



THE

WARRIOR

The Official Publication of the East Central Community College Alumni Association
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RANDY J. CLEVELAND

INNOVATION LAB

EAST CENTRAL

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

With *you* In Mind

New Collaborative Learning Space

*RANDY J. CLEVELAND
INNOVATION LAB OPENS*

-See Page 9 for More

A Message From the President

Dear Alumni and Friends,

As we close another remarkable year at East Central Community College, the holiday season gives us the perfect moment to reflect on our progress with gratitude and look forward with hope to the New Year.

This fall, we welcomed a record 3,016 students, marking our seventh consecutive semester of enrollment growth. Our students continue to excel, with our Career and Technical Education and Allied Health graduates achieving a 92.7% job placement rate—a powerful testament to workforce readiness and strong industry partnerships.

We also expanded opportunities for students to advance their education through a new partnership with Mississippi State University, allowing graduates of our Culinary Arts Technology Program to seamlessly pursue a Bachelor of Science in Culinology. The ECCC Foundation further strengthened student support with new annual and endowed scholarships that will make a difference for years to come.

Campus improvements remain a priority. Construction is well underway on a new cafeteria, and we proudly celebrated ribbon cuttings for the Randy J. Cleveland Innovation Center, Founders Gym Renovation Project, and the Esther Bailey Smith Athletic Performance Center.

As we prepare for a busy and promising spring semester, we look forward to celebrating student success, welcoming future Warriors to campus, and making visible progress on key construction and academic initiatives. Above all, we remain committed to helping every student discover—and achieve—their potential.

Warm wishes for a joyful holiday season and a bright new year. Thank you for your continued support of East Central Community College.



Dr. Brent Gregory
President



With *You* In Mind

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On the Cover: Randy J. Cleveland '81 and his wife, Nina, are pictured inside the newly opened Randy J. Cleveland Innovation Lab at East Central Community College. The state-of-the-art collaborative learning space was recently dedicated during a ribbon-cutting ceremony, marking a major milestone in ECCC's Deeply Rooted, Future Focused capital campaign. For more information see page 9 inside this issue.

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,
Landon Rutland & 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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Find us on LinkedIn at
East Central Community College.

A Meet and Match at EC

FORMER WARRIOR ATHLETES SASHA AND FREDRICK KNIGHTEN MARRIED 17 YEARS

Drawn to East Central for its strong academics, welcoming campus atmosphere, Sasha Lilly and Fredrick Knighten quickly found themselves part of a close-knit community of friends and teammates who helped shape their future. A relationship that began as friends would evolve over late-night pool games in the student activity center that soon turned into dates and would eventually turn into a lifelong partnership.

Sasha, a native of Columbiana, Ala., played basketball at East Central Community College from 1999–2001, while Fredrick, who hails from Meridian, suited up for the football team from 2000–2002. After falling in love at East Central, they have been married since 2008 and reside in Calera, Ala.

“We spent countless hours together between classes, practices, and games,” Sasha recalled. “The Grill and the Student Center were our favorite hangouts.”

Their time at EC was filled with memories of competition and camaraderie but also challenges that strengthened their bond—like rehabbing ACL injuries together.

Both credit East Central mentors

who pushed them to grow on and off the field. For Sasha, that meant guidance from head coach Sammy Pace and assistant coach Brad Hodge. Fredrick fondly remembers the encouragement of head coach Terry Underwood and assistant coach Tim Coats. “They taught us discipline, teamwork, and how to lead with integrity,” they agreed.

After leaving East Central, both went on to further their education and build successful careers. Sasha earned a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from the University of Mobile and a master’s in administration of justice and security. She now serves as a Lieutenant with the Columbiana (Alabama) Police Department. Fredrick earned his bachelor’s degree in athletic training from the University of West Alabama and works as a warehouse supervisor for Alabama Beverage.

—MEET continued on page 8



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



ECCC Foundation Hosts 2025 Scholarship Reception



East Central Community College recognized the achievements of student scholarship recipients during the 2025 Scholarship Recognition Reception, held September 24 in Brackeen-Wood Gymnasium.

The annual event, sponsored by the East Central Community College Foundation, brought together students, donors, faculty, staff, and community members to celebrate the impact of scholarships on student success.

The program began with a welcome from Dr. Stacey Hollingsworth, Executive Director of the ECCC Foundation, followed by an invocation from Mr. Tyler Yates, Vice President for Business Operations.

Several student scholarship recipients shared remarks during the ceremony, including: Reagan Lowe, recipient of the Harvey & Martha Wheeler Pre-Pharmacy/Pre-Med Scholarship; Adam Savell, recipient of the Classes of 1957, 1958, and 1959 Scholarship; Kimyatta Viviams, recipient of the Jesse A. Ladd Memorial Scholarship; and Neely Wolverton, recipient of the Laura Reeves Thorne Memorial Scholarship.

The program concluded with remarks from ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory, who commended the scholarship



recipients for their accomplishments and expressed appreciation to donors whose support makes such opportunities possible.

The Scholarship Recognition Reception is held annually to highlight the generosity of ECCC's donors and to celebrate the students whose educational journeys are made possible through scholarships.



FORMER WARRIORS RECOGNIZED DURING FOOTBALL ALUMNI NIGHT

These Warriors enjoyed food and fellowship, toured the football facilities, and were recognized at halftime for their lasting impact on the ECCC football tradition. The Alumni Office hopes to make this an annual event! If you played football at East Central, please be sure we have your updated contact information so you don't miss future alumni gatherings. Pictured are (from left) Rabe Jermaine Crosby, Lamont Crockett, Alan Ware, Mike Lee, Mike Land, Cyrus Ben, Ricky Harrison, Jimmy Steadman, Darnell Brown and son, Colby Amis, Ross Tew and nephew Jax Valentine, Brad Breland, Jeff Breland, and Jay Brown.

ECCC Announces New Scholarship Honoring Transformative Teachers

East Central Community College is proud to introduce the Impact Scholarship Program, a newly established scholarship designed not only to support students financially but also to shine a spotlight on the educators who change lives. Beginning in Fall 2026, this innovative program will award scholarships to deserving students while celebrating the teachers who inspired them along the way.

Funded through a generous philanthropic gift, the Impact Scholarship Program was created by a donor whose life has been shaped by embracing the love of Jesus and extending forgiveness to others. Their desire to uplift students and recognize the power of great teaching is at the heart of this initiative. The program reflects the profound difference individuals can make when they invest in the future through higher education.

A Vision Rooted in Gratitude and Transformation

The donor's founding vision centers on the belief that remarkable educators leave lasting marks on the lives they touch. The Impact Scholarship Program

seeks to honor these teachers—those whose encouragement, guidance, or simple belief in a student changed the trajectory of a life.

By placing educators at the center of the scholarship narrative, this program reinforces the ripple effect of mentorship across generations. It strengthens community ties, celebrates teaching excellence, and enhances opportunities for student success and support.

A Scholarship That Goes Beyond Financial Aid

Recipients of the Impact Scholarship will receive \$500 for the fall semester and \$500 for the spring semester, totaling \$1,000 per academic year. Students will be selected based on academic achievement and demonstrated financial need.

What sets this scholarship apart is its signature requirement: the Impact Teacher Essay. Applicants must submit a 300–500-word essay telling the story of the teacher or professor who made the greatest impact on their life. This heartfelt component anchors the program's mission—reminding us that educational success is never achieved alone.

How to Apply

The Impact Scholarship will be incorporated into ECCC's existing Foundation Scholarship application system.

