

# NKU MAGAZINE

SPRING/SUMMER 2017 // VOL. 2, NO. 2

# LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

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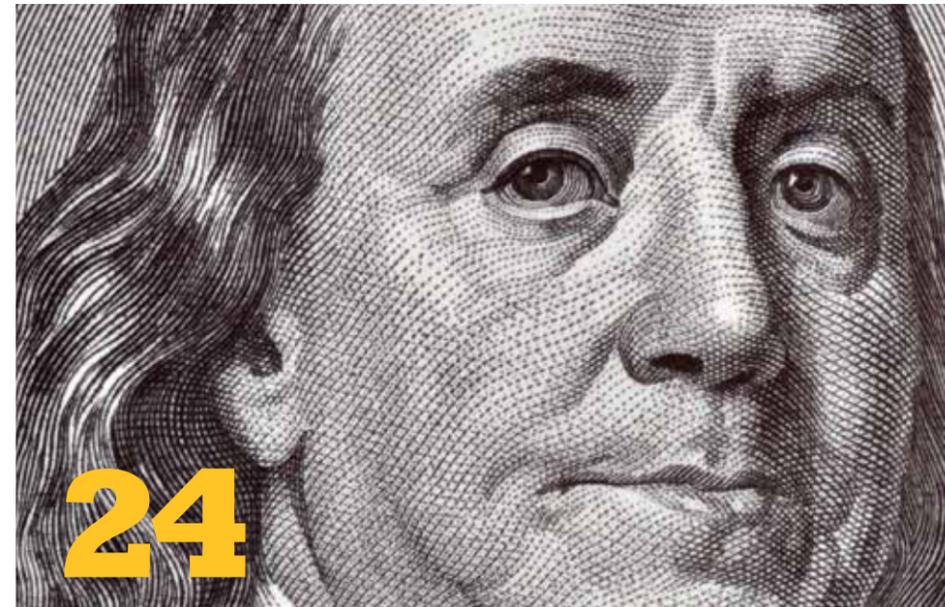


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After winning the Horizon League Championship, the Norse men's basketball team became only the second team since 1970 to make it to the NCAA D-I Tournament in its first year of post-season eligibility.

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Should we fear the coming age of robots and artificial intelligence? Dr. Austin Lee, one of the country's foremost experts in social robotics, says not at all.

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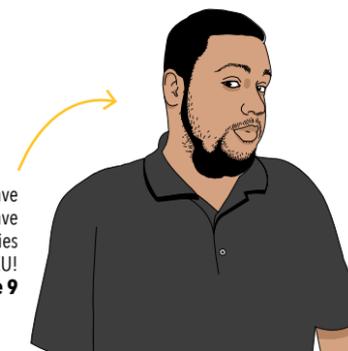
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SPRING/SUMMER 2017  
VOL. 2 // NO. 2

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NKU MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED BY THE  
OFFICE OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS  
AT NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY  
FOR ITS GRADUATES, DONORS, AND FRIENDS.

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**COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, CONCERNS?**  
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! EMAIL US AT  
NKUMAGAZINE@NKU.EDU.

## DID YOU KNOW

**An Honors College is coming to NKU.**

The Northern Kentucky University Board of Regents recently approved changing the status of the University's honors program to an Honors College.

The new Honors College will help NKU attract and retain high-achieving students and will help the university provide increased access to first-generation, transfer, and underrepresented minority students.

"This change will establish a reputation for academic rigor within the Honors College and allow us to grow our research and creative activities," said NKU President Geoffrey Mearns. High standards have been set for admission to the Honors College, but alternative methods of demonstrating excellence will be included in the application process, thus providing access for a diverse group of students. The Honors curriculum will increase to 24 credit hours, which is 20 percent of the total credit hours required for graduation.



Have a question? Email us at [nkumagazine@nku.edu](mailto:nkumagazine@nku.edu).



## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear NKU Alumni and Friends:

It has been a professional privilege and a personal honor to serve as the fifth president of Northern Kentucky University. Working together, we have enabled our students to succeed, and we have advanced the mission of our University.

We have continued to attract outstanding students from across the Commonwealth—and from around the world. Our students are increasingly diverse, and we proudly foster an inclusive community where everyone is respected and empowered. And, because of the talent and dedication of our faculty and our staff, we have graduated record numbers of women and men who will have a lasting impact on the people they serve.

We have enhanced and expanded our campus with the construction of the new Health Innovation Center and with the renovations of Founders Hall and our Campus Recreation Center. Three years ago, we also added a new residence hall. We have a modern and vibrant campus.

We successfully transitioned to NCAA Division I athletics. In our first year of eligibility, our women's soccer team and our men's basketball team qualified for NCAA national tournaments by winning Horizon League championships. Their achievements ignited great pride in our University. I am particularly proud that our student-athletes also excel in the classroom. For 11 consecutive semesters, they've earned a collective GPA of 3.0 or better. Last fall, they earned

a collective GPA of 3.27—an all-time record for our University.

Most importantly, we were finally able to persuade the Governor and the General Assembly to remedy the historic unwarranted funding disparity that has impeded our University's growth and impact. Next year, we will receive an additional \$5.1 million in state support, and there will now be an outcomes-based funding model in Kentucky that ensures that future state support will not be dictated by geographic politics. Although our work is not yet done, we have made great progress—progress that many people believed wasn't possible.

**I am proud to have played a small role in these achievements. Thank you for your support and encouragement.**

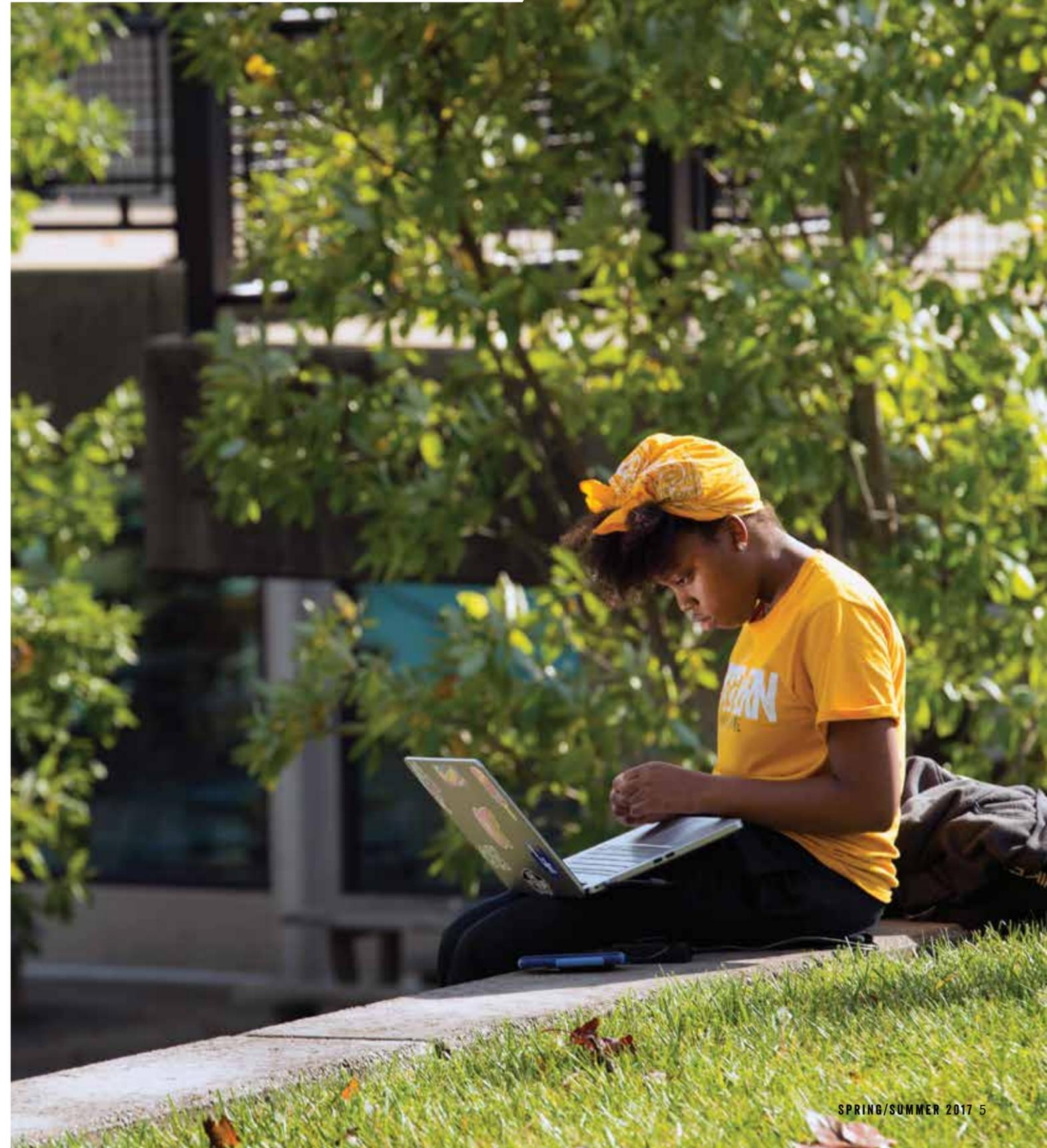
Jennifer and I are also profoundly grateful for the kindness and generosity you have bestowed upon us and our children.

