

**Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Feb. 4, 2016**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

We gather as Bearcats to celebrate championships and we gather in difficult times. In a span of two weeks, we have gathered to celebrate the lives of Haily Hayes and Nick Turner – two Northwest Missouri State students who left us too soon. We gathered for their family and friends. We gathered for each other and as members of the Northwest community. We gathered to celebrate the ways they connected with us and with others.

Haily, a freshman business management major from Oak Grove, Missouri, left us Jan. 17, and in celebrating her life, we can help uplift the importance of education and in helping kids. Haily was a member of Sigma Kappa and a dedicated volunteer for Big Brothers Big Sisters. Her passing has sparked a spike in applications for Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Nick, a junior corporate recreation and wellness major from St. Louis, who passed away Sunday, was quiet and respectful but an energetic and tough competitor. He had a winning attitude. He was an inspiration to his teammates on the Bearcat football team. He, too, lit up when kids were around.

Words cannot possibly convey how our campus community is feeling and how much we mourn for Haily and Nick, their families, friends and others. Our campus certainly is entering another phase of learning and growing – a difficult phase full of various stages of grief and so much more.

In crafting remarks to share with Nick's family, friends and teammates as we gathered Monday night, I kept coming back to three points: finding a way, embracing friendship and teammates, and elevating people and love.

Find a way, as most of you know, was our 2015 national champion Bearcat football team's battle cry. Yet, I believe, as Bearcats and as a community, we can use it on a greater level. Find a way each day to articulate your blessings. Find a way to do good – daily. Find a way to value each person and their strengths and talents – daily. Find a way to put down our technology and engage those around us in meaningful conversations – daily. Find a way to celebrate the people who surround us – daily.

On embracing friendship and teammates, it is our responsibility to look over those who are by our side – not just when they are with us, but when they move away, and in the cases of Haily and Nick, pass on to a greater existence. Being a friend – does not stop when a season is done, when a championship is won or when a life expires. Embrace differences and ensure we celebrate each other in good times – but be there for each other in difficult times.

On elevating people and love, our iPhones and championship trophies are artifacts. Rather, we shape our legacies and elevate others through the relationships we build, the love we spread and the beauty we color with our personal canvas. As Bearcats, we are known for connecting with others. We come together as a Bearcat family in good times and in times of pain. We'll keep connecting.

Our campus community is feeling a range of emotions – from sadness and confusion to anger – about our losses of Haily and Nick. Some are feeling a sense of uneasiness, given the short time between their deaths. We have no reason to believe the circumstances of Haily’s or Nick’s deaths pose a risk to other individuals at Northwest or our community. Do not perpetuate rumors. Our campus is safe.

In closing, I visited my mom in my hometown of Flint, Michigan, last weekend and Snoop Dog was visiting the city as well. Pundits asked why he was doing so because he had no ties to the city.

To paraphrase his response, he said we are all people and the people of Flint are his ties. As Bearcat Nation, a community and northwest Missouri, we share common ties, and we are a people joined together.

Community members, thank you for being ties to our campus, our students and each other. Thank you for your compassion, sharing and love. Thank you for providing opportunities for our students to serve, learn and grow. Thank you for being mentors, guides and a support system.

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