

Not everything is about COVID-19!

It goes without saying that this summer looks and feels different than those in the past. While we try to make health and safety decisions on behalf of our communities – in a swirl of constantly emerging expert information – one thing that has remained constant is the vitality of Fort Hays State University. Our purpose, people, and place continue to not only remain relevant, but to thrive. Here are just a few of the many success stories to celebrate from the past two months.

Driving forward our mission of creating engaged global citizen-leaders, and a cause for celebration, was the official accreditation approval this summer from the Council on Social Work Education for our online bachelor's degree. Social work is one of the fastest-growing careers in the country, and Fort Hays State University continues to find ways to reach students studying for both bachelor's and master's degrees. Fort Hays State is one of only a handful of universities in the United States – and the only one in Kansas – to offer the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) online. FHSU also is the only university in the state to offer the MSW online.

Following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minn., this spring, our Criminal Justice chair, Dr. Tamara Lynn, wanted to make a difference by creating a culture that emphasizes de-escalation to benefit students pursuing careers in corrections, probation and parole, juvenile services, and other positions where situations may escalate quickly. Toward that end, we recently signed a preliminary agreement for our Criminal Justice and University Police departments to explore the opportunity to establish a regional training center for the National De-escalation Training Center (NDTC) on the FHSU campus. The NDTC is located at Wayne State University in Detroit and facilitates innovation, research, and development of best practices in law enforcement de-escalation training.

These two powerful examples are some of the many ways we have been relentlessly pursuing our mission. We have also been focused on taking care of our place.

Have you been on campus lately? It is beautiful! Our grounds crew in particular has been nurturing and caring for our physical campus in Hays, America. I often walk the campus with my dog, Gracie, and bask in the beauty of the many flowers, plants, trees, and well-cared-for grounds. I hold deep admiration and gratitude for the many colleagues who work hard during the hot, muggy, and often windy, summer months to create such a beautiful environment for all us to enjoy.

While our grounds colleagues toil over the land, our facilities planning team has been equally busy “keeping our house in order.” In addition to the building of the new Fishli Wills Center for Student Success, progress this summer includes renovation to the Black and Gold Room in the Memorial Union, and a roof replacement, HVAC upgrades, and new carpeting for Martin Allen Hall.

Sheridan Hall got a bath, so to speak, with masonry cleaning and sealing. I love how well our team takes care of our beautiful campus limestone. Meanwhile, our team completed Phase 6

of our exterior lighting project: replacing street, pedestrian, and building lighting with LED fixtures. Gustad Bridge also got a “facelift” with repairs to concrete columns and the redesigning of metal guard rail attachments. Albertson Hall also received updates to its roof.

Saving the best – our people – for last, many of our colleagues received accolades over the summer. Fort Hays State University senior Anna Deal was awarded the prestigious American Advertising Federation of Kansas City Foundation scholarship. This is a big deal (pun intended). Anna, a communication studies major from Hutchinson, was one of only 17 students from universities across Kansas and Missouri to be selected as a recipient. We are so proud of her!

Faculty and staff have spent countless hours this summer working through the redevelopment of courses for new delivery methods, incorporating the use of existing and new technology, and overall preparation for the deployment of fall courses at FHSU. I am so thankful for their care for the students’ experiences in the classroom – whether that be online, on campus, or through our international partnerships.

Meanwhile, our alumni have been investing in their alma mater in partnership with the FHSU Foundation by establishing new scholarships. For example, alumni and retired faculty Gary and Ila Hulett established a scholarship in support of students studying chemistry. The scholarship is in honor of Ila, a long-time professor of chemistry, who was known for helping students no matter what time of day. In my book, Gary and Ila are a power couple as they continue to fuel the success of this university in so many ways.

Another power couple, Merrill Milham, retired research physicist, and Dr. Ann Davidoff, a retired professor, created the Milham-Wasinger-Davidoff Mathematics Scholarship and the Milham-Wasinger-Davidoff Physics Scholarship. They join so many others who have provided for the future of students and our world and demonstrate on a very personal level how every gift matters.

As we hunker down and reshape our plans in a COVID world, our Journey capital campaign is rapidly approaching the finish line and continues to push toward its goal of \$100 million by Fall 2021. To date, the Foundation has received more than 65,000 campaign gifts from nearly 23,000 donors. That is called extraordinary generosity.

At Fort Hays State, resilience reigns and success endures. And even in these uncertain times, ones of a nature that none of us have experienced before, I can be certain of one thing – as a colleague of mine said recently, not everything is about COVID-19!

– end –