. I was thoroughly impressed with the culture of service, commitment to student success, and potential for an even greater impact in the region. I also felt a connection to the students, many of whom come from a background like my own.*

**One of your initiatives is to build a new academic master plan for MGA that aligns academic planning, campus identity, and student presence. Can you elaborate on that? What is meant by 'campus identity' and 'student presence'?**

*Our campuses are each unique and are designed to bring people together in thoughtful discussion in an engaging environment. Each of our campuses has a strong identity that could be relayed to potential students and parents, but in some instances, we have not promoted those identities broadly. Eastman as the aviation campus would likely be the strongest campus identity, and student presence is constant as most of their programs require in person learning every day of the year. The college experience in Cochran is just as rich and engaging, with a very strong identity as a traditional college campus with a number of programs that bring people together, but the experience is not as well known. Students who experience Cochran relay wonderful stories of the experience and the relationships they built. I believe Cochran remains the 'hidden gem' my predecessor referenced, and that is something we want to build on and promote. Dublin as our health sciences campus is seeing great returns with GEER II funding, the latest expansion, and proposed future programming in physical therapy. In Warner Robins we have a strong relationship with Robins Air Force Base and our IT and cyber security programming is thinking through expanded programming. The Macon Campus is growing intentionally in a wide variety of programs and experiences and has literally come out of the woods for 22 million people to see as they drive past on I-475. It is certainly not hidden any longer and watch for new and engaging experiences in collaboration with Macon-Bibb!*

**Besides the academic master plan, what are some of your short-term goals as provost? What are some of your longer term goals for MGA?**

*We recently hired a new associate provost of Faculty Development, Dr. Rod McRae. The goal is to increase faculty support across all campuses and schools so they can spend more time on high impact practices engaging with students. Those relationships are so impactful and open opportunities many were not aware of. Longterm, I would like to see us continue to develop career pathways for all programs in partnership with the communities we serve. Working with our community partners we can develop students who are raised, educated, work, and contribute back to the Middle Georgia region.*

**What is the most important message about Middle Georgia State that you would like to convey to the communities the University serves?**

*The University, and all those who dedicate our time and effort in supporting it, stand in service to students. Always feel free to ask us questions and reach out if you have ideas. We strive for continuous improvement and together we attain that goal.*

**Tell us a little about yourself.**

*I have been renovating a house since I moved here. The market was ridiculous when we bought, so the house needed a lot of work, and it continues for a couple hours every night. I hope to have major renovations completed soon, but if anyone would like to give me a night off, I would be happy to visit groups that are interested in hearing from our office.*

**What are some things people would be surprised to learn about you?**

*I attended schools all over when I was in college including Akron, Ohio, Charlotte, NC, Hilo, Hawaii, Tallahassee, Fla., and Prague, Czech Republic. I also spent my summers as a child working on my uncle's farm in Presho, SD.*

**Favorite quote?**

*Cura te ipsum. (Cure yourself). In medicine for physicians, it is often referenced as heal yourself first before healing others. It just serves as a constant reminder for me that we all need to care for ourselves. ■*



“MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY HAS DIRECTLY IMPACTED MY FUTURE CAREER BECAUSE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFORDED THROUGH THEIR UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE PROGRAMS.”



Image courtesy Lynzee White

## MGA Graduate Student Forges Her Path in Public Relations

When Lynzee White discovered Middle Georgia State University's public relations graduate program, she knew she had found the perfect fit – “keeping me close to home while receiving a quality education.” Overjoyed, White couldn't apply fast enough.

“As I explored graduate programs, I wanted to apply for a public relations program, but I wanted to keep my cost as affordable as possible. When I saw that Middle Georgia State University was offering a master's in PR, I immediately began gathering everything needed to apply.”

White, 25, from Cochran, works as a supply planner at Robins Air Force Base. Hired as a part of the Supply Chain Student Trainee Pathways

program, she supports the military by ensuring that specific plane parts are in good condition and available when needed. White is also a social media coordinator for Mt. Calvary Baptist Church and runs her own photography business, Lynzee White Photography, which allows her to “dive deeper” into her passion.

White's love for photography began to bloom during her early years at MGA. She received her undergraduate degree at the University, graduating in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in Media and Communication. She remembers her time at MGA fondly – so fondly that it prompted her to return to the University for her master's degree.

