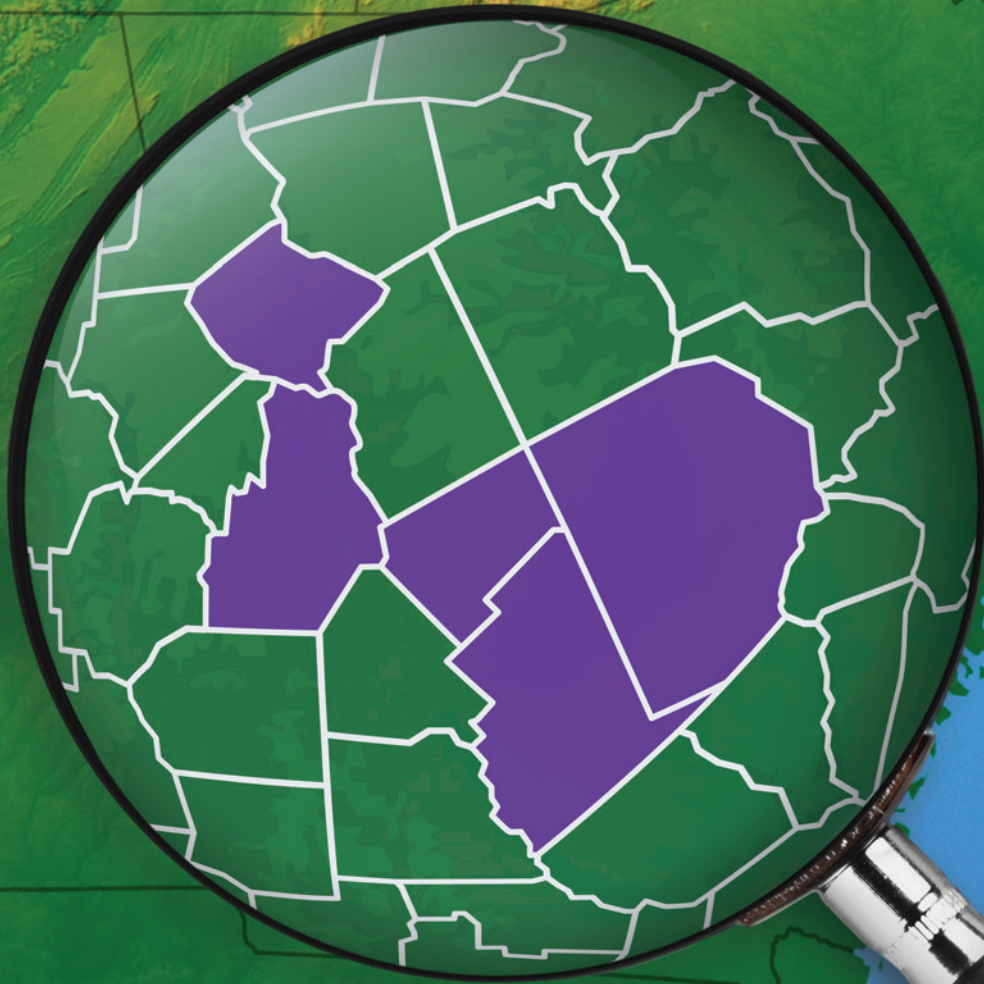


# MGA TODAY

A PUBLICATION OF MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY



## Connecting Campus *and* Our Communities

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Campus Spotlight:  
Warner Robins

MGA Athletics Transitions  
To NCAA Division II

Recognizing Outstanding  
Leader & Alumnus





19


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## 2025 Alumni Association Board of Directors

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The MGA Foundation would like to remember Vice Chair **Don Avery**, who passed in January 2025.  
His service to and support of the University will be forever remembered.



## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The pages of this reimagined *MGA Today* reflect both transformation and tradition. While you'll notice our fresh design approach, our commitment to sharing Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) pivotal moments and achievements remains unwavering.

In this issue, we proudly showcase the inaugural year of our Center for Middle Georgia Studies and its vital work in strengthening our regional connections. Building on our Spring 2024 coverage of Knights Athletics, we share exciting updates on our transition to NCAA Division II this fall – a milestone that represents our growing competitive spirit.

The heart of MGA's success story continues to be champions like you. You'll read about transformative initiatives like the Jennings Family Distinguished Lecture Series and witness how the Sheridan Foundation's generous support creates life-changing opportunities for our students. These

stories exemplify how visionary support shapes not just individual futures, but the very fabric of our University community.

The 2024-2025 academic year stands as a testament to MGA's momentum. We've achieved record-breaking enrollment this fall and unprecedented student engagement across our campuses. These milestones reflect our value of Engagement and a deepening commitment to creating exceptional educational experiences. Yet as proud as I am of these achievements, I'm even more excited about the chapters yet to be written in MGA's story.

Go Knights!



Christopher Blake, Ph.D.  
MGA President







BY MYR'LICE' DICKENS-MORSE, MGA Class of 2025—Media & Communication

# Cochran Knights Brighten the Community *with a New Mural*



Last fall, the City of Cochran's Downtown Development Authority contacted Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) Art Department about participating in a new opportunity to assist in the beautification of the city's downtown area.

As a result, MGA Knights on the Cochran campus are now making big strides in their local community by expanding their talents beyond their classrooms.







According to Charlie Agnew, an MGA professor who teaches mural painting and is leading the project, there are five talented students who are working on a mural that will grace the corner of East Cherry Street and North Second Street, Andrea Bien Aime, Emily Behrends, Karley Mihalik, Alyssa Singletary, and Connie Swinson.

This mural – a depiction of Cochran landmarks and icons – and what it symbolizes for the city of Cochran holds great weight. When asked if he considered this mural to be significant for both the MGA and Cochran community, Agnew described the mural as

*“a way to bridge the gap between the University and the city...a way to bring us closer together.”*

The mural is a beautiful example of how MGA and Cochran support one another, where students are praised by the community for their amazing work and dedication to beautifying the community.

The mural, when finished, will be filled with artwork that is symbolic of the city, MGA, and the state of Georgia, tying together all these communities. Agnew shared that the mural will depict the city’s courthouse clock tower, a peach blossom, and a local business, while also hinting at the city’s railroad history. It also makes reference to other murals done in the city by MGA professors.

But that isn’t to say that this project was without its challenges.

Since this project is outside, there were a few struggles that delayed its completion with the weather that constantly hit the Middle Georgia area last fall. Despite this, Agnew and the students working on the mural have persevered and plan to have the mural done during the spring 2025 semester. This project and the students’ commitment to the mural have greatly reflected MGA and the University’s values of learning, adaptability, and engagement.

With the completion of the current mural there is hope that MGA will gain more opportunities for similar outreach and engagement. The wish is that this project will encourage students and community members to take away a sense of building community and togetherness all while encouraging future development. ●





# Building Student Leaders of Character

How MGA Is Shaping Tomorrow's Trailblazers

BY SHERON SMITH

*(L – R) Dr. Winfield Tufts of the University's School of Business, and Rafael Villamil of MGA's Center for Career & Leadership Development, are spearheading MGA's Leadership & Character Development Collaborative.*



► **Coby Roye considers himself to be a natural-born leader. But he is the first to say he still has a lot to learn.**

Participating in iLead, one of Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) student leadership initiatives, "gives me a sense of direction," said Roye, 22, a junior information technology major who, among other activities, has been president of the University's Cyber Knights Club and secretary of the Honors Student Association.