Thank you,

**Geoffrey S. Mearns**  
President

## [ AROUND CAMPUS ]

Engulfed in the green of campus, a student studies on the sunny steps of the Oakley & Eva G. Farris Amphitheatre. This past April, NKU launched its 2017 Sustainability Strategy with a stated goal of becoming completely carbon neutral by 2050. This plan outlines NKU's sustainability priorities within academics, engagement, operations, and planning and administration.





# AROUND THE HORNS



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[ NORSE ]

## ON THE RISE

Norse Men's basketball makes a mark in its first NCAA Division I Championship

// By Bryan McEldowney

In what was being billed as either David vs. Goliath or the “game with a lot of ‘steak,’” the Northern Kentucky men’s basketball team faced off against No. 2-seed Kentucky in the 2017 NCAA Championship First Round at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana. In its first-ever NCAA Division I tournament appearance, the up-and-coming Norse drew one of the nation’s most-decorated programs of all-time in the Wildcats.

The Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati communities rallied in support of the Norse. (Even local restaurateur Jeff Ruby got into the fun by offering free steaks to every NKU student should the team pull off the upset. Hence, the game’s “steak” billing.)

Lavone Holland II provided Norse fans with a memorable moment during the first half when he sliced through the lane, knifing between three defenders and elevating for a one-handed jam. The junior guard finished with a game-high 22 points. Freshman forward Carson Williams also put forth a valiant effort with 21 points and nine rebounds. Though the Norse battled throughout the nationally-televised game on CBS—even pulling within seven points with just under a minute remaining—the Wildcats held on in a 79-70 decision. 🐾

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**JUNE 7-25**

**"The 39 Steps," Stauss Theatre**

Don't miss this comedic adaptation of a Hitchcock thriller mixed with a spy novel and wizardry. The fast-paced "whodunit" features only four cast members who take on the personalities of 100 zany characters. For more information, visit [commonwealth.nku.edu](http://commonwealth.nku.edu).

**JUNE 24**

**Black and Gold Safari, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden**

Join fellow alumni, faculty, staff, family, and friends to support the Young Alumni Scholarship Fund at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden for NKU's fifth annual Black and Gold Safari. Enjoy animal encounters, appetizers, live music, silent auction, and private after-hours access to the zoo. Tickets are \$40 for alumni and \$30 for young alumni and include admission to the zoo, parking, and event activities. To purchase tickets, visit [alumni.nku.edu](http://alumni.nku.edu).

**JULY 5-23**

**"Burger Town," Stauss Theatre**

This musical comedy follows the life of Dan O'Riley, a shy fry cook living in Chicago who is making a living at a humble fast-food restaurant. Things change dramatically for Dan—and Burger Town—when he accidentally invents the Triangle Burger. For more information, visit [commonwealth.nku.edu](http://commonwealth.nku.edu).

**AUGUST 26**

**NKU Night at the Reds, Great American Ballpark**

Head to Great American Ball Park for our annual NKU Night at the Reds! Bring a friend or the whole family and join fellow NKU alumni as our hometown Reds take on the Pittsburgh Pirates. The first pitch is at 7:10 p.m. For more information, visit [alumni.nku.edu](http://alumni.nku.edu).



# GERARD "GERRY" ST. AMAND NAMED NKU INTERIM PRESIDENT

This past May, Gerry St. Amand was named interim president of NKU. Amand is no stranger to Highland Heights, having first joined NKU in 1999 as the Dean of the Salmon P. Chase College of Law. In 2006, he transitioned to the role of Vice President for University Advancement, where he stayed for seven years before returning to Chase in a full-time teaching capacity. Amand has also served on the NKU Foundation Board, and has been recognized numerous times for his commitment and contributions to NKU and the community.

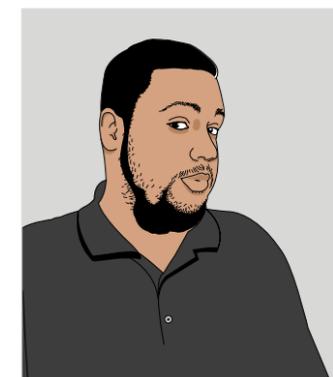


### BLACK AND GOLD SAFARI

Mark your calendar for the fifth annual Black & Gold Safari to support the Young Alumni Scholarship Fund! This year's event will be held on June 24 at the Cincinnati Zoo. Get wild with one-on-one animal encounters hosted by Cincinnati Zoo staff, a scavenger hunt, music, drinks, and food. There is even face painting for the kids! Register today at [alumni.nku.edu](http://alumni.nku.edu).

### NKU, REDS, & AVETT BROTHERS

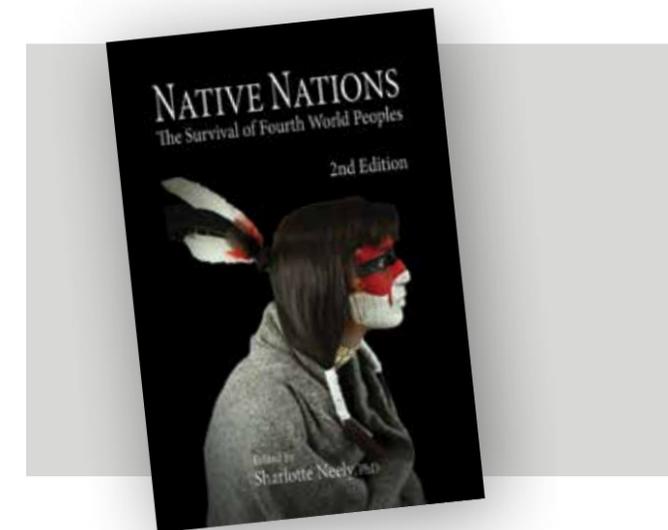
Cheer on the Cincinnati Reds at NKU's annual Night at the Reds on August 26 at Great American Ball Park. Join alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends as our hometown Reds take on the Pittsburgh Pirates. The first pitch is at 7:10 p.m. followed by a concert by The Avett Brothers. Visit [alumni.nku.edu](http://alumni.nku.edu) for more details.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DIONNE LAYCOCK

### PODCAST SERIES FOR NEW NKU STUDENTS

Coming to NKU? Have questions? We have answers. *Ask NKU* introduced a podcast series for new and prospective students of Northern Kentucky University. This three-part series, which includes three dynamic NKU students, as well as the Admissions Director and the Communications Coordinator, tackles questions about registration and orientation process, offers advice to make sure you get the classes you want, and points you toward resources to help new students decide on a major. It also discusses life on and off campus, cool things to do and places to go around the region, the commuter experience, campus housing, meal plans, tips and advice for parking and how to navigate the roundabouts. Check it out at [inside.nku.edu/nkumagazine](http://inside.nku.edu/nkumagazine).



