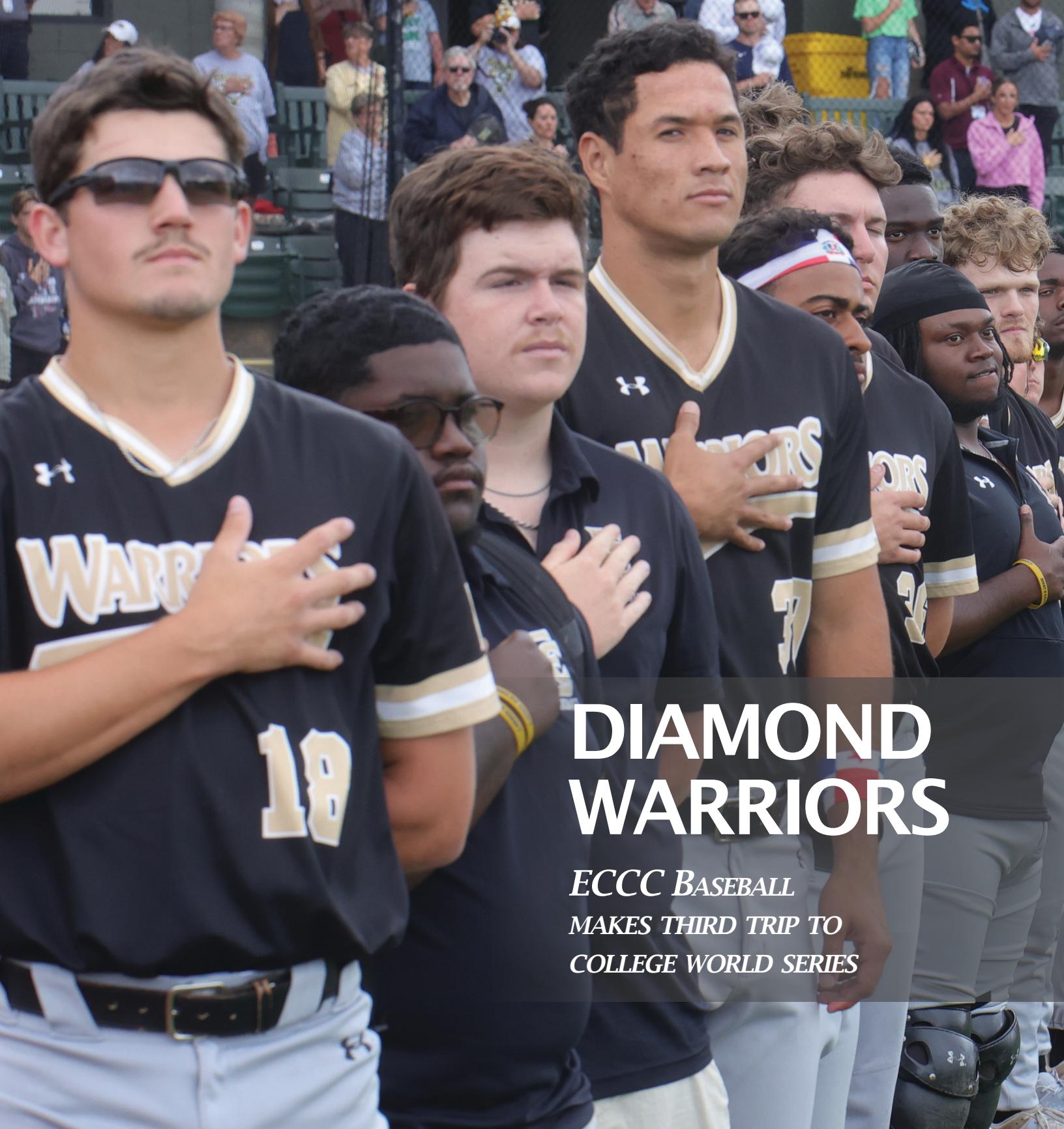




THE WARRIOR

The Official Publication of the East Central Community College Alumni Association
Volume XXXIII, No. 1 • December 2024



DIAMOND WARRIORS

ECCC BASEBALL
MAKES THIRD TRIP TO
COLLEGE WORLD SERIES

A Message From the President

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Every day, as I walk across our campus, I'm reminded of the incredible foundation that was laid long before many of us arrived. It's in the original buildings, the stories of beloved faculty, and the lives changed by access to education right here in our community. Those who came before us—educators, donors, community leaders, and students—had the foresight to plant something meaningful. They believed in the power of learning and the importance of opportunity, and they laid a foundation that has stood the test of time.

But as any builder will tell you, a foundation, no matter how strong, is only the beginning.

Left untouched, even the most carefully laid foundation will eventually be weathered by time and the elements. It's true purpose is not to stand alone, but to support something greater. And so, the question becomes: What will we build upon what they started?

Here at East Central Community College, we're building boldly—and thanks to many of you, our recent capital campaign has met its initial goal. That's something to celebrate. But even as we mark that milestone, we know the work is far from finished. We continue to identify meaningful projects—both large and small—that will shape the future of our students and our community. With recent reductions in state funding, private support is more critical than ever. Your generosity helps us move forward in ways that simply would not be possible otherwise.

In this issue, you'll find exciting updates on several capital projects that are already underway—and many that have been completed. These are the visible signs of progress. But the heartbeat of this college is our people and programs. That's why we continue to welcome support in areas that matter most to you—whether it's academics, athletics, fine arts, workforce programs, scholarships, or student life. Your gift can reflect your passions and create lasting impact exactly where it moves you.

Thank you for being part of this story. For helping us honor the past, meet the moment, and build for the future. Together, we are proving that a foundation isn't the finish line—it's just the beginning.

With deep appreciation,



Dr. Brent Gregory
President



With You In Mind

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On the Cover: The ECCC Diamond Warriors earned their third trip to the NJCAA World Series in as many years and finished the season in third place for the second consecutive time. More information on this historic season can be found on page 25.

The Warrior is printed two times annually and is distributed to alumni of East Central Community College and other friends of the college.

Editorial staff members include:
Lucas Calvert, Stacey Hollingsworth,
Maria McLeod, Karen Robertson
& Amy Thompson

ACCREDITATION
East Central Community College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award the Associate Degree. Questions about the accreditation of East Central Community College may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).

NON-DISCRIMINATION
East Central Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or qualified disability in its educational programs and activities, employment practices, or admissions processes. The following offices have been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies of East Central Community College: Inquiries regarding compliance with Title VI and ADEA are coordinated by the Executive Vice President, Walter Arno Vincent Administration Building, Post Office Box 129, Decatur, MS 39327, Phone: 601-635-6323, Fax: 601-635-4011, Email: compliance@eccc.edu.

Inquiries regarding compliance with Title IX and Section 504 are coordinated by the Vice President of Student Services, Eddie M. Smith Student Union Building, Post Office Box 129, Decatur, MS 39327, Phone: 601-635-6267, Fax: 601-635-4067, Email: compliance@eccc.edu.

Inquiries regarding compliance with ADA are coordinated by the Director of Student Success, Eddie M. Smith Student Union Building, Post Office Box 129, Decatur, MS 39327, Phone: 601-635-6228, Fax: 601-635-2150, Email: compliance@eccc.edu.



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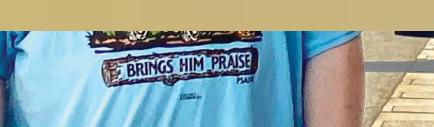
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Find us on LinkedIn at
East Central Community College.



Ben's Call

FAITH, FAMILY, AND A FUTURE BEHIND THE MIC

Born with cerebral palsy and autism, Ben Land doesn't have the fine motor skills to play the sports he loves – but that hasn't slowed him down.

"Everything in my life has a significant degree of difficulty attached to it," Ben said. "It is difficult for me to comb my hair, button my shirt, and hold a fork. I cannot tie my shoes, and unspoken social situations are confusing to me. However, when I go to a ballgame or turn the volume down and call a game that is on our television, I feel like I completely belong."

With an almost photographic memory, and a deep passion for athletics, the East Central Community College sophomore is forging a path towards a career in sports broadcasting – showing that different abilities can lead to exceptional achievements.

"I knew I would never be able to physically play sports," he said. "But due to my neurological diversity, I can see the games in my mind and remember statistics like they're photographs."

That special gift led Ben to launch "The Yellowjacket Buzz," a podcast now in its third year on the Union High School website. In his podcast, Ben covers every sport at UHS from football and powerlifting to band and cheer – encouraging athletes and coaches and celebrating their hard work.

Deanna Rush, UHS academic counselor, remembers when Ben enrolled at the high school following years of home-schooling.

"In a matter of days, Ben became the most popular kid on campus," Rush said. "Everyone embraced him and his very warm and fun personality. I think he knew every student's name, every athlete's stats, and every teacher's favorite college sports team. Ben truly had great support from his peers who always cheered him on or supported him in any way they could. They did this because Ben did that for them; in his time at UHS, Ben truly was everyone's biggest cheerleader."

Thriving at East Central

Since arriving at East Central in fall 2024, Ben has embraced college life – and the campus community has embraced him right back. He's formed friendships with Warrior athletes, been inducted into Phi Theta Kappa honor society, and found numerous ways to get involved.

"I enjoy participating in service projects," he said. "I like to help people. Throughout my life, the Lord has blessed me with people who were willing and wanted to help me. I want to serve the Lord and pay that kindness forward."

