

## **Top 10 list brimming with good news**

Each year, I like to look back and create a “Top 10 list” in David Letterman style. The list, roughly in chronological order, is certainly not all-encompassing – there are great stories and good news every day at Fort Hays State University. However, it does provide a means of looking back and recounting some of the many blessings we enjoyed in 2021. So, in keeping with tradition, here is my top 10 list for 2021.

March brought the exciting news that beginning fall of 2021, thanks to the generosity of the Schmidt Foundation, five students would receive full-ride scholarships to FHSU. The Schmidt Foundation Scholarship includes 30 hours of tuition and fees for fall and spring courses, books, and room and board over a period of four years. Each year, five students will be selected – so in the fall of 2024, we will have 20 Schmidt Foundation scholars on campus.

Speaking of outstanding students, we were enamored with the accomplishments of Brynn Wooten, a sophomore from Westminster, Colo., who was named a 2021 Barry Goldwater Scholar in May. This nationally competitive scholarship will fully fund her final two years of undergraduate study. Brynn’s passion for science, especially paleobiology, began at a very young age as a visitor to the Sternberg Museum of Natural History. During her college search process, she learned of Sternberg Museum’s affiliation with Fort Hays State and immediately decided she wanted to become a Tiger. Brynn is the first FHSU student to receive this prestigious award.

The return to in-person commencement ceremonies was definitely a highlight of 2021. The thrill of having students once again walk across the commencement stage was fantastic. Hats off to the planning committee that thoughtfully balanced honoring our students and their families with best practices for health and safety.

In June, the Kansas Board of Regents approved our new 2022 regional tuition for on-campus students. Fort Hays State doubled down on its commitment to providing quality accessible education by making the bold move to redefine the meaning of regional on-campus tuition. We now offer the equivalent of in-state tuition to students from Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. I can’t wait to welcome more students home to Hays, America!

Over the summer, we celebrated the accomplishments of two student-athletes: basketball standout Whitney Randall received the MIAA Women’s Winter Student-Athlete-of-the-Year Award, and pole vaulter Ryan Stanley earned the MIAA Men’s Spring Student-Athlete-of-the-Year Award after claiming the NCAA Division II national championship in the pole vault. Extraordinary accomplishments for both student-athletes. Tiger proud!

Fully returning to face-to-face classes and a myriad of student activities, from football to theatre, was a spectacular high point in fall 2021.

In August, we dedicated the Schmidt Foundation Center for Art and Design. I especially loved listening to the personal stories about Bob and Pat Schmidt, who enjoyed nearly 69 years of married life together before Pat passed away in 2015 and Bob in 2017. The couple was known for their love of FHSU and their philanthropic support. With a generous \$2.5 million gift, the Schmidt Foundation has carried on Bob’s and Pat’s legacy and their love for education, the arts,

and Fort Hays State by naming a building after them – a building with which the couple would have been enamored.

Speaking of extraordinary generosity, September concluded our Journey campaign. The Journey campaign kicked off Homecoming of 2016 with a goal of raising \$100 million in support of FHSU and its students over a five-year period. Those years flew by, and not only was that ambitious goal reached – it was surpassed. The Journey campaign raised a total of \$112,769,457!

In October, the university hosted a ribbon-cutting event for the Fischli-Wills Center for Student Success. Similar to the Center for Art and Design, this celebration honored two extraordinary individuals, the late Richard Fischli and Dolores Wills-Fischli. Richard and Dolores began their journey with Fort Hays State as two rural Kansas kids pursuing a college education. Both earned bachelor's and master's degrees from FHSU in the 1950s, then moved to southern California. Upon retiring from their careers in education, the Fischlis moved back home to Logan, Kansas. Today, this impressive new facility has become a reality thanks to a \$5 million gift from the Fischlis' estate. Although the generous couple is no longer with us, their legacy of impacting students will continue to live on at Fort Hays State.

Given our focus on improving the lives, our Criminal Justice Department chair, Dr. Tamara Lynn – in partnership with Chief of University Police, Ed Howell – put together a de-escalation center. With the invaluable assistance of U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, FHSU began our Thanksgiving break by celebrating a \$1.25 million federal grant for the training center. Fort Hays State's regional training center will train police on how to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations using a psychological approach. The training provided by FHSU places the university at the forefront of this vital law enforcement training initiative.

And while I have mentioned 10 items, like that extra cookie in a baker's dozen, I must add how excited I am, that at the writing of this column, both our men and women's basketball teams were undefeated, and our women were ranked No. 1 in the NCAA Division II coaches poll. Perhaps this is a foreshadowing of what will appear in my 2022 Top 10 list.

I end 2021 and begin 2022 by expressing my deepest gratitude to our faculty and staff for their resilience and innovation, never losing sight of our enduring commitment to caring for our students. Simply put, our faculty and staff rose to the challenge in 2021 and continued to deliver robust support services and outstanding teaching and learning experiences in thoughtful, impactful, and personal ways. I also thank our students for having faith in Fort Hays State University and working together to create an environment of respect and kindness.

Happy New Year to you and yours – and to FHSU!

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