

Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Dec. 14, 2017
Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

I hope this message finds you well as we celebrate the holiday season and the culmination of our fall trimester at Northwest Missouri State University.

We recently lit our holiday tree at the historic Thomas Gaunt House – a cherished ceremony each year that uplifts the values we hold dear at Northwest, of civility, love and unity – and I thank Mrs. J for the role she plays to prepare the house and help coordinate the ceremony each year. I am so thankful for her partnership and her leadership as she joined the Downtown Maryville organization as its volunteer executive director this fall.

Last weekend, our Madraliers, under the direction of Dr. Brian Lanier, hosted its 44th annual Yuletide Feaste – a venerable tradition at Northwest that transforms our ballroom at the J.W. Jones Student Union into an elegant royal banquet with performances by Recorder Consort, the Royale Brass Quintet and The Royal Court Players. The holiday season is indeed a wonderful time of year at Northwest.

December, of course, also marks a time of closure and celebration for the students who have completed their degrees at Northwest and are preparing to begin the next chapter of their lives. We host our winter commencement ceremonies Friday at Northwest, and we boast 495 graduates this fall. We also are looking forward to welcoming 2005 Northwest alumnus Bilal Clarence back to campus as our commencement speaker. A software engineering manager at a Silicon Valley technology giant, he has established himself in the field and as an entrepreneur.

With our commencement ceremonies as the culmination to our fall trimester, we have many achievements for which to be thankful – from a national award recognizing our sustainability initiatives to successful partnerships that support our community and provide our students with valuable profession-based experiences. Partnerships and experiences such as the one that allowed Northwest student Emily Stark to further her passion for public artwork and create a mural – aptly titled, “Nurture and Grow” – in downtown Maryville are outstanding opportunities for our students.

We are advancing agriculture through the receipt of a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture that will support agriculture faculty and students in developing an experiential-based classroom toolkit for middle school students to showcase the importance of food systems and draw linkages between food production and agricultural careers.

We also are thankful for our Horace Mann Laboratory School, which recently succeeded in its bid for a grant award that will fund a new outdoor classroom outside Everett W. Brown Education Hall. The outdoor space, which will be accessible to the community, is truly innovative and unique in nature. Furthermore, our Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families achieved reaccreditation for another five years from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and we are proud to continue providing opportunities for our students and local families at that facility.

As a new legislative season begins, we are thankful for Sen. Dan Hegeman and Rep. Allen Andrews joining the Legislative Breakfast last week in conjunction with the Greater Maryville Chamber of Commerce. We are thankful for their service and advocacy.

As the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and Higher Education Reauthorization Act appear imminent, we are rightfully concerned about the damaging effects on higher education and our stakeholders. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities, to which Northwest belongs, has stated its disappointment with the approval of the tax and jobs act, noting it contains key provisions that undermine nonprofit institutions, including public colleges and universities, and thus reduce access to affordable, high quality public higher education.

This appears to be a frontal assault on student success, intellectual pursuits and the continuing economic prosperity of communities and those we serve. We will work to understand the thinking and pending impacts behind these pieces of legislation and mitigate the fallout of intended and unintended consequences – as we always do – to protect one of our nation’s competitive forces.

Amid all that is taking place, it is incumbent on each of us to take a step back and give thanks for our blessings. We have a special culture at Northwest and in our community. Thank you for all you do to uplift and promote our culture at Northwest Missouri State University. I wish you a happy holiday season.

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