"It's helped me be a better leader and shows me how to teach other students to be leaders," he said.

Roye is among the approximately 140 Middle Georgia State students who are learning and honing leadership and character skills as part of an interconnected, University-wide effort that involves both academics and extracurricular initiatives. MGA is looking to significantly boost those numbers.

The University's budding Leadership & Character Development Collaborative (LCDC) is a wide-ranging team effort coordinated by MGA's School of Business and the Center for Career & Leadership Development. Supported by a major grant received through Wake Forest University's Educating Character Initiative, MGA is building an interdisciplinary and co-curricular approach to giving students opportunities to develop into leaders of character. (See info box, page 9.)

Dr. Winfield Tufts of the University's School of Business, and Rafael Villamil of MGA's Center for Career & Leadership Development, are spearheading the collaboration, although many faculty and staff across various departments and offices are involved. As of early this spring, Tufts and Villamil were developing a March 28 workshop for faculty and staff directly involved in student leadership and character development initiatives.

MGA is building the initiative based on three components: character-based leadership education integrated into classroom coursework; character-based leadership practiced through co-curricular activities; and character-based leadership lived out through short- and long-term service projects.

"This is vitally important work," said Tufts, who teaches courses in the School of Business's Master of Business in Professional Leadership (MBPL) program, a degree that focuses – to a far greater degree than most traditional business graduate programs – on qualitative leadership.

"Positive, effective leadership is built on

competence and character," Tufts continued. "Positive, effective character-based leadership works to help members of a given organization, including employers, flourish. By investing in leadership- and character-building opportunities for our students, we help ensure they are well-prepared to take on the challenges of an evolving global landscape and can also have significant positive impact on their communities."

Maribel Ponce of Warner Robins, an IT specialist at Robins Air Force Base, is one of the students in the MBPL program. She's wanted

to pursue a graduate degree since completing her bachelor's in IT in 2009 but waited to find one that resonated with her aspirations.

"I wasn't looking for just another credential," said Ponce, 49. "I wanted a program that would shape me into the leader I knew I could become. Leadership isn't defined by titles but by the ability to inspire and guide others.

"While I've always been fortunate to have people willing to trust and support me, I realized that the challenge wasn't gaining followers but communicating my vision in a

*Continues on next page*



*Coby Roye, an MGA junior majoring in IT, is a campus leader honing his skills through iLead, one of the University's student leadership initiatives.*

***"It's helped me be a better leader and shows me how to teach other students to be leaders."***



way that aligned with theirs. The Master of Business in Professional Leadership program offered the tools I needed to bridge that gap.”

Like Roye, Ponce considers herself a natural leader, “but leadership isn’t just about having followers. It’s about inspiring and aligning others toward a shared vision. In the next decade, I aspire to inspire others the way I’ve been inspired by incredible mentors. I also want to be a voice for those who feel unheard, empowering them to recognize and use their own voices to create change.”

Surveys of MGA students show strong interest in participating in leadership, character, and ethics-building initiatives, even if many of them, particularly undergraduates, aren’t

certain exactly what all of that involves.

“How do we motivate students to get to the point where they see those things as being valuable to them, something that will have big payoffs throughout their lives?” Villamil said. “That will be at the forefront as we bring all of our leadership- and character-programming together into a comprehensive effort.”●

*“It has not only enhanced my leadership skills but has also helped me grow as a person.”*

*—Maribel Ponce*



*Maribel Ponce is pursuing MGA's unique Master of Business in Professional Leadership that focuses on qualitative leadership. An IT specialist at Robins Air Force Base, Ponce credits the degree program with helping refine her ability to articulate ideas, build consensus, and lead purposefully.*



## MGA Student Leadership & Character Development Components

Many MGA degree programs include leadership and ethics coursework. The School of Business also offers an innovative Master of Business in Professional Leadership that focuses on qualitative leadership. [www.mga.edu/business](http://www.mga.edu/business)

Through the University's Center for Career & Leadership Development, students can participate in specific leadership programs, including Knights Lead, Emerging Leaders, and iLead Peer Educators. The center hosts a major Student Leadership Conference each spring. [www.mga.edu/center-career-leadership-development](http://www.mga.edu/center-career-leadership-development)







A record number of MGA students – 135 – attended the spring 2025 Student Leadership Conference, hosted by the University's Center for Career & Leadership Development.



## ABOUT THE GRANT

MGA is using a recently acquired grant to initiate a comprehensive collaborative aimed at helping students develop greater leadership and character skills. The \$50,000 Capacity-Building grant, awarded through Wake Forest University's Educating Character Initiative, will help MGA unify existing initiatives and build others, all aimed at empowering students to grow in their ability to become ethical leaders in their fields and in other endeavors. Ultimately, MGA is deliberately creating a University-wide program that will develop leaders of character who will have a significant positive impact on their communities. Wake Forest developed the Educating Character Initiative with support of a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. [www.mga.edu/capacitybuildinggrant](http://www.mga.edu/capacitybuildinggrant)





# Warner Robins Campus Spotlight

BY ALEXANDRIA BROOKS

*From tech takeovers to new STEM and nursing ventures, Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) Warner Robins Campus has begun a tremendous transformation into an innovative educational hub thriving with new initiatives.*

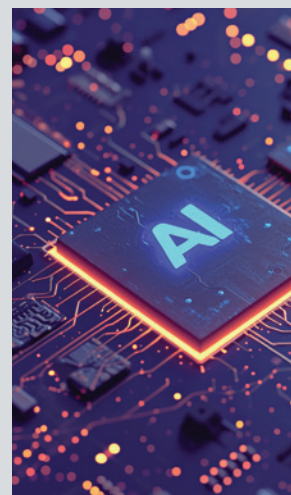
## Houston Healthcare Nursing Suite

In the fall of 2023, in honor of Houston Healthcare's dedication to shaping the education and future careers of aspiring nurses, MGA announced the naming of the nursing suite on the University's Warner Robins Campus as the "Houston Healthcare Nursing Suite."


For two decades, Houston Healthcare has been a continued supporter of Middle Georgia State University's nursing programs, contributing \$1.2 million through nursing faculty line support and providing vital medical equipment and program and scholarship funding, which has been instrumental in preparing students for a challenging career in healthcare.

## Continuing Education Program Expansion

The University's Continuing and Professional Education Department (CPE) has expanded its offerings at the Warner Robins Campus through partnerships with Robins Air Force Base (RAFB). During summer 2024, the CPE department, in collaboration with the School of Computing and Office of the President, offered a series of information technology training classes in partnership with the 402nd Software and Engineering Group. These courses were attended by over 60 employees from the 402nd.







In January 2025, the CPE team, in collaboration with the School of Business and Office of the President, partnered with the Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex to launch the Fundamentals of Business Aviation Certificate for 100 team members. This certificate program, consisting of six modules, is designed to enhance workforce readiness by equipping participants with critical skills in logistics, operations, project management, and supply chain management within the aviation industry. Participants also have the opportunity to apply prior learning assessments toward college credit, creating a seamless pathway to degree completion.