- Applications open: November 1
- Application deadline: February 1

Students completing the standard Foundation Scholarship application will have the opportunity to apply for the Impact Scholarship by submitting the required essay.

A Celebration of Educators: The Impact Reception

The program doesn't end once the scholarship is awarded. Each year, ECCC will host a dedicated event on the Decatur campus honoring scholarship recipients and their named "Impact Teachers." Separate from the annual scholarship reception, this special gathering will serve as a moment to recognize educators who represent the heart of the college's mission.

The celebration creates a meaningful bridge between students and teachers—highlighting gratitude, encouraging connection, and inspiring faculty and future educators alike.

FRIED CHICKEN, FRIENDS & FUN: ECCC RETIREES RECONNECT MONTHLY

East Central Community College retirees have launched a new tradition—gathering on the first Thursday of each month in Mabry Cafeteria to enjoy Fried Chicken Day, good company, and plenty of shared memories.

Joining in on the fun at the August luncheon were (front row, from left) Maudean Sanders, Midge Davis, Gloria McRae, Jeannie Vance, Gary Ann Moore, Carol Germany, and Roberta Holt; and (back row, from left) Julie Rowzee, Paige Case, Lori

Luke, Ricky Harrison, Michael Alexander, Bubby Johnston, Larry Blackburn, Roger Whitlock, Bruce Guready, Gene Davis, William Miles, Haywood Reeves, and RT Purvis.



EC Foundation Hosts Dynasty Construction Clay Shoot



The ECCC Foundation hosted a Clay Shoot fundraiser at Camp Binachi in October. Twelve teams participated and \$2,000 was raised for the annual fund.

Dr. Stacey Hollingsworth, executive director of the Foundation, said, "We thank each participant and volunteer for helping make the event possible. This event is a friend raiser for the college, and our goal is for everyone to enjoy the competition, the fellowship, and have fun."

The winning team included Brandon Jones, Lyndon Cooley, Ander Humphreys, and Chandler Thomas, all students at Newton County High School.

Top Shooter overall in

the Clay Shoot was Randy Wedgeworth.

Dynasty Construction Services served as title sponsor of the event. Flight sponsor was First South Farm Credit. Robinson Eelctrip Supply Company served as food sponsor and Community Bank was a station sponsor.

Additional clay sponsors included B & G Equipment Inc., HMC Construction LLC, McLain Plumbing & Electrical Service, Inc., The Trading Post Company Inc., Tri State Truck Center Inc., and Dr. Scott Tynes.

Additional photos from the event can be found at <https://eccwarriors.smug-mug.com/2025-26/Academics/Clay-Shoot>



The winning team included (above, from left) Brandon Jones, Lyndon Cooley, Ander Humphreys, and Chandler Thomas, all students at Newton County High School. At right, top shooter overall was Randy Wedgeworth.



ALUMNI HOUSE BRICK PAVERS INSTALLED

Renovations on The Alumni House are complete, and the brick pavers have been installed on the east wing porch! Each brick tells a story—honoring alumni, celebrating families, and preserving memories that helped shape who we are today. Thank you to everyone who took part! Stop by to see all 100 bricks on the alumni house patio and stay tuned for an announcement regarding ribbon cutting ceremonies and an open house coming soon.

ECCC Alumni Board of Directors 2025-2026

Jim McAdory '91
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Asa Jimmie '20
(Neshoba)
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(Jones)
At-Large Member

Dr. Brent Gregory
(Newton)
Ex-Officio Member

Maria McLeod
(Rankin)
Ex-Officio Member



EC CLASSMATES REUNITE AT FAIR

These former East Central Community College classmates held a reunion and reminisced during the 2025 Neshoba County Fair. Pictured are (front row, left to right) Sherry Vance, Senita Thorne, and Kay Powell; and (back row, left to right) Debbie Webb, Kim Henley, Pam Stevenson, and Debra Nicholson

MEET

Continued from page 4

The couple's family continues the tradition of hard work and achievement. Their daughter, Skye, is a graduate of Auburn University at Montgomery with a degree in Psychology and works in a psychiatric facility. Their son, Ryan, is thriving in middle school and making his mark in track and field.

Reflecting on their journey, both say East Central gave them the confidence and foundation they needed for life. "It's where we found our passions—and each other," Sasha

said. "East Central will always hold a special place in our hearts."

If they could relive one moment, Sasha would choose playing in the Sweet Sixteen in Topeka, Kansas, while Fredrick would revisit the thrill of the playoffs. Both agree their time at EC taught lessons that still guide them today: "Hard work pays off, and relationships matter more than titles."

Their advice for current students? "Get involved, ask questions, and don't be afraid to fail. Leave EC with purpose, confidence, and a sense of belonging—just like we did."

EAST CENTRAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
With *You* In Mind

**Classes of
1990 - 1994**

Join us for a combined class reunion.

Didn't graduate? No problem. If you were part of the chaos, you're part of the crew! Come relive the glory days—and be ready to deny or defend the legends that live on!



Saturday, March 7  **ECCC Baseball Field**
(Warriors vs. Baton Rouge 1 p.m. Doubleheader)



Cheer on the Diamond Warriors and relive your EC memories!

Free Tickets, Food, & Fellowship

**To RSVP, Scan the QR Code at right or visit
<https://www.ecccathletics.com/1990sReunion>**

For more info: mmcleod@eccc.edu or 601-635-6303





New Collaborative Learning Spaces

ECCC CUTS RIBBON ON RANDY J. CLEVELAND INNOVATION LAB

East Central Community College celebrated a milestone in academic innovation recently with a ribbon-cutting ceremony officially opening the Randy J. Cleveland Innovation Lab, a completely redesigned instructional wing located on the second floor of Newton Hall.

Funded through a transformative gift from Randy J. Cleveland, class of 1981, and his wife, Nina, the new space represents a major investment in collaborative, technology-driven learning environments and supports the college's Deeply Rooted, Future Focused capital campaign.

The renovation includes two modern, open-concept classrooms intentionally designed to promote collaboration, discussion, project-based learning, and team-centered problem-solving. Each room features flexible seating, interactive work areas, integrated presentation technology, and multiple digital screens that allow students to cast content wirelessly from personal devices, creating a shared digital workspace that mirrors modern industry and engineering environments.

"This innovation lab embodies the future of how students learn, communicate, and prepare for success," said ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory. "Our students deserve learning spaces that reflect real-world expectations—spaces that encourage creativity, teamwork, and the ability to think beyond a traditional classroom. We are grateful to Randy and Nina Cleveland for believing in the mission and future of East Central Community College."

Cleveland, a distinguished engineer and retired senior executive of ExxonMobil, reflected during the ceremony on how his experience at East Central shaped his career path.

"When Nina and I heard about the college's first capital campaign, it immediately felt right to be part of it," Cleveland said. "It was 45 years ago that I was sitting in this very building – probably taking a differential equations exam in my pre-engineering courses during my two wonderful years at East Central."

"My time here really set the foundation for Nina and me to spend 35 years at ExxonMobil, and we want to encourage students to find their passion and pursue that passion...I hope this innovation lab creates a space and environment where students and faculty can establish relationships, have face-to-face discussions, and learn how to deal with conflict. We want this facility to enhance communication and collaboration and



ultimately bring better solutions."

The innovation lab represents one of the major facility milestones tied to the Deeply Rooted, Future Focused campaign, focused on enhancing instructional spaces, expanding workforce opportunities, and modernizing campus learning environments.

Following remarks, East Central leadership, guests, students, and alumni participated in a ribbon-cutting and self-guided tours of the renovated space.

