

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, Aug. 15, 2019**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

The fall semester at Northwest Missouri State University officially begins in less than a week with classes starting Aug. 21, but the campus really comes alive when our first-year students arrive Saturday morning for move-in day and the kickoff to our Advantage activities.

Preparations for this fall have been months in the making, beginning with the work of our recruitment, financial assistance and residential life teams to finalize scholarship and housing packages, and so many others who are working diligently behind the scenes to ensure our new Bearcats feel welcome and have nothing short of a positive experience as they begin their careers. Our focus on student success is a collaborative effort, and we are pleased to be projecting an enrollment of more than 7,000 students this fall, which amounts to a 2.7 percent increase from last fall.

Our alumni also were busy this summer and helped new students begin building the network that becomes so valuable to them during their time on campus and beyond. The Northwest Alumni Association, in partnership with regional alumni chapters and volunteers, hosted eight "New Student Send-Off" events throughout the state as well as Omaha and Des Moines to provide opportunities for alumni, students and parents to connect with others in their communities.

In addition to our Summer Orientation Advisement and Registration programming in June, Advantage activities help first-year students acquaint themselves with other Northwest students. They learn about the campus and hear from some truly inspiring speakers. We also provide them with some entertainment before their coursework begins.

We invite you to join us at the Memorial Bell Tower at the center of the Northwest campus around 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon and greet our newest Bearcats during the March to the Tower. The tradition symbolizes our first-year students' entrance into the Bearcat community as they proceed from our new student convocation and pass under the Bell Tower. On the other side, faculty, staff and community members welcome the new students with high fives, words of encouragement and hand-made signs.

To further help Northwest kick off the fall semester, join us for our annual back-to-school fireworks show at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday at the practice fields north of the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse. Bring your blankets and lawn chairs for what is sure to be a spectacular show.

Indeed, we are poised at Northwest to have another exciting academic year in 2019-20. With the sun-setting of our previous strategic plan last spring, we are focused on a new set of strategic objectives to guide our thinking, actions and investments. Our core competencies – safe, trusted, invested and resourceful – are threaded through everything we do. We remain committed to providing an outstanding education at an affordable price.

We also are proud to be entering the public phase of our Forever Green capital campaign. Years in the making, the Forever Green campaign offers opportunities to invest in and optimize Northwest's strengths, establish innovative academic programming, intensify our emphasis on profession-based learning and provide solutions for our students, communities and workforce.

Our goal for the campaign is to raise \$45 million, which includes \$14 million already raised to construct the Hughes Fieldhouse, and we have secured more than half the funding needed for a planned \$8.5 million Agricultural Learning Center. Investment in student scholarships also is a key bucket of our campaign that has drawn significant interest and funding.

As Campaign Co-Chairs Mel and Valorie Booth wrote in a recent letter of thanks to our Northwest Foundation Board, Northwest Leadership Team and University Advancement staff for the work they have completed and will continue to do on the campaign, we know the final phase of our Forever Green campaign will be exciting, and we believe many more Bearcats will join in endorsing and supporting Northwest through their generous contributions. "Even though it was more than 50 years ago, memories of our time on campus seem like yesterday," Mel and Valorie wrote. "It was a great place to get an education then and an even better place for students today. We have a great affection for Northwest and wish for each new generation a similarly memorable Forever Green experience."

We are so appreciative at Northwest of the support provided by our surrounding communities. As the institution enters its 114th year, we invite you to join us in uplifting our students and others, achieving new milestones, solving the problems that confront us and sustaining our amazing university.

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