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"I thoroughly enjoyed the Media and Communication program. It opened my eyes to how much I enjoy creating media and learning about the world of communications... I enjoyed my professors and the sense of community that the students shared. I have two children, with one of them being a toddler when I was working through my bachelor's degree. Professor Rebecca Edwards was kind enough to let me bring my daughter to class on several occasions. She offered up a spot on her whiteboard and some markers for my daughter to color. I remember my classmates playing with her so that I could work on an assignment during class. Dr. Lavette Burnette offered to watch my daughter in her office one day so that I could go to an extra credit assignment.

**I'LL NEVER FORGET THE KINDNESS OF THESE PROFESSORS. I TRULY COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT THEIR SUPPORT." —LYNZEE WHITE**

White, one of the first to pursue the new PR degree program, is eager to forge her path in the professional world. Despite only just beginning her master's courses, White is thoroughly impressed by the amount she has learned in such a small amount of time.

"I am in the first group of students in the program, have taken two classes, and have already learned so much about writing digitally, as well as PR theories. The assignments have allowed me to have 'hands-on' experience in the world of PR by building websites, writing articles, and creating connections that I otherwise wouldn't have made!"

MGA opened doors for White and she has no doubt that her time in the PR program will show her much of the same.

"Middle Georgia State University has directly impacted my future career because of the opportunities that I have been afforded through their undergraduate and graduate programs," White said. "I was selected to be a summer intern at the Museum of Aviation in 2019, which allowed me to work hands on in the public relations and communications world, which was a great opportunity and set me on the correct path for all of my future endeavors. I love working for Robins Air

## MGA Graduate Programs

[www.mga.edu/graduate-studies](http://www.mga.edu/graduate-studies)

Doctor of Science in Information Technology  
Post-Master's Certificate in Adult Gerontology  
Acute Care Nurse Practitioner  
Master of Science in Information Technology  
Master of Science in Management  
Master of Science in Nursing  
Master of Science in Occupational Therapy  
Master of Arts in Public Relations  
Master of Arts in Teacher Education  
With Initial Teacher Certification  
Master of Arts in Technical  
and Professional Writing  
Graduate Certificate in Technical Writing  
and Digital Communication  
Graduate Certificate in Strategic  
Business Communication (Fall 2022)

**Most of MGA's graduate programs are fully online.**

Force Base, and I hope to transfer to the public affairs department upon the completion of my graduate degree and completing the Pathways program."

MGA's fully online Master of Arts in Public Relations program was created in 2021 to help fill the growing need in media, communications, marketing, and advertising. Graduates of the program are prepared for careers in public relations in fields such as business, entertainment, technology, government, and beyond.

MGA continues to grow the new program, introducing a "stackable" graduate certificate in Strategic Business Communication coming in fall 2022, which allows students to further their professional growth without committing to a graduate degree program. The "stackable" feature allows those pursuing the new certificate to have all five classes count towards the Master of Arts in Public Relations should they decide to pursue the graduate degree. ■



# MGA President Highlights Successful Fundraising Campaign, Building Projects, Economic Outlook, And More In State of the University Address

Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID pandemic, Middle Georgia State University (MGA) made great strides in 2021, concluding an \$11.6 million record-breaking fundraising campaign, launching its first doctorate, and attracting greater numbers of students applying for admission, Dr. Christopher Blake, MGA president, said in his 2022 State of the University address on Wednesday, Jan. 26.



This was Blake's ninth "State of the University" address since becoming MGA's president in 2013. The address is available in its entirety at [mga.edu/sotu](https://mga.edu/sotu)

"Middle Georgia State University is poised right now to move forward to new heights of excellence in its service to the people of Georgia," said Blake, who presented his address from the newly opened Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center on the Macon Campus. "We have weathered the headwinds facing us these past two years with great versatility, courage, and success, and we are ready for new extraordinary achievements in the year ahead because we have resolutely and wisely persevered in our efforts together as a learning community."

In reviewing some of the University's achievements and milestones, Blake noted the continuing work of the institution's COVID task force, "which kept us informed, healthy, and capable of managing our work so ably. ... Our endurance and leadership have enabled us to pass some extraordinary milestones on the path we have trod for two years."