About Randy J. Cleveland

Randy J. Cleveland is a 1981 graduate of East Central Community College and earned his degree in petroleum engineering from Mississippi State University. He joined Exxon in 1984 and built a distinguished 35-year career in global energy leadership, operations, and organizational management, serving in multiple technical and executive roles across the U.S. and Europe. Cleveland held senior leadership positions in New Orleans, Houston, Aberdeen, and London, including oversight of large-scale production operations and strategic planning initiatives. Following the merger of Exxon and Mobil, he continued to expand his leadership impact and later played an integral role in the integration of XTO Energy into ExxonMobil. Cleveland retired in 2019 after serving as Vice President Americas for ExxonMobil Production Company. He and his wife, Nina, remain strong advocates and supporters of higher education and student opportunity.



Nursing Grads Achieve 100% First-Time NCLEX Pass Rate

East Central Community College's Practical Nursing Program is celebrating a significant accomplishment as all graduates from the July 2025 class achieved a 100% first-time pass rate on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX).

This achievement showcases the high caliber of instruction within the program and the dedication of students who

commit to the rigorous academic and clinical preparation required for nursing practice.

ECCC's Practical Nursing Program continues to serve the region by preparing graduates for essential roles in clinics, hospitals, and healthcare facilities, supporting both local employers and the overall quality of patient care.

Graduates of the 2025 Practical Nurs-

ing Program included:

Madison Hope Byrd, Summer Nicole Downs, Natalie Griffin, Ashtin Taylor Hines, MaKayla Tyesha Lancaster, Kyleigh Laughlin, Jacob Campbell Leake, Janiya Paulina Palm, Shalindra Plummer, Magan Ren'ee Purcell, Savannah Jane Ray, Casandra Danielle Tatum, Chaunta-ra Triplett, and Essence Aa'Yanna Shardee' Wesley



Alumni Tennis Mixer Saturday, March 28

Join us for an unforgettable day of tennis, food,
and fun on the East Central Community College courts!
You don't have to be an alum to join the fun—everyone's welcome to play!



\$25 per person



Lunch Included

Registration 9 a.m. • Play Begins at 10 a.m.

Random Draw Doubles • Best of 5 (No-Ad) — 4 Rounds

(*Divisions based on participation.)



*Come meet our new coach and check out the Comans-Hunter Pavilion,
including the brand-new dressing room and viewing platform facility!*

Whether you're playing for the win or just here for the fun,
this is your chance to reconnect with old friends or make new ones.

**RSVP to Claim Your Spot Today! Scan the QR Code
or visit <https://www.ecccathletics.com/TennisAlumniEvent>**

For more info: mmcleod@eccc.edu or 601-635-6303





DR. ESTHER BAILEY SMITH SPORTS PERFORMANCE FACILITY OFFICIALLY OPENS

East Central Community College officially cut the ribbon and celebrated the grand opening of the Dr. Esther Bailey-Smith Sports Performance Facility during the college's first home football game of the 2025 season. The college is thankful to all those who contributed to the completion of this wonderful facility. This new space represents a major step forward in ECCC's commitment to elite training and athletic excellence. Pictured, from left, are assistant athletic director Brooks Warren, football coach Jonathan Webster, Dr. Esther Bailey-Smith, President Dr. Brent Gregory, Athletic Director Paul Nixon, and Physical Plant Director Sean Mowdy.



EC's Spence Recognized with Workforce Award

East Central Community College's Director of Career and Technical Education Cody Spence has been honored with the Instant Impact Award by AccelerateMS in recognition of his outstanding contributions to strengthening Mississippi's workforce.

Spence was one of only four individuals and organizations statewide to be recognized at the 2025 MS Horizons Workforce Strategy Symposium in Jackson, an event that drew nearly 500 participants from business, industry, government, and education.

The Instant Impact Award specifically highlights Spence's success in helping secure approximately \$2 million in funding through AccelerateMS, which has transformed CTE programs at East Central Community College. The funding has supported significant enhancements in



SPENCE

Automotive, Diesel Technology, HVAC, Collision and Repair, and Electrical Technology programs, creating new pathways for students to pursue skilled careers.

"These improvements directly benefit our students and communities by providing hands-on training for high-demand fields," said Spence. "I am grateful for the support of AccelerateMS and proud of how these investments are preparing the next generation of workers here in east central Mississippi."

AccelerateMS Executive Director Dr. Courtney Taylor noted that this year's honorees reflect the innovation and collaboration required to build a resilient workforce across Mississippi.

Spence has served as Director of Career and Technical Education since 2023.

Annual Report Card Shows High Marks for ECCC

In accordance with Mississippi House Bill No. 1071 from the 2010 legislative session, East Central Community College in Decatur has released its academic year 2023-2024 Mississippi Community College Performance Profile, or Report Card. The bill created an Education Achievement Council which was established to set education achievement goals for institutions of higher learning and community colleges in the state and to assist in monitoring progress towards those goals through the preparation of annual institutional and state report cards.

The Community College Report Card, designed to reflect the unique mission of community colleges, incorporates



measures closely aligned with the Voluntary Framework of Accountability developed by the American Association of Community Colleges. Therefore, each report card includes information for the specific community college, along with corresponding figures for the state system, which includes all 15 Mississippi community colleges. Information contained in the report includes student enrollment, degrees awarded, student success, student retention,

student progress, workforce development information, and High School Equivalency and adult basic education statistics, as well as enrollment and success in developmental or remedial coursework (college readiness).

In the 2023-2024 Community College Report Card, ECCC was among the best in the state in the areas of Career and Technical Education (CTE) Placement and Student Success.

-REPORT continued on page 15

WARRIOR AND LADY WARRIOR BASKETBALL ALUMNI



You Are Invited to be our Special Guests!

E **Thursday, January 29**
ECCC vs. Gulf Coast
5:30 p.m. Women • 7:30 p.m. Men

**Basketball alumni who RSVP by Jan. 23 receive complimentary game tickets.
Enjoy food, fellowship and on-court recognition between games.**

RSVP by scanning the QR code at right or visit
<https://www.ecccathletics.com/BasketballReunion>.

For more info: mmcleod@eccc.edu or 601-635-6303





A SPECTACULAR WARRIOR CHRISTMAS

East Central Community College students, staff, and community members packed Huff Auditorium for the annual Christmas Spectacular, December 3. The festive evening was presented by the Fine Arts Division and showcased the Wall O' Sound band, Choir, EC Listening, and the Art Department. Guests enjoyed Santa visits, hot chocolate, and holiday cheer as the college and community came together to celebrate the season.





All-Time Enrollment Record

ECCC Tops 3,000 Students for Fall 2025 Semester

East Central Community College has reached a historic milestone, enrolling a record 3,016 students for the Fall 2025 semester. This marks only the second time in the college’s history that enrollment has surpassed 3,000 students — the first since 2011 — and it represents the highest student headcount ever recorded at ECCC.

ECCC’s student numbers are up 8% from Fall 2024 to Fall 2025, continuing a trend of consistent growth with

seven consecutive semesters of enrollment increases.

The college has also posted a 13.3% enrollment increase from Fall 2023 to Fall 2025, the highest growth rate among Mississippi’s 15 community colleges during that timeframe. Even more significantly, since Fall 2021, ECCC has grown enrollment by more than 25%, a distinction shared by only one other institution in the state.

“This is an incredible moment in our college’s history,” said ECCC President Dr.

Brent Gregory. “Surpassing 3,000 students demonstrates the confidence that families and students across our district and the state place in East Central. Our focus on quality instruction, student support, and affordability continues to make ECCC a premier college.”