### LONGTIME PROFESSOR SHARLOTTE NEELY RETIRES IN STYLE

Charlotte Neely, an anthropology professor at Northern Kentucky University, ended her 43-year tenure this spring with the launch of the second edition of her book, "Native Nations: The Survival of Fourth World Peoples." The book, which she says was inspired by her students, is being released just as Neely closes her office door for the last time. During her time at NKU, Neely has been honored as an NKU Outstanding Professor, published numerous articles as well as four books, and is a past president of Anthropologists and Sociologists of Kentucky. "Having the second edition of 'Native Nations' published right as I retire," Neely says, "reminds me that retirement is not the end of my career, just the conclusion of one phase of it."



### ALUMNI BENEFITS

Don't forget! NKU's Alumni Association provides a variety of exclusive memberships, including scholarships, subscriptions, and discounts at local restaurants, as well as at the Campus Recreation Center, Liberty Mutual, the AAA Club Alliance, and Newport Aquarium. Request your card and check out all of your benefits at [alumni.nku.edu](http://alumni.nku.edu).



Support NKU Health Innovation Center by visiting [givenow.nku.edu](http://givenow.nku.edu).



ILLUSTRATION BY DIONNE LAYCOCK

[ MEDICINE ]

# MEDICAL SCHOOL COMING TO NKU

NKU and University of Kentucky partner to bring regional medical campus to Highland Heights

**THROUGH A REMARKABLE PARTNERSHIP** with The University of Kentucky College of Medicine, a medical school is coming to Northern Kentucky University. This past winter, UK announced plans to develop a regional medical school campus in northern Kentucky for four-year medical education. The program is the third regional medical school campus announced by UK designed to increase the overall number of physicians in the Commonwealth. Four-year regional campuses also have been proposed in Bowling Green and Morehead; the campus at Bowling Green is projected to begin enrolling students in 2018, and Morehead sometime thereafter.

The newest UK College of Medicine initiative will be in partnership with NKU and St. Elizabeth Healthcare.

Currently, the UK College of Medicine is at its capacity at the Lexington campus, and although there is a deep applicant pool for medical students, the college can't expand enrollment without the help of regional partners, says Dr. Robert DiPaola, dean of the UK College of Medicine. "This series of partnerships that now expands throughout Kentucky will benefit everyone across the Commonwealth."

"In Kentucky we have a shortage of physicians, especially primary care physicians, throughout the state," says UK President Eli Capilouto. "As the university for Kentucky, we are working in close partnership with leading universities in our state and regional medical centers to directly respond to this need. Additionally, this collaboration will allow us to expand college of medicine enrollment in a manner that effectively

and efficiently utilizes existing resources throughout the state."

While details of the broad-based initiative are still being ironed out, UK officials have signed a memorandum of understanding with the partners.

Currently, the UK College of Medicine enrolls 547 students, including 139 in the most recent admitted class—the Class of 2020.

UK plans to increase its class size through expansion to these regional campus locations. Local advisory committees will recommend students for admission to the program.

"NKU is proud to have the opportunity to partner with the University of Kentucky and St. Elizabeth Healthcare to leverage our individual strengths and the power of our brands to bring professional medical education to northern Kentucky," says NKU President Geoffrey Mearns. "Among other things, this medical school campus at NKU will help us further the mission of our Health Innovation Center to improve the health of the people that we serve."

The UK COM-Northern Kentucky campus will be a fully functioning four-year campus, utilizing the same curriculum and assessments as UK's Lexington campus. Onsite faculty will have UK College of Medicine appointments and teach in small groups. Utilizing state-of-the-art educational technology, they will also provide simulation and standardized patient experiences with lectures delivered from Lexington. Additionally, clinical experiences will occur at St. Elizabeth Healthcare and surrounding community practices.

"This collaboration between St. Elizabeth Healthcare, the University of Kentucky College of Medicine, and Northern Kentucky University beautifully complements St. Elizabeth's vision of leading Northern Kentucky to become one of the healthiest communities in America," says NKU alumnus Garren Colvin, president and CEO of St. Elizabeth Healthcare. "Combined with our support of the NKU Health Innovation Center and the recent opening of the St. Elizabeth Training and Education Center, we are incredibly proud to be involved in educating generations of local, bright, talented individuals and helping shape them into the medical leaders of our future." 🐾

## MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

In our last issue of *NKU Magazine*, you met four of our new Alumni board members: Shelly E. Deavy '00; Randolph J. Poe '83,'85; Wade Williams '97, '01; and Lisa K. Blank '82, '01, '07.

This issue, we would like to introduce you to the rest of the team: Nicole E. Clare '09, Josh S. Heuser '01, Serena Owen '98, Erika T. Jay '14, and Christina A. Rogers '04.

The Northern Kentucky University Alumni Board of Directors was founded in 1974 and today consists of 24 members elected for a term of three years by members of the Alumni Association. Board members may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms.

Get to know some of our members below, and read about their favorite NKU memories!



**NICOLE E. CLARE '09**  
**Citigroup, Vice President, Communication and Public Affairs**

My favorite memory happened after I had graduated. As a corporate partner of the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project, Citi is invited to meet with the classes that we support and also attend the Celebration Ceremony. Being able to engage with the students who participate in this project has by far been my favorite experience.



**JOSH S. HEUSER '01**  
**Agar, LLC., Founder**

My most interesting memory is the fact that I didn't receive my diploma until sometime after graduation because I left a library book in my trunk. I later received my diploma upon paying my late fees, but didn't get to keep the book. It was a good book!



**SERENA OWEN '98**  
**Aspire Educational Services, Owner**

My favorite memories include: marrying my husband Larry in the NKU Baptist Student Union on our graduation day; introducing our children, Destiny and Jibril, to NKU, and watching our son become an NKU alum; being honored with an NKU Parent of the Year and Alumni Distinguished Service Award; and using my NKU education to help bless others. Thanks and Go Nurse!



**ERIKA T. JAY '14**  
**Northern Kentucky University, Coordinator, Equal Opportunity Programs**

My favorite memory is walking across the stage at graduation. My experience at NKU has changed who I am and how I look at the world. It's a debt I try to repay by giving back to my school so others have the same opportunity.



**CHRISTINA A. ROGERS '04**  
**Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, Vice President, Special Events**

It is almost impossible to pick just one favorite memory! For me, it's the totality of the entire experience - the education in the classroom, the education that came with my involvement in student organizations, the friendships I made and the lessons I learned that made my years at NKU the most important years of my life.



[ CAMPUS ]

# THE TICKET PUNCHER

As the Norse battled for the league championship, one former student brought NKU fans—literally by the busload—to cheer them on. // **By Brent Donaldson**

**THE TEXTS AND TWEETS** started flying around 2 p.m.—about five hours before the Northern Kentucky University men’s basketball team would beat Youngstown State and earn their shot at a Horizon League title and a possible berth in the NCAA D-I tournament.

Was it true? Was someone really offering NKU students a last-minute, all-expenses-paid trip to the Motor City Madness Horizon League Tournament in Detroit?

“I can confirm that this is a thing that’s happening,” retweeted NKU’s student newspaper, *The Northerner*. “IF NKU WINS TONIGHT,” reads the original post from that afternoon, “there will be a bus leaving from BB&T Arena at 9:30 a.m. There are 55 spots on the bus and they are first come, first serve. The cost of the bus, game ticket, AND hotel

for the night will be covered by a very generous alumnus of Northern Kentucky University.”

The man who made this impromptu road trip possible is Christopher Boggs, a former NKU communications major who wanted to share a little Norse joy.

