

**Local newspaper column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Northwest Missouri State University's spring semester is in full swing – coming off a superlative fall semester during which Northwest recorded its third-highest enrollment in the institution's 114-year history. Moving forward, we are focused on providing pathways to real-world learning. We are focused on relevant profession-based learning. We are focused on being stewards of the communities we serve.

We have enacted a revised strategic plan, titled "Adventure 2030, and there's no question "the ride" in higher education during this next decade is going to be an adventure. The sector is being disrupted. We are disrupting and remolding our institution. We are taking hold of it by enacting our strategic plan, which focuses on four key areas: learners, partners, people and operations. We have action plan development teams in place and will be working diligently in coming months to address the proposed actions and build them into our FY21 budget.

Aaron North, the vice president of education at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, joined us in January for our All-Employee Meeting and made that much clear. But he also was complimentary of Northwest's focus on students. We measure outcomes after graduation. We enact responsible self-disruption by demonstrating a willingness to learn and apply that learning to challenge ourselves and evolve.

Indeed Northwest is doing many things right, but we have much to consider. How are we impacting learning throughout people's lives? How are we providing students with a pathway to economic empowerment through their identities and in their communities? In the not-so distant future continuous stacking, hybrid delivery models, students attaining college degrees in their 30s and 40s, and a "new campus" that serves not just students seeking degrees but a broad community of learners could be the norm at Northwest.

As we talk about investing in our students and Northwest, and moving forward and disrupting in a responsible way, and embracing the future, you are helping us chart the course and helping to separate us from our peers.

Beyond strategic planning and our intense focus on learning, Northwest is a community that shows compassion and empathy – and I want to share a recent example of the characteristics we practice at Northwest. We talk about it all the time – Bearcats learn. Bearcats care. Bearcats connect. Bearcats practice civility. And Bearcats show pride – and what an example so many of our employees showed recently of Bearcats reaching out, empathizing and breaking down silos.

It started with a simple idea. Ameer Wilmes, an assistant director of financial assistance, had been thinking about all the work our grounds crew and custodians do to keep the Northwest campus roadways and sidewalks clear. She felt a need to do something to show appreciation for them. So she sent an email to about 25 colleagues and shared her idea of gathering some treats our crews could enjoy when they came inside for a break.

Amee's idea spread. Bearcats connected. And provided potato chips. Cookies. Cinnamon rolls. Meat and cheese platters. Staff members provided enough food for not just first shift workers, but for the second and third shifts, too!

In an email thanking individuals and office teams who provided food, Amee wrote, "The food and drink spread was one to be envied!! The smiles, thank yous and the faces of those who knew they were appreciated were priceless. I am truly glad that I was able to be there this morning to give a little talk about our appreciation and stick around and visit with the wonderful staff from these areas. A card was given and I mentioned each office that contributed to the day."

I challenged our faculty and staff at Northwest, and I relay the challenge to you. For the big and small tasks, for the mundane and the tall tasks, let's be sure to continue to outreach to others, lending a smile and a thanks, offering kudos and appreciation.

Reach out and join us this weekend – whether you chose to attend Friday's Northwest Jazz Festival, Theatre Northwest's production of "Under Milk Wood," Saturday's Bearcat basketball games, or our inaugural Diversity Leadership Conference and the keynote address by Dr. Michael Eric Dyson at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Ron Houston for the Performing Arts. Northwest thrives on the support of our surrounding communities and we hope to see you on campus this spring.

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