He has helped PTK raise money for a special needs prom and has attended as many EC sporting events as possible. He studies in the Success Center and to help with his mobility issues works with a student sports trainer on campus.

"I am enjoying my experiences at ECCC. I like the family atmosphere that is evident on campus. Everyone at ECCC is supportive, encouraging and interested in the students' success."

Rooted in Faith and Family

Ben's journey would not be possible without the constant support of his mother, Kathy, and his "Granna," who have dedicated their lives to helping him succeed. His mother and late father, Tim, adopted Ben when he was just over a year old. Kathy at-

tends his college classes to take notes for him when needed, while Granna helps prepare study materials and ensures he keeps up with assignments.

"My mother is my inspiration," Ben said. "She's patient, kind, encouraging, always praying for me — and she loves sports. How great is that? She and Daddy adopted me when I was 15 months old. I could not speak, sit up or eat. Daddy died when I was five. Mother had no siblings, no uncles, aunts, or cousins. She prayed that the Lord would send someone to help her determine how to give me the best opportunities for my future. Mother told me she knew how to love me, but she needed help with everything else. The Lord sent the matriarch of a family in our church, and she became my Granna. She didn't have to love me — but she chose to."

His mother, reflecting on their journey together, said, "As Ben's Mother there have been so many experiences that have taken my breath away. One experience that I hope I never forget was the day Ben came into the den of our home and said, 'Mama, what's the matter?' I told him I had experienced a bad day. Ben looked at me with a puzzled expression and said, 'Mama, what is a bad day? I have never had one of those.' Ben sees every day as a gift and every person he meets as a blessing. I can never find enough words to express what a gift Ben is to my life. I am blessed beyond measure to be given the gift to become his mother."

Like any parent, Kathy says she just wants to see Ben happy with his life. "He enjoys college and is learning so much about participating in social situations. Ben's biggest challenges are his mobility and keeping up with his time schedule. My biggest challenge is letting go."

Mentors Who Make a Difference

Kathy said elementary school came with challenges and by middle school, she thought it best to homeschool. Although she is now retired, Kathy was still working at the time, so she reached out to East Central for support.

"I was still teaching and could not be at home. Ben's Granna was teaching him, but we needed help. So, Phi Theta Kappa assisted me and provided three education majors to work with Ben five days a week on academic and social learning. In return, these students received credit for service hours while they assisted Ben. They were instrumental in helping Ben be where he is today."

One of those tutors, Rachel Laird (now Harris), would later become his English Composition teacher at East Central. Harris remembers their early days together — practicing conversations, learning social cues, and starting his sports blog.

Harris said, "In the beginning, a lot of what we did together was just life: doing things like practicing holding conversations, maintaining eye contact, and being tactful about personal space. Because we were homeschooling at the time, we incorporated both academic and social learning into living daily life. We did follow an online curriculum for part of the day, but we also practiced skills like cooking, cleaning, and running errands.

While encouraging him to improve his writing skills, Harris helped Ben start his sports blog where he wrote about games he had watched that week. She said what started as posts for her and his grandmother quickly expanded to his church family and the community and would eventually lead to a position writing sports for The Neshoba Democrat, a local newspaper.

"The day that his sports blog gained him an interview on a statewide level was such a surreal moment and seeing him now getting ready to head to MSU to major in Sports Communica-



tion and Broadcasting brings me awe as I remember where we started."

At East Central, Land has also found a mentor in ECCC history instructor Madison Price, whom he said is one of his favorite teachers.

"He has a great sense of humor," Land said. "We often talk about sports after class. He is very calm, easygoing, helpful and encouraging."

Dr. Amanda Walton, ECCC's ADA coordinator, has also become a close ally. "Ben is my buddy," she said. "He's an amazing person — intelligent, kind and incredibly passionate about sports. He'll be a phenomenal broadcaster."

Walton recalled a friendly rivalry over college sports and how Ben checks in every Monday to discuss the latest games. "I'm not looking forward to the day he leaves EC," she said. "He's one of a kind."

Looking Ahead

Ben plans to graduate from East Central in spring 2026 and transfer to Mississippi State University to pursue a degree in communications with a focus on sports broadcasting. His dream is to one day work for the SEC Network and be involved in the sports information department at MSU.

Kathy said, "We are already setting up campus visits. The professors at the TK Martin Center at MSU have been very helpful in the past, and so we plan to lean on them as well. Dr. (Chelsey) Vincent at EC has also been very helpful in planning Ben's future at MSU."

Encouragement for Others

Ben said he is grateful to the Lord for bringing him to ECCC where he has had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people and he offers this heartfelt advice to others with disabilities: "Don't be afraid to ask for help. People can't read your mind. At EC, people will help in any way they can. I am treated with respect and my difficulties do not define my level of success. Every student who comes to EC will be valued and appreciated for the unique individual they are."

Kathy echoes Ben's sentiment and said everyone at EC has been instrumental in helping Ben build confidence apart from her and have been supportive and respectful of Ben's abilities

-LAND continued on page 9

ALUMNI NEWS



WANTED

Help us find today's most wanted alumni.

Collegians

Charge:
Rockin' & Rollin'
For Decades

Last Seen:
Multiple Sightings including
Huff Auditorium
Vickers Fine Arts
Founders Pavilion at The Fair
Cruise Ships
& Various Theme Parks

Academic Hall of Fame Inductees

Charge:
High GPAs, Involvement
in Numerous Activities,
School Spirit

Last Seen: Huff Auditorium
on Awards Day

Class of 1975

Charge:
50 Years of Warrior Pride,
Power, & Partying

Last Seen: Rocking bell
bottoms
and school spirit

50 Year Club

Charge:
Half a Century (and more!)
of Loyalty, Wisdom
& School Spirit

Last Seen: More than 50
Years Ago they attended EC
and some have never
been heard from again.

(This is everyone who
graduated before 1975.)

REWARD: A wildly fun Homecoming full of throwback stories, rock 'n roll glory, and a little bit of "Wait... that happened?!"

Seriously though...We're on the hunt for members of these legendary ECCC groups! They'll be honored and reunited during Homecoming on Thursday, Sept. 25 — and we want to make sure they're in the loop.

Know someone? Tag 'em, text 'em, or just tell 'em:

👉 It's time to update their info so they don't miss out:

www.eccc.edu/alumni-news or contact mmcleod@eccc.edu.

ROCK 'N ROLL
with Black and **Gold!** **HOMECOMING**
SEPT. 25, 2025

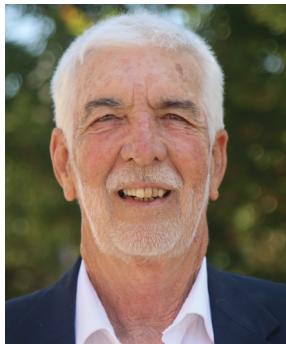


EAST CENTRAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

More information, as it becomes available
can be found at eccc.edu/homecoming

2025 Homecoming

EC ANNOUNCES ALUMNI HONOREES AND SPECIAL REUNION GROUPS



**LARRY
BLACKBURN '72**
Alumnus of the Year



**ESTHER
BAILEY SMITH '77**
Alumna of the Year



**JAKE
YARBOROUGH '92**
Athletic Hall of Fame



**SHANNON
COOLEY '94**
Athletic Hall of Fame

East Central Community College will recognize four outstanding alumni during the 2025 Homecoming celebration which begins at 3 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 25 in Brackeen-Wood Gymnasium on the Decatur campus.

• Larry Blackburn ('72) of Decatur is this year's Alumnus of the Year. A former student, instructor, and workforce director at ECCC, Blackburn is known for his servant leadership, musical talents, and decades of service on campus and in missions at home and abroad.

• Dr. Esther Bailey Smith ('77) of Decatur is the 2025 Alumna of the Year. A trailblazer in the telecommunications industry, Smith helped lead her family's company into the digital and fiber era while continuing her family's legacy of generosity and support for East Central and the community.

• Jake Yarborough ('92), former standout player and head coach, will be inducted into the ECCC Athletic Hall of Fame. He led the Warrior baseball team to its first NJCAA Region 23 Championship in 2005 and spent decades coaching high school baseball in Mississippi.

• Shannon Cooley ('94), a dominant JUCO and Division I baseball player and longtime Army National Guard member, will also be inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame. Cooley's journey from EC dugouts to military duty exemplifies grit, growth, and gratitude.

In addition to these honorees, ECCC will also recognize:

• All former members of the college's rock-and-roll band, The Collegians

• The Class of 1975-Golden Anniversary Recognition

• Members of the Academic Hall of Fame

• And the 50-Year Club, which includes all alumni who graduated 50 or more years ago.

Mark your calendar and join us for an evening of celebration, memories, and Warrior pride!

For more information or to update your contact information, contact Maria McLeod, director of alumni relations, at 601-635-6303 or call toll-free 877-462-3222, ext. 303. Her email address is mmcleod@eccc.edu.

“Rock & Roll with Black & Gold” 2025 Tentative Homecoming Schedule

12:00 p.m. Pep Rally featuring the Wall O' Sound Band, Cheerleaders, Centralettes, and the Warrior Football Team - East Mall near Mabry Cafeteria

1:00 p.m. Tailgating Area Opens - South End Zone of Bailey Stadium
(Tailgating spots are available in the South End Zone area each home game on a first come, first served basis. No alcoholic beverages or tobacco products (including vapes) are allowed on campus, in the stadium, or within tailgating areas. Fans are welcome to bring their own food and drinks, but no outside food or drinks can be brought into the stadium after 30 minutes before kickoff. All tailgaters must purchase a game ticket to enter the stadium and participate in the tailgating experience. No vehicles/ATVs/golf carts will be allowed inside the stadium. Fans are welcome to drop off tailgating supplies at the gate for setup.)