### Department of Computer Science & AI Degree

In the summer of 2024, MGA's School of Computing launched the Department of Computer Science, housed at the institution's Warner Robins Campus near Robins Air Force Base, a hub for engineering and technological innovation, as well as several prominent tech companies, such as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Boeing.

Dr. Myungjae Kwak, a School of Computing professor and the new department's first chair, said Warner Robins is an ideal location for the department's programs and initiatives.

"It's a growing city that hosts Robins Air Force Base, a hub for engineering and technological innovation," Kwak said. "The proximity to the base, where numerous engineers and technical professionals work, creates a unique synergy between the academic environment and the practical, real-world applications of computer science... The presence of the base and its associated tech companies ensures a steady demand for highly skilled professionals in computer sci-

ence, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence, making it an excellent site for cultivating the next generation of tech leaders."

The new department builds upon the school's existing strengths in IT and mathematics, expanding access to STEM education and research opportunities in the region. Programming is focused on providing exceptional education and conducting innovative research in areas such as computer science education, human-computer interaction (HCI), and artificial intelligence (AI). The department aims to drive advancements in a dynamic field and equip students with the skills to thrive in high-demand careers in the ever-growing tech industry.

This spring, MGA announced the Department's new Bachelor of Science in Applied Artificial Intelligence, a "first-of-its-kind undergraduate program" from any University System of Georgia institution. Based on the Warner Robins Campus, the strategically designed AI degree emphasizes hands-on learning that focuses on developing and using AI tools to improve industries in Georgia's key economic sectors. MGA will launch the degree in the fall of 2025.

The Department also launched both bachelor's and associate's degrees in computer science in the fall of 2023, basing those programs in Warner Robins for in-person classes.

*"The proximity to the base... creates a unique synergy between the academic environment and the practical, real-world..."*

— Dr. Myungjae Kwak

### Georgia Academy Continued Growth

In fall 2023, The Georgia Academy reached 23 students enrolled in the program who attended classes offered on the Warner Robins Campus. Since then, enrollment has nearly doubled, increasing to 43 students in fall 2024.

The Georgia Academy is a unique, selective two-year dual enrollment opportunity for high school students to enroll in collegiate coursework while still attending high school. Students can attend Middle Georgia State University either full-time and work towards an associate's degree or part-time enrolling in a few courses each semester. Those attending The Georgia Academy full-time will complete the requirements for both an associate's degree and their high school diploma simultaneously. Students enrolled part-time will earn credit for undergraduate coursework that will accelerate their progression toward a bachelor's degree.

In addition to taking coursework, students also have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning.

### NextGen Coders Offered in WR

Further expanding its outreach to Middle Georgia youths, the School of Computing began hosting NextGen Coders on the Warner Robins Campus. The nonprofit student-led organization offers courses designed to teach young people coding through beginner and intermediate-level classes, preparing them for future careers in tech. The program provides students with free 12-to-13-week courses consisting of hour-and-a-half-long Saturday sessions. With support from MGA and 21st Century Partnership, the program tripled enrollment and continues to grow. ●





Less than a year after its formal launch, Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) Center for Middle Georgia Studies is making a big impact.

From collaborating with organizations on projects ranging from developing a cybersecurity workforce to enhancing STEM education to contributing to historical preservation, the center's progress is outpacing even what its executive director, Dr. Kristie Roberts-Lewis, thought was possible in such a short time.

"In some ways, my expectations have been exceeded," Roberts-Lewis said. "We've been able to apply for multiple grants worth over a total of \$2 million. I've been community canvassing, meeting with organizations around the region to learn about their needs and interests and determining where there might be some synergy between us and them."

The Center for Middle Georgia Studies is fueled by a \$1.2 million grant from the Peyton Anderson Foundation, with additional support coming from a gift from the estate of Carolyn Wynn Smalley. Leveraging Middle Georgia State's faculty expertise and community assets, the center aims to work with other organizations to examine and address critical issues such as poverty, financial literacy, leadership development, program evaluation, workforce demands, innovative educational programming, and healthcare access – among other things – in the region.

Plans for the center geared up in the summer of 2023, culminating in the renovation of the MGA Macon Campus library space it now occupies and the appointment of Roberts-Lewis, who before her new role was senior program manager at the UNCF Institute for Capacity Building. Roberts-Lewis brought extensive experience in higher education and community engagement to the center's helm.

"The center's development fits in well with an essential part of MGA's strategic plan," Roberts-Lewis said, "which is to lead innovation and economic opportunity."

In the early going, what has the center been engaged in?

Roberts-Lewis, along with various MGA faculty members and graduate assistants, are collaborating with other regional entities to focus on projects that mostly relate to the individual wellbeing of citizens through improved health, education, financial futures, and to the overall vitality of communities.

Specifically, the center's recent work includes:



# Connecting Campus *and Our* Communities

BY SHERON SMITH

**MGA's Center For Middle Georgia Studies  
Evolves As An Intellectual Hub For Ideas  
To Address Regional Needs**





- With MGA's School of Computing, submitting a \$1.2 million grant proposal for a Cybersecurity Workforce Development Clinic in partnership with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the Smart Broadband initiative, and the Macon-Bibb County Enhancement Authority.
- Working with MGA biology professor Dr. Tyler Achatz, applying for a \$93,000 National Science Foundation grant to launch the "LINK" (Leveraging Institutional Networks for Knowledge) program, aimed at enhancing STEM education for rural and underrepresented students in Middle Georgia.
- Working with the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank to develop a cultural competence statement and plan, and training for that organization to help it engage with a wider variety of regional partners who want to help provide food to people in need.
- With the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, developing a workforce analysis, along with an asset map understanding community linkages, gaps, and opportunities for community engagement and collaboration.
- Preparing to work with the Macon Violence Prevention (MVP) organization and the Community Foundation of Central Georgia to evaluate grantees who received funding to implement or expand MVP programming to impact and reduce crime in the city of Macon.
- Assisting the Newberry Institute with curriculum for creating awareness for students on careers in agriculture, developing a proposal for historical designation, reviewing and codifying items within the onsite museum, and more.
- Partnering with United Way of Central Georgia to develop evaluation metrics and tools to produce data from the ALICE report to help assess community impact and the need for support services for various community-building initiatives. The ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report is an analysis of how many households cannot meet the costs of living in a given region.
- Working with the Middle Georgia Community Action Agency to provide professional development for the staff and provide computer skills training for elderly members of the population in rural parts of Georgia.

