

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

We've passed the mid-term point of our fall semester, the fall colors on the beautiful Northwest Missouri State campus are beginning to show and the news is bright.

We've announced a fall enrollment of 7,267 students – the highest in our 115-year history – while maintaining state-leading placement rates and nationally accredited academic programs, such as our School of Education. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education, in fact, has notified Northwest of its statewide mission designations in educator preparation as well as emergency and disaster management and profession-based learning, pending a vote by the General Assembly during its spring 2021 session.

We are pleased, too, with the continued success of our Forever Green capital campaign, which launched publicly a year ago with a goal of raising \$45 million for University initiatives centered on academic excellence, scholarships, student life and other donor-directed gifts. The campaign will close next spring and has raised more than \$49 million to date. Meanwhile, construction is progressing steadily on our Agricultural Learning Center at the R.T. Wright Farm, and less than \$470,000 is needed to meet our FY21 fundraising goal for that project.

Our campus is slowly returning to some kind of normalcy, and our students and employees have embraced our mitigation measures. We are hearing from visitors about the positive experiences they are having on our campus. They feel safe, they appreciate the mitigation measures and our agility – and their experience on the Northwest campus is of higher quality than those on other campuses.

Yet, we understand challenges remain amid COVID-19. As I talk with K-12 colleagues and my presidential peers throughout the country, as well as our own faculty and staff, a common theme of our conversations is that things are hard to predict in our current environment.

The modes of learning and campus life look different this fall than what we are used to seeing at Northwest, but our students, faculty and staff continue to “bring it,” doing what we do to persist toward degree completion and maintain a focus on student success. We have incorporated new technology and innovative approaches to ensure learning continues.

As just one example, our 30th annual Freshman/Transfer Showcase – which provides first-year theatre students an immediate opportunity to gain experience with a mainstage production – went on with COVID-19 mitigation measures, including actors wearing clear masks that were barely noticeable to audience members. Additionally, the performance was livestreamed, providing a new opportunity for our broadcast students to hone their skills with engineering a live production not unlike what we're used to seeing on TV. Northwest broadcast students are streaming concerts, too, including a performance by our Symphony Orchestra Tuesday night.

Our expert faculty continue to represent Northwest well in their fields also. Take, for example, Professor of Biology Dr. Kurt Haberyan, who, with a team of researchers, recently confirmed the discovery of a new algae species. Dr. Rhonda Beemer, an associate professor of health and physical education, also is Northwest's faculty athletics representative and was selected to participate in the NCAA Division II FAR Fellows Institute and received a NCAA Division II Women Leaders X grant. Jacque Loghry, the assistant director of Northwest TRIO Student Support Services, recently was recognized with The National Society of Collegiate Scholars Regional Chapter Advisor of the Year award.

Our partnerships remain strong as well. The University Police Department received notification recently that it will receive a three-year, \$300,000 grant, approved by the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women to help us implement a comprehensive community response team and provide Mosaic Life Care with about \$45,000 per year for sexual assault nurse examiners.

Locally, as we continue to navigate our COVID-19 environment, we must not be complacent as we are seeing a slight increase in cases in Nodaway County and warning signs of a second wave exist across the country. On the Northwest campus and in collaboration with our local partners, we continue to facilitate and coordinate immediate COVID-19 response needs and refine our processes and protocols.

While we have urged our campus community to remain conscious of following mitigation measures and the effects of the virus on those around us, we ask the residents of our surrounding communities to do the same – wash your hands, wear face coverings and maintain a safe distance from others.

As we say, "Bearcats Together," let's continue to take care of each other, support each other and look out for each other.

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