

Maryville Daily Forum column
Thursday, Oct. 4, 2012
Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Throughout Northwest's history we have faced very good times and very tough times. But no matter the circumstances one thing our University community always does well is lean on each other and use our experiences to better ourselves, our University and our community. That has once again been the case in recent weeks and will continue to be a theme.

It has been an emotional experience these last three weeks since the tragic death of one of our own, Tomarken Smith. My colleagues and I have walked the campus and have been in the community, talking to so many of you about and the kind of person he was. He was a senior pre-professional studies major with a minor in coaching. He had a winning smile and attitude. He was engaged. He loved life and loved people. He was a Bearcat.

Since Tomarken's passing on the morning of Sept. 14, members of the Northwest Leadership Team and other campus leaders have come together multiple times with student leaders, faculty and staff in a variety of sharing sessions. We've also continued to meet with Director of Public Safety Keith Wood, City Manager Greg McDanel, Mayor Glenn Jonagan and other city and county leaders to discuss short- and long-term actions pertaining to this case. These discussions have been powerful and insightful, and they will continue.

We can't erase what happened last month, but one of the many ways we can honor Tomarken is by coming together as a community and celebrating his life. We need to ensure we engage in tough conversations and focus on how we – the University and community – together can help accentuate our overall student success focus.

To start, consider the rich cultural perspectives Northwest offers and how that adds so much to our community. I challenge you to educate yourself about the range of resources and organizations that give back to our community in so many ways – from the 250 student volunteers who spent a recent Sunday afternoon painting cabins at Mozingo Lake for our annual BRUSH campaign to the annual "Take Back The Night" march and rally against violence, which is coming up Thursday, Oct. 11, and is sponsored by Northwest Wellness Services and our Coalition Against Violence group.

Indeed, we have much to celebrate at Northwest, including last weekend's Family Weekend festivities, during which we honored six distinguished alumni – Maryville residents Edward Farquhar and Ahmed Malkawi, among them – at our annual Alumni Awards Banquet. We also celebrated the opening of the Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families, which adds value to the education that both our teachers in training and the children who attend the school are receiving on the Northwest campus.

We recently honored our Dean's Faculty Award winners, and Dr. Joe Kreizinger, associate professor of theatre and chair of the Department of Professional Education, was named Northwest's recipient of the 2013 Governor's Award for Excellence in Education. Joe's exemplary work is just one model of the excellent teaching, research, service, student support and collaboration our faculty carry out on a daily basis.

Also, I am excited by Northwest's partnership with the city of Maryville to begin engineering design work on the Fourth Street Improvement Project. It's been a pleasure to work with Greg McDanel and Mayor Jonagan on the proposed project, which will dramatically enhance the appearance and safety aspects of a key route between Maryville's downtown the Northwest campus. This is an exciting time for our university and the city, and I believe this is only one of many such projects we'll partner on in coming years.

As citizens of northwest Missouri, Northwest Missouri State University is our university, and it remains a part of our identity. Northwest and its surrounding communities have prospered for 107 years because of

an attitude built on working together and supporting one another no matter the challenge. I am thankful to you for your support and look forward to continued collaboration.

Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest visit www.nwmissouri.edu.