*Continues on next page*





**Middle Georgia**  
State University

CENTER FOR MIDDLE GEORGIA STUDIES

## AT-A-GLANCE

### The Center For Middle Georgia Studies (CMGS)

The center's mission is Uniting Knowledge and Community to Understand and Address Real-Life Issues in Middle Georgia. Services offered to organizations include research and analysis, training and educational programs, and community partnering and outreach. Learn more at: [www.mga.edu/cmgs](http://www.mga.edu/cmgs)

#### CMGS Advisory Board

**Karen Lambert**, *President and CEO, Peyton Anderson Foundation*

**Kathryn Dennis**, *President, Community Foundation of Central Georgia*

**Steven Kruger**, *President, L.E. Schwartz & Son, Inc.*

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**Dr. Keith Moffett**, *County Manager, Macon-Bibb*

**Mike Davis**, *Commissioner, Bleckley County*

**DuBose Porter**, *Executive Director, Georgia Trust for Local News*

**LaRhonda Patrick**, *Mayor, Warner Robins, Georgia*

**Spencer Barron**, *City Manager, Eastman, Georgia*

**Dr. Kendra Russell**, *MGA Provost Fellow, International Education & Professor/Director of Program Innovation & Evaluation*

**Dr. Rod McRae**, *MGA Associate Provost for Faculty Development*

- Hosting a financial literacy workshop in collaboration with Capital City Bank and sponsoring a discussion of the economic and cultural divide between Atlanta and the rest of Georgia.

It's a lot to take on, Roberts-Lewis acknowledged, but the impactful work of MGA's Center for Middle Georgia Studies is just getting started. With a strong foundation already laid, the center is poised to make meaningful strides in fostering regional growth and community engagement.

"We aim to become a dynamic 'think tank' to tackle critical issues and spark innovative solutions," Roberts-Lewis said.

For example, tackling emerging challenges such as artificial intelligence (AI) will be among the center's major focuses in the coming year. Recent conversations Roberts-Lewis has had with leaders in healthcare and economic development have highlighted AI's potential, from enhancing surgery to auto-

mating tasks, while also addressing ethical concerns such as intellectual property and worker displacement.

"How do K-12 teachers help students prepare for it, and how do organizations understand it in ways that are meaningful to them?" she said. "We're exploring how to prepare the workforce for AI integration and help organizations use it responsibly."

Roberts-Lewis emphasized the center's unwavering commitment to building strategic partnerships, driving innovation, and developing impactful solutions to address the challenges facing the Middle Georgia region.

*"We strive to become a cornerstone of innovation and progress for regional development," she said, "and continue to be a catalyst for positive change."*



*L-R are Dr. Kristie Roberts-Lewis, executive director of the Center for Middle Georgia Studies; Karen J. Lambert, president & CEO of the Peyton Anderson Foundation; and Dr. Christopher Blake, MGA president, at the formal opening of the Center for Middle Georgia Studies.*



## Gifts & Grants

### MGA Foundation Receives Porter Trust Gift—

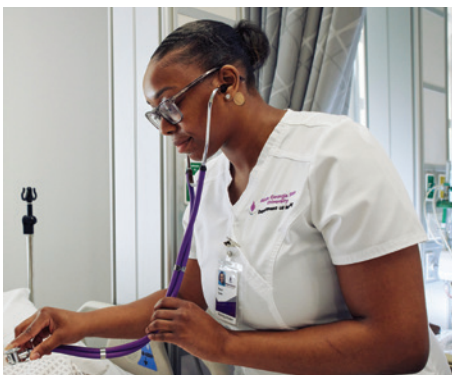
The Ben G. Porter Trust has awarded the MGA Foundation an unrestricted gift of \$70,000 to help support scholarships and other initiatives.



“We are honored to be part of Mr. Porter’s enduring impact on the community he loved,” said Nancy White, MGA’s vice president for University Advancement. “This gift will help the Foundation continue to address some of the University’s greatest needs by supporting scholarships, classroom and program enhancements, and quality academics. We are grateful to the Ben G. Porter Trust for recognizing the University’s value to this region by entrusting us with this gift.”

### Piedmont Macon Partners with Middle Georgia State University to Support Nursing Education—

This January, Piedmont Macon announced they are making a major investment in the future of healthcare by funding a new clinical instructor position for Middle Georgia State University nursing students. Piedmont Macon will fund the full-time clinical instructor position for one year, a commitment valued at \$125,000. Based at Piedmont Macon, the instructor will provide hands-on clinical instruction and supervision to MGA nursing students, ensuring they gain essential real-world experience in a healthcare setting.



### MGA Receives Grant to Grow Student Leadership and Character Development—

MGA will use a new grant to initiate a comprehensive program aimed at helping students develop greater leadership and character skills. The \$50,000 Capacity-Building grant, awarded through Wake Forest University’s Educating Character Initiative, will help MGA unify existing initiatives and build others, all aimed at empowering students to grow in their ability to become ethical leaders in their fields and in other endeavors. The University is creating a university-wide program that will develop leaders of character who will have a significant positive impact on their communities. Additionally, this program will directly interface with the Center for Middle Georgia Studies to impact a wide variety of MGA’s stakeholders.



### National Science Foundation Grants Major Award to MGA for STEM Workforce Development Initiatives—

With a newly announced \$375,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, MGA will join forces with Winston-Salem State University, North Arkansas College, and St. Vincent College to more strongly align classroom teaching and learning with professional workforce needs in STEM-related industries. As a potential result of this major project, more MGA students should be even better prepared for jobs in those industries once they complete their degrees.

**City of Dublin Pickleball Courts**—Last fall, MGA’s Dublin Campus debuted new pickleball courts. The project was the result of a partnership between the University and the City of Dublin to renovate unused tennis courts on the campus into pickleball courts. The formal opening was attended by MGA President Christopher Blake and other University representatives; city officials, including Mayor Joshua Kight; and those active in the Dublin Pickleball Association.



### Nursing Department Receives Community Foundation of Central Georgia Grant to Support Medication Administration Safety—

The Community Foundation of Central Georgia has awarded a \$20,000 grant to Middle Georgia State University’s nursing department to support student training in medication administration safety. The department will use the funds to buy an automated medication dispensing cabinet, housed in the Macon Campus nursing lab, to ensure all graduates are competent with safe medication administration. Along with the purchase of new equipment, nursing faculty will enhance the curriculum to include additional simulation hours for students to prepare and safely administer medications.



*Continues on next page*



## Faculty & Staff Spotlights



### **Dr. Sabrina Wengier Wins Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award**

—Dr. Sabrina Wengier, professor of French and coordinator of Modern Languages at MGA, formally received the Felton

Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty award for the state university sector during the University System of Georgia's annual gala on September 12. The award was initially announced last spring. Wengier is the first MGA faculty member to receive this significant award, given in recognition of individual faculty for a strong commitment to teaching and student success.



### **Betsy McDaniel Appointed to OT State Board**

—Betsy McDaniel, chair of MGA's Department of Rehabilitation Science, was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp to the State Board of Occupational Therapy. She was officially sworn into office by the Governor on Monday, September 30, 2024, at the state capitol. McDaniel will serve a four-year term as one of six board members.



### **Dr. Scott Hinze Chosen as Governor's Teaching Fellow**

—Middle Georgia State University faculty member Dr. Scott Hinze was chosen to be a 2024 Governor's Teaching Fellow.

A cognitive psychologist and an associate professor of psychology, Hinze was among the faculty chosen for the highly competitive program from institutions across the state. Hinze's research focuses on how we apply principles of memory and comprehension to learning complex information.