Outlining some of the University's recent achievements and progress, Blake noted that:

- The MGA Foundation's "Building A Legacy of Greatness" campaign, which concluded in fall 2021, raised more than \$11.6 million, a University record. Funds raised through the campaign are being used to increase student scholarships and strengthen academic programs. Campaign proceeds funded the construction of the Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center, purchase of new aircraft for MGA's School of Aviation, and increased support for health sciences programs.
- MGA recently secured millions of dollars in new state funding to transform the Dublin Campus into a healthcare degree program hub, purchase more aircraft and equipment for the School of Aviation, and renovate Roberts Memorial Library and Dillard Hall on the Cochran Campus.

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 —

- MGA enhanced staff salaries and made them more competitive following a study conducted by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. A similar study is now underway for faculty compensation. Meanwhile, more pay enhancement is coming by way of the General Assembly later this year after it approved Gov. Kemp's proposed \$5,000 increases in the salaries of all state employees. "It is imperative that this University attracts and retains talent, and this administration is committed to providing working conditions and salaries that achieve that end," Blake said. "Similarly, our record level of granting \$500K in student scholarships, coupled with our extraordinary affordable price-point for tuition, ensures that our students receive the best value and quality education in Georgia."
- MGA was successful in making the case for an economic model that is equitable to those of other state universities within the University System of Georgia. "We will continue to press for resources from the state, from grant agencies, and from philanthropic donors so that we can continue to be both affordable and excellent," Blake said.
- The University introduced the "Be Well" initiative to expand mental health and wellbeing services to students.
- MGA graduated 800 students, a record number for fall, at December 2021 commencement ceremonies.
- The University is expecting that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges board will confirm its status as a Level 5 doctoral-granting institution. The University launched the Doctor of Science in Information Technology in summer 2021. "As we continue to see graduate enrollment growth and graduate programming diversify, we are poised to reach new student audiences across our region," Blake said.

- MGA is teaching IT courses to dual-enrolled Houston County high school students in a classroom at Project Synergy, co-located with the 402nd Software Engineering Group from Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex. This means the University is now providing information technology instruction from the high school through the doctoral level. Middle Georgia State is "the 'University of Choice' for many kinds of students, at different stages in their lives, their learning, and their circumstances," Blake said.
- While MGA has faced moderate pandemic-era enrollment declines, retention numbers are stronger and applications for fall 2022 admission are 20 percent higher than at this point last year.
- The University will make a renewed push to establish a unique identity at each of its five campuses and "create energy and vigor" for in-person academic and student life. "Online learning is essential to MGA," Blake said, "but must be used sparingly and intentionally, especially with undergraduate students, and not simply as a convenient option."

Noting the state of Georgia's strong economic outlook, Blake said that MGA's response "must be to use this environment of optimism and opportunity to full advantage."

"We can, in this economic climate and post-pandemic planning, deliver shortly a future for our University that will be more prosperous, rewarding, and powerful than the past two years," he said. "While each of us feels the fatigue of the pandemic in our lives and our work, the warm winds that are starting to blow offer us not just the return of a spring season, but the tangible opportunity to make next year a huge win for Middle Georgia State University. We must keep our eye on that prize and work for it now with the conviction that it is going to be a better time ahead very shortly." ■



By Alexandria Brooks



**Dr. Myungjae Kwak**, far left, MGA associate professor of IT, and Houston County dual-enrollment students at Project Synergy.

## MGA Elevates Dual-Enrollment Students Through Synergy Innovation Center

**M**iddle Georgia State University dual-enrollment student Justin Pope, 17, a junior at Veterans High School, is earning school credits and pursuing his dream of becoming a game developer at Project Synergy.

“Originally, I was going to take a dual enrollment class that was going to teach me how to build laptops and computers so I can get a certification in that, but I saw a class for coding application development,” he said. “I’ve been interested in making games since 7th grade and I had a little bit of coding experience in HTML, so I decided to take this class and become a game developer. The class also counts as a science credit. It’s helping me reach that goal so I can take another dual enrollment class my senior year.”

Pope is one of 22 students taking an application development course taught by Dr. Myungjae Kwak, Middle Georgia State University (MGA) associate professor of IT, at the new R. Wayne Lowe Synergy Innovation Center in Warner Robins.

MGA partnered with Robins Air Force Base and the Houston County School District to offer high school students computer programming dual-enrollment courses via the new facility. It opened its doors in 2021 and has already garnered praise from MGA’s tech-savvy students like Pope.