College leaders attribute the continued surge of enrollment to expanded recruitment efforts, innovative academic programs, and a vibrant campus life—all of which exemplify the college’s

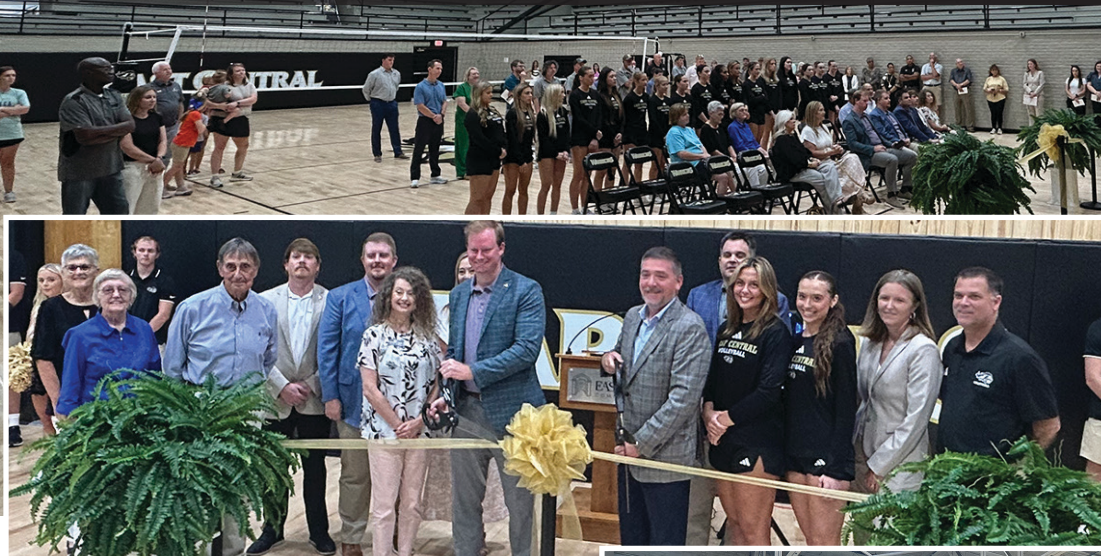
tagline: With You In Mind. “We are thrilled to see this momentum,” Gregory added. “Our record enrollment shows that students recognize the value of an ECCC education, and we remain dedicated to serving our students with the best possible collegiate experience.”

Applications for the Spring 2026 and Fall 2026 terms are now open. Prospective students can apply by visiting my.eccc.edu/ICS/Future-Student.

ECCC Foundation Board of Directors 2025-2026

Aubry Cox '81 (Leake) Chairperson		Drew Kenna '04 (Scott) Vice Chairperson		Melissa Thrash Carleton '88 (Out-of-District) Secretary-Treasurer	
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Speedy Calvert '76 (Winston) Director		Ken Gordon, Jr. '73 (Scott) Director		Gregory Shoemaker '83 (Out-of-District) Director	
		Philip Prince '95 (Neshoba) Director		Gilbert Thompson (Neshoba) Director	

Historic Founders Gym Reopens



East Central Community College cut the ribbon on Founders Gymnasium — a building that honors our past while opening new doors for our future. This renovation was part of our Deeply Rooted, Future Focused Capital Campaign, made possible by the generosity of so many alumni, friends, and community partners. A special thank you to Community Bank, whose generous gift made the naming of the new court possible and ensures that generations of Warriors will continue to grow, compete, and achieve in this space. The same day also marked another first in ECCC history — the inaugural home game for our Women's Volleyball program, the newest sport on campus! Bottom right, these Warrior alumni were among the many standout athletes who played collegiate ball in Founders Gymnasium and attended the recent ribbon-cutting ceremony for the renovated facility. From left are Billy Frank Alford, Sam Nowell, Sandy Puckett Keenan, and Lucy Young.



REPORT

Continued from page 12

In Career and Technical Education Placement, East Central led the state with a 92.7 percent job placement rate for CTE and allied health graduates, excluding Associate Degree Nursing students. The college's performance significantly exceeded the state average of 81.8 percent, highlighting ECCC's strong partnerships with regional employers and commitment to workforce development.

In Student Success, East Central

continued to perform at a high level, with 60.6 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen from the Fall 2021 cohort graduating, transferring, or remaining enrolled within 150 percent of the expected program length. This compares favorably to the state average of 61.8 percent. The college also reported a 50.7 percent student progression rate for full-time students earning 42 or more credit hours toward graduation by the end of their second enrollment year.

Other strengths for East Central proportionate to college enrollment in-

cluded a total of 508 graduates and 526 total awards conferred, along with the awarding of 410 National Career Readiness Certificates (NCRCs) to support workforce preparation. ECCC students also earned an average ACT composite score of 18.1, slightly above the state average of 18.0.

The 2023-2024 Performance Profile (Report Card) for East Central Community College can be found on the college's website at www.eccc.edu/consumer-information. In addition, a copy can be obtained from the Office of the President.



KNIGHT CROWNED HOMECOMING QUEEN

East Central Community College crowned Allison Knight, a graduate of Lawrence County High School, as the 2025 Homecoming Queen during halftime ceremonies of the Warriors' Homecoming football game against Hinds on Thursday, September 25, in Bailey Stadium. She was escorted by Montavis Hobbs, a graduate of Mendenhall High School. Knight was presented with a bouquet of flowers by ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory and the 2024 Homecoming Queen Destiny Williams. Joining Knight on the 2025 Homecoming Court were the following sophomore and freshman maids and their escorts: from left, Markuese Grady and Amya Hunter, Caleb Gray and Katelyn Simpson, Jaylen Torgusson and Mikayla Holifield, Austin Carter and Courtney McDonald, Jayden Brown and Cemorya Tatum, Drew Martin and Lyric Lay, Logan Hitt and Maury Ann Walley, and Darrin Davidson and Cambree Moore. The presentation was followed by the Wall O' Sound Marching Band's halftime performance.



2025 Homecoming Celebrated

ECCC HONORS ALUMNI, ATHLETIC HALL OF FAMERS, AND REUNION GROUPS AT 2025 HOMECOMING

East Central Community College celebrated the achievements and legacy of its alumni during Homecoming festivities on Thursday, Sept. 25, on the Decatur campus. The highlight of the day was the Alumni Reception and Recognition Ceremony in Brackeen-Wood Gymnasium, where four outstanding individuals and several reunion groups were honored.

Four distinguished individuals were recognized for their service, leadership, and lasting impact on the college and its communities. Larry Blackburn was named Alumnus of the Year, Dr.

Esther Bailey Smith was honored as the Alumna of the Year, and former Warrior baseball players Jake Yarborough and Shannon Cooley were inducted into the ECCC Athletic Hall of Fame.

In addition to individual awards, the college recognized several reunion groups whose shared experiences shaped campus life and community pride. Former members of The Collegians rock-and-roll band reunited, recalling a beloved chapter of East Central's musical tradition. The Class of 1975 celebrated its Golden Anniversary, joining fellow alumni for fellowship and

recognition. Members of the Academic Hall of Fame were honored for their scholarly accomplishments, while the 2015 National Finalist Lady Warrior Softball Team was celebrated for an unforgettable postseason run that remains one of the high points in ECCC athletics.

The college also welcomed back the 50-Year Club, inviting all alumni who graduated prior to 1975 to gather, reconnect, and help usher the Class of '75 into the club. Rounding out the festivities, Alumni Band members joined the Wall O' Sound during halftime of the football game.