Established in 1995 by Zell Miller, then governor of Georgia, the Governor's Teaching

Fellows program is designed to provide Georgia's higher education faculty with expanded opportunities for developing important teaching skills, addressing faculty members' pressing need to use emerging technologies and instructional tools that are becoming increasingly important for learning in today's society.



### **MGA's Graduate Studies Librarian Named 2024 GALILEO Ambassador**

—Dana Casper, graduate studies librarian at MGA, was named the 2024 GALILEO Ambassador, an award that recognizes her achievements building dynamic educational lessons that incorporate and promote the online library portal.

Casper, MGA's graduate studies librarian since 2017, was recognized as the 2024 ambassador during the virtual GALILEO annual conference, attended by hundreds of librarians and library staff throughout the state. The ambassador award's purpose is to "honor educators, librarians, library staff, or other history or literacy advocates across the state who go the extra mile to tout GALILEO and pursue lifelong learning opportunities in their schools, universities, or communities."

### **MGA's Teri Miller Sworn in as VP of Internal Affairs for the American Association for Respiratory Care**

—In November 2024, Teri Miller, chair of MGA's Department of Respiratory Therapy and Health Sciences, was sworn in as vice president of Internal Affairs for the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) at their 70th International Congress and Annual Business Meeting, marking the beginning of her two-year term in office.



## Program News

### **MGA to Offer Bachelor of Science in Health Science**

—In the fall of 2024, MGA began offering a new accredited Bachelor of Science in Health Science degree, designed to complement existing programs in nursing, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, and rehabilitation science. Program graduates can use the degree as a means of entering the healthcare field as community health educators, patient representatives, healthcare data analysts, or other allied health professions or build on the knowledge gained through the program by entering graduate school or pursuing a second bachelor's degree in a specific healthcare profession, such as respiratory therapy or nursing.



The new program aligns with the University System of Georgia and MGA's commitment to advancing educational opportunities, supporting workforce development, and positively impacting the broader community.



### **Board of Regents Approves MGA's Master of Education in Curriculum & Instruction with Literacy Focus**

—Last fall, MGA launched a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with a literacy focus this fall. Housed in MGA's School of Education & Behavioral Sciences, the new fully online degree allows certified teachers to take advanced coursework related to literacy education. Program participants learn content and strategies to teach literacy skills to students who may have learning challenges or live in difficult home or community environments that affect their ability to gain literacy skills. Upon completion of the degree and successfully passing the GACE assessment in



curriculum and instruction, graduates could advance in their schools as academic coaches or instructional support specialists.



**MGA Partners with Fayette County Public Schools Center of Innovation to Offer Dual Enrollment Aviation Courses**—As part of a new partnership with Fayette County Public Schools Center of Innovation (COI), MGA is offering students aviation courses as dual enrollment options, catering to Fayette County's growing aviation community. Students enrolled in these courses have the opportunity to complete college-level courses through the dual enrollment program. By seamlessly integrating aviation courses with core classes at the COI, students can expedite their progression into in-air flight training, potentially beginning as early as their sophomore year.



**OT Program Earns ACOTE Accreditation**—Middle Georgia State University's Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT) Bridge Program has been granted full accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). The program received news of the accreditation

status last spring, announcing that, after a meticulous application and evaluation process, the program has been awarded full accreditation for seven years — the longest possible accreditation period for new programs.

ACOTE accreditation serves as a seal of approval for occupational therapy programs that satisfy educational requirements in the United States and its territories.

## Student Success



**Middle Georgia State University Nursing Graduates Exceed State and National NCLEX Pass Rates**—For a second consecutive year, MGA nursing programs have exceeded the National Council Licensure Examination's (NCLEX) state and national pass rate levels.

According to official 2024 NCLEX results, MGA's Associate of Science in Nursing

program has a 96% pass rate for first-time test takers, while the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program has a 100% pass rate. MGA nursing graduates' remarkable scores surpass most regional competitors and transcend both state and national averages.

MGA is one of eight bachelor programs in the state of Georgia with a 100% pass rate, with 136 total graduates becoming RNs. With 136 RNs passing their NCLEX in 2024, MGA is also ranked ninth out of 54 schools for the most new RNs in the state.

**IGNITE DeKalb Teacher Residency Program Graduates First Class from MGA**—Among the nearly 800 students who made up MGA's fall class of 2024 are about 40 members of the charter class of the IGNITE Teacher Residency Program, a grow-your-own classroom teachers initiative of the DeKalb County School District.

The school district chose to partner with MGA's School of Education & Behavioral Sciences, which offers an online Master of Arts in Teaching program. The district selected students who hold non-education bachelor's degrees to move through MGA's master's program together as a cohort. DeKalb covered tuition and provided each student with a living stipend. In exchange, the graduates commit to teaching in the DeKalb County School District for at least five years.



## Athletics

**MGA Athletics Partners with Bleckley County FAST Program**—MGA Athletics and the Bleckley County Family and Students Together (FAST) program announced a community service partnership for the 24-25 academic year. The partnership provides MGA athletes to act as mentors for primary and elementary school students.

*Continues on next page*



## Other



**MGA Hits Record-High Enrollment**—Middle Georgia State University hit a record-high enrollment in fall 2024, reaching 8,409 students, a 4.6 percent increase over fall 2024. Dr. Stephen Schultheis, MGA's vice president for Enrollment Management, cited major increases in the number of dual-enrollment and graduate-degree students, higher retention rates, and a greater number of students living in on-campus housing among the factors leading to record enrollment.

**MGA's Economic Impact Increases to \$296 Million**—According to a study released by the University System of Georgia, Middle Georgia State University contributed more than \$296 million to the economy in fiscal year 2023 – a nearly 3 percent increase over the previous year. Due to on- and off-campus spending during the same period, the University accounted for more than 2,700 jobs.



“Middle Georgia State University continues to be a driving force in our region's economic vitality,” said Christopher Blake, Ph.D, MGA's president. “The economic impact of our institution extends beyond our five campuses, fostering job creation and supporting employment through the spending of our students, faculty, and staff. MGA's impact on the economy is not the only benefit of our commitment to our core values of Stewardship, Engagement, Adaptability, and Learning, but it is a significant and important one that demonstrates the vital role the University plays in uplifting the communities we serve.”

**MGA Joins USG Institutions Offering Hurricane Recovery Support**—Hosting students from a sister university, serving as a staging area for vehicles used in relief efforts, and offering a place for community members to charge their tech devices are among the ways MGA campuses supported Georgia's Hurricane Helene recovery efforts.

MGA welcomed 32 Valdosta State University students and staff to its Macon Campus residence halls after heavy rains and massive winds hit the city of Valdosta. The University's Dublin Campus opened its library to members of the community without power who needed a place to charge their devices or just take a break in an air-conditioned environment. Students and instructors in the University's Aviation Maintenance Technology and Aviation Structural Technology programs donated cases of water, diapers, batteries, and non-perishable food items.



In addition to those support efforts, a portion of the MGA Macon Campus's parking lots served as a Logistics Staging Area for vehicles and equipment of the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency.

**MGA & Macon-Bibb Reopen Reconstructed Macon Downtown Airport Runway**—Last November, Macon-Bibb County and MGA held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the newly reconstructed Runway 10-28 at the Macon Downtown Airport. Construction on the project began in January of 2024, made possible by a \$5.7 million grant from the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration.