Through the partnership, students gain the opportunity to advance their education, increase their employability, and connect with local public organizations and businesses at the new, state-of-the-art facility. Students have access to coursework provided by MGA’s School of Computing and innovative software, including training and lab spaces. The partnership also greatly benefits the community by bringing forth more high paying jobs, employers, and opportunities for economic development in the Middle Georgia area. ■

Students interested in the dual-enrollment program may contact MGA recruiter Andrea Blackshear at [andrea.blackshear@mga.edu](mailto:andrea.blackshear@mga.edu) or 478-841-0037. For further information on MGA’s School of Computing dual-enrollment coursework, contact Dr. Kevin Floyd, associate dean, at [kevin.floyd@mga.edu](mailto:kevin.floyd@mga.edu) or (478) 471-2801.



# MGA FOUNDATION **SURPASSES \$11 MILLION GOAL** IN GREATNESS CAMPAIGN





The Middle Georgia State University (MGA) Foundation's *Building A Legacy of Greatness* private fundraising campaign — THE MOST AMBITIOUS IN THE INSTITUTION'S HISTORY — exceeded its \$11 million goal, coming in at more than **\$11.6 MILLION**.

**T**housands of alumni, friends, and community partners proudly invested in the success of MGA's students. Thanks to the leadership and generosity of campaign chair, Robert F. Hatcher, Sr., the campaign achieved each of its objectives in addition to exceeding the financial goal: increase student scholarships, strengthen academic programming, recruit & retain the best faculty, enhance professional development, and build the Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center.

"This campaign has made history," said Dr. Christopher Blake, Middle Georgia State's president. "We've demonstrated our commitment to the values of stewardship and engagement and shown how creative and enterprising we can be in finding new ways to fund our operations. We are now in a stronger position to help support the communities and students we serve and to continue making higher education more accessible."

Hatcher is a longtime MGA supporter. The former chair of the Board of Regents for the University System of Georgia, Hatcher has long been known in central Georgia for his support of community development, particularly in the area of education. During his tenure with the Board of Regents, he was part of the team responsible for envisioning the consolidation of Macon State College and Middle Georgia College into what is now a university that offers career focused graduate degrees. ■

The *Building A Legacy Of Greatness* campaign made it possible to construct the Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center on the Macon Campus. The facility brings together key enrollment-related offices under a single roof, making it an inviting point of entry for students needing assistance in taking the steps needed to begin working on their degrees.





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**652**  
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The **Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center**, fully funded by private donations, opened its doors this fall to streamline the enrollment process for prospective students.



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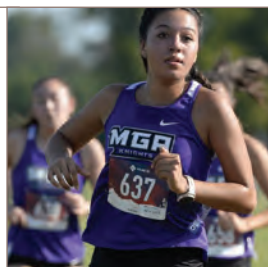
- Develop unique career-oriented programs and degrees
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**\$2.8 MILLION**

**Greater University Impact Fund** to address the greatest needs of the University and our students.







## MGA Alumni Profile Stephen Adams

As an MGA student, Stephen Adams obtained an internship with the Macon Economic Development Commission. Now he's executive director of the Macon-Bibb Industrial Authority.

**Full Name:** Stephen Holden Adams.

**Age:** 38.

**Hometown & Residence:** Macon.

**Employment:** Executive director, Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority.

**MGA Degree:** Bachelor of Science in Business and Information Technology, Class of 2008.

### Describe your current career.

*I am currently the executive director of the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority, after having served as project manager, director of operations and economic development director. In one of my last classes at MGA, I asked my marketing professor, who was also the VP of the Macon Economic Development Commission at the time, if I could intern with him. Little did I know that would lead me to starting with MBCIA in 2009 and that eventually I would become executive director.*

*At MBCIA I work with amazing people, both locally and from all around the world. While my daily operations rarely are the same from one day*

*to the next, we focus on bringing new opportunities to Macon-Bibb County via new industries that are looking to build new facilities. Most recently we have worked with Amazon, Dean Baldwin Painting, Irving Consumer Products, Embraer, Kumho Tire and Schnitzer Steel, just to name a few. These companies and others have invested more than \$1.4 billion in our community over the last 5 years, creating over 2,500 new jobs. In addition to working with new prospective industries we also work directly with our existing industries to ensure they are getting the necessary resources to be successful. It truly is an honor to work with our community and state partners to make opportunities like these possible.*

### What is one of the highlights of your career at MBCIA?

*With Kumho Tires, I was able to support them and be with them every single day, working with South Korea officials and making some lifelong friendships. Getting to know them and seeing the impact of the jobs on our community and their families really makes all the stress of the job fade away.*

### Describe how your Middle Georgia State experiences are benefiting you now?

*On a daily basis, something I learned at MGA has an impact on the decisions I make and the direction it takes me.*

### What advice would you give a current student or recent graduate interested in pursuing a career in your professional field?