3:00 p.m. Reception hosted by the ECCC Alumni Association - Brackeen-Wood Gymnasium
(Free and open to all alumni and friends of the college)
Reunion Groups Meet - Brackeen Wood Gymnasium

3:30 p.m. Recognition of Alumni Honorees and Re Groups - Brackeen-Wood Gymnasium

6:30 p.m. ECCC vs. Hinds Football Game - Bailey Stadium
(The Homecoming Queen and her court will be presented during halftime followed by the Wall O' Sound Marching Band which will present its halftime show.)

ALUMNI NEWS



Warrior Golf Classic

RECORD TURNOUT HIGHLIGHTS 2025 SCRABBLE

A record 29 teams teed off at the 22nd annual Warrior Golf Classic, held Friday, May 9, on the Oaks Course at Dancing Rabbit Golf Club, with proceeds benefiting student scholarships and alumni programs at East Central Community College.

The four-person scramble tournament, hosted by the ECCC Alumni Association, marked its largest participation in event history.

"This tournament continues to be a success each year thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and all those who play," said Maria McLeod, ECCC director

of alumni relations and event coordinator. "We are grateful for their support, which helps us provide much-needed scholarships to our students."

The team of Josh Sanders, Lake Thoms, Jody Blount and Jason Mangum claimed the Championship Flight with a 22-under-par round of 50 over 18 holes.

In the First Flight, the Ochsner Rush team of Jackson Therrian, Derrick Jones, Patrick Ross and Donovan Cooksey earned top honors with a 14-under 58.

The Trane team — Thomas Blake, Ethan Paschal, Dylan Shields and Mat-

thew Perry — took the Second Flight with a 10-under 62.

On-course contest winners included Jason Mangum (closest to the pin, front nine), Robert Ammon (closest to the pin, back nine), Joe Rush (longest drive, front nine) and Jody Blount (longest drive, back nine).

Dozens of other participants took home door prizes, which included a variety of golf equipment and accessories.

For more information about the Warrior Golf Classic, contact McLeod at 601-635-6303 or mmcledo@eccc.edu.

Platinum Sponsors

SPONSORS FOR THE 2025 EVENT INCLUDED:

- The Citizens Bank of Philadelphia
- PATH Company, LLC

Food Sponsor

- First South Farm Credit of Newton

Gold Sponsors

- McLain Plumbing
- The Junction
- American Fidelity Life
- Educational Furniture
- Bank of Forest
- Trane
- Sequel Electrical Supply
- Community Bank
- INSports

- Howard Industries
- First Financial Bank
- American Benefits Brokers - Steve Baker
- SouthGroup Cox
- Southern Pine Electric
- B&G
- Ammon Roofing
- Zach Mowdy Team
- Trace Services
- Rapid Rentals
- Weir ESCO
- Regions Bank of Union
- Robinson Electric
- Weyerhaeuser

- Ochsner Rush

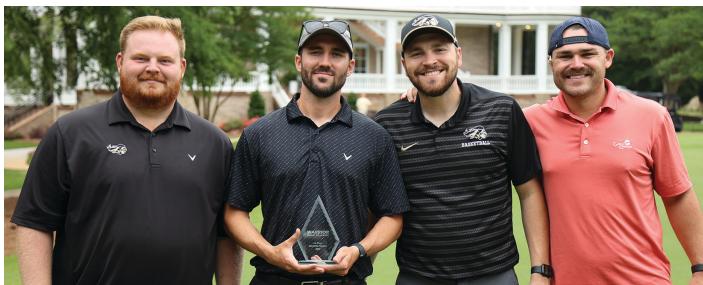
Hole Sponsors

- Dallas Printing
- The New York Blower Company
- Magnolia Tent
- Mayo Law Firm
- Foreman Wood Products
- Ely Guild Hardy
- Transact
- Moore's Pharmacy
- Erdley Family
- Piggly Wiggly/Ogletree Feed & Seed
- Smith Brothers Traditions



CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT WINNERS

The team of (from left) Jason Mangum, Josh Sanders, Jody Blount, and Lake Thoms claimed the Championship Flight of the 22nd annual Warrior Golf Classic with a 22-under-par round of 50 over 18 holes.



SECOND FLIGHT WINNERS

The Trane team of (from left) Matthew Perry, Ethan Paschal, Dylan Shields and Thomas Blake took the Second Flight with a 10-under 62.



FIRST FLIGHT WINNERS

In the First Flight, the Ochsner Rush team of (left to right) Jackson Therrian, Derrick Jones, Patrick Ross and Donovan Cooksey earned top honors with a 14-under 58.



ON-COURSE WINNERS

On-course contest winners (from left) included Jason Mangum (closest to the pin, front nine), Robert Armon (closest to the pin, back nine), Joe Rush (longest drive, front nine) and Jody Blount (longest drive, back nine).



HILTON-YELVERTON SCHOLARSHIP ESTABLISHED

Stephen Yelverton (left), owner/operator Rapid Rentals, presents a check to ECCC foundation fundraiser Jason Tune establishing the Hilton-Yelverton Scholarship. This annual scholarship was established by Yelverton in 2025 to assist students continuing their education at East Central Community College. This freshman tuition scholarship is awarded annually and is renewed until graduation provided the recipient maintains a minimum 2.5 grade point average and an academic load that would permit graduation in four semesters. To be eligible for the scholarship the student must enroll at East Central Community College full-time in the fall following high school graduation; demonstrate the need for financial assistance; and be of good moral character.

LAND

Continued from page 5
and difficulties. Having attended and loved East Central herself, she said it has been gratifying to see her son enjoy the experiences as much as she did.

Ben said he finds his

strength in his faith and that he often reflects on Psalm 139:14: "I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

"My faith in the Lord is where my deepest strength is found," he said. "I just want to give Him my best every day."

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES AT ECCC

ECCC is committed to ensuring equal access to a quality education for qualified students with disabilities through the provision of reasonable academic accommodations and auxiliary aids which support the College standards and academic integrity. The Office of Student Success is committed to creating a positive campus environment where students with disabilities are encouraged to pursue careers on the basis of personal interest and ability. Students seeking Disability Support Services should contact Dr. Amanda Walton, director of student success, at awalton@eccc.edu or 601-635-6228 or visit her office in the Smith Student Union Building.

ALUMNI NEWS



Growing up on his family's cotton farm in Walnut Grove, Sonny Upton knew early on that it wasn't the life he wanted.

"I always knew I didn't want to be a cotton farmer" he said. "Growing up, that was the path laid out before many of us, but it wasn't for me. I graduated high school in 1949, and without wasting any time, I headed straight to boot camp. My training took place in San Diego, and from there, I was sent to Guam—arriving on Christmas Eve. I remember thinking, 'What in the world have I gotten myself into?'"

In August 1952, while in Japan, Upton broke his leg. He returned to the states where he was assigned to NAS Millington, just north of Memphis, where he remained until his scheduled discharge the next year.

On leave, Upton hitchhiked home – on crutches in a cast that covered him from hip to ankle. Around midnight, he was stranded between Canton and Carthage on Highway 16. After that ordeal, he decided it was time to buy a car. That decision would change his future.

"At that point, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life," Upton said.

"That changed when I ran into an old friend, Cecil Caldwell, who had just graduated from pharmacy school at Ole Miss. I hadn't seen him in four years, but I knew his younger sister from school. Cecil didn't have a car and needed a ride to Oxford, and I was headed that way. I agreed, and on the trip, we got to talking.

"Cecil asked what I planned to do with my life. I told him I had no clue. He encouraged me to attend pharmacy school. I told him I was not a very good student, but he wouldn't take no for an answer. He told me to give it a shot and even got me a course catalog."

The summer of 1953, Upton enrolled at East Central. His first classes: freshman chemistry and English.

"I had no idea what I was getting into," he said. "I flunked chemistry the first time, but I knew I had to pass, so I took it again that fall and passed."

He had Ms. Woodward for English, having been told to steer clear of Miss Una Harris – an EC legend who was known for her excellent but difficult classes. That next summer, he enrolled in organic chemistry.

"We started with about fifteen students. Eventually, everyone dropped out but two of us. Then the last one's wife went into labor, and he had to leave. That left me alone in the class. Mr. Cross, our professor, would lecture for two hours,

WARRIOR VOICES: Real Stories. True Impact.

FROM THE COTTON FIELDS TO THE PHARMACY: A JOURNEY OF DETERMINATION & DISCOVERY

take a lunch break, give me instructions and then leave me alone in the lab to work. He loved to fish and quail hunt, and I guess he trusted me to complete the lab work on my own. That summer, I fell in love with organic chemistry."

Upton described Mr. Cross as tough—someone who cared about technique and discipline. "Spill acid on one of his lab countertops, and you'd hear about it. He taught me how to be precise, how to respect the work. His lessons stuck with me my whole life. I wouldn't have made it if I had gone somewhere else first."

East Central's campus had about 600 students at the time, and Upton, a bit older after four years of military service appreciated the friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

East Central also had competitive sports teams. A few years prior to enrolling and while on leave from the military, Upton attended a basketball game having heard from his sister, Shirley, about the unbeaten Warriors who were destroying every opponent.

