

Measuring the university's success through the achievements of its graduates

Whether it's for the holidays or a class reunion – coming home is such a special time to rekindle relationships, share joyful (and sometimes mischievous) memories, and take time to reflect on our growth. A university, like a family, provides roots for that growth. And like a family, there is often a lot of planning, preparation and heart that accompanies traditional coming-home events.

And so I begin this column expressing my deep gratitude to everyone who will work hard throughout this weekend to create a wonderful homecoming celebration.

Homecoming also provides us with an extra special opportunity to recognize our alumni through our awards programs. Celebrating their success is especially important. In fact, if you pay special attention to our mission, our work with our students is not really measured by their success while they are students. Our mission is about developing engaged global citizen leaders. Thus the true measure of our success is how our alumni live their lives after they graduate; how they serve their professions, their communities, and our world.

I really value how our awards align with that mission. The Alumni Achievement Award, established in 1959, honors graduates of the university for outstanding accomplishments through career and profession, meritorious service in community betterment, philanthropic activities, and educational achievements.

Past recipients of this award include George F. Sternberg, a 1933 graduate whose first paleontological discovery was of a nearly complete plesiosaur at the age of 9. He became a world-renowned paleontologist and is credited with discovering the famous Fish-Within-A-Fish fossil. John C. Thorns Jr., a 1950 graduate, is also a past recipient. In addition to serving as a faculty member and Art and Design Department chair, he also founded the Hays Arts Council and was a leading force in establishing the on-campus art gallery now named the Moss-Thorns Gallery of Art.

Oh!, and by the way: Don't miss the ribbon cutting for our beautiful Art and Design Building at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The Distinguished Service Award, established in 1974, recognizes individuals, alumni or friends of the university, who have demonstrated a continuing concern for humanity on a universal, national, state or community level; who support spiritual, cultural and educational objectives; and who endorse and exemplify the highest standards of character and personal attributes. This truly mission-centered award has celebrated the compassion of people like Earl and Winona Field (Earl was a 1937 graduate) and Steve Shields, president and CEO of Action Pact Development and an emeritus member of the FHSU Foundation Board of Directors, who is relentlessly focused on positively impacting the quality of life and healthcare for senior citizens.

The Young Alumni Award, established in 1977, recognizes the outstanding achievement and recent accomplishments of 10-15-year graduates. The award is based on professional and educational achievement, community activities, honors and awards received and other noteworthy items of merit since graduation.

Last year's recipient, Jennifer Lapka (a 2003 graduate) really touched my heart, and we have remained in contact throughout the year. Jennifer is the founder of Rightfully Sewn, a charitable organization with two

special purposes. One is to provide seamstress training for at-risk women so they can enter, and thrive in, the fashion industry. The second is to re-establish Kansas City as an “epicenter of garment manufacturing” and then market Kansas City fashion designers in the production of “affordable, high-quality, American-produced garments.”

I am so eager to meet this year’s award recipients and hear the amazing stories of how they delivered big on our mission.

The four recipients of this year’s Alumni Achievement Award are:

- Buck Arnhold ’74, ’76, ’80, a retired artist living in Olathe whose commercial work has included art for Boulevard Brewing Co. and the Kansas City Chiefs.
- Kevin Faulkner ’83, ’83, a retired investor relations officer who lives in Pebble Beach, Calif.
- Dr. Leigh (Bunn) Goodson ’94, president of Tulsa Community College in Tulsa.
- Michael R. Miller ’85, ’86, ’93, Kansas City, who is a retired special agent with the FBI.

The two recipients of this year’s Young Alumni Award are:

- Dr. Cole Engel ’07, ’07, ’09, Hays, an assistant professor of accounting at FHSU.
- Joshua W. Snider ’05, an attorney and the managing shareholder for Gordon Davis Johnson & Shane P.C. in El Paso, Texas.

Dr. Christie (Patterson) Brungardt ’01, and Dr. Curt Brungardt ’81, ’84, Council Grove, both emeritus professors of leadership studies at FHSU, will receive the Distinguished Service Award.

Their accomplishments and generosity are truly inspiring, their impact profound. The stories of their contributions, in large part rooted in the strong relationships and learning developed at The Fort, will be recounted and celebrated.

And I, like all of the presidents before me, will take great pride in how generations of faculty and staff have facilitated the fulfillment of our mission, and in doing so, made this world a better place.