Dr. Esther Bailey-Smith

ALUMNA OF THE YEAR

Dr. Esther Bailey-Smith ('77) is a woman whose life has been rooted in family, community, and connection.

After attending East Central, she went on to complete her bachelor's degree at Millsaps College, an MBA at Ole Miss, and eventually a doctorate at the University of Alabama.

But perhaps her strongest education came from home. Her father, the late Bill Bailey, a war veteran and visionary businessman, taught her how to lead. Her mother, Louise, taught her how to manage the books. Together, they ran the Decatur Telephone Company—a business that connected more than just phone lines. It connected people.

The roots of the company trace back to the 1950s, when there were only 27 phones in town and three-digit numbers. Esther recalls her father borrowing \$1 million to buy the first electronic switch, using her grandfather's land as collateral. Her mother ran the switchboard out of their bedroom, 24/7. "She knew everybody's voice, but nobody's face," Esther laughed.

By 1976, Decatur had one of the first completely digital telephone offices in the world, thanks to a Northern Telecom DMS-10 switch. "We were cutting off analog lines with a chainsaw," she remembered. "The new switch was so big; we had to construct a new building to house it."

From memorizing the phone book as a child to helping program one of the world's most advanced digital switches, Esther was deeply involved in every transition. "I made notes as I used the software and sent them back to developers to improve it. So, I guess you could say I helped shape it for other users."

The next frontier was fiber-optic internet. Her father set an ambitious goal: 100% fiber coverage for all homes in their 20-square-mile service area. They began laying fiber in the early 2000s, creating a loop so service would never be disrupted. "If it got cut one way, it could go the other," she said.

They ran the company like a fam-



“I’m just a small-town person,” she said.
“But I’ve lived a big life, right here.”

ily. Employees stayed for decades—one retired after 60 years during COVID, then came back weekly to clean the office and celebrate birthdays.

When the pandemic hit, Decatur Telephone didn't shut down. "We worked 100 percent," she said. "Schools sent everyone home, businesses went remote. Internet demand exploded. We ran everything ourselves—no contractors. Just 14 employees, including three in the office, two part-time, and a few outside techs."

Annette Pillsbury, a longtime employee, said: "I can honestly say the 13 years I have been working for Esther has been one of the best jobs I've ever had. Esther is a fantastic boss who truly cares about her employees, the company, and the community. It is no surprise that she is being honored as Alumna of the Year. It is a well-deserved honor. Working for a family-run business with such strong leadership has been a privilege."

That family leadership continues today. Esther's daughter, Hannah, now works in the company, handling accounting and financials.

Despite opportunities elsewhere, Esther never left Decatur. After graduation, she had offers from companies like Northern Telecom but turned them down. "I like this town, and I liked what I was doing. I've lived other places, and I felt like a number. Here, I feel like a

person."

Her commitment to East Central has been equally strong. Dr. Stacey Hollingsworth, executive director of the ECCC Foundation, said: "I have known Dr. Smith for most of my life. She has always been active in the community through various clubs and organizations. The Bailey/Smith family has created a legacy of standing in the gap to help provide for the college and the greater Decatur community."

That giving spirit echoes her father's generosity. He supported schools, churches, and East Central Community

College—where Esther once played chalk chase as a child and now serves as a vital partner in keeping

the campus connected. When the college stadium was damaged after Hurricane Katrina, Esther recalled her father simply saying, "Mama, write them a check." Bailey Stadium is named in honor of her parents.

Dr. Smith has continued that legacy, most recently contributing to the college's capital campaign and helping complete the football weight room.

Paul Nixon, ECCC director of athletics, said: "Since I started as Director of Athletics, very few individuals have been as supportive of the college as Esther Smith. Her support has not only been in financial donations, which have been significant, but she has also provided her counsel, wisdom, experience, and friendship to me in a community that I was new to."

Ken Karcher, who served as ECCC's head football coach from 2013 to 2023, added: "Esther embodies everything that East Central Community College stands for as a community partner. She is among the most genuine, kind, and generous people I have ever met. I have spent time with Esther and her late husband, Mike, in various environments. Each time I left her company, I felt seen and valued and left a better person for our time together. She is most deserving of this honor."

—SMITH continued on page 22

Larry Blackburn

ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Larry Blackburn was the first in his family to attend college and since then at least three generations of the Blackburn family have attended East Central.

When asked why he chose to attend ECCC, Larry jovially replied, "Because Homer did." Homer Burton was his best friend and mentor, and he played basketball at East Central. Larry thought he wanted to do the same. He didn't make the basketball team, but he did enjoy playing intramurals and received a college education that was just the beginning of his long journey with East Central.

Larry grew up in a family of carpenters, so it was a natural choice that he sought a degree in East Central's

drafting and design technology program and learned to draw house plans.

He continued his education at the University of Southern Mississippi earning a bachelor's degree in industrial education and joined the workforce after graduation. He never planned to teach, but with the influx of armed services veterans enrolling in college in the mid-70s, his former instructors, Pace Guthrie and Chester Clark, recommended him for a job in the ECCC vocational and technical division teaching remedial skills.

As student enrollment continued to increase, the college also increased offerings in the vocational and technical curriculum. Larry was then given the opportunity to become the first instructor in the college's new carpentry and cabinetmaking program.

Although a bit hesitant to make the transition, Larry said when he found out the salary, he quickly agreed as it was a much-needed raise in pay.

"They told me I would teach carpentry, and they would pay me \$1,000 a month. And I said okay!"

Ricky Harrison, a longtime friend and former co-worker at East Central, said of Larry, "He became the carpentry and cabinetmaking instructor and had one of the most successful programs, not only at EC but across the state of Mississippi and the nation."



Many of my students would come work with me after class and we roofed many of the houses in Newton County.



During the summers and after the school day was done, Larry spent time performing carpentry work as a side job. And his students often helped.

"Many of my students would come work with me after class and we roofed many of the houses in Newton County. And those students who put in the time to work and earn wages after hours became some of the most successful students. They were able to learn on a real job site and it paid off in the long run."

Larry led the carpentry program from 1975 through 1990. When Mississippi began investing in workforce education at the community college level, he left the classroom to take on responsibilities working with businesses and industries in the district to train employees and help upskill or reskill them for new job opportunities.

Larry was promoted to director of the college's Workforce Development Center in 1998 and served in that role until his retirement.

During his career, Larry became close friends with co-workers and mentors. He spent "fishing days" the week after graduation with many of the career-technical staff and other teachers and administrators, and even Dr. Eddie Smith, then college president, went on a few of those trips.

Larry also dominated on the intramural field when several employees put together a flag football team. He said, "Bubby Johnston and I were stars of the intramural game against students. I was the quarterback, and he was the receiver."

Larry continues to serve the college in various ways.

Artie Foreman, director of special projects at ECCC, said, "After retiring, Mr. Blackburn helped with numerous projects at the baseball complex and continues to do so. He also serves at his church and has gone on numerous

mission trips. He has given of his time unselfishly, not expecting anything in return. He loves this college

and is most deserving of this award and this recognition."

His servant's heart is not limited to the ECCC campus, nor is it limited to Decatur. When a friend asked him to go to Costa Rica on a mission trip a few years back, it had a lasting effect on Larry and missions are now a regular part of his life. He not only gives his time and money to serving others, but he also shares his gift of music—playing the guitar and singing.

"Music and missions give me not only enjoyment, but spiritual growth," he said.