“NKU gave me more than I’ll ever be able to give back to her,” Boggs says. “To watch the team come together this year and make a historic run to the Horizon League championship game has been an amazing experience. I don’t need a pat on the back. I do this expecting nothing. In life, I want to try and give more than I receive, and I get so much satisfaction seeing things I do bring joy and happiness to someone’s day. It’s all good.”

[ PHILANTHROPY ]

# THANK YOU

Thank you to our generous donors, who contribute to the success of our students each and every day. We would like to announce two generous gifts: a \$113,000 gift to create the Eta Rho/Pi Kappa Alpha Richard Murgatroyd Endowed Scholarship, and a \$340,000 gift from Toyota USA Foundation to support the Center for Integrative Natural Science and Mathematics (CINSAM) at NKU.



## PI KAPPA ALPHA ALUMNI

The Pi Kappa Alpha Alumni Association created the Eta Rho/Pi Kappa Alpha Richard Murgatroyd Endowed Scholarship. The \$113,000 gift will support academic and leadership academy scholarships for students in good standing with NKU’s PIKE fraternity. The gift was made possible by PIKE alumni who contributed to a fund over the years to support the fraternity. To make a lasting impact, the alumni decided to use their contributions to create an endowed scholarship. Mr. Murgatroyd says, “The chapter has made great strides on campus and in the community the last few years. I want our scholarship to encourage more men to value their academics and participate in leadership development activities.”



## THE TOYOTA USA FOUNDATION

The Toyota USA Foundation invested \$340,000 in CINSAM’s Next Generation STEM Classroom Project 2.0, which provides high quality, classroom-embedded professional development in teaching STEM subjects. Teachers develop their skills in inquiry-based and hands-on education that includes engineering concepts and incorporates the outdoors. This phase of the project also develops leaders within and outside northern Kentucky to improve implementation and dissemination of high impact practices. “This program helps address workforce readiness, a key issue for companies throughout the region, by empowering teachers to further prepare students for the next-generation of jobs,” says Mike Goss, president of Toyota USA Foundation. “The results of the first phase of this program were so encouraging that we decided to provide an additional grant to help further scale it to additional school districts.”



[ D-I ]

## MEMORABLE SEASON CULMINATES IN HORIZON LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP



**AS THE FINAL SECONDS REMAINED ON THE CLOCK**, senior Cole Murray fought back the emotions as he stepped up to the charity stripe for the final two free throws as the Northern Kentucky University men's basketball team headed towards its first Horizon League Championship.

Murray sank both free throws, which served as icing on the cake in the 69-63 victory over Milwaukee. The celebration was on. The team came storming onto the court and jumped atop

tournament MVP Lavone Holland II in the far corner. A slew of fans screamed and cheered on the Norse, who not only won the league tournament but also punched their ticket to the NCAA Division I Championship.

Drew McDonald joined Holland on the all-tournament team, capping a memorable season for the sophomore forward in which he was also named to the all-league first and all-academic teams. Head coach John Brannen was tabbed as the League's Coach of the Year.

The Horizon League title provided NKU with its 24th win, easily the most in the D-I era and the 7th-best total in a storied program history that includes a pair of Division II national runner-up finishes. Northern Kentucky became just the seventh team ever and only the second since 1970 to earn a berth into the NCAA Division I Championship in its first season eligible. — *Bryan McEldowney*

## VICTOR NAMED BEST MASCOT IN MARCH MADNESS



March Madness brings out the competition, and Victor E. Viking was up to the challenge. Charles Curtis, who pens the column "For The Win" for *USA Today*, annually ranks the mascots of all 68 teams that reach March Madness. "An absolute perfect combination of amazing nickname and incredible mascot. Presenting: Victor E. Viking!" Curtis says.

Victor's accolades led to some playful hijinks in an appearance on the set of WLWT (Channel 5) with NKU alumni Sheree Paoello and Mike Dardis.

## NORSE TRULY EMBODY THE TERM "STUDENT-ATHLETE"

Northern Kentucky University's student-athletes continue to raise the bar of excellence, both in their respective sports and in the classroom. The fall 2016 semester was no different, as NKU's nearly 250 student-athletes combined for a department record 3.28 cumulative GPA.

This marked the fifth-straight semester with at least a 3.2 GPA and 11th-consecutive above a 3.0.

"This fall's 3.28 cumulative GPA is truly remarkable," says Ken Bothof, Director of Athletics. "This success is a testament to the quality of student-athletes at Northern Kentucky University. Strong academic success is also related to the hard work, care and concern exhibited by our academic services department, including Debbie Kirch, Kalin Holland, and their support staff."



## SPRING SPORTS UPDATES

**Softball** - Softball had impressive efforts against two ranked opponents, opening the season against No. 12/10 Georgia. The Norse later led No. 17/16 Kentucky through four innings before falling 2-1.

**Men's Tennis** - Men's tennis swept the Horizon League weekly honors twice this season, with Mate Virag (two-time Player of the Week), Lukas Clemens, Javier Araya, and Andrew Niehaus earning distinctions.

**Women's Tennis** - The tandem of Margita Sunjic and Klara Skopac play in the No. 1 doubles spot for the Norse. Sunjic tops the singles lineup and Skopac holds down the No. 2 spot with just five losses between the pair so far.

**Baseball** - Todd Asalon captured his 500th win as NKU's head coach in a win over Miami (Ohio) on March 22 before opening Horizon League play by sweeping Milwaukee at Bill Aker Baseball Complex, which recently received new artificial turf renovations.

**Men's Golf** - Jacob Poore put together quite a stretch for the men's golf team, earning two top-10 finishes in a stretch of three tournaments during the spring season.

**Women's Golf** - Women's golf went on a record-breaking streak in the Cardinal Classic hosted by Ball State, establishing new 18-, 36- and 54-hole team records in a 48-hour period.

**Men's Track & Field** - Men's track & field had 10 players sitting in the top-five of the League's outdoor rankings with a month left in the season.

**Women's Track & Field** - Women's track & field finished fourth in the Horizon League Indoor Championship and, as of the end of March, was positioned well for the outdoor championship with 20 different performances sitting in the top-five of the league rankings.

## MEN'S SOCCER ALUM BEATTIE WINS FAI CUP IN IRELAND

Six years after leading the Northern Kentucky men's soccer team to a 2010 Division II National Championship, former Norse men's soccer player and 2010 National Division II Player of the Year Steven Beattie helped Cork City FC capture the Irish Daily Mail FAI Cup in his home country of Ireland in November.

The midfielder assisted the only goal of the game, coming in the final minutes to seal a 1-0 victory over Dundalk. The Skerries, Ireland, native won the FAI Cup for CCFC 24 years after his uncle, Mick Neville, accomplished the same feat.

Beattie, the most decorated soccer player in NKU history, was inducted into the Northern Kentucky Athletics Hall of Fame in February, 2017 along with the entire 2010 national championship squad. In addition to his national Player of the Year honor, Beattie was the Daktronics Player of the Year in 2008 and 2010 and was a three-time All-American for NKU.

Beattie played for the Norse from 2007 through 2010. He was selected 13th overall by Toronto FC in the 2010 MLS Draft and signed a two-year contract with CCFC prior to the 2016 season after playing for Sligo Rovers FC in Sligo, Ireland. — *Melissa Powell '17*



# LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD

**INSIDE THE CAMPAIGN TO REFORM KENTUCKY HIGHER-ED FUNDING**

**BY IAN ALDRICH**

**ON A SERENE SPRING MORNING IN LATE MAY OF 2013,**

Northern Kentucky University President, Geoffrey S. Mearns, traveled to Frankfort for his monthly gathering of fellow presidents of the state's other comprehensive universities. The meeting, held on the second-floor offices of a tired, white, stone-faced building that serves as the home for the Commonwealth's Council on Post Secondary Education (CPE)—a state agency that coordinates changes and improvements for Kentucky public colleges and universities—represented the early stages of discussions concerning Kentucky's \$1 billion annual higher education budget.

Over the next several months the leaders would advise the CPE on the budget needs of their respective institutions, and then, as they usually did, unanimously sign off in November on its proposal to the General Assembly.