Mayor Lester Miller hopes the reconstruction will “attract more people” and help MGA School of Aviation students better utilize the airport to reach “new heights” in their academic journey.

**Cochran Satellite Airport**—MGA and the city of Cochran hosted a formal opening of a new satellite building at the Cochran Airport. The building will support flight education and training for the University's Eastman-based School of Aviation.

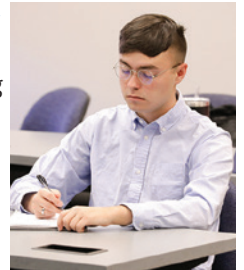


This is a shared project among MGA, Cochran, and Bleckley County. The \$70,000 project reflects the strong collaboration between the community and the University, supporting MGA's aviation program and fostering educational growth.

## MGA's Writing Center Earns CARE Certification

The MGA Writing Center has earned a Center Acknowledgment and Recognition of Excellence (CARE) certification from the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA). MGA is one of only three college/university writing centers in Georgia to have earned the certification.

The CARE program certifies writing centers that are committed to literacy, learning, and writing. The program establishes professional criteria relevant to diverse local contexts, providing writing centers the opportunity to articulate their unique stories and celebrate their accomplishments. ●





# Leading the Charge for MGA Athletics Expansion

BY CAMBRI STEADMAN

➤ To the casual fan, a sporting event begins the moment they set foot into the arena or set their sights onto the playing field. For administrators and staff, the behind-the-scenes efforts begin long before the thrilling cheers of fans fill the stands.

As excitement continues to build around Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) athletics program's transition into the Division II level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), much work is taking place to ensure the Knights are ready for action this fall.

Completing the current day-to-day operations while transitioning into a new collegiate sanctioning agency are no small task, but MGA Athletics personnel is up for the challenge because the future of the program is worth it.

In a follow-up conversation with *MGA Today*, Athletics Director Michael Brown, provides insight into the progress the program has made to facilitate a smooth transition into the NCAA and what the transition means for MGA Athletics.

***What steps has MGA Athletics taken leading up to the February 2025 application submission to transition to NCAA DII? What are some of the future steps the program will take while it awaits the NCAA's provisional membership vote in July?***

"The past six months the University has undertaken a great amount of prep work associated with building out procedures manuals and handbooks associated with the transition of our intercollegiate athletics affiliation from the NAIA to NCAA Division II. We have also established several committees that are to serve as part of the governance structure needed to make the transition. The NCAA Division II membership application also requires a great deal of documentation and institutional information to be shared as part of the application process which has required many departments across the institution to assist in this process. The next few months will continue to see our strategic plan play out in terms of goals and objectives while preparing for the NCAA to send a third-party vendor visit to campus to view our facilities and operations as part of the membership application."

***When undergoing a sanctioning agency transition, what are some of the costs associated with the transition and how do those costs affect the athletics budget?***

"Our University's strategic plan is clear when it comes to our intercollegiate athletics program. It simply states: to compete and win at the NCAA Division II level. A big part of preparing our institution for a change in competition level is making sure we are prepared financially for this type of commitment.

This started with a proposal to the University System of Georgia (USG) that included a full financial breakdown of how the University was going to embrace the financial challenges. A significant portion of the funds needed to make the athletic affiliation transition were to be completed through fundraising efforts of the University Foundation. Expenses such as application fees to the NCAA, Peach Belt Conference, as well as an exit fee from the Southern States Athletic Conference (SSAC), are all funded by the MGA Foundation and their commitment to help serve student-athletes for the next generation."

***What are MGA Athletics' plans to re-establish the Knights Athletic Association?***

"The re-establishment of the Knights Athletics Association (KAA) is a critical component of the growth needed by our Athletic Department to make the successful transition to NCAA Division II and to thrive with our new level of competition. The first step in this process was the hire of a staff member to lead these efforts which was completed last fall in the hire of Bobby Kummer, our new Development Officer for Athletic Initiatives. His leadership thus far has been instrumental in establishing plans to re-launch the KAA with the growth of corporate partnerships, individual donors, annual giving, and naming opportunities for athletic facilities. We look forward to continuing to roll out ways for businesses and individuals to show their support of the Knights."

*Continues on next page*

Director of Athletics  
Michael Brown



MIDDLE GEORGIA

KNIGHTS BASEBALL



### ***What will be the local/regional impact on recruitment with the program switching to NCAA Division II?***

"The brand awareness of the NCAA on a global scale will certainly make our athletics brand more visible amongst our local and regional community. Our acceptance into the Peach Belt Conference will also allow us to regularly compete against institutions that are more similarly aligned both in and outside the USG. The ability to create regional rivalries with institutions that are throughout the state and within a reasonable driving distance will hopefully allow alumni and families of current student-athletes to show their support more regularly by attending our games both at home and on the road. Having a footprint in other communities in Georgia will also positively impact recruiting by opening up new opportunities for our institution to be seen on a regular basis."

MGA Today was also able to hear from Bobby Kummer, MGA's new development officer for athletic initiatives. With over 28 years of experience at the collegiate level, Kummer comes to MGA from Mercer University and is charged with leading the fundraising efforts for MGA Athletics.

### ***What is the importance of donor/community financial support for collegiate athletics?***

"As we all know, the more resources you have available to you in life, the better situation you put yourself in. College athletics is no different. I think everyone sees this on the Division I level with Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) and the Transfer Portal. Recruiting at the DI level has changed greatly in the last 3 years. You will not be able to recruit the best players if you don't have financial resources. I am excited to be at MGA because we focus on providing educational opportunities that will help change the course of a person's life. We are not funding a collective for pay-to-play. Instead, we are raising scholarship dollars to help cover the cost of a college education. At our level, we need assistance in continuing to

increase our scholarship dollars. By maximizing our scholarships, we will be able to attract the best talent for our teams and put our University in a position to compete against our Peach Belt opponents equally."

### ***Why is it essential for MGA Athletics to increase donor/community support as it transitions to NCAA Division II?***

"It is a very exciting time to be at Middle Georgia State. Our campuses are continuing to grow, and our student attendance has increased every year. MGA is helping us change the future of Middle Georgia and the investment in our student-athletes will only continue to help our community. 80% of our graduates stay within a 100-mile radius of the Macon area. We are the footprint of our community's future."

### ***How can your previous experience with collegiate athletics help reinvigorate the Knights Athletic Association?***

"My background has been heavily involved with college athletics. I was a former Division I athlete and played college basketball. After I graduated from college, I spent 28 years on the sideline as a Division I assistant basketball coach. College athletics has been a massive part of my life, and I have been able to personally see how it can help change the future for so many different people from all walks of life. At MGA we offer 10 varsity sports, we compete on both the Cochran and Macon campuses, and as we elevate our University's athletic program to NCAA DII status, athletic scholarships are more critical than ever. This transition enhances our University's reputation and creates opportunities to attract exceptional student-athletes who will thrive both on the field and in the classroom."