"I arrived too late to get inside Founders Gym—it was packed wall to wall," he said. "I had to watch the game from the doorway. I remember players like Denver Brackeen, Howard Sessums, and a guy known as Yank who was from North Carolina. Yank was unstoppable. Three of our players got up on the stage and sat

-UPTON continued on page 16

EAST CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Alumni & Friends

Natchez, Mississippi DAY TRIP

Tuesday, October 14

\$225 per person

ITINERARY

6:30 a.m.

Depart for Natchez

10 a.m.

Longwood Tour

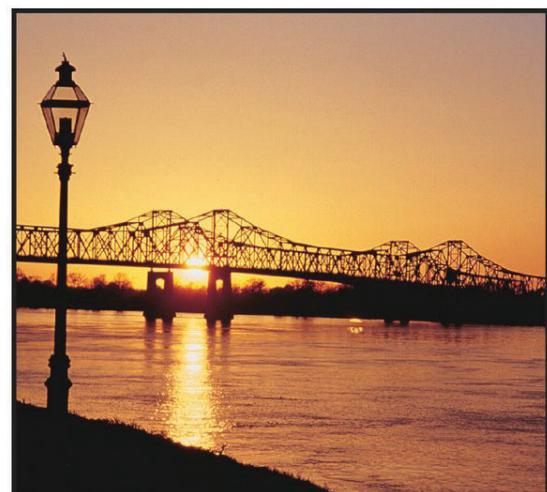
Longwood, also known as Nutt's Folly, is a historic antebellum octagonal mansion located in Natchez.



11:30 a.m.

Lunch at the Carriage House, Stanton Hall

Lunch Included



1 p.m.

Tour of Stanton Hall and the City of Natchez

Stanton Hall, also known as Belfast, is a Greek Revival mansion within the Natchez Historic District and is one of the most opulent antebellum mansions to survive in the southeastern United States.



4:15 p.m.

Depart for home

Dinner on your own

For more information contact Stacey Hollingsworth at 601.635.6327 or email sholling@eccc.edu.

EAST CENTRAL

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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ALUMNI NEWS

*East Central Community College
Foundation and Alumni Association hosts*

CLAY SHOOTING FUNDRAISER

Friday, October 3, 2025
Binachi Shooting Sports
4434 Camp Binachi Road, Meridian

Title Sponsor \$2,500

Exclusive Name Recognition & Signage + A Title Sponsor + Three Team Entries
(Up To 4 Shooters Per Team 12 Total Shooters)

Flight Sponsor \$1,500

- Exclusive signage at the beginning of the course
- Two team entries
(Up to 4 shooters per team 8 total shooters)

Station Sponsor \$1,000

- Exclusive signage at a shooting station
- One team entry
(Up to 4 shooters per team 4 total shooters)

Food & Beverage Sponsor \$100

- Exclusive signage at registration pavilion
- One team entry
(Up to 4 shooters per team 4 total shooters)

Clay Sponsor \$500

- Recognition as a clay sponsor
- One team entry
(Up to 4 shooters per team 4 total shooters)

Check In:

7:30 to 8:00

Safety Briefing:

8:30

Shooting Starts:

9:00

Lunch:

12:00

- Prizes to top individual shooter and to each member of the winning team
- Eye and ear protection provided
- 4-Wheelers prohibited, Golf carts and UTVs encouraged (Each person is responsible for their own transportation)
- Bring Your Own Ammunition or Purchase On Site from Binachi (Please notify the Foundation Office if you are purchasing ammo on-site)



**EAST CENTRAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION**

**Scan the QR Code
to Register TODAY!**



*For more information, contact Stacey Hollingsworth, Executive Director of the Foundation,
at 601-635-6327 or sholling@eccc.edu*



BASEBALL ALUMNI DAY BRINGS FORMER WARRIORS BACK TO THE DIAMOND

ECCC hosted its annual Baseball Alumni Day on Saturday, April 26, at the Clark/Gay Baseball Complex. Originally planned for March 15, the event was rescheduled due to inclement weather. Despite the shift, a dedicated group of alumni returned to campus to take part in the day's activities, which in addition to great baseball and reminiscing, included facility tours, and a pre-game recognition ceremony honoring the 2005 Region 23 Championship Team. Sophomore Warriors were also recognized.

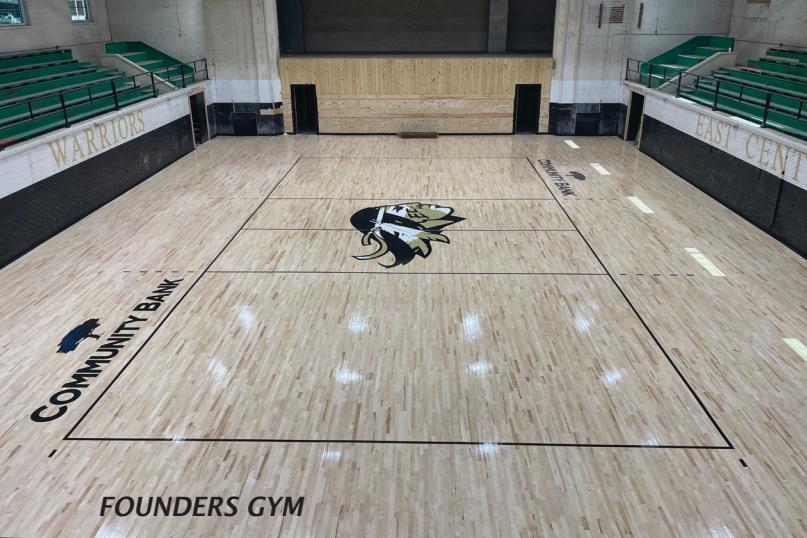
This annual event wouldn't be possible without the continued support of alumni. Special thanks go to Trampas Amedee ('92) and Daniel Landry ('93), who not only cook for the group each year but also played key roles in establishing Baseball Alumni Day and keeping the tradition strong.

Free tickets were provided to alumni who RSVP'd in advance, and the picnic area in right field gave attendees a relaxed space to reconnect and enjoy the game together.

Plans are already underway for Baseball Alumni Day in 2026. Stay tuned to alumni publications and ECCC's social media for the announcement of the date and details. We look forward to welcoming even more Warrior Baseball alumni back to campus next year.



ALUMNI NEWS



FOUNDERS GYM



NEWTON HALL

Capital Campaign

DEEPLY ROOTED. FUTURE FOCUSED. THANKS TO YOU.

At East Central Community College, we are deeply grateful for the alumni, friends, and partners who have made our **Deeply Rooted, Future Focused Capital Campaign** a resounding success. Because of your generosity, we are not only transforming our physical campus but also expanding opportunities for our students and the broader community.

These enhancements represent more than bricks and mortar—they are investments in people, programs, and potential. And thanks to you, momentum continues to build.

Campus Progress: Your Support at Work

Founders Gymnasium is nearing completion and will soon shine as a centerpiece of campus pride. A brand-new floor has been installed, locker rooms are being finalized, and the entire building has received new windows, a roof, and heating and cooling systems. A fresh coat of interior paint will be one of the final

touches before we welcome fans to our inaugural volleyball season.

Newton Hall is being reimagined as a hub for innovation. Thanks to a generous gift from Randy and Nina Cleveland, the second floor east end is undergoing a full renovation to house our future engineering and business programs. The project is on track to open for the Fall 2025 semester.

Vickers Fine Arts Center is in the architectural planning phase for a much-needed new roof, funded through institutional dollars. Once completed, campaign funds will support the redesign of the entrance—enhancing accessibility and making a bold first impression that reflects the vibrancy of our arts programs.

Each of these projects is a physical symbol of our belief in what ECCC stands for—past, present, and future. They reflect the unwavering support of those

who know the value of an East Central education and believe in the promise of its students.

Thank You—and an Invitation to Keep Building

We extend our deepest thanks to the many donors whose names are listed in the following pages. Your gifts have laid the foundation for progress and transformation.

But our work is not finished.

As needs grow and opportunities expand, your continued support is more important than ever. The campaign may have met its original goal, but new projects and rising costs—especially in light of state funding cuts—mean that every gift continues to make a difference.

Join us in shaping the future of East Central. Make your contribution today at: www.eccc.edu/deeply-rooted-future-focused-capital-campaign

Together, we remain deeply rooted in tradition, while staying future focused for generations of Warriors to come.

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Jeffrey Hodges		LeAnn Shirley	

UPTON

- *Continued from page 10*

in folding chairs and left two EC players playing the other team's five. They couldn't get the ball away from Yank. They'd put two men on him and still couldn't get him."

Upton lived on campus and remembered his roommate fondly—Bill Acton, from Alabama. "He married Jeannie Monk from Lake, and I was in their wedding. They eventually moved to Magee, where he worked in poultry production," he said.

Upton also discovered a few unexpected favorite classes. "I had to meet a minimum number of hours for the GI Bill, so I took economics with Mr. Bobo—not part of the regular curriculum, but I loved it," he said. "I also took literature under Ms. Newsome. She could entrance a room—her teaching made stories come alive. I wish I could've taken more of her classes."

After two summers and one full academic year, Upton made plans to transfer to Ole Miss for pharmacy school.

