



A-State Alumni Association staff members Amanda McDaniel, Lindsay Burnett, Marsha Carwell, Tara Thomason and Carissa Griffin

A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION *for the* Arkansas State University Alumni Association

BY AUDREY HANES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

This October, the Arkansas State University Alumni Association will mark 100 years of keeping alumni connected to each other and to their alma mater. To commemorate the occasion, the organization will host a celebration on Homecoming Weekend, where decades of Red Wolves (and Indians) will return to remember their collegiate experience and make new connections.

The 100th anniversary celebration will take place on Oct. 4, the night before the Red Wolves' Oct. 5 homecoming football game against South Alabama. Guests will gather on the back terrace of the Cooper Alumni Center to enjoy cocktails, dinner and live entertainment by '90s party band, Dial Up.

Arkansas State University Alumni Association Executive Director of Alumni Relations Lindsay Burnett, along with Tara Thomason, Amanda McDaniel, Marsha Carwell and Carissa Griffin, have been working hard alongside the association's board to create a centennial celebration where anyone and everyone who graduated from A-State would feel welcome. The event will take place outdoors, weather permitting, and dress code is casual. The traditional Distinguished Alumni Dinner that usually takes place the night before homecoming will take a hiatus this year in order for the focus to be on the centennial celebration.

"We have been talking about this for about two years with the alumni board," said Burnett. "We threw out the idea of small events throughout the year, but we ultimately decided to do one large event; we want everyone to feel welcome, so we opted to not

have a specific theme or formal event. We wanted everyone to be able to come back and visit and reminisce and have a great time. We're aiming for a fun, casual and amazing party atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable and it's the perfect spot to catch up with other alumni."

Those who are Alumni Association members will receive a discount to attend, but all former A-State students are welcome. There will be gifts for 1924 Sustaining Life members, and there will be branded items such as custom wine and drink glasses and custom molded chocolates that feature the 100-year logo.

"Come and throw down and have a great time," said McDaniel. "We will have upscale food but still more casual overall with a mix of seating and something for everyone."

The Alumni Association began in 1924 thanks to interest from the first 13 graduating classes of the First District State Agricultural High School, which is how A-State originated. There are currently 105,137 graduates of A-State nationwide, 8,092 of which are members of the A-State Alumni Association. Membership is open to all graduates, students, fans and friends and is encouraged because it is the most recognizable way of expressing loyalty and affinity to the university.

"This year's Alumni Association centennial celebration is a testament to the enduring bonds that form at Arkansas State," said A-State Chancellor Dr. Todd Shields. "Our graduates feel a personal connection to A-State because it is where they experienced significant personal growth, formed lifelong friendships and laid

the foundation for their careers. They find a shared identity with fellow alumni and take pride in being part of a university that continues to enrich lives and positively impact our state, region and the world."

Peggy Wright, the current Alumni Association president, got involved with the group as soon as she graduated in 1996 and went on to serve as secretary, vice president and then president in 2021. Wright is a political science professor at A-State and the director of the Delta Studies Center, where she has been since 1998.

"At the 100-year celebration, alumni can expect fun, fellowship, seeing old friends and making new ones," said Wright, who says her goal on the board is to make being an Alumni Association member even better. "(We are) constantly looking for ways to attract members but also to retain them. ... I am looking forward to continuing to be a great ambassador for Arkansas State University. I have so many great memories of students and people I have worked with the last 20-plus years.

"Being an A-State alumna means having an extended family of over 100,000 and excitement in getting to meet so many and share great memories of Arkansas State University days. ... Join this wonderful family. You won't regret it."

One of those memories was post-graduation.

"My most memorable experience was being featured in the Summer 2008 'Voices Magazine' Rock Doc to the Stars publication (Vol.10, Issue 2)," said Wright. "My family still has their copies, and my grandkids love showing it to people."

Shields says that comradery and sharing of memories is what he is most looking forward to at the centennial celebration.

