

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, Nov. 19, 2020**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

As Northwest Missouri State University moves into its Thanksgiving break next week and we transition our courses to a virtual mode for the remaining two weeks of our fall semester, we have reason to celebrate the University's ability to stay on ground during a global pandemic that has thwarted so much of what we take for granted in our lives.

Our ability to navigate the challenges we faced on campus this fall while maintaining our focus on student success is heartening and speaks to the tremendous work of our dedicated faculty, staff and students as well the loyalty of our Bearcat community.

Northwest isn't allowing the pandemic to hinder our progress and ability to innovate as we look to the future of our institution. Consider, for example, our Agricultural Learning Center (ALC), which is nearly 50 percent complete at the R.T. Wright Farm and on pace for a spring opening. The ALC is just one piece of our Forever Green campaign, which will conclude in the spring and has already exceeded our \$45 million fundraising goal by nearly \$5 million.

More than \$6.5 million has been raised for the ALC with leading support provided by nearly 50 public and private donors who have joined the University's Homesteaders society by giving \$25,000 or greater toward the project. Northwest also received \$2.5 million from the state of Missouri as well as an equipment grant award of \$343,000. Further, we are grateful for Northwest alumnus John Cline, who announced during our Oct. 23 Board of Regents meeting that he is committed to closing the fundraising gap for the ALC, providing an awe-inspiring gift that is a tribute to his family's lasting connection to Northwest.

When finished, the \$11.4 million, 29,000-square-foot multipurpose ALC will provide for significant enhancements to our School of Agricultural Sciences and its curriculum, as well as other interdisciplinary areas, through the additions of laboratory and exposition spaces as well as classrooms. The ALC will be a destination for producer and agricultural industry meetings, workshops, shows and career development events.

Northwest also is pursuing significant advancements that will uplift our School of Education as well as the need for early child care in our community with the support of a \$1.6 million grant award from the Missouri Department of Social Services. With that funding, we will expand our early child care programming and upgrade the Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families – further preparing future educators and further separating our nationally recognized program from the pack.

Yet, amid this success at Northwest, we are staying vigilant to the effects of COVID-19. We join our partners representing the city of Maryville and Mosaic Life Care in urging our community to continue to be responsible about wearing face coverings, keeping a safe distance from others and using good hygiene to prevent spread of the virus.

After Northwest experienced a concerning spike of COVID-19 cases in August, we recorded three weeks of 20 or fewer active positive cases and now are riding somewhat of a seesaw. We have experienced a second spike in recent weeks, and we continue to monitor a variety

of data points in support of our incremental decision-making. We have used our data throughout the fall as a guidepost and – thanks to the work of so many – have had success with mitigated intramurals, programming and other activities on campus. Our data and contact tracing tell us that unmitigated off-campus activities continue to be a key driver for our case counts.

As we enter the holiday season, allow me to echo the sentiment Nate Blackford, the president of Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville, provided on this page last month. Please take care of yourself and others, and support each other. All of us deal with issues in different ways, and I encourage you to find ways that work best for you to handle the day-to-day ups and downs we all experience.

And celebrate. Celebrate the small things – and the big things – around you. Celebrate family and friends. Celebrate your co-workers by giving them thanks for what they do and do well. Celebrate our students for the grit and persistence they show in learning and bettering themselves. Celebrate all the good that is Northwest Missouri State while taking care of those around you and taking care of yourself. Finally, we celebrate you and our entire community. A very happy Thanksgiving to all!

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