"By this time, I had met Pat—Patricia McCraney from Newton. We had started dating. When I told her I was leaving for Ole Miss, she said, 'Well I'm coming with you.' We got married in Newton at her

aunt's house not long after."

The newlyweds loaded up everything they owned in a borrowed two-wheel trailer—dishes, crystal, a kerosene stove, and a mattress that his father had given them.

"Somewhere outside Vaiden, that mattress flew off the car, and we looked like the Clampetts trying to get it tied back down," he said.

The moved into Vet Village in Oxford, a complex for military veterans. Rent was \$9.40 a month. Everything ran on kerosene.

"Our clothes always smelled like it," Upton said. "We'd walk into class, and the richer students could smell us a mile away. It was cold in the winters. Our son Johnny was born while I was still in school, although he was delivered back at the hospital in Newton."

Pat was a piano major—having been taught by Mae Hogan and East Central instructor R.G. Fick. Upton said, "She was a talented pianist and taught at a nearby county school to help make ends meet."

After graduation, Upton's first job was at City Drug Store in Carthage. He made \$400 a month and never asked how many hours he would be working. After six months, while visiting Pat's parents in Laurel, he was offered a new job and a \$200 raise. After a few years there, he

took a job in Richton and would then go on to serve as a hospital pharmacist at Laurel General.

Five years later, he purchased Upton Drugs in Newton where he served his community for 27 years before retiring.

The Uptons were married 54 years and resided in Newton until moving to Decatur just a short time before Pat passed away from cancer in 2008. They raised three children: Johnny, William David—who died in a car accident—and Scottie.

When asked what advice he would give to current ECCC students, Upton said, "Never stop learning—you never know where life will take you."

EVERYONE HAS A STORY

Warrior Voices: Real Stories. True Impact. shares the real experiences of East Central Community College students, alumni, faculty, and staff. From life-changing moments to everyday triumphs, these voices reflect the heart of our Warrior community — past, present, and future.

We plan to capture more of these stories as we look forward to our Centennial Celebration in 2028. Want to share your story? Email mmcleod@eccc.edu



100 Years of ECCC!

Share Your Story



Were you a student, faculty member, or staff at ECCC? Your memories are a vital part of our legacy—and we'd love to include your story in our Centennial Oral History Project.



Reach out to share your ECCC experience:

✉ Dr. Stacey Hollingsworth – sholling@eccc.edu | 601-635-6327
✉ Maria McLeod – mmcleod@eccc.edu | 601-635-6303



Your story is our history. Be part of the celebration!
#ECCC100 #ECCCAumni #ShareYourECCCStory

Employees Honored

MOTT AND KEITH RECEIVE TOP CAMPUS AWARDS

East Central Community College recently recognized two exceptional members of its campus community for their dedication, service, and impact.

Margaret Mott, who has served as a Business Office Clerk since joining the ECCC staff in 2019, was named Outstanding Staff Member of the Year. This award honors employees who demonstrate initiative, dependability, teamwork, and a consistently positive attitude. Those who nominated Mott praised her reliability and commitment to going above and beyond in her role.

"Margaret shows up on time every day ready to get the job done. She never complains about the workload, although I know it can be overwhelming. She goes out of her way to make sure students and staff feel welcome in the business office. Outside of her normal duties, Margaret works the ticket booths at basketball and football games and tries to attend as many campus events as possible. Margaret is a wonderful asset to not only the business

office but the campus as a whole."

Also recognized during the event was Brandi Keith, associate degree nursing instructor, who was selected as Instructor of the Year for 2025. Keith, who began teaching at ECCC in 2017, was celebrated for her instructional excellence, leadership, and commitment to both the college and the broader community.

"Mrs. Keith goes over and beyond for her students," a nominator noted. "She is a listening ear and gives great advice. She is there when you need her, and when she says she will do something, you can always count on her to get it done. She is one of those instructors that all students look for in a teacher. She is a teacher, a counselor, and a mentor."

A graduate of East Central, Keith holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Mississippi Medical Center, a master's degree from Mississippi University for Women, and a doctorate of nursing practice from the University of Mississippi.



ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory presents Margaret Mott, above, and Brandi Keith, below, with their awards.



EC Launching Marketing Program in Fall

East Central Community College is excited to launch an all-new Marketing Management Technology program in August 2025, offering students hands-on training for careers in sales, advertising, digital marketing, public relations, and management.

With limited seats available, college officials are encouraging interested students to enroll as soon as possible.

The two-year program leads to an Associate of Applied Science degree, with opportunities to earn stackable career and technical certificates along the way. Courses include Principles of Marketing, Personal Selling, Advertising, E-Commerce, Digital Media Applications, and Consumer Behavior, providing students with a strong foundation in business and marketing strategies.

"The marketing industry is rapidly evolving, especially with the growth of digital platforms," said Cody Spence, Director of Career & Technical Education. "This program is designed to prepare

students for in-demand careers, whether they are entering the workforce or advancing in their current jobs."

Students will gain experience in entrepreneurship, event management, human resource principles, and merchandising math, ensuring they are well-prepared for mid-level management roles. The program also includes work-based learning opportunities to help students build real-world experience before graduation.

Selected to lead the new program is Makaeya Vincent ('18).

"We are thrilled to have Makaeya join the ECCC family," said Spence. "Her background in digital media, marketing, and student recruitment will be invaluable as she helps our students develop the skills they need for success in this rapidly growing field. Makaeya's commitment to student success and her hands-on experience make her the perfect fit for this role."

Vincent comes to ECCC from William Carey University, where she served as

a recruiter and admissions counselor. In this role, she played a key part in increasing applications by nearly 50% and managed social media efforts for the Admissions and Intercultural Studies departments. She also worked as the on-air representative for university news and admissions initiatives and helped produce a wide range of marketing materials.

"I'm excited to return to East Central as an instructor and contribute to the academic success of students in marketing technology," Vincent said. "ECCC played an important role in my academic journey, and I'm honored to now have the opportunity to serve students and help them pursue their educational and professional goals."

For more information or to enroll, contact Janet Estes, Career Technical Education Navigator, at jestes@eccc.edu or 601-635-6299.

CAMPUS NEWS



Class of 2025

GRADUATES CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Nearly 400 graduates were awarded degrees and/or certificates during East Central Community College's Commencement Ceremonies held April 30 and May 1 in Huff Auditorium on the Decatur campus.

ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory awarded degrees and certificates during four ceremonies honoring ADN graduates, Career and Technical Education students, and two groups of academic graduates.

Across all four ceremonies, student speakers shared sentiments of deep gratitude, strong faith, and anticipation for the future. Whether heading to hospitals, shops, classrooms, universities, or beyond, the Class of 2025 leaves East Central not just with degrees, but with purpose.

Association Degree Nursing

Representing the Associate Degree Nursing graduates, Emily Smith delivered a powerful message shaped by compassion, discipline, and deep faith.

"Nursing school is meant to teach you a completely new way of thinking," she shared. "Although much time is devoted

to learning about individual disease processes... the end goal is being able to think like a nurse."

Smith shared three key lessons with her classmates. The first: remember where you started—a call to humility and kindness toward future students. "Nothing will ruin a clinical day quite like an experienced nurse treating you like you are a waste of their time and space," she said candidly.

Her second point reminded graduates that self-care is more than a trend—it's a necessity. "Self-care is often much harder than it looks. It's asking for help... it's talking to a therapist when you feel overwhelmed."

Finally, she credited her perseverance to her faith: "It is not through my strength that I am standing here today, but through His." Smith concluded with a tribute to the faculty, families, and Florence Nightingale herself, who once said, "Let us never consider ourselves finished nurses. We must be learning all of our lives."

Other nursing graduates participating in the 10 a.m. ceremony on April 30 were Dylan Gomez who gave the invocation

and Nadia Johnson who led the benediction.

Career-Technical Education

For students completing Career and Technical Education programs, fellow graduate Jacob Howell offered an address full of pride and gratitude.

"This is a momentous occasion," he began, "a celebration of the sacrifices and challenges we have overcome to achieve this milestone."

Howell emphasized that every graduate's success was the product of many hands and hearts: "To the faculty and staff—it's clear you care deeply about your students. And to our families, your encouragement and unwavering support made this all possible."

Quoting Laozi—"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"—he reminded peers that their next step, whether into the workforce or another program, would be powered by the skills and confidence they built at EC.

"When in doubt," Howell concluded, "remember how our experiences here have prepared us for the trials ahead."

Also participating in the 1 p.m. cer-



emony on April 30 were Devin Hughes who gave the invocation and Olivia Wheat who led the benediction.

Academic Graduation Ceremony - A-K

Tate Baucum, a student-athlete who chose to stay local and pursue tennis while earning his degree, delivered a message of balance and personal growth.

"The path I chose wasn't the easiest," Baucum said, "but it was one that required devotion and hard work." He recounted nights spent doing homework at the BSU and carrying textbooks on tennis trips.

Despite the grind, Baucum spoke warmly of what made it all worth it: "I've built so many friendships—through classes, intramurals, clubs, and tennis. And I've had instructors who enriched me not just academically, but personally."

His advice to fellow graduates was

twofold: "Don't just work hard—challenge yourself to live up to your full potential," and "Never stop learning. Find ways to make growth and learning part of your everyday life."

Most importantly, Baucum reminded his peers that their story was still unfolding: "Some of the seeds we planted may seem futile now—but they will bear fruit and multiply."

Zaira Jimenez gave the invocation, and Aiden Boyd presented the benediction during the 10 a.m. ceremony on May 1.

