

Maryville Daily Forum column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

From last week's Homecoming celebration to the number of events we have coming up that serve to celebrate the learning and successes of our students this fall, we are in the midst of a special time of the year at Northwest that helps us to develop a deeper connection with the University, its community impact and reflect on the connections we've built with students through the years.

Amid all of the Homecoming festivities last week – the decorating contests, the variety show, the parade and the Bearcat football team's big win to cap it – there is one event that is particularly meaningful to so many at Northwest, especially to the 247 Bearcats who hail from countries 28 countries other than the United States.

Last Friday, Northwest hosted its 15th annual International Flag-Raising Ceremony at the Joyce and Harvey White International Plaza, which is named for 1951 Northwest graduate Joyce (Smith) White and her husband, Harvey. Born and raised in Maryville, Joyce also taught literature at Northwest for several years and served two terms on the Northwest Foundation Board of Directors. But it was during her years as a student and through her close friendship with international student Mary "Maria" de Ardeles Stein of Argentina that she developed a passion for promoting diversity.

Fourteen years after the International Plaza was completed and Northwest had its first Flag-Raising Ceremony, the White's vision has become an increasingly important part of our University's identity. As Director of International Affairs Dr. Jeff Foot reminds us, the founding idea for the International Plaza was for it to serve as a symbol to international students that they are welcome at Northwest and in Maryville – that they are not simply "foreign exchange students," but they are Bearcats. The chance for each student to see his or her country's flag flying high above the International Plaza each day is extremely comforting and powerful.

Over the years, the tradition of the Flag-Raising Ceremony has grown immensely. The number of students participating in it has more than doubled from the 117 who participated in that first ceremony during the 1998 Homecoming weekend. Now, so many of Northwest's Walkout Day activities are scheduled around the Flag-Raising Ceremony, and the lawn between the International Plaza and Colden Pond is filled with students, faculty, staff, alumni who have returned for the weekend and community members. With each passing year, there is an increased energy in the air that makes one proud of the unity we share at Northwest and helps each of us pause to reflect on our own heritage.

With the Homecoming week behind us now, our students, faculty and staff turn to finishing the trimester strong; there are just five weeks left before our winter commencement ceremony Dec. 14. In the meantime, there are many exciting events and traditions coming up, including one of our great holiday traditions at Northwest – the 39th annual Yuletide Feaste, Dec. 7-8.

Additionally, theater students will produce a series of short plays during their Black Box Showcase Nov. 16 and 17. Our next Encore performance, "Cirque Mechanics," takes place Nov. 19, and our final Distinguished Lecture of the fall trimester is Apollo 13 Astronaut Fred Haise on Nov. 28. Throughout the month there are a few concerts featuring our musical ensembles, and our annual Holiday Tree Lighting is 5:15 p.m. Nov. 27 at the Gaunt House on the Northwest campus.

And let's not forget, the Bearcat football team needs your support this weekend as we take on our rivals to the south in an important game at 2:30 p.m. Saturday at Bearcat Stadium that will decide the winner of the MIAA championship. We all hope to see the stadium packed with green and white not only this Saturday, but for several more to come. Along with that, our volleyball team finishes its regular season

with a match against Truman State at 7 p.m. Saturday in Bearcat Arena. The basketball seasons are under way, too, and both teams are looking forward to successful campaigns.

There is never a shortage of educational and entertaining opportunities at Northwest, and with Thanksgiving upon us, we are thankful for the people of northwest Missouri and the relationship we have with our community.

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