"My favorite part of alumni gatherings is hearing the stories of our graduates – each one a unique journey filled with overcoming obstacles, professors who went the extra mile and lots of laughter," said Shields. "These stories are reminders of the lasting impact A-State has on our students and inspire us to continue fostering a community that supports one another long after we leave campus."

Burnett, a Jonesboro High School graduate and second-generation A-State student, started working at A-State in 2007 and moved into an alumni relations position in 2011 before taking on the role of executive director in 2017, where her job includes managing the Cooper Alumni Center.

"It's a privately funded building and completely managed by the alumni office," said Burnett of the large venue. "We manage all building and event logistics. We also just handled its renovation. Jill James with High Design helped us transform the building with an updated and more modern event space."

The Cooper Alumni Center, which was officially dedicated on Oct. 17, 2008, has served as a thriving home base for the alumni association. The alumni center is named for Darrell Cooper '64 and Charlotte Pugh Cooper '64 of Clarkston, Mich., who gifted the Alumni Association \$2 million in 2003 for that purpose. The 20,000-square-foot facility is a multipurpose building available for meetings, receptions and community events and includes a banquet room, history room, board room and upper and lower lobby reception areas. The Cooper Alumni Center also includes office space for Alumni Relations, Advancement Services, Career Development and Engagement, the Development Office and the Vice-Chancellor for University Advancement.



Burnett and the rest of the Alumni Association staff have fond memories of their time as students at A-State, which is one of the reasons they are so invested in continuing to grow the organization and the opportunities it offers alumni.

"Both my parents went here, and they were first generation students," said Burnett. "I followed in their footsteps and joined some friends and my boyfriend, now husband, in coming here. A-State never felt like high school in my hometown. A-State has a wonderful charm to it where you feel like part of a family and not just a number. I love it for the comfort and the feeling of family. A lot of people were just so welcoming during my time here. That's even how I got this job – one of my past professors called me and said she had a job that would be perfect for me while I was working at a bank."

"The campus is the perfect size – not too big and not too small. You never feel like just a number here. I love being involved with my sorority, AOPi, which opened doors to meeting people I would not have met otherwise and making those connections."

For her and many others, the memories they've made as alumni are just as important as the ones they made during their collegiate experience.

"I graduated an Indian, but becoming a Red Wolf, it really rejuvenated everyone," said Burnett. "It lit this spark in so many alumni; the mascot change just really reinvigorated the campus, from alumni to staff, faculty and students. I have enjoyed the aspect of staying in touch with my alma mater, of having a place to come back and reconnect to people. Alumni association connections are very important to people; they can come back on a football weekend and run into someone they know. I love the connection part of it."

"And as an employee, one of my favorite things is when we have alumni stop by or call and tell us stories about their time here. History is never lost. We are our own version of historians

COVER FEATURE



here. We love everyone sharing those stories.”

That connection and the feel of campus is one of the reasons McDaniel, a Searcy native, chose A-State in the first place and chose her career with the Alumni Association.

“You’re not just a number here, you truly do feel a connection,” said McDaniel, who was a marketing major and Alpha Gam during her time there. “That is what A-State means to me – those connections and the community that you have because you went here. I have worked here for 10 years now, and it’s like home. I like to come to work. I like the people I work with and interact with.

“Bubbles and Bingo is my favorite (event) I do here, and it’s so interesting to see these students come here from all over the world to play rugby for A-State. ROTC is another group I work with. Our 50-year reunions we do every year are also really special. Some of them haven’t been back to A-State since then, and they are so joyful to share stories about their time here. It shows how timeless the university is.”

Rounding out the centennial anniversary year will be the association’s annual “Voices” magazine in December, along with the 100 for 100 membership drive, which encourages 100 new members to join the Alumni Association at the life membership level at a time that will come with a few extra celebratory perks, including a plaque to be displayed in the Cooper Alumni Center.

As the Alumni Association finishes its final preparations for the 100th anniversary celebration, the board and staff want to remind Red Wolves that it’s never too late to join the Alumni Association.