Academic Graduation Ceremony - L-Z

Closing out the graduation ceremonies, Ashton Luke delivered a deeply personal farewell to East Central, describing the college as "a place that gives back as much as you put into it."

Luke described late-night study sessions, talks with professors who "didn't

just see me as a number," and fellowship at the Baptist Student Union. "If you know me," she joked, "I might miss bingo night the most."

Reflecting on the diversity and drive of her fellow graduates, she said, "We all possess different majors and career goals. It's easy to compare ourselves—but it's important to remember every person has a unique purpose."

Luke credited her strength to both her family and her faith: "Jesus is my Savior and the reason for every success I have," she said. "He will never leave us nor forsake us."

Her final charge was a call to action: "The future is ours to shape. I truly believe we can make it brighter, bolder, and more beautiful if we remain determined."

Anna Grace Reed gave the invocation, and McKinley Gregory led the benediction for the 1 p.m. ceremony on May 1.

ECCC RETIREES

East Central Community College recently celebrated the retirement of six outstanding members of its faculty and staff during the college's End-of-the-Year Luncheon held in Mabry Cafeteria. Pictured are (from left) Elizabeth Minter, Librarian since 2010, Jennifer Savell, Mental Health Counselor and Instructor since 2015, Mickey Vance, Vice President for Business Operations since 1999, Gerald Jordan, Welding Instructor since 1998, and Ida Johnson, Dormitory Supervisor since 2014. Not pictured is Dr. Katherine Scott, Associate Degree Nursing Instructor since 2024.



CAMPUS NEWS



New VP for Business Operations

***ECCC ALUMNUS
TYLER YATES PROMOTED
TO VICE PRESIDENT***

East Central Community College is pleased to announce that alumnus Tyler Yates ('12) has been named the institution's next Vice President for Business Operations following the retirement of longtime vice president Mickey Vance, who has served the college for over three decades.

Yates brings a strong background in accounting, operations, and campus leadership to his new role. He has served as EC's Business Office Accountant since 2019, where he has played a critical role in managing student accounts, coordinating audits, preparing board financial statements, and maintaining financial systems across campus. His experience also includes oversight of major digital transitions in campus operations, including the implementation of Transact software solutions and enhanced digital payment systems that benefit employees, students, and the community.

"Tyler Yates has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership, innovation, and a deep commitment to the mission of East Central Community College," said ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory. "He brings a strong understanding of both the technical and relational sides of business operations, and we are confident he will continue building on the solid foundation

laid by Mr. Vance."

Yates' most recent business office upgrades at the college include the successful campus-wide launch of Transact systems, such as point-of-sale upgrades, mobile credentials, and digital ID badges. He has also led efforts to digitize financial aid processes, travel forms, and student statements, ensuring increased efficiency and accessibility.

Yates holds a Master of Business Administration from Delta State University and a Bachelor of Accounting from Mississippi State University. He is a 2012 Hall of Fame inductee at East Central, where he was a member of the Wall O' Sound marching band and many other clubs and organizations. He was a member of the Mississippi Community College Leadership Academy Class of 2022 and currently serves as president of the ECCC Alumni Board.

"East Central has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember in one form or another, and it is an incredible honor to serve my alma mater," said Yates. "I look forward to working alongside our outstanding faculty and staff to support our students - and to help advance the mission of East Central for years to come."

East Central Shows Consistent Spring Enrollment Growth

East Central Community College continues to lead the way in student enrollment growth among Mississippi's 15 community colleges, reporting a 7.6% increase in spring-to-spring headcount from 2024 to 2025. Over the past three years, ECCC has increased enrollment by an impressive 25.6% in spring-to-spring headcount, the most in the state. This sustained growth reflects ECCC's ongoing commitment to providing an exceptional, affordable educational experience that attracts students from across its five-county district and beyond.

"We are so proud of the efforts of our enrollment management team, faculty,

staff, and the entire ECCC community," said ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory. "This continued growth is a testament to the quality education, supportive environment, and exciting campus life we offer. It underscores our dedication to student success and our role as a premier choice for higher education in Mississippi."

ECCC's consistent enrollment increases can be attributed to its strategic focus on student success initiatives, sincere involvement from faculty and staff to students, and comprehensive support services. The college's reputation for excellence, combined with its affordability and commitment to student engagement, continues to

attract both traditional and nontraditional students in all programs on campus.

"Our continued growth is exciting, and it motivates us to keep enhancing the student experience," added Gregory. "We are committed to providing unparalleled educational opportunities that prepare our students for success both academically and in their future careers."

Applications for the fall 2025 term are now open, and respective students are encouraged to explore the diverse learning opportunities available, including Late Start, Intensive Terms, Summer Term, and more. Join the Warrior family by visiting www.eccc.edu/apply.



ECCC BREAKS GROUND ON NEW CAFETERIA

East Central Community College held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new cafeteria which will be located next door to the current facility and where Jackson Hall stood prior to its demolition last year. The event was well attended and remarks were given by Dr. Jimmy Hollingsworth, chairman of the ECCC Board of Trustees, and Dr. Brent Gregory, president of ECCC. Both leaders emphasized the importance of the new facility in enhancing the student experience and supporting campus growth. Special guests in attendance included representatives from Aladdin Food Services, a key partner in the project; State Representative Kenji Holloway of District 27; and several members of the ECCC Board of Trustees. The new cafeteria will span nearly 15,000 square feet and seat over 250 guests at a time in a modern, spacious setting. The facility will feature multiple serving lines to improve efficiency and is designed to meet the evolving needs of East Central students, staff, and the community. Construction is expected to be completed by the Fall 2026 semester. The project underscores East Central's commitment to providing top-tier facilities and services to support student success.



Humanities Instructor of the Year

ROBBINS PRESENTS MODERN MYTHOLOGY IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

Bradley Robbins, an English instructor at East Central Community College, was selected the college's 2025 Humanities Teacher of the Year.

As part of his recognition, Robbins delivered a presentation titled "Modern Mythology in Professional Wrestling," that explored the ways professional wrestling serves as a contemporary form of mythology, shaping cultural narratives much like ancient legends.

From Mount Olympus to Monday Night Raw, the presentation examined how larger-than-life wrestling characters parallel traditional folk heroes, creating contemporary legends that resonate across generations.



"As a lifelong fan, I've discovered that professional wrestling isn't just entertainment – it's our culture's living mythology factory. Just as the ancient

civilizations shared stories of gods and heroes clashing, today's audiences witness the creation of modern legends every time they tune in to watch these larger-than-life characters battle in the squared circle," said Robbins. "This lecture bridges the gap between classical storytelling and contemporary entertainment, revealing how wrestling creates the folk heroes of our time. This is the ultimate collision of two of my greatest passions and I cannot wait to share!"

Along with his campus presentation,
-ROBBINS continued on page 22

ATHLETICS

Nominate a Warrior for Alumni Honors

Each year, the East Central Community College Alumni Association proudly recognizes outstanding individuals who represent the very best of our Warrior spirit.

From PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE to ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT, these awards are our way of celebrating alumni who inspire, lead, and serve.

We need YOUR help to find them. Now accepting nominations for:

- Alumna of the Year
- Alumnus of the Year
- Athletic Hall of Fame

Nominations are welcome year-round, but to be considered for the upcoming year's awards, submissions must be received by January 31.

SUBMIT A NOMINATION TODAY!

Alumnus/Alumna of the Year

www.eccc.edu/alumnusalumna-year-online-nomination-form



Athletic Hall of Fame

www.eccc.edu/athletic-hall-fame-online-nomination-form



Help us honor & celebrate the alumni who continue to make us proud!

Questions?

Email mmcneal@eccc.edu
or call 601-635-6303

2025 ECCC WILLIAM WINTER SCHOLARS

East Central Community College history instructor Madison Price and student Katie Morrow were selected the college's 2025 William Winter Scholars and were recognized at the 36th annual Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration, hosted by Copiah-Lincoln Community College. Each year, participating institutions honor a faculty member and student who have demonstrated excellence in the humanities.

This year's NLCC theme, "Follow the Frenchman through Natchez: The Return Tour of Lafayette," highlighted the 200th anniversary of Gilbert du Mortier, the Marquis de Lafayette's farewell tour of the United States. In partnership with the Sons of the American Revolution, the event served as a historical conference celebrating Lafayette's legacy and



influence.

The NLCC is one of Mississippi's most significant annual conferences dedicated to literature, history, film, and culture. Each year, it brings nationally recognized scholars and authors to Natchez to explore humanities-related topics in the American South.

ROBBINS

- *Continued from page 21*

Robbins was recognized at the Mississippi Humanities Council's Public Humanities Awards Ceremony in Jackson.

A 2003 graduate of Clinton High School, Robbins holds an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts from East Central Community College, a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education - English from Mississippi State University, a Master's degree in Secondary

Education - English from the University of West Alabama, and an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Mississippi. He is currently completing a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Liberty University.

At East Central, Robbins serves as Lead Teacher for Dual Credit English Composition courses and is a member of the Instructional Advisory Committee. He also teaches American Literature and African American Literature.



SELECTED TO 2025 HALL OF FAME

Inductees into the 2025 ECCC Hall of Fame, the highest honor a student can receive at the college, include (from left) Ashton Luke of Philadelphia, Tate Baicum of Newton, Anna Grace Reed of Decatur, Ronaldo Suarez Brunet of Forest, Aiden Boyd of Morton, and Zaira Mahe Jimenez of Forest. The honorees were announced during Awards Day activities held April 17 in Huff Auditorium. Their photos will hang in the Hall of Fame Collection in the lobby of Huff Auditorium.