Having taken over as NKU's president the previous August from the University's longtime leader, Dr. James C. Votruba, Mearns was new to the job but not unfamiliar with the issues that NKU was facing. Under Votruba's leadership, NKU had experienced fantastic increases in enrollment, graduates, and program offerings. But that rapid growth had been met with diminished state support. Scarred by the 2008 recession, legislators were on their way to slashing hundreds of millions of dollars from the Commonwealth's higher education budget by 2015.



**“THIS IS A REAL CONCERN THAT TOO MANY STUDENTS ARE FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS.”**

**JULIE BELL**, education program director for the National Conference of State Legislators

ultimately lead Kentucky to change how it financially supports its universities. It also secured the legacy of Mearns—not just at NKU, but across the Commonwealth’s higher education community.

But the issues lay deeper than budget cuts. There was also the matter of how the Commonwealth funded its public universities. Because Kentucky, which operates with two-year budget cycles, lacked an outcomes-based funding model, there was no formula that guided how tax dollars were allocated to the various institutions. The result: schools like NKU were, in effect, penalized rather than rewarded for placing more qualified graduates into the workforce.

Mearns knew that Votruba had made repeated requests to the other presidents that something needed to change. Schools like NKU couldn’t continue to evolve, he argued, without fair allocation of state assistance. The other presidents didn’t disagree, but with legislators still playing it cautious, Votruba shelved his request and signed off on the CPE’s proposal. Bring it up again in two years, when Kentucky has its next budget session, he was told.

So he would, and the cycle would repeat itself. Mearns wasn’t interested in repeating history. Since January of his first year at the helm, he’d pushed for the group to work on developing a comprehensive and strategic funding model to address the disparities. But with no firm assurances, he changed course. At the May meeting, which extended well past lunch, Mearns diplomatically informed the group—including CPE’s president, Robert L. King, who always participates in the discussions—that he would not sign off on the agency’s upcoming budget proposal.

“I was arguing the same things that Dr. Votruba had, and the sentiment from some was that you agreed to this the last time, in 2011, so what’s changed?” Mearns says. “And what I pointed out is that there’s a difference between acquiescing and agreeing. It was necessary to draw a very clear distinction, so that even if I wasn’t successful in persuading anybody in 2013, they couldn’t turn around and keep delaying and saying you agreed the last time.”

Through that summer and into autumn, the presidents haggled over what the CPE should push for. There was also an effort by some in the room to get Mearns to change his mind so the leaders could show a united front.

“I think everyone understood,” says Western Kentucky University President, Dr. Gary A. Randsell. “Our boards pay us to advocate for our institutions. We’re hired to represent them, and that’s what Geoff was doing and everyone understood that. Now, one or two presidents may have wanted to debate Geoff’s position because they favored something quite different. But we are all adults. It’s okay to disagree.”

And so they did, but Mearns stood firm. That November his efforts paid off when the CPE recognized his position by passing a formal resolution to determine if disparities existed between the universities. It was the first big step in a three-and-a-half-year process that would

**THE HISTORY OF PERFORMANCE BASED FUNDING IS ONE OF FITS AND STARTS.**

The story begins in 1979 when Tennessee became the first state to experiment with it. Several states eventually followed its lead throughout the next two decades, including Connecticut, Missouri, and, ironically enough, Kentucky in 1992. Through the 1990s, a total of 18 states had adopted some form of performance-based funding. It was a mix of approaches, with some states like South Carolina pegging 100 percent of its higher education budget to formula, while others offered it as a bonus program that fell outside their universities’ base budgets.

But as the economy weakened in a post-9/11 world, and as Republicans, who were largely supportive of performance-based measures, ceded political ground to Democrats, these approaches were scaled back or eliminated completely.

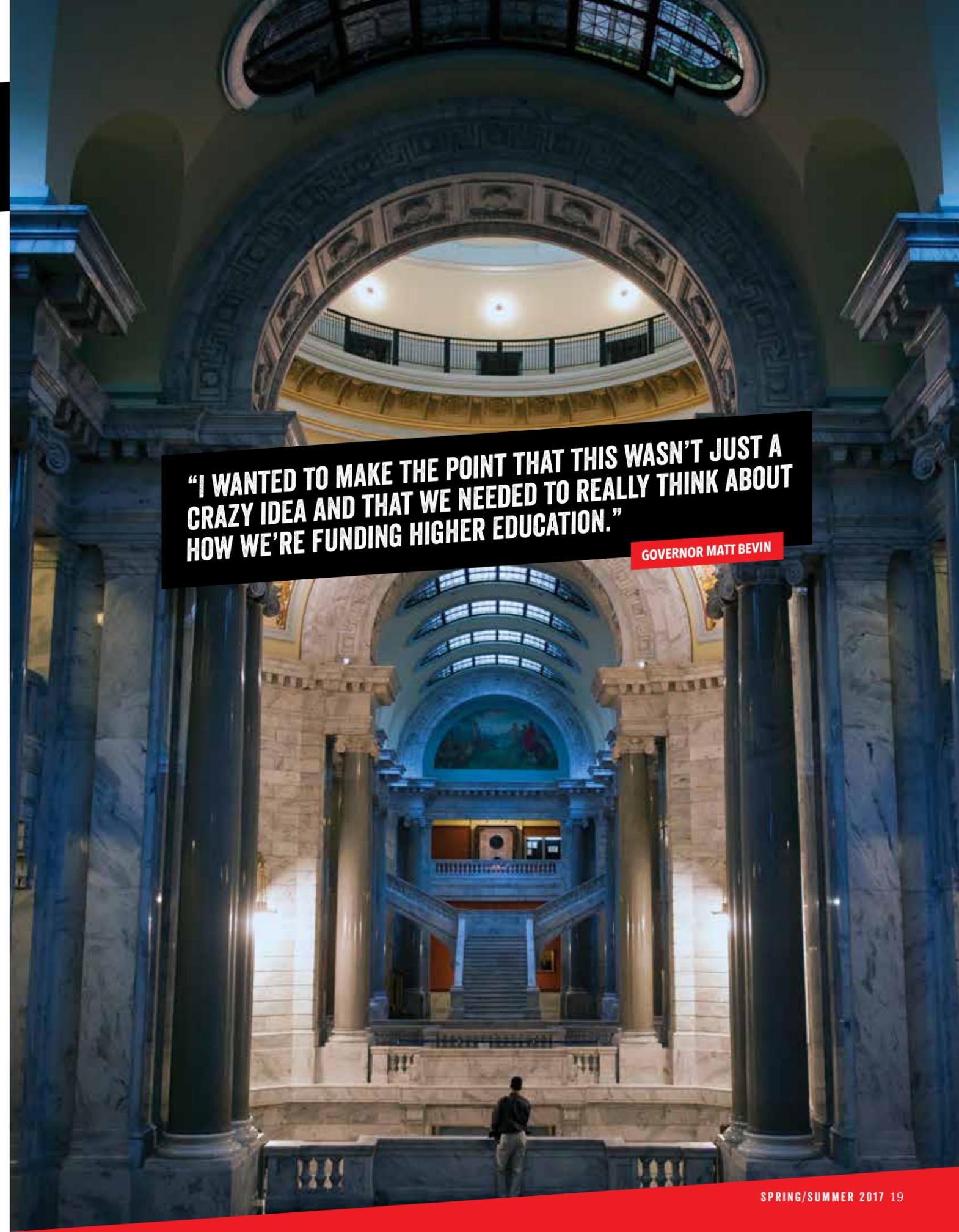
It was only in the wake of the 2008 economic recession that states began to revisit performance-based funding. By 2016, 32 states had instituted performance-based funding policies, many with more finely tuned metrics (degree completion, for example) than had existed with prior models.

