

**Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Sept. 7, 2017**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

We are driven at Northwest Missouri State University by student success and profession-based learning opportunities that are embedded in a focus on access, affordability and quality. We are focused on helping students persist through their education, complete their degrees and secure employment.

With those drivers in the fronts of our minds, classes are in session and our 2017-18 academic year has begun at Northwest. This fall, we welcomed a freshman class of 1,253 students and 298 transfer students. Moreover, we are extremely pleased that a record 74 percent of our sophomore class returned to Northwest this fall, a 3 percent increase from last year's rate, which also remains ahead of state and national averages.

As students were making their way to campus, we learned that Maryville is listed by Safewise as one of the "Safest College Towns in America" for the third consecutive year, appearing at No. 22 on this year's list and up from 28 last year. This is a tribute to the partnership of our local law enforcement agencies and our University Police Department and all they do to engage with students and promote safety.

Additionally, we were notified by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities that Northwest will receive its Excellence and Innovation Award this fall in the category of Sustainability and Sustainable Development. We are so proud of our long history of using alternative fuels and sustainability practices.

All of this is evidence of our culture of being safe, trusted, invested and resourceful, but a large part of our success also is attributed to our partnership with the city of Maryville and the ways our community embraces Northwest and our students.

City Manager Greg McDanel and so many other community leaders joined us Aug. 23 for our All-Employee Meeting, which took a community focus this year. Greg provided a powerful review of the transformational ways Northwest and the city have partnered in recent years – from the Fourth Street Improvement Project to Mazingo Lake Recreation Area to the construction that is now underway on the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse. I welcomed Greg's challenge to us that we work to explore other areas in our community where our individual expertise or our students' skills and profession-based learning needs may help elevate Maryville and surrounding communities.

We also are thankful for downtown revitalization expert Ron Drake for addressing our All-Employee Meeting, taking time to visit Maryville and hear more of our story, and helping us flip our minds toward the potential for our community's future. We need to take note of the "cool factors" in Maryville as well as on our own campus and exude pride in our assets. We need to guard the heart of Maryville and create more spaces for people to make connections.

We talk a lot at Northwest about tearing down silos and interdisciplinary approaches. We need to consider community partnerships to assist businesses, non-profits and our

community as a whole – in any area of study – and how we may look differently at physical locations on our own campus. Our Campus Master Plan provides many opportunities and, certainly, we will discover others as we work on master plans for areas such as residential life and agricultural sciences. We will take Ron’s message and expand on it to better our campus.

We are 112 years young this fall, and Northwest’s partnership with our community has never been stronger – but I believe we can take it to another level as we think about quality of life, quality of work, quality of living, vitality and viability. As partners, we must work together and continue to enhance our programs, our services and our community so that students all backgrounds have opportunities to succeed.

Beyond partnerships, let us reaffirm the importance of unity as we begin the academic year. I am encouraging Northwest employees and students to discuss with each other and with their teams the importance of civility. Talk about the importance of welcoming all, the importance of freedom of speech and allowing for protests safely – but also the importance of fighting hate speech with our own freedom of speech and speech of love and dignity for all. I urge you to engage each other in uplifting our Northwest culture of acceptance and connecting.

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