Warrior Strong

A HISTORIC YEAR FOR ECCC ATHLETICS

East Central Community College just wrapped one of the most successful years in its proud athletic history, further solidifying its reputation in Mississippi and among NJCAA programs nationwide.

In 2024-25, Warrior Athletics delivered an inspiring season filled with championship runs, national tournament appearances, and academic excellence. From the gridiron to the classroom, from the baseball diamond to the cross-country course, East Central student-athletes are excelling in every arena.

Highlights from the 2024-25 Warrior Athletics Season

- ECCC Warrior Football (8-3) won the MACCC South Division, defeated Holmes in the MACCC Playoff semifinals and hosted the State Championship Game for the first time in school history.

- ECCC's Men's and Women's Cross Country teams both produced the individual Region 23 Champions at the



NJCAA Regional Meets held in Alabama.

- ECCC Men's Basketball (17-13) qualified for the Region 23 Tournament for the third year in a row and won their first-round game at Southwest advancing to the quarterfinals.

- ECCC Women's Volleyball officially launched and signed a full roster in preparation for the 2025 season.

- ECCC Men's Golf qualified for the NJCAA District Tournament again, and the Warriors' top golfer, Will Thompson, qualified to compete individually at the NJCAA D-2 National Tournament where he secured a Top 50 finish in the 4-round

event.

- ECCC Softball (24-19) qualified for the Region 23 Tournament again, marking the 20th time in the past 21 seasons the Lady Warriors have qualified for postseason play.

- ECCC Baseball (46-16) made history again, becoming the first Mississippi team to make 3 consecutive trips to the World Series in Enid, OK and finishing 3rd for the second year in a row. The 2024-25 Warrior Sophomore class finished with 101 wins in their 2-year baseball careers.

- ECCC Warriors and Lady Warriors saw 93 student-athletes make the MACCC All-Academic teams with 37 of those being Distinguished All-Academic. In addition, 7 teams had an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher.

With momentum building and expectations higher than ever, there's never been a better time to support ECCC Warrior Athletics. Your gift—

whether one-time or recurring—can be designated to the team of your choice or applied where it's most needed. Every contribution fuels scholarships, facility improvements, travel, equipment, and so much more.

Let's keep the Warriors strong, competitive, and proud.



**SUPPORT THE
WARRIORS.**

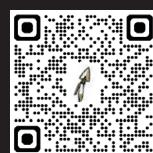
FUEL THE FUTURE.

Your gift to ECCC Athletics helps provide vital resources for our student-athletes—on the field, in the classroom, and beyond.

From equipment and travel to scholarships and facilities, every dollar makes a difference.

STAY IN THE GAME.
BE PART OF THE LEGACY.

Scan below to give today!



ATHLETICS

CALLING ALL FORMER WARRIOR TENNIS PLAYERS! AND OTHER ALUMNI AND FRIENDS WHO ENJOY TENNIS

We're planning a fun, friendly Alumni Tennis Tournament—and we want you on the court!

Whether you played decades ago or just last year, we're gathering names of former players who are interested in participating.

All skill levels and ages welcome!



Date to be announced soon

East Central Community College Courts

Fun. Casual. Easy Play.

Family-friendly day of connection and community.

Let us know you're interested!

Email mmcleod@eccc.edu or call 601-635-6303

Help us spread the word to your fellow teammates!



Willis Inducted into MACCC Hall of Fame

East Central Community College alumnus Jason Willis ('99), a Philadelphia native and Neshoba Central High School graduate, was recently inducted into the Mississippi Community College Sports Hall of Fame.

Willis was a member of the 1998 team that won the college's first State Championship. During his two-year stint, the Diamond Warriors made back-to-back trips to the NJCAA Region 23 Tournament, finishing as runners-up in 1999.

A right-handed pitcher/first baseman, Willis boasted a 10-2 record during his freshman season at East Central while earning East Central's and the MACJC South Division's Most Valuable Player Award. He was named All-State and All-Region. He also posted a .337 average at the plate with 13 home runs and was a 24th-round New York Yankees draft pick.

During his sophomore season in 1999, Willis finished with a 10-5 record and led Region 23 in strikeouts with 127. Willis

set a Region 23 Tournament record by striking out 18 men in a single game. He allowed only four hits and two walks during that game and hit a two-run homer. He was again named All-State and All-Region.

Earlier in the 1999 season, Willis threw a no-hitter against Southwest Mississippi Community College, the first no-hitter for an EC pitcher since 1996. That game was his fourth career shutout, an ECCC record at the time.

Willis, who originally signed with Ole Miss, opted to sign with the Yankees and spent several years in the organization's minor league, including being part of the NY Penn League's 2001 Championship squad.

Following his baseball career, Willis owned and operated a sporting goods store for several years. He currently serves as a representative for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and as Family Pastor at Trinity Baptist Church.



EC President Dr. Brent Gregory (left) and Jason Willis

Willis and his wife, the former Crystal Cooley whom he met at ECCC, have three daughters: Cambre Willis Mayo, Jaci, and Claydi.

He said, "I'm proud of the family and the life we have built, and it all started at EC!"

Hughes Named Head Tennis Coach for ECCC

East Central Community College recently announced Turner Hughes as the new head coach of the men's and women's tennis teams. A native of Ellisville, Hughes brings valuable coaching and management experience from programs across the state. Most recently, he served as a tennis coach at Cleveland Country Club, where he managed the tennis pro shop, led the Ju-

nior Team Tennis program, and provided instruction for players of all ages. He also served as a student assistant coach for the men's and women's tennis teams at Delta State University, assisting with practices, matches, player development, and team logistics.

"We are excited to welcome Turner Hughes as our new head tennis coach,"

said ECCC Director of Athletics Paul Nixon. "Turner has a strong background in tennis instruction and program leadership, and he has shown a true commitment to growing the sport in our five-county district."



HUGHES

Previously, Hughes worked for over two years at Laurel Country Club as an assistant tennis professional, overseeing daily operations, organizing junior programs, and helping coordinate tournaments. His dedication was recognized by the Mississippi United States Tennis Association, which named him Assistant Professional of the Year in 2022. He is certified through the United States Professional Tennis Association.

Hughes began his tennis management studies at Tyler Junior College, earning an Associate of Arts degree in Professional Tennis Management. He recently completed a Bachelor of Science in Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Delta State University.



HEY, FOOTBALL WARRIORS — WE WANT YOU BACK ON THE FIELD! (Sort of.)

Football Alumni Night | Thursday, Oct. 16 | ECCC vs. Jones | Bailey Stadium

Put on your favorite game-day tee and join us for a night of reminiscing and reconnecting. We can't wait to hear your stories!

 **Alumni Tent Tailgate** — Free food & fellowship from pregame through halftime
Your Own Comfy Lawn Chairs Welcomed and Encouraged!

 **Halftime On-Field Recognition**

 **Optional Warrior Hall & Weight Room Tours**—
See what's new and what's still just how you remember it!

Whether you wore leather helmets or just graduated last year — we want you there!
Cheerleaders and family members welcome too!

We need to know how much food to prepare, so
 To RSVP for free tickets or get more info:
 mmcgleod@eccc.edu |  601-635-6303





Baseball's Historic Run

WARRIORS FINISH THIRD AT NJCAA WORLD SERIES

The 2025 ECCC Warrior Baseball team under the direction of head coach Neal Holliman and assistants Zachary Crane, Innes Mackay, and Grant Griffin, experienced another historic season and punched their ticket to the NJCAA Division II College World Series for the third consecutive year.

The Warriors produced an impressive 46-16 (.742) overall mark, including a 20-8 conference record. They amassed 496 runs, hit .291 with a .431 on-base percentage, and slugged .439.

Finishing runners-up in MACCC conference play, ECCC earned the right to host

one of two regional semi-final tournaments, where they outlasted four other teams for the championship. They advanced to a best of three series with division foe Pearl River Community College for the overall Region 23 Championship where they lost two games to one and finished runners-up.

Although defeated in the Region 23 Championship series, the Warriors stellar play earned an at-large bid to the World Series in Enid, Okla.

The Warriors made a deep run in national tournament play before once again facing Pearl River in a gut wrenching semifinal loss which cut short



their quest for the national title.

Their 46-16 record is near the top of the record book for most wins in a single season with the best record set by the 2024 team who had a 55-9 overall mark. However, the sophomore members of the 2025 team would capture 101 total wins in their two-year stint – and consecutive World Series appearances – becoming the winningest class in school history.



Holliman said, "This team proved it could compete with the best. We'll build on that hunger. And we'll be back."



HOLLIMAN WELCOMES FORMER ASSISTANTS BACK TO ECCC

During this year's Region 23 Playoff Tournament hosted by East Central, Head Coach Neal Holliman took time to visit with several of his former assistants—now leading or assisting rival programs—highlighting the strong coaching tree and lasting connections built through EC Baseball. From left, are Southwest head coach Jack Edmondson, Holmes head coach Scott DeLoach, Co-Lin head coach Adam Chamblee, Co-Lin assistant coach Kyle Flessner, and Holliman.