The growing use of performance-based models is not a random development. Since the 1980s, state support hasn’t matched the growth in enrollment demand, placing more of the burden on students to cover ever-increasing tuition costs. Over the last 37 years, student-paid dollars has more than tripled. These two developments are not unrelated. As public funds have dried up, the onus has been put on colleges to justify the state appropriations they do receive.

“This is a real concern that too many students are falling through the cracks,” Julie Bell, education program director for the National Conference of State Legislators, told *The Washington Post* in May 2016. “States have also had to struggle to keep up the pace of funding over the years with tight budgets and requirements to fund healthcare and prisons. States have been looking for a different approach to funding higher education. Legislators find performance-based funding appealing because it balances one of their most significant levers, which is funding, with one of their most significant responsibilities, which is accountability.”

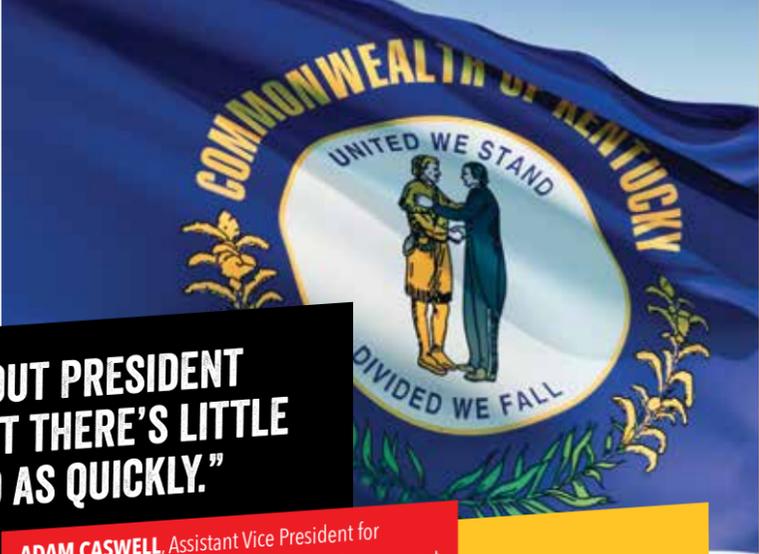
But performance-based funding is not without criticism. Last year the Century Foundation, a progressive think tank based in New York City, published a paper that argued these models only reinforced disparities between universities and did little to actually improve the results they were built upon.

But what if the existing funding approach already greatly



**“I WANTED TO MAKE THE POINT THAT THIS WASN’T JUST A CRAZY IDEA AND THAT WE NEEDED TO REALLY THINK ABOUT HOW WE’RE FUNDING HIGHER EDUCATION.”**

**GOVERNOR MATT BEVIN**



**“WOULD THIS CHANGE HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT PRESIDENT MEARN’S ADVOCACY? MAYBE. EVENTUALLY. BUT THERE’S LITTLE QUESTION THAT IT WOULDN’T HAVE HAPPENED AS QUICKLY.”**

**ADAM CASWELL**, Assistant Vice President for Government, Corporate and Foundation Engagement

exacerbates existing disparities? What happens when budget dollars are issued in a way that's grounded in historic numbers and driven by geographic politics?

That's been the story in Kentucky. As the 2008 recession deepened, the Commonwealth, like many states, slashed its higher education budget. But whereas many states began to restore cuts once the economy began to percolate, Kentucky legislators kept cutting. From 2014-2015, the Commonwealth sliced spending by 2.3 percent per student, tying it with West Virginia for deepest cuts in the nation. According to a 2015 study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, since the recession Kentucky had cut state higher education funding per student by a massive 27.6 percent.

All of this has come at a time of incredible growth for NKU. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred is up 84 percent since 1999—the fastest growth among the state's six comprehensive regional universities. In addition to opening the College of Informatics in 2005, NKU is slated to open its brand new \$97 million Health Innovation Center (HIC) in 2018. The facility will offer best-in-class trans-disciplinary educational experiences to healthcare leaders and providers of the future, and house a new medical school in partnership with the University of Kentucky and St. Elizabeth Healthcare.

But to meet those growth demands while also facing down the state's funding challenges, NKU has had to hike its tuition. Over the last 30 years, the ratio between student funding versus state money has flipped. In 1985, money from Frankfort accounted for 68 percent of total funding. Today, it's just 26 percent.

As it has tried to make up the difference through tuition increases and budget cuts, NKU's state pension contributions have escalated significantly over the last eight years. In 2010, the University contributed \$3.9 million to the Kentucky Retirement Systems (KERS) fund. By 2016, the amount had jumped to \$15.3 million. Something had to give.

**IT WAS THESE CIRCUMSTANCES** that prompted Mearns to act in May 2013. With a commitment in place to change the state's approach, CPE teamed with a group of consultants to develop a working funding model to examine whether state dollars were being effectively distributed. The results, released in the spring of 2015, were anything but surprising to those in the NKU community. The study found that the university was annually underfunded by \$10.7 million. For a school with an annual operating budget of around \$220 million, it was

not an insignificant number.

Through much of 2015, a working group that included the presidents of the six comprehensive universities tried to hammer out a rational funding model they could agree on and put before the General Assembly. Mearns was one of its primary vocal leaders. He brought his message to Frankfort and to his own university community, appealing for a change.

He found a willing ear in Republican gubernatorial candidate Matt Bevin, an experienced businessman and small business owner who was taking his first shot at a political office. Bevin was in full support of Kentucky moving to a performance-based model and told the presidents that, if elected, he'd fully back the change.

He reiterated his position at a second meeting with the university leaders shortly after he won the governor's seat in November 2015. By then, consensus among the school presidents had started to unravel. There was disagreement on the proposed model's metrics and how they should be applied. By early 2016, the group had dissolved and the fate of crafting a working agreement that could be put before legislators looked uncertain.

And then the process received a shot in the arm from Bevin. At his first State-of-the-Commonwealth address on January 26, 2016, the Governor laid out the need for a performance-based model. As a point of reference, he specifically mentioned NKU's \$10.7 million funding disparity.

“I wanted to make the point that this wasn't just a crazy idea and that we needed to really think about how we're funding higher education,” Bevin says. “And there's nothing more powerful than a very specific, easy-to-get-your-head-around example. And both Northern and Western were schools that everybody knew. Look: \$10.7 million is a number everyone can get their head around, and very specific to the fact that while not a billion dollars, it's a significant amount of money. What could a school like Northern Kentucky do with the thoughtful stewardship of an extra \$10 million each year. It served as a catalyst for people to think, “That doesn't seem fair.”

The governor and legislature moved quickly to force action. They met NKU's shortfall halfway, adding \$5.1 to its annual state share. The Governor then ordered the creation of a new working group made up of the president of the CPE, Robert King, university presidents, state budget officials, and legislators, to craft a new plan for a performance-based model.



Their charge: To have something finished on December 1, 2016, that could be put before the full Senate and House for a vote.

As work mounted in Frankfort, Mearns and Adam Caswell, NKU's Assistant Vice President for Government, Corporate and Foundation Engagement, spearheaded a grass roots effort to corral support for a new funding model.

Launched in late 2015, Invest in Success—a website funded by the NKU Foundation that enabled citizens to contact their legislators and advocate for a new funding model—spread to NKU leaders across the region. Chambers of commerce, city commission meetings, non-profits all took notice. “If there was a group that met regularly, chances are we spoke to them about NKU's funding disparity and legislative priorities,” Caswell says.

But simply raising the volume on the issue wasn't enough. Mearns and Caswell wanted their audiences to act. They encouraged them to contact their local legislators, and through a widget on the project's web site, it allowed constituents to do so in a matter of seconds. But would they make the effort?

The University's leaders received their answer at a campus town hall in October 2015 at NKU's Student Union Center, where some 200 people turned out to hear Mearns and others make their case for why Kentucky needed to change how it funded its higher education institutions. In his previous post as Vice President of Public Affairs for the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, Caswell had considered a meeting like this a success if 10 to 15 people contacted Frankfort.

