

**Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Jan. 7, 2016**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Let me start by wishing you a joyful 2016 and, again, offering thanks for your support of Northwest Missouri State University. The year of 2015 was a remarkable one for the university that included numerous celebrations – and learning opportunities – culminating, of course, with our Bearcat football team capturing its fifth NCAA Division II national championship in program history.

So much of our success occurs with the support of our surrounding communities and large alumni base, as was evident at Sporting Park on Dec. 19, and we are so grateful.

Our employees reconvened yesterday for our annual January All-Employee Meeting, and classes resume Monday to begin the spring trimester. As we do each year around this time, we pause and reflect on all we have accomplished so far in the academic year and reset for the spring trimester.

The ultimate celebration comes at the end of each term when we honor those students who cross the bridge to alumni status. During our Dec. 18 winter commencement ceremonies, we celebrated more than 600 students who earned their degrees, joining the one-third of select Americans to attain such status.

These graduates ranged in age from 20 to 67 years old and hailed from 20 states and five countries. Our most popular bachelor's degree was elementary education, and the most popular master's degree was applied computer science.

It was a pleasure also to have Greg Gilpin – a 1986 alumnus, musician, composer and educator – join us to deliver the commencement address. Greg urged graduates to “take it all in” and “take chances and take advantage of opportunities.” Indeed, that is something we do well at Northwest.

As you've read and heard me say on several occasions, Northwest is disrupting from a position of strength. That means we are experiencing significant progress on a variety of fronts, but we are not resting on our laurels. We are thinking boldly and focused on the future. We are taking some risks, seeking to be a solution provider and cultivating partnerships that are values-based, robust and purposeful.

During 2015, we opened a School of Health Science and Wellness, and we continued our focus on agricultural sciences and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) instruction. We are adding and revising a variety of academic programs.

Establishing and maintaining partnerships remain an important part of our culture. We celebrated our Northland CAPS Innovation Education Partnership and broke ground for our Northwest-Kansas City Center with the city of Gladstone and North Kansas City Schools. We released the findings of an economic impact study that illustrated \$617.5 million in added regional impact, and we celebrated the completion of the Fourth Street Improvement Project, which was the product of our partnership with the city of Maryville.

We hosted an Open Forum on Social Justice that was planned and convened by student leaders. Our progress on diversity, equity and inclusion requires our communities to be part of the solution.

We also hosted significant academic summits, including an STEM Excellence Pathway Workshop in partnership with the Missouri Mathematics and Science Coalition, the Carnegie Science Center and the Northwest Missouri Regional Professional Development Center as well as our Missouri Academy of Science, Mathematics and Computing. We hosted workshops with North Central Missouri College and Metro Community College to have collaborative discussions with faculty about programming. We hosted a summit with regional health care industry leaders to discuss health science and wellness.

We opened our state-of-the-art Robert and Virginia Foster Fitness Center in September, and we're focused on upgrading other facilities. We're garnering support for a proposed Agricultural Learning Center on our R.T. Wright Farm. We also received nearly \$6.9 million from the state for some sorely needed work on deferred maintenance.

And, Dr. Diana Linville, an instructor in our Department of Mathematics Computer Science and Information Systems, was named our Governor's Award for Excellence in Education recipient.

We continue work on "Focus," Northwest's strategic plan, which is helping align and drive our work. We are in year two of addressing the plan, which includes five strategic objectives and 14 strategic actions. We have action teams in place and working toward our goals.

Our goals are helping to prioritize our work and initiatives as well as guide our conversations and budget decisions. We'll make some mistakes along the way. We'll also take our strengths and enhance them.

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