“It’s important to stay connected and learn about the amazing things happening on campus, because there really are so many great things happening,” said McDaniel. “If you’re not connected in some way, you might not hear about things, especially if you’re out of town.

“And for the alumni who live where people haven’t necessarily heard of A-State, they serve as our recruiters. We have got to have that because we can’t reach everyone on our own.”

Burnett echoed McDaniel’s reason for encouraging Red Wolves to stay active at A-State after they graduate.

“I graduated almost 20 years ago, and just in that time frame, the school is completely different just in its landscape alone,” said Burnett. “People might remember it one way, and it’s not that way at all now. People need to stay connected and hear about ways they can help us and help our students. Our greatest recruitment asset is our alumni.

“In higher education, they talk about something called the enrollment cliff. There are going to be fewer 18-year-olds in the next few years, so college recruiting will be even more competitive. If we have more people involved with the Arkansas State University Alumni Association, sharing all the great things happening on campus, it might help encourage recruitment, as well. It’s important for the livelihood of the university.”

For more information about the Arkansas State University Alumni Association and its 100th anniversary celebration on Oct. 4, visit astatealumni.org.

A Century of Presidents

In honor of 100 years of the Arkansas State University Alumni Association, board member Richard L. Hartness Sr. compiled a list of a century’s worth of the group’s presidents. Those who have served as president of A-State’s Alumni Association include:

1924-26 Horace Thompson	1949-50 Douglas Bradley	1972 Laudies Brantley	1998 Jeff Hankins
1927 E. Roy Keller	1951-52 Charles Sims	1973 Cecil Hollifield	1999-2000 Rick Miles
1928-29 Lawrence Reese	1953 H. T. (“Pug”) Winters	1974-75 Tom Manning	2001-02 Jamie Frakes
1930-31 Robert A. Sammons	1954 W.H. (Buddy) Meador	1976 Marlin Jackson	2003-05 Bob Earwood
1932-33 Dolph Smith Jr.	1955 Gale Rodgers Jr.	1977-78 Tom Franzen	2006-07 Whit Barton
1934 Bert Harb	1956-57 Tom Miller	1979 Harry Truman (H.T.) Moore	2008-09 Gary Pugh
1935 Hattie Caraway (honorary)	1958-59 Johnny Bearden	1980-81 Judy Long	2010-11 Paul Rowton
1936 Homer E. McEwen	1960 Ned Penney	1982-83 Dan Pierce	2012-13 Charlotte Razor
1937 Herman Horton	1961 Roy Fogle	1984 Susan Dudley	2014-15 Rich Carvell Jr.
1938 Foster Clark	1962-63 Robert Blackwood	1985 Steve Reynolds	2016-17 Margo Kagebein
1939 Imogene Baker	1964 Bobby G. Wood	1986 Steve McFerron	2018-19 Nonnie Wiggins
1940 Buel T. Johnson	1965 Wayne Hartsfield	1987-88 Rick McBride	2020-21 Dale Morris
1941 William Wyatt	1966-67 Ray L. Grigsby	1989 Hazel Dickey	2022-23 Peggy Wright
1942 Guy French	1968 W. R. Glenn	1990 Carl Alexander	2024 John Baine, Peggy Wright
1943 J. J. Yarbrough	1969 Dr. Charles Moyers	1991-92 Harold Perrin	
1944-45 Clarence Adams	1970 Dr. John McMullan	1993-94 Jim Kersey	
1946-48 Leslie (“Dukie”) Speck	1971 Ray Grigsby	1995-97 Ben Bush	

Let's Party!

JOIN US TO
CELEBRATE
100 YEARS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4 *at* 6:30 P.M.

Cooper Alumni Center Outdoor Terrace

Dinner Buffet and Live Music

Casual Fun Attire



Purchase Tickets at
AStateAlumni.org/100

1924 Sustaining Life Members – 2 FREE tickets

Alumni Association Members – \$25

Golden Anniversary Club Members – \$25

Other Alumni & Friends – \$45

Entertainment provided by 90s party band

DIAL UP



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