“I'll never forget coming back to my office [after the meeting] and tracking how many messages had been sent,” he recalls. “I turned on my computer and saw that 100 people had sent around 400 messages. They'd been doing it during the meeting, right on their phones. People have passion for NKU, and they realized this was an important issue.”

The groundswell never let up. In all, more than 1,300 residents sent some 4,000 messages to their legislators.

**A LITTLE MORE THAN FOUR YEARS** after President Mearns began to push his fellow university presidents to get behind a different funding approach, Governor Bevin signed into law the state's new performance-based model on March 21, 2017.

Senate Bill 153, which adopts the model created by the CPE's second working group, breaks down the funding in three distinct ways:

35 percent of funds are based on student success and outcomes, 35 percent tied to total student credit hours, and 30 percent based on supporting important campus operations and student support.

For the coming budget cycle, beginning July 1, the model will apply to just 5 percent of the budget, around \$45 million. But it comes with a “hold harmless” provision so that no money will actually be moved from one university to another. The next year, the full budget will run through the model but with a one percent cap on how much money a university can lose from the budget's application. The following year, the cap goes to two percent.

Like any workable piece of legislation, the new law was the product of compromise. There was considerable debate between the university leaders, for

example, on how much, if any, out-of-state students should be valued in the metrics. Border universities, like NKU, whose student body is populated by a considerable number of Ohio residents, wanted them to be counted just like in-state students. “I don't think that's good public policy,” Mearns says of the latter position. “But I understand the politics of it.” In the end, the group agreed to count non-residents at 50 percent.

There was also disagreement over how to measure the price of delivering a credit hour. Research institutions like the University of Kentucky, where there's a higher cost structure to deliver an English 101 credit than at NKU or Western, successfully fought for a larger reimbursement from the state.

“Again, I don't think that's good public policy,” Mearns says. “Why should the state value of an English credit be more at UK than at Morehead? But that compromise was necessary to bring the research institutions into the fold.”

**OF COURSE, THIS ISN'T JUST A STORY** about education funding. Drill down deeper, and you'll see it's really about Kentucky's future. From university leaders like President Mearns to legislators to the governor, there's the view that by incentivizing universities to respond to the changing demands of the economy, they can better provide a stronger, more adaptable workforce.

Bevin believes Kentucky has an opportunity to become a hub of advanced manufacturing. What Germany is to Europe, he thinks the Commonwealth can be to the rest of the United States. But to attract those employers, to bring those jobs to the state, you need a qualified labor pool. He and other supporters of the bill think Kentucky is in a better position to do that thanks to its new funding model.

“You cannot become the hub of excellence without the right workforce,” he says. “You cannot have the right workforce if you're not incentivizing those creating them and educating them and training them to focus on the jobs of the 21st century. Advanced manufacturing—the types of jobs that demand a different approach to education than we have historically used.”

Would this change have happened without President Mearns' advocacy? Maybe. Eventually. But there's little question that it wouldn't have happened as quickly, Caswell says.

“He wasn't afraid to disrupt the process at CPE,” he says. “If he hadn't done what he did in 2013, we wouldn't be talking about this. Things would have been status quo.”

# TIMELINE OF SUCCESS

From his five-year strategic plan to securing a new higher-ed funding model for the Commonwealth, **PRESIDENT GEOFFREY S. MEARNS** has made a lasting impact at Northern Kentucky University



The Kentucky General Assembly agrees to increase NKU's state appropriation by **\$5.1 million** in the second year of the biennium, while state leaders commit to adopt an outcomes-based funding model.



The NKU women's soccer team makes history by capturing the University's first D-I conference championship in the Horizon League and becoming the first NKU team to play in the NCAA Tournament.

NKU participates in its first NCAA Division I competition.

NKU becomes a tobacco-free campus.

THE NKU BOARD OF REGENTS APPROVES "FUEL THE FLAME," NKU'S 2013-2018 STRATEGIC PLAN WITH A PARAMOUNT GOAL OF STUDENT SUCCESS.

**NORTHERN TERRACE OPENS AS NKU'S SEVENTH CAMPUS-LIVING OPTION, BRINGING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF NKU RESIDENTS TO MORE THAN 2,000.**

The NKU Board of Regents votes to form **School of the Arts (SOTA)**, the first school of its kind in Kentucky that combines music, visual arts, and theatre and dance. NKU announces partnership with **St. Elizabeth Healthcare**, including an **\$8 million** investment to support the Health Innovation Center.



THE EXPANDED AND RENOVATED NKU CAMPUS RECREATION CENTER REOPENS.

**RICH BOEHNE ('81) AND THE SCRIPPS HOWARD FOUNDATION** donate \$1 million to the Boehne First Family Generation Scholarship fund.

"THREE YEARS AGO, WHEN I BEGAN ADVOCATING FOR THE CREATION OF AN OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING MODEL, SOMEONE FAMILIAR WITH THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS TOLD ME THERE WAS NO WAY THIS CHANGE WOULD EVER HAPPEN."  
GEOFFREY S. MEARNS



In its first year of post-season eligibility, the NKU men's basketball team wins the Horizon League championship and becomes the first basketball team in the University's history to make it to the NCAA Tournament.

<b>2012</b> AUGUST 17	<b>2013</b> JANUARY 17	<b>2013</b> NOVEMBER 13	<b>2014</b> AUGUST 11	<b>2015</b> JANUARY 15	<b>2015</b> SEPTEMBER 9	<b>2015</b> NOVEMBER 27	<b>2016</b> FEBRUARY 3	<b>2016</b> APRIL 15	<b>2016</b> NOVEMBER 5	<b>2017</b> MARCH	
<b>2012</b> APRIL 18	<b>2012</b> OCTOBER 26	<b>2013</b> OCTOBER 4	<b>2014</b> APRIL	<b>2014</b> SEPTEMBER 29	<b>2015</b> MAY 11	<b>2015</b> OCTOBER 21	<b>2016</b> JANUARY 26	<b>2016</b> FEBRUARY 5	<b>2016</b> JUNE	<b>2017</b> FEBRUARY	<b>2017</b> MARCH
 <b>GEOFFREY S. MEARNS</b> is unanimously named as Northern Kentucky University's fifth President. First official day takes place on August 1; Mearns begins strategic planning process.	NKU AND GATEWAY COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE ANNOUNCE <b>GATEWAY2NKU</b> PARTNERSHIP, A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO MAKE EARNING A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN NORTHERN KENTUCKY SEAMLESS AND AFFORDABLE. THE PROGRAM GROWS TO INCLUDE <b>JEFFERSON COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE</b> <b>CINCINNATI STATE TECHNICAL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE</b>	 <b>Mearns officially sworn in as President during installation ceremony.</b>	 In its biennial budget, the Kentucky General Assembly authorizes <b>\$97 million</b> in state funds to design and construct the Health Innovation Center and renovate Founders Hall.	 NKU transitions from the Atlantic Sun to the Horizon League.	 <b>MEARNS BEGINS "ROAD TO NKU" TOUR WITH FIRST STOP IN SOMERSET, KY. OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS, MEARNS VISITS MORE THAN 75 KENTUCKY HIGH SCHOOLS.</b>	 NKU breaks ground on the Health Innovation Center.	 In a public address, <b>GOVERNOR MATT BEVIN</b> recognizes the funding disparity that has impeded the growth of NKU, and proposes allocating substantial additional state support for the University.	NKU announces its first Black Alumni Council to serve and support African-American graduates and students.	<b>For the first time since 2004, NKU hosts more than 360 top Kentucky high school students as part of Governor's Scholars Program.</b>	NKU partners with the University of Kentucky and St. Elizabeth Healthcare to develop a UK medical school regional campus at Northern Kentucky University.	 <b>SENATE BILL 153</b> , which moves Kentucky to an outcomes-based funding model, heads to the Governor's desk after passing both chambers of the General Assembly by wide margins.