### ***In what ways is donor recruitment similar to recruiting student-athletes?***

"This is one of the main reasons I took the job at MGA. I am a relationship person. I loved recruiting and getting to know different people, their stories and what motivates them. To me recruiting really means building a relationship and sharing a passion for what you believe. Building a portfolio is more than just asking for money. I want to surround myself with people who are passionate about our students, our alumni, and the Middle Georgia community. MGA's 5 campuses offer so much for our communities' growth and development, and I look forward to working with our supporters to continue to help Middle Georgia State University grow and flourish."

With the program's application for provisional membership submitted in early February 2025, the NCAA will vote in July 2025 to determine the Knights' provisional membership to begin play in fall 2025. For a three-year provisional period, the Knights will participate in the Peach Belt Conference alongside Augusta University, Clayton State University, Columbus State University, Flagler College (Florida), Georgia College & State University, Georgia Southwestern University, Lander University (South Carolina), [the] University of North Georgia, [the] University of South Carolina Aiken, and [the] University of South Carolina Beaufort.


The Knights are excited to join the more than 300 NCAA DII institutions nationwide, and 16 Division II collegiate members in Georgia for their first provisional year of NCAA membership. ●

Development Officer  
Bobby Kummer



*Middle Georgia State University has made tremendous upgrades to its athletic facilities over the past year, including renovations to Stuckey Field on the Cochran Campus. The program also added LED lights at the tennis complex on the Macon Campus, with financial support from Macon-Bibb County.*



A photograph of Matthew Stepka, a man with long brown hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue button-down shirt and dark trousers. He is standing on a stage, smiling, with his hands in his pockets. Behind him is a large American flag on a stand. To the left, a person's head and shoulders are visible in the foreground, looking towards the speaker. The background wall is a light color with some framed text or artwork.

# MGA's Jennings Family Distinguished Lecture Series Off to GREAT START

BY SHERON SMITH

*Matthew Stepka, a former Google vice president and founder and managing partner of Machina Ventures, an early-stage investment fund focused on enlightened AI that amplifies our humanity, was the first Jennings Family Distinguished Lecture Series speaker on September 11, 2024, drawing 150 people. During his visit, Stepka also had conversations with MGA students majoring in information technology.*

A notable figure in the technology and venture capital industries ushered in Middle Georgia State University's (MGA's) new Jennings Family Distinguished Lecture Series last fall when he shared his thoughts on how artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming education and the human experience.

The lecture by Matthew Stepka, a former Google vice president and founder and managing partner of Machina Ventures, drew about 150 community members to Middle Georgia State's Macon Campus in September 2024. Prior to his talk, Stepka visited with and answered questions from about 30 students majoring in information technology.

"We're pleased with the inaugural lecture and have many ideas for helping the series become an increasingly important annual event," said Dr. Rod McRae, MGA's associate provost for Academic Success and chair of the lecture series planning committee. "We've been working to identify a few good options for potential topics and speakers for this year's lecture and will announce something soon."

MGA, with the generous support of Genelle B. Jennings and her family, announced the creation of the Jennings Family Distinguished Lecture Series last summer. The lecture series is planned to be an annual event that will bring high-profile experts to MGA to discuss critical issues in science, technology, politics, industry, and culture prevalent in the nation and region. *"We are thrilled and honored to establish this distinguished lecture series to encourage dialogue on vital topics of our time,"* said MGA President Christopher Blake, Ph.D.

An attorney who has long supported higher education in Georgia, Genelle B. Jennings has been instrumental in shaping the concept of and providing funding for the Jennings Family Distinguished Lecture Series, established to contribute to a deeper and more focused understanding of important science, business, civic, and cultural issues of the day. The lecture series is funded through a charitable trust named for her late husband, W. Mansfield Jennings, Jr., a businessman who served on the University System of Georgia's Board of Regents.

Originally from Terrell County, Ga., Genelle B. Jennings attended Agnes Scott College and Emory Law School. After her marriage, she and her husband settled in Hawkinsville, where she established her law practice and helped raise their two children. She has served on the board of Central Georgia Technical College and currently serves on the boards of Mercer University and the McDuffie Center for Strings.

"Helping higher education in Georgia to flourish was one of Mansfield Jennings's top priorities and it remains so today with Genelle Jennings," Blake said. "We are grateful to her and her family for trusting MGA to establish a high-quality lecture series that will bring notable leaders of various professions to our campuses to discuss some of the pivotal topics of our time." ●

## The Jennings Family

DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES





## Phil J. and Alice S. Sheridan Foundation Commits \$450,000 to Enhance MGA Foundation Funds to Help Students with Emergency Financial Needs

BY SHERON SMITH

As Alejandro Avila tells it, he and his wife weren't exactly broke as he transitioned from his Air Force service to becoming a full-time student at Middle Georgia State University (MGA) – but things were a little tight.

"We were above water, but barely," said the 26-year-old senior nursing major, who takes most of his classes at the Warner Robins Campus. "My wife was transitioning to full-time work, and I was transitioning to being a student and no longer getting that paycheck twice a month from the Air Force."

Thanks to a grant from special funds managed through the Middle Georgia State University Foundation, Avila and his family successfully navigated that gap so he could pursue his dream of becoming a registered nurse.

"It was an incredibly huge help," he said. "Buying books and your (clinical) uniforms can get expensive in the nursing program, so every little bit made a difference."

University students, including many at MGA, are sometimes just one job transition, medical bill, car repair, or unexpected caregiving duties away from having to drop out of school – often never to return. For those students, the opportunity to get a little extra financial assistance can make all the difference.

Thanks to the generosity of the trustees of the Macon-based Phil J. and Alice S. Sheridan Foundation, Middle Georgia State (MGA) is now in an even stronger position to help students in those or similar situations. The Sheridan Foundation recently committed \$450,000 over three years to help MGA students with emergency funding needs that could disrupt their ability to complete their degrees.

Chris Sheridan, president of the Sheridan Foundation, and the MGA Foundation, a philanthropic entity that raises and manages donations to support the University's mission and goals, announced the gift in late summer 2024.

A core value of MGA is stewardship, which means directing support and resources to student need and financial literacy. Many MGA students have documented financial need. More than 70 percent receive some form of financial assistance.

The funds administered through the MGA Foundation have varying criteria. The Sheridan Foundation gift specifically helps students who meet certain qualifications and are otherwise in good standing at the University but face financial emergencies that could jeopardize their continued enrollment.

The MGA Foundation maintains several programs to help qualified students. They include the Student Emergency Access to Learning fund, the GAP Funding program, and the Knights Retention fund. Much of the Sheridan Foundation gift will be distributed through these funds or others.

While working on his Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Avila tutors part-time at the Student Success Center on the Warner Robins Campus. He is on track to graduate in December 2025 and looks forward to a new career that he feels confident is his calling.