He has shared that legacy of service with his family as many of them have been on those mission trips with him, including his son-in-law, ECCC head baseball Coach Neal Holliman, who has traveled with him to Montana several times.

Holliman said, "Mr. Larry has always gone above and beyond to get others involved and make sure everyone has a great time on these trips. The people in Montana love to see him coming. His influence on our church is amazing with the love, leadership, and servanthood he continually displays. There is no question my family and I would not be where we are without him."

Larry Blackburn has been a part

—BLACKBURN continued on page 22

Jake Yarborough

ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

A two-year letterman on the 1991 and 1992 ECCC baseball teams, Jake Yarborough made his mark early, earning the 1992 Most Outstanding Offense Award and setting multiple school records, including single-season and career RBIs, career hits, and most at-bats. He signed with Delta State University, where he was part of the 1994 NCAA Division II World Series team and later served as a graduate assistant coach.

Regarding his selection to the 2025 East Central Community College Athletic Hall of Fame, Yarborough said, "This recognition wraps up my baseball career as a player and coach on the highest level for me. ECCC is a place I love and cherish. I wanted to prove myself here, and later, I wanted to give back to the place that did so much for me."

Yarborough returned to ECCC as an assistant coach in 2000 and became head coach in 2001 following the passing of his former coach and mentor, Jamie Clark. In 2005, he led East Central to its first NJCAA Division I Region 23 Championship. That same year, he was named Region 23 Coach of the Year by both the NJCAA and the American Baseball Coaches Association.

"Coach Clark was a show-me coach. He didn't want to hear it—just show me," Yarborough recalled. "He taught discipline and toughness, and I've carried that with me ever since."

Teammate Trampas Amedee remembers Yarborough as a fierce competitor. "Jake was my teammate. He was a



"ECCC is a place I love and cherish. I wanted to prove myself here, and later, I wanted to give back to the place that did so much for me."

quiet guy most of the time, but when we stepped between the lines, he was a different person. He was one of the best competitors I ever played with. Then he came back as an assistant coach and later head coach and won the first Region 23 championship at EC. He is very deserving of the Hall of Fame for both his playing and coaching careers."

Over the next two decades, Yarborough built a respected high school coaching career, including 17 years at Grenada High School. He guided his teams to 15 playoff appearances, numerous division titles, and consistent success in some of Mississippi's most competitive districts.

His approach to coaching was grounded in the same values that shaped him as a player: work ethic, humility, and toughness.

"I think a real player must love the game—not for notoriety but for competition," Yarborough said. "Work while you wait. If you're not starting, earn your chance. Be a doer."

Current ECCC Head Baseball Coach Neal Holliman praised Yarborough's legacy. "Jake has always expressed that East Central holds a special place in his heart, and he continues to value ECCC as the foundation for his many accomplishments and the person he is today," Holliman said.

Yarborough's leadership, on and off the field, has not gone unnoticed.

"Throughout his career as a player, coach, and mentor, Jake has made an indelible mark on the ECCC baseball program," said Maria McLeod, director of alumni relations. "His leadership, passion for the game, and unwavering dedication to his players make him a deserving candidate for the Hall of Fame."

Yarborough said the recognition from East Central is meaningful not just as a personal honor but as a reflection of his deep connection to the college.

"ECCC is a 'show-me, don't-tell-me' school—on and off the field," he said. "That attitude came from the professors and athletics. It shaped me."

Now a member of the 2024 Northeast Mississippi Coaches Association for Better Baseball Hall of Fame, Yarborough's legacy stretches far beyond the diamond. It lives in the players he coached, the program he helped build, and the college that helped build him.

Nominate a Warrior for Alumni Honors

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

And we need YOUR help to find them.

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

SUBMIT A NOMINATION TODAY!

Questions? Email: mmcleod@eccc.edu • or call 601-635-6303

**Alumnus/Alumna
of the Year**

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Athletic Hall of Fame

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



Shannon Cooley

ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

Shannon Cooley was a two-time First Team All-State selection and key member of the 1993 and 1994 East Central Community College baseball teams. With batting averages of .372 and .338 across his two seasons at ECCC, and a combination of 11 home runs, 4 triples, 12 doubles, and 38 RBIs, Shannon Cooley made his mark early.

He parlayed that performance into a scholarship with Northeast Louisiana University, where he continued to shine. In 115 games, he hit .328, drove in 91 runs, swiped 43 bases, and earned numerous accolades—culminating in his selection as the 1996 Southland Conference Player of the Year.

At East Central, Cooley played under the tough love of legendary coach Jamie Clark.

“Playing for Coach Clark was tough, easy, fun, aggravating, stressful, entertaining, and business-oriented—all at the same time,” he recalls. “But after my time as a player, I came to love him deeply. He cared about us as people.”

One moment Cooley won’t forget happened during a game against Gulf Coast. He smashed a towering home run off a top-tier pitcher, only to be met with a reprimand from Coach Clark for missing a “take” sign.

And then there was the infamous brawl with Scooba—“ask anyone,” Cooley said cryptically, suggesting the story is better told over coffee with former teammates—teammates who remain some of his closest friends to this day.

“We were honestly a family,” Cooley says. “We laughed together, we were disciplined together, and we grew up together.”

Cooley’s baseball journey took him all the way to professional ball, where he was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies in 1996 and played several seasons in the minors. But he is quick to contrast the professional grind with the camaraderie and meaning he found in college ball.

“The minor leagues are a different



“We were honestly a family. We laughed together; we were disciplined together, and we grew up together.”

beast. It’s not about winning or losing; it’s about making it to the next level,” he explains. “You live on the road, and unless you’re a silver spooner, you’re broke.”

He encourages today’s EC athletes to cherish their time on campus. “Those two years of JUCO—I wouldn’t trade them for anything.”

Current ECCC Head Coach Neal Holliman said of Cooley, “There are numerous people who can vouch for Shannon Cooley as an athlete and baseball player at East Central as he has accomplished many honors on the field. ... However, I would also like to focus on the type of character and example Shannon has been for players who continue to come through East Central.

“He represents himself, our program, and the community in a first-class manner. I have always appreciated his willingness to support our program and to share his experiences and the importance of being a member of the East Central baseball program.

After leaving baseball to return home during his father’s battle with cancer, Cooley shifted into a new phase of his life—one shaped by service and sacrifice.

“I didn’t get released. I voluntarily retired,” he says. “I wanted to spend

time with my dad. That decision led to my wife, my children, my grandchildren—and most of all, my relationship with God.”

Cooley has since served 24 years in the Army National Guard, 22 of those on active duty, with deployments to Kuwait, Iraq, and Washington D.C.

“The military, honestly, was just a segue from baseball,” he says. “Both are about brotherhood, sacrifice, and showing up even when it’s hard.”

Lieutenant Colonel (R) David Alexander who became Shannon’s co-worker in the Mississippi Army National Guard

in 2004 and has known him since high school said, “Shannon is the epitome of a senior leader who

strives to develop others and influence others to succeed. His character is unwavering, his love for God and Family is his motivation and his constant drive to make those around him better is relentless. ... Shannon’s honest approach to situations and his ability to communicate with clear and concise guidance is amazing. ... I often recommend others to him for counsel and advice, and I constantly use him as the example of what a soldier, a leader, and a Godly man should be.”

Over the years, Cooley credits a long list of mentors and coaches—from youth ball through college—with shaping him into the man he is today.

“Coach Mack Fanning taught me what it meant to be a student of the game. Joe Gibbon told me to clean up my language and that stuck with me for 35 years. Coach Harris, Coach Shimfessel, Coach Ray ‘Smoke’ Laval—they all left their mark. Coach Clark wanted us to be great men. I hope I’ve done that.”