*Intern. Learn more about that field and make sure you really know that this is what you would like to do. Communication is critical. Good communication with all parties will take you far. Misunderstandings can lead to so many problems. Communication is not always telling your story, but it's more about understanding your audience.*

### In five years ...

*I'll be continuing to carry out the work of providing opportunities to my community and making Macon-Bibb County the best place to live, work and play. ■*



### Outstanding Alumnus Marvin Riggins

Marvin Riggins, retired chief of the Macon-Bibb County Fire Department, received the Outstanding Alumnus Award, which recognizes graduates who have distinguished themselves academically, professionally, or through community involvement and achieved positions of influence.

Riggins, who graduated from what is now Middle Georgia State in 1998, retired from the fire department in 2020 after more than 40 years of service. He rose through the ranks from private to become chief. Riggins received numerous awards throughout his career, including:

- “Firefighter of the Year” three times, “Paramedic of the Year,” and the Macon Optimist Community Service Award.
- The 2009 Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs President Award, 2016 Georgia Fire Chief of the Year, and Georgia Fire Chief’s Designation Certification.
- The 2017 Special Presidential Award from the Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs and International Association of Fire Chief’s Career Fire Chief of The Year.

(Above) **Marvin Riggins**, the 2021 Outstanding Alumnus recipient, and his wife, **Gloria**.

## Legacy of Leadership And Outstanding Alumnus Award Recipients Recognized At President’s Gala

At the 2021 President’s Gala, an annual event hosted by the Middle Georgia State University Foundation, alumni, donors, foundation trustees, and University leaders gathered to honor two individuals who have made service to others a lifetime pursuit. The gathering also was a celebration of the record-breaking success of the Building A Legacy Of Greatness fundraising campaign.



Celebrating the success of the MGA Foundation's most ambitious private fundraising campaign in the University's history.

**A special thank you to the sponsors  
of the 2021 President’s Gala.**







L-R: **Allen Gudenrath**, a Georgia Board of Regents member; **Dr. Christopher Blake**, MGA president; and **Robert F. Hatcher Sr.**, chair of the Building A Legacy Of Leadership campaign, at the 2021 President's Gala.



## Legacy of Leadership Malcolm Burgess

The Middle Georgia State University Foundation presented the Legacy of Leadership Award to Malcolm Burgess. The award recognizes individuals who have given exemplary service to the University and the Foundation.

Burgess is chairman of his family's kaolin business, Burgess Pigment Company, which his father founded in Sandersville in 1948. He is a long-time supporter of Middle Georgia State University.

A few years ago he established a scholarship to help MGA students with financial need majoring in health sciences, business, or the arts. More recently, he made a major gift to help fund the construction of the Peyton T. Anderson Enrollment Center on the Macon Campus.

A Macon native and military veteran who graduated from the University of North Carolina, Burgess also supports numerous other organizations, including the Community Foundation, Museum of Arts and Sciences, Children's Hospital, and Wesleyan College.

(Above) **Malcolm Burgess**, the 2021 Legacy of Leadership award recipient, and his daughter, **Becky Burgess**.



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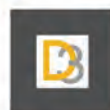
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## In Memoriam / Lisa Maria Henry

Lisa Henry considered it a highlight of her education career when she got to show actor Jeff Goldblum some basics of air traffic control for an episode of his documentary series, *The World According to Jeff Goldblum*. Although she died from cancer before Disney+ streamed the season two, her wonderful spirit and sense of humor lived on in the

portion of the show that highlighted her role as assistant professor and program coordinator for the MGA School of Aviation's Department of Air Traffic Management. She leaves behind a rich legacy of integrity and service. If you'd like to support the Lisa Henry Memorial Scholarship, email [development@mga.edu](mailto:development@mga.edu).



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