"I'm very excited about it," he said. "Nursing is a science, but it's also an art. You have to know how to talk to people, how to treat people when they are in a vulnerable place. I know I will be good at that." ●

*For more information about the MGA Foundation's emergency funds to help students, call 478-471-2732 or email [development@mga.edu](mailto:development@mga.edu).*



# 3 Questions *with* Stephanie Folsom

Middle Georgia State University (MGA) Foundation Trustee

➤ Stephanie Folsom was born in Georgia and raised in Macon. Folsom graduated from the College of Charleston, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Art in Corporate Communication. While at college, she pledged Tri Delta and was a member of the school's equestrian team. She began her career in 1999 in commercial real estate with Coldwell Banker Commercial Eberhardt & Berry, Inc. and became a partner within the firm in 2004. Her career includes selling, leasing, and managing commercial real estate throughout the Middle Georgia region. She earned her Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation in 2003 and has repeatedly ranked in the Top 2% of agents nationally for Coldwell Banker Commercial, with her most recent ranking in 2024. Folsom and her husband, Miki, are celebrating their 18th wedding anniversary this year, and they enjoy traveling and spending time with their two grandchildren.

## *What is your motivation for giving and being involved in philanthropy?*

"My motivation to serve comes from a basic love of people. Helping others is a way to honor those who have helped me along my journey. Life is like a team sport; you can't do it all on your own. Helping others allows all of us to achieve a higher sense of purpose and self-worth. It is also a way for me to set an example for the younger generation — that making time to help others is important and should be prioritized."

## *How did you become involved with MGA?*

"I became involved through the Rotary Club of Macon. MGA President Christopher Blake and I serve together as Rotarians. He asked if I would be interested in serving as a Trustee, and the rest is history. With a deep love for Macon, and also as a local business owner, it is only natural to want to support and help MGA, which does such an excellent job providing our community with the workforce leaders of tomorrow."

## *What excites you most about the future of MGA?*

"MGA is being led by a dynamic group of leaders who have a passion to see the school succeed and grow. To be a part of that team is exciting. As a Trustee, I am serving on the athletics board with a focus on the equestrian team. Growing up with a love of horses and competing in college, naturally my passion is aimed at growing this club sport." ■







# All-State ELECTRICAL

## Alumni Profile

Jacob Patton, CEO

BY RICK DEVENS

➤ At 22 years old, Jacob Patton founded All-State Electrical, learning many lessons “the hard way” along the way. Today, as CEO of the company, he oversees operations in both Macon and Norcross, leading a dedicated team focused on making a positive impact in their communities. Growing up in South Macon, Jacob was familiar with the electrical trade thanks to his father, which sparked his interest in pursuing a career in the industry. After graduating from Bibb County schools, he chose to attend Middle Georgia State University (then Macon State College), drawn by its strong reputation, affordability, and proximity to home, as he wasn’t ready to leave the area just yet. Later, he transferred to Georgia Tech to earn his degree in electrical engineering, but it was his time at Middle Georgia State University (MGA) that helped lay the foundation for his future success.

*What were your most memorable experiences as a student at Middle Georgia State University?*

“Being involved in the theater program and the extracurricular activities, I met so many amazing people. I met a lot of people that I never would have met just from attending classes. Being in that program was pretty special for me. I still have some great friends from it.”

*What inspired you to start All-State Electrical?*

“How do you inspire a 22-year-old? I learned pretty early on that I wanted to be self-employed. I didn’t want to go work in a big corporate world or sit behind a desk. I wanted that adventure, wanted everything to be my fault, for better or worse.”

*How did Middle Georgia State University help shape your journey?*

“Middle Georgia State taught me a lot. It taught me how to learn. You know, it’s really a big change going from high school to college, but Middle Georgia State – one of the things that I think was really special about it, being a smaller university compared to going off somewhere – was that I was really connected to the professors. It was more of an open-door policy where you could go and see your professors. It gave me the opportunity to be really engaged and learn to ask people for help when I needed help.”

*What does it mean to you to be part of the Middle Georgia State University alumni community?*

“I get to drive past the University every day. It has a lot of connections, brings back a lot of good memories. We always attend the galas





and some of the different events and fundraisers. It gives me the opportunity to share my experience at Middle Georgia State with other people in the community. Like, 'Hey, this was an awesome thing, and it did have a very positive impact on my life.'"

***Why do you stay involved with MGA?***

"I think the University has done a great job being connected with Macon-Bibb and having a University this connected to the local community through more engagement and different organizations helps Macon as a whole. You know, it helps with getting to know people. It helps drive the economy. So, there are a lot of really positive things that come from supporting the University."

***What advice would you give to your younger self as a student at MGA?***

"Be engaged. I think you can ask anybody on my team – one of the things I talk about every day is that the most important things we have in life are relationships. And I still cherish some of the relationships that I have from Middle Georgia State. So, I would encourage someone – day one – get engaged. Don't just go to class and leave. Get to know the professors. Get to know the faculty. Get to know the other students. Those can be lifelong relationships that can help you in a big way for the next 30, 40, 50 years. It doesn't just have to be a college experience."

***How do you envision the future of Middle Georgia State University and its role in shaping future leaders?***

"In our organization, we have multiple team members who are graduates of Middle Georgia State University. One is already on our leadership team. There are a couple more that are up and coming. I think Middle Georgia State does a great job of helping to provide for the needs employers have in Middle Georgia and to take companies to the next level. We personally use it as a resource for finding awesome, talented people right here at home. You don't necessarily have to go recruit from a university in another state or down the road because ***we're doing great things right here.***" •



# Knight IN THE Vineyard

The 2024 President's Gala and Silent Auction was a sold-out event with more than 250 attendees joining us for an evening of generosity and celebration. More than \$157,000 was raised to support Middle Georgia State University and will fund scholarships, academic programs, student engagement opportunities, and other initiatives that support the University's mission.



**Year In  
Review**



scholarships awarded  
for 2024-2025

**\$496,836**

in scholarships awarded  
for 2024-2025

Scholarship support over 10 years



**\$3.75M**





## Distinguished Award Winners

At the 2024 President's Gala, hosted by the Middle Georgia State University (MGA) Foundation, two incredible leaders were presented with awards for not only their impact on Middle Georgia State University, but on the entirety of the Middle Georgia region.

Karen Lambert was presented with the 2024 Legacy of Leadership award, which honors the recipient's service to the University and the Foundation. A Macon native and leader within our region, she has served with numerous civic, professional, and cultural organizations during her decades-long career. While under Lambert's leadership, the Peyton Anderson Foundation has supported MGA in many generous ways, including funding the University's Peyton Anderson Enrollment Center and the Center for Middle Georgia Studies.

The Outstanding Alumnus Award, granted to a distinguished graduate of MGA whose achievements and honors in the community and region reach above and beyond, was awarded to Sigismund (Siggy) Tetteh, '08. A local leader in information technology (IT), he serves as a member of Houston Healthcare's executive leadership team and provides oversight and management of the health system's IT areas. He also remains involved with MGA as a member of the IT advisory board.



# Save <sup>THE</sup> date!

Join us **Oct. 17, 2025** for the  
**2025 President's Gala  
& Silent Auction**

[mga.edu/gala](https://mga.edu/gala)


University support over 10 years

 **\$10.6M**

Combined Scholarship and University Support over 10 years

 +  = **\$14.3M**

Percentage of alumni  
living within a  
100-mile radius of  
Middle Georgia  
**72%**







## Middle Georgia State University

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\*Exciting trips to Portugal  
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**MGA ALUMNI & FRIENDS**  
TRAVEL PROGRAM

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