For Shannon Cooley, it’s never been just about the stats, the titles, or the trophies. It’s been about the people, the moments, and the values forged along the way—from the dugouts of Decatur to the front lines of duty, and everywhere in between.

SUPPORT THE WARRIORS. FUEL THE FUTURE.

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SMITH

–Continued from 18

For her contributions to the industry, she received a Lifetime Pioneer Award in telecommunications—becoming one of the youngest recipients, thanks to her early start working alongside her parents.

Though the technology has evolved—from analog to digital, from copper to fiber—the heart of the company hasn't changed: service, fairness, and community. And as her daughter prepares to one day take the reins, a legacy of leadership continues.

"I'm just a small-town person," she said. "But I've lived a big life, right here."

BLACKBURN

–Continued from 19

of the fabric of East Central for more than 40 years—as a student, teacher, administrator, alumnus and friend. His legacy is one of leadership, mentorship, and service that continues to inspire.

Harrison said, "Larry continually supports EC in many ways that no one is aware of... Larry is a strong community minded person who believes that hard work pays off. I am confident he has served EC in a positive way his entire life and will continue to do so."

BASEBALL ALUMNI DAY

Saturday, March 7, 2026

1 p.m. Doubleheader vs. Baton Rouge

**Special Pre-Game Recognition of the
2016 MACCC State Champion Team and
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Sports Updates

East Central Community College wrapped up the fall athletics season with postseason appearances, all-conference selections, and multiple MACCC Player of the Week honors across football, volleyball, and men's and women's soccer.



Warrior Football

The Warrior football team finished 3-6 overall and 3-3 in MACCC play, closing the year with a win over Southwest Mississippi. East Central averaged 245.8 yards per game, including 206.8 passing yards, and scored 14.4 points per contest. Defensively, the Warriors recorded 644 tackles, 14 sacks and 10 interceptions, returning two for touchdowns, while special teams added eight field goals and converted 14 of 15 PAT attempts. Prince Cottonham and Keoni Denny both earned MACCC Defensive Player of the Week honors during the season.

Football also earned significant postseason recognition with Elijah Singleton named All-MACCC First Team, while Anthony Hopson Jr., Denny, Cottonham, Freddie Gavin Jr., and Gabriel Bobbitt were selected to the Second Team. Elgin McDuffey and Connor Mullins received Honorable Mention honors.

Lady Warrior Volleyball

In its inaugural season, the East Central volleyball program posted a 14-12



record and a 9-7 conference mark, advancing to the MACCC semifinals before falling to Jones College. The Warriors averaged 10.60 kills per set on a .127 hitting percentage, along with 10.06 assists, 1.50 aces, 17.51 digs, and 1.51 blocks per set. East Central earned key wins over Pearl River, Northwest Mississippi, Jackson State CC, Meridian and Itawamba. Libero Emily Truan was a two-time MACCC Defensive Player of the Week and was named to the All-MACCC First Team, while Ainslee Copeland earned Second Team honors and Anna Wojtczak received Honorable Mention.



Warrior Soccer

The men's soccer team finished 8-7-1 overall and 6-4-1 in conference play, advancing to the MACCC postseason before falling to Hinds in the opening round. East Central scored 34 goals, av-

eraging 2.13 per match, and allowed 1.31 goals per contest with four shutouts. Key victories came against Mississippi Gulf Coast, Holmes, Northwest Mississippi, East Mississippi and Meridian. Michael Lismore was selected to the All-MACCC First Team, while Camilo Lopez Sanchez earned Second Team honors and Juan Jose Solano was named Honorable Mention.



Lady Warrior Soccer

The women's soccer team completed the season 4-9-3 overall and 2-7-2 in conference play, scoring 24 goals and earning results late in the year with wins over Hinds and Itawamba and draws with East Mississippi and Meridian. The Warriors averaged 1.50 goals per match and finished with two shutouts. Raiyleigh Perry was named All-MACCC Honorable Mention.

**Go online to
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East Central Community College

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Sponsored by the
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May 15

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Registration Deadline

April 15, 2026

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Information

601.635.6303
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Schedule

9 a.m. Sign In/Range Time
10 a.m. Tournament Begins
3 p.m. Meal and Prizes
(Approximate Time)

Registration Fee

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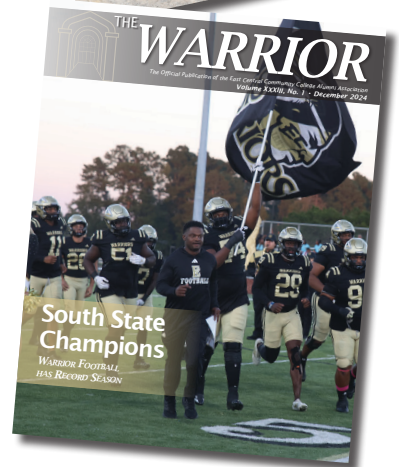
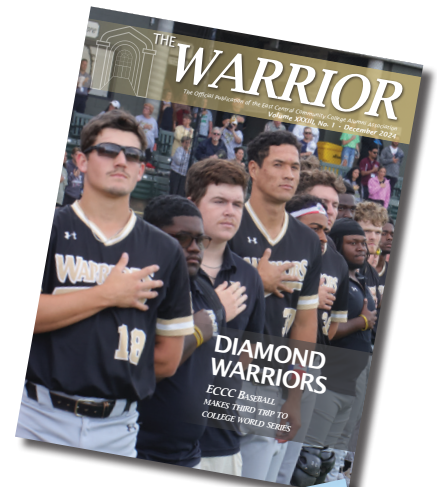
To continue receiving a printed copy of *The Warrior* magazine, one must pay annual alumni dues or make an annual contribution to the Alumni Association.

Alumni Association Membership runs from July 1 to June 30 each year. Dues and contributions to the ECCC Alumni Association help promote events such as Homecoming, Special Alumni Days, EC Day at the Fair, the Warrior Golf Classic, and occasional student events on campus.

Please mail your dues to
ECCC Alumni Association,
P. O. Box 129, Decatur, MS 39327,
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- \$25 per individual annually*
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- \$250 per couple lifetime membership*



EAST CENTRAL
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With You In Mind

Alumni Updates

60s

Roger Hines ('64) of Kennesaw, Ga. recently had a book published about the large family in which he grew up in Scott County near Forest. Titled *The Hard and the Beautiful / Life in a Family of Seventeen Children*, Hines said, "the book describes our 'elegant poverty' but accentuates the love we had for each other, all because of the Christian faith of our dear parents. It traces the historical periods through which we all lived from 1894, the birth year of our father, to 1966, the year our youngest sibling turned 19. The book is co-authored by my daughter Christy who writes on fatherhood and the need of fatherhood." The book can be found on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookmiser, and many other outlets. Hines, a retired educator, was a columnist for the Marietta (GA) Daily Journal for twelve years and often referred to Forest and EC.

80s

Joe Clay ('84) of Lake recently published his first book *Mornings With Joe* which contains 31 daily devotions. Proceeds from his book will support ECCC athletes. Joe has also served for many years as the public address announcer for ECCC baseball games.

Stacy Powell Sr. ('84) of Lithonia, Ga. Serves as Sergeant (Executive Protection for the Sheriff) in the Henry County Sheriffs Office.

Dr. Jimmy Hollingsworth ('85) was recently installed as a trustee of the American Dental Association.