SEASON AT A GLANCE

Overall record
46-16 (.742)

Conference (MACJC)
20-8 (.714)

Historic Postseason

In their third consecutive trip to the NJCAA Division II World Series they reach the semifinals for the second year in a row; third-place finish; sophomore class exceeded 100 wins

ATHLETICS

Alumni Updates

60s

Bob Tom Johnson ('63) was posthumously inducted into the Scott County Sports Hall of Fame.

70s

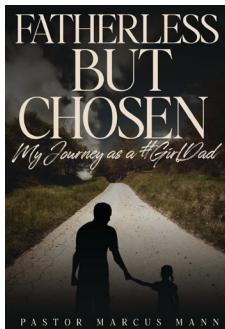
Kenneth Thrash ('72) was posthumously inducted into the Scott County Sports Hall of Fame.

Charlene Jones Bates ('79) was recently inducted into the Scott County Sports Hall of Fame.

90s

Chad Harrison ('92) was elected President of the Mississippi High School Activities Association.

Marcus Mann ('94) released his second book titled Fatherless But Chosen: My Journey as a #Girl-Dad. It is available on Amazon in Hardback, Paperback & E-book. Mann said about his book, "This is more than a book. It's my story of pain, purpose, and becoming the father I never had. If you've ever felt unseen, abandoned, or are still healing — this is for YOU." Mann is a former Warrior and NBA basketball player and currently serves as a pastor and chaplain.



R. William Anderson ('98)

Accepted a full-time position with the Union Police Department and became a part-time Police Officer for East Central Community College

Lee Martin ('99) was recently inducted into the Scott County Sports Hall of Fame.

Camp Keith ('99) was named president of the Meridian Division of Community Bank.

90s

Former football Warrior **Free-man Jimison** ('00) joined the staff at Northeast Lauderdale as a teacher and offensive coordinator for the football team. He is a Meridian native and has been a football coach since 2013, most recently at Laurel High School.

Warrior football alum **Josh Hardy** ('00) was recently named defensive coordinator and inside linebackers coach at Flomaton (Ala.) High School.

Lewis Bradford ('02), **Kiley Culpepper** ('02), **Jason Wooten** ('02), and **Craig Martin** ('04) were recently inducted into the Scott County Sports Hall of Fame.

In Memoriam

Don Acton ('53), July 19, 2024
Harmon Drexil "Joe" Beeland ('54) Dec. 22, 2024
Wayne Tullos ('55), July 21, 2025
Torris Ann Lyle ('57), Dec. 28, 2024
Faye Love Horton ('61) Dec. 27, 2024
Dale Gressett Wood ('62), June 3, 2025
George Wesley Dykes ('63), Dec. 25, 2024
John Allen Roby ('63), March 16, 2025
Nancy Sneed Bounds ('65), Jan. 14, 2025
Samuel "Sammy" G. Everett ('67), April 4, 2025
Dorothy "Dot" Barfoot Ledlow ('67), Feb. 25, 2025
James Edward "Ed" Rainer ('67), May 17, 2025
Lynda Maxine Sloan ('67) April 12, 2025
Donny Burkes Todd ('67), Jan. 1, 2025
Tommy Dearing, ('68) Feb. 16, 2025,
Rev. Ed Dickerson ('68), March 27, 2025
Virgie Ann Harris Lindley ('68), April 6, 2025
Gary O'Neal Hill ('72), March 26, 2025
Howard Steve Moorehead ('72), May 14, 2025
George Lee Robinson, Jr. ('73) March 17, 2025
Kim T. Killen ('75), May 28, 2025
Rodrick Donald ('95) November 28, 2024
William Brian Sims ('95), April 2, 2025
Clark Foy ('00), April 12, 2025
Jimmie Carol Pete ('01), March 28, 2025
Kenisha Leah Nicholson ('04), April 10, 2025
Melissa Eshee ('05), April 14, 2025
Stephen Carl Bolton ('07), May 22, 2025
Thomas O. Kennedy ('10), May 10, 2025

Former PNCCTC Director

Robert Murphy, retired director of the Philadelphia /Neshoba County Career-Technical Center, a division of ECCC, died April 26, 2025. He was an Attala County native and graduate of Mississippi State University, earning his Bachelor of Science degree, followed by a master's degree from Delta State University.

He began his career in education as an administrator at Western Line School District in Avon, Mississippi, and later moved to Philadelphia, where he dedicated many years to Neshoba Central High School. In 1995, he assumed the role of director at the PNCCTC, a position he held until his retirement in 2010.

Former Board Chairman

Roger "Prentice" Copeland ('49) of Philadelphia, died Sunday, May 4, 2025 at his home in Neshoba County. He served on the Board of Trustees of the East Central Community College for over 55 years. He served two stints in the U.S. Army, serving in World War II and again in the Korean Conflict. After his discharge he then attended East Central Community College and Mississippi Southern where he received his B.S. and Masters Degrees, and advanced work in Mathematics and school administration.

Prentice began his teaching and coaching career in 1952 at Coldwater High School for 2 years before moving to Zephyr-Hill High School and then on to Neshoba Central High School after school consolidation. He was then appointed the first high school principal of the consolidated school. He was later elected and served as the County Superintendent of Education until his retirement in 1988, with thirty-seven and a half years of service in the Neshoba County School System.

EC Alum Acquires Industry-Leading Company

Jason Nance ('96), a Louisville native, recently purchased Integrated Sports Specialties, the industry's leading provider of athletic-only laundry detergent. Nance has been with the company for the past eight years, serving as Director of Southeast Sales, where he played a key role in its growth and success.

A 1994 graduate of Nanih Wayia High School, Nance's career has been marked by notable leadership roles in collegiate athletics. Prior to joining Integrated Sports Specialties, he served as the Director of Football Equipment at the University of Minnesota and the Director of Equipment Operations at the University of Alabama.



NANCE

OLIPHANT CROWNED MISSISSIPPI'S TEEN USA

Madalyn Oliphant of Hickory, who just completed her freshman year at ECCC, was crowned Miss Mississippi Teen USA 2025. She will represent Mississippi at the Miss Teen USA national pageant. She is a 2024 graduate of Newton County High School.



ECCC Board Member

Jerry Kelley Nance ('69, '00) died Friday, July 18, 2025, in Winston Medical Center in Louisville. He was a current member of the ECCC Board of Trustees, a position he had held since 1985. A Louisville native, Jerry earned his Bachelor of Music Education degree and Master of Music degree from Delta State College and had a 54 year music career as a church music director having served Calvary Baptist Church for 13 years and First Methodist Church of Louisville for 36 years. He also worked as a partner with his father in the masonry contracting business.

Jerry received his AA Nursing degree from ECCC in 2000 and was employed as a Registered Nurse for Winston Medical Clinic in Louisville. Jerry was fundamental in the formation of Cornerstone Clinic offering free medical aid to the citizens of Winston County and was chosen Winston County's Man of the Year primarily for those efforts.

Stay Close, Stay Involved: We need YOU!

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Do you remember the laughter, the late nights, the feeling of finding your place—not too far from home, but just far enough? It's been more than 30 years for me, but I can still picture it like it were yesterday.

That's the magic of East Central. It has always been more than just an institution of higher learning, more than the next step; it's where we made lifelong friends and laid the foundation for our futures. It's been home, family.

Today's students are still staying up late, laughing, falling in love, choosing majors, and clinging to traditions like Fried Chicken Thursdays. They're building the same kind of memories and futures that many of us did.

And it's because of you—your support, your prayers, your belief in what EC represents—that this legacy continues to thrive.

Yes, we still rely on your financial support, and every dollar matters. But more than anything, we need you. Your stories. Your time. Your voice.

We want to know what you're doing now. Are you teaching in a classroom? Serving in a hospital? Running a business or a household? Performing on stage or working behind the scenes? No matter where you are or what you do, you matter to us—because you're part of what makes East Central so special.

As we look ahead to East Central's 100th anniversary in 2028, we're working to preserve and share the stories of those who've shaped our first century. And we can't do that without you. We need to hear your EC story.

If you're willing to share—even just a few memories—we'd be honored to hear from you. Please reach out to us at alumni@eccc.edu.

Whether you give, get involved, or simply stay in touch—know that you matter here. You are still a vital part of this community. You remind our current students that they're not just passing through—they're joining a legacy.

In this issue of The Warrior, you'll see the visible signs of progress: new facilities, new programs, and new opportunities. But the heartbeat of this college remains the people who believe in it. Thank you for helping us honor the past, support the present, and build for the future.

Let's stay close. Let's stay involved. And let's carry this legacy forward—together.

With gratitude,
Maria McLeod
Director of Alumni Relations

Stay **CONN***E***CTED**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Class of: _____

Email: _____

Mail updated contact info to ECCC Alumni Association,
PO Box 129, Decatur, MS 39327,
or update online at
www.eccc.edu/alumni-news

ALUMNI NEWS



EAST CENTRAL

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Upcoming Ribbon Cuttings

**COMMUNITY BANK
COURT AT
FOUNDERS GYMNASIUM**

**Monday, August 25, 2025
3:30 p.m.**

ECCC vs
Northwest Shoals
Community College (AL)
Volleyball game
to follow at 5:30 p.m.

**ESTHER BAILEY-SMITH
SPORTS PERFORMANCE
FACILITY**

**Thursday, August 28, 2025
5:30 p.m.**

ECCC vs
Northeast Mississippi
Community College
Football game
to follow at 6:30 p.m.

EAST CENTRAL *With You In Mind*
COMMUNITY COLLEGE