90s

Dr. Lori Rogers Wilcher ('93) of Union was honored with the Sherrye C. Thompson Parent Advocate Award from the Mississippi Association for Gifted Children.

00s

The Citizens Bank of Philadelphia recently announced the appointment of **Elizabeth "Liz" Johnson Owen ('03)** as its Senior Vice President and Chief Talent Officer. Liz has previously served in the position of Director of Human Resources and Chief Risk Officer. Liz is a long-term employee of the bank, joining the bank's team in 2006. She is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of Mississippi State University, where she also earned a Master of Business Administration in 2006. Liz is a 2018 graduate of the Mississippi School of Banking. She serves on the Mississippi Bankers Association Human Resources Committee, as well as the East Central Community College Alumni Board.

10s

Kirk Stringer and Kara Smith ('15) were married Saturday, August 30, at Green Gates Farm House in Stringer.

In Memoriam

Joan Maxey Hensley Nance ('56), June 24, 2025

Bobbie Nell Smith Ray ('60), Aug. 5, 2025

Hubert Lavelle Williams, Jr. ('61), Aug. 16, 2025

Eva Brenda Rowena Gatewood Hubbard ('63), Nov. 9, 2025

Doyle Henry McMullan ('63), Aug. 30, 2025

Don Crawford ('67), Aug. 23, 2025

Larry Golden ('69), July 18, 2025

Terry Tullos ('72), Aug. 4, 2025

Robert Warner ('72), Aug. 30, 2025

Bruce Cater ('75), Oct. 19, 2025

Celee Brown Vickers ('97), Aug. 29, 2025

Jonathan Thorne ('00), Oct. 20, 2025

Tanya Clearman Burroughs ('01), Sept. 28, 2025

Blake Warren ('04), Aug. 4, 2025

Heather Blackwell ('06), July 18, 2025

Jason Watkins ('10), Aug. 20, 2025

Walterine Herrington Bell, M.D.

Walterine Herrington Bell, M.D., ('52) of Brandon died October 30, 2025. She graduated from Union High School, East Central Junior College, Mississippi College, and the University of Mississippi School of Medicine. She completed a psychiatric residency at the University of Louisville in Louisville, Ky. Before returning to Mississippi to spend her career serving as a staff psychiatrist at the Mississippi State Hospital. She was selected ECCC Alumna of the Year in 1989.

Carole Pace Henry

Carole Pace Henry ('57) of Madison died Sept. 29, 2025. She attended Decatur High School, East Central Junior College, and Mississippi State College for Women. She taught in Missouri and California until she retired. In preparation for her career, Mrs. Henry received numerous honors and accolades. A 1957 graduate of ECJC, Mrs. Henry was a member of college marching band, Phi Theta Kappa, where she served as secretary, and was a cast member of ECJC players. Also, she was a member of Girls Choir Mixed Choir, and college Ensemble. She was the feature editor of the Wo-He-Lo, as a freshman, and served as editor in chief her sophomore year. She was a member of Sigma Tau Sigma and recipient of the Social Science Award, being the first female to receive that award. The college honored her as Alumna of the Year in 2012.

Nell Allen Rogers

Nell Allen Rogers ('66) of Philadelphia died Oct. 24, 2025. Nell served as the Housing Program Manager for the Disaster Recover Unit of the Community Incentives Divisions of the Mississippi Development Authority. She previously served in the administration of Tribal Chief Phillip Martin of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. She held bachelor's and master's degrees from Mississippi State University. She was selected ECCC Alumna of the Year in 1998.



RETIRED CHOIR DIRECTOR CELEBRATES 90TH BIRTHDAY

Charles W. Hinson who served as ECCC's director of choral activities from August 1983 to May of 1999 celebrated his 90th birthday in August. In addition to serving as vocal music instructor and choir director, Hinson established the Ac'cents show choir, the first show ensemble and predecessor to Vocé. He also taught music appreciation, music theory, and private voice lessons. When he retired the ECCC choir of 80 plus members was the largest in the history of ECCC. He and his wife, Marie, moved to DeFuniak Springs, Fla., upon retirement. He enjoys his art studio and continues to produce award-winning paintings. He also enjoys writing music. He enjoyed his 16 years at ECCC where his wife, Marie, and son, Chuck, are graduates.

Carolyn Riser Haralson

Carolyn Riser Haralson ('91) of Forest died Sept. 26, 2025. She served as a dormitory supervisor at East Central Community College from 1982 until her retirement in 2003 after 21 years service. While employed at the college, she took advantage of the opportunity to attend classes and graduated in 1991 with an associate in applied science degree. She was a talented seamstress, lending her craft to many of the college plays and musicals. In retirement she turned her attention to quilting as a member of the Ephesus Quilters at Ephesus Baptist Church.

Alice Moore Pouncey

Alice Moore Pouncey of Decatur died Nov. 25, 2025. She served as a home economics and psychology instructor at East Central Community College from 1969 until her retirement in 2001. She was selected ECCC Instructor of Year and in addition to her teaching duties she served as sponsor of the Fashion Squad and served on numerous committees. She held degrees from Jones Junior College, University of Southern Mississippi, University of West Alabama (then Livingston University). She was preceded in death by her husband, Ken, a former ECCC football coach.

Small Gifts. Big Impact.

You don't have to make a large donation to make a big difference. In fact, when many of us give just a little each month, those small gifts add up to do some pretty amazing things for East Central Community College students.

Think about it—what you might spend on a bag of chips, a cup of coffee, or one dinner out could help fund scholarships, provide classroom resources, or support student programs that change lives.

For instance:

If just 100 alumni each committed to giving \$5 a month, that's \$6,000 a year—enough to make a real difference for students.

If 1,000 alumni gave \$5 a month, that's \$60,000 a year, opening even more doors of opportunity.

And if 10,000 alumni joined in at \$5 a month, we'd have \$600,000 each year to build on the foundation laid by those who came before us—keeping our campus vibrant and up to date in both social spaces (like dorms and student activities) and educational areas (like technology and classroom resources).

Best of all, these unrestricted gifts allow us to pool resources and meet needs as they arise—whether that's updating a lab, improving campus facilities, or supporting student success initiatives. However, if your heart is tied to a specific area, you can earmark your monthly gift for a particular department, program, or cause—like Fine Arts, Athletics, or even a specific sport or instructional area.

With our easy online giving system, you can set up a recurring monthly gift in just minutes. Simply choose an amount that works for you—\$5, \$10, \$25—and your contribution will automatically support ECCC every month.

Your small gift—combined with hundreds or thousands of others—creates big opportunities.

Would you consider a recurring gift today? Small or large, it makes a difference.

Maria McLeod

Director of Alumni Relations



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LONGTIME EMPLOYEES RETIRE

East Central Community College celebrated the careers and contributions of four December retirees – Mike Reeves, Carol Shackelford, Derek Pace, and Artie Foreman – during the annual Christmas social, where ECCC President Dr. Brent Gregory presented each with a plaque of appreciation. Foreman, who first joined the college's physical plant staff in 1993 and rose to director of the physical plant before being named director of special projects, leaves behind a legacy of quiet dedication and campus stewardship. Pace, who began his tenure in 1996 in Information Technology and advanced to Dean of IT, helped guide the college through numerous technological changes with steady leadership and innovation. Shackelford, who came to ECCC in 1998 as an English instructor and later served as department chair, caps an inspiring 50-year career in education marked by a passion for her students. Reeves joined ECCC as the truck driving instructor as part of the Workforce Education department. All four were honored with heartfelt receptions by their departments before the campus community gathered to celebrate their service and wish them well in retirement.

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