# THE CHANGE AGENT

**DR. ABDULLAH AL-BAHRANI  
AND THE MISSION TO SAVE  
AMERICA FROM  
FINANCIAL ILLITERACY**



**// BY BRENT DONALDSON**

**R**ight now, you are making a value judgment tied to basic economic principles. If you read on, the risks of your investment include wasted time, potential loss of benefits gained through a different activity, and the risk of placing value in potentially misleading information.

But because so many of us fail to view everyday decisions through the lens of economics, our choices often work against our best interests and our personal finances are a mess. Only 46 percent of Americans have saved more than \$10,000 for retirement. Despite the lessons we should have learned from the Great Recession, we added \$89.2 billion in new credit-card debt in 2016—the most since 2007. And nearly two thirds of us can't calculate interest payments correctly.

When the National Financial Educators Council recently asked young adults aged 18–24 “What high school-level course would benefit your life the most?”, the majority (51.4 percent) responded “money management.” Yet we don't do it.

Northern Kentucky University economics professor Dr. Abdullah Al-Bahrani is a man whose mission is to make financial literacy and economics a core element of education across every age and economic stratum. He plies his trade through the cultural currency of today's students—pop culture, social media, music, and film—not in an effort to be hip, but because economics is about getting the most satisfaction out of life with the least amount of cost.

If you can find a way to teach that to today's youth, you can save the country and the planet from suffering the next global depression, one student at a time.

Dr. Al-Bahrani arrived at NKU in 2013, three years after he cut his teeth as an economics professor at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. It was at Bloomsburg that Al-Bahrani was tasked with a distinct and influential challenge: to teach a class called “Economics for Non-

Economists,” and to teach it using no math or graphs.

“Which, for an economist—we've become so math-oriented that we don't know how to step away from it anymore,” Al-Bahrani says. “But I signed up just because I like challenges, but I had no idea what I was going to do.”

He decided to break down basic economic concepts by demonstrating their ties to nationality, our everyday decisions, and core economic philosophy.

**“ECONOMICS IS TYPICALLY TAUGHT IN A VERY DRY WAY OF SUPPLY VERSUS DEMAND. BUT THE WHY OR THE HOW IS NEVER EXPLAINED. I WANT STUDENTS TO FEEL WHAT A RECESSION FEELS LIKE. I WANT THEM TO FEEL HOW EXCITED EVERYBODY WAS DURING THE HOUSING BOOM AND HOW PEOPLE THOUGHT IT WAS NEVER GOING TO END.”**

**AL-BAHRANI**



He showed his students ESPN's “30 for 30” documentaries—particularly an episode called “Once Brothers.” The film centers on former Yugoslavia national basketball teammates Vlade Divac and Dražen Petrovic, best friends torn apart by geopolitical, ethnic, and ideological divides within their country during the Yugoslav War. When one friend dies unexpectedly, the other is overwhelmed with regret and heartbreak. That emotion became real for Al-Bahrani's students, who suddenly realized how a government's structure can impact personal relationships and friendships.

“And that's economics,” Al-Bahrani says. “It allows me to put history in motion with economic education. That's something that my students appreciate a lot—the power of storytelling—because economics is typically taught in a very dry way of supply versus demand. But the why or the how is never explained. I want students to feel what a recession feels like. I want them to feel how

excited everybody was during the housing boom and how people thought it was never going to end.”

But just as importantly, Al-Bahrani discovered, his students slowly began to distill their everyday decisions through an economic filter—a goal that fueled the groundbreaking programs he'd soon bring to NKU.

Dr. Abdullah Al-Bahrani was born in 1981 in Muscat, Oman, where he lived only briefly as a child during two separate parts of his youth. Memories of his late childhood are tied largely to his mother, Sana Al-Balushi, as she pursued her Ph.D. in education and curriculum design from the University of Louisville. His father, Abbas Al-Bahrani, an economist for the Sultan of Oman, had to stay back. Young Abdullah often went with his mom as she attended night classes on UofL's campus and studied late into the morning hours before heading home.

“That's why a Ph.D. felt like it was possible for me,” Al-Bahrani says, “because I saw how she went through it. She went through the hard work, but she did it with two teenagers while my dad had to stay back in Oman. She was in a new city by herself and she got through it. But seeing that struggle and seeing the reward of the education, it really taught me what a Ph.D. is about. I view a Ph.D. as learning how to learn for the rest of your life.”

Out of the 13 papers Al-Bahrani has authored or co-authored during his relatively short tenure at NKU, 11 of them center on innovative ways to teach economics. “A lot of things that I do in the classroom force the students to see the economics,” Al-Bahrani says. “With assignments like “Econ-Selfies” or “Econ-Beats,” students are actively participating—they have to do something to actually learn.”

For Al-Bahrani's Econ-Selfie assignments, students are instructed to take a picture of something in their everyday lives related to a class lesson, then write 140 words about how the photo connects with the chosen



economics principle. “It teaches them two things,” Al-Bahrani says. “It teaches them to look around, right? Try to see economics in their personal life. And it teaches them to explain it—to explain the economics. At first, students don’t like that assignment. ‘You’re jumping on the bandwagon of a fad, right? You’re trying to be cool using the term “selfie.”’ But after they submit that first assignment, usually the response is ‘I can’t stop seeing economics now.’”

To create Econ-Beats, Al-Bahrani partnered with colleagues in NKU’s Electronic Media and Broadcasting—a program housed across campus in the College of Informatics. Students are tasked with choosing a popular song, rewriting the lyrics using an economic theme and lexicon, recording the audio, and producing a music video as the final product. At the end of each semester, Al-Bahrani and his colleagues host an open screening where people from across the city get to vote for their favorite. More than \$1,000 in prizes are awarded each semester.

“Dr. Al-Bahrani communicates with students through media and with the language they know and understand,” says Dr. Rebecca Porterfield, Dean of NKU’s Haile/US Bank College of Business. “When students are tasked with putting economics

to music and video, all the technology inputs they are familiar with come together in an innovative and creative way—a way that allows for application that leads to real knowledge.”

There are two movements afoot in the United States that are equally related to our collective financial illiteracy. The first—a major focus of Al-Bahrani and NKU’s Center for Economic Education, which he leads—is to begin teaching economics and financial decision making as early as possible. As early as kindergarten, he says.

The second movement seeks to remedy the consequences of not doing the first. Credit card and student loan debt. Underwater mortgages. Our inability to distinguish between a want and a need, or the understanding of how to manage our finances and time. The movement has been loosely described as “adulthood,” and the most well-known example may be the Adulthood School in Portland, Maine. The school educates adults on matters of health and wellness, home improvement, and economics and financial basics. “You’re smart and capable,” the school’s website says, “your education just didn’t provide you with all the skills you need.”

Rachel Weinstein, a psychotherapist and co-founder of The Adulthood School, says that

financial distress leaks into every other part of our lives. “Not learning these (financial) skills early on creates a sense of chaos and anxiety that detracts from a person’s ability to be purposeful in their life, and to be productive and successful.”

Al-Bahrani sees it all of the time. “I have students who come to me and say, ‘I don’t know what to do with the rest of my life.’ Well, I don’t either,” he says. “I’m always trying to figure out my next step. Our students come in believing that the job that they get or the decision that they make today is going to be it for the rest of their life. That might’ve been the case when our parents or grandparents worked, but in today’s world and in today’s economy, really what you need to be developing is your brand. What makes you, you? Close your eyes. Ten years down the road, what do you see yourself doing? What do you see? Let’s start with the basic wants that you have. And that’s all economics is. What are the basic needs and wants that I have? You can build the rest around it.”

“I am fortunate to be the dean of a faculty that is highly talented,” Dr. Porterfield says. “When you witness the abilities and talent of an individual like Dr. Al-Bahrani, and know his knowledge of his field is strong, you just move out of the way and cheer him on.”



Support NKU’s College of Business by visiting [givenow.nku.edu](http://givenow.nku.edu).



# ROBOTS, AWAKEN!

**SHOULD WE FEAR THE COMING AGE OF ROBOTS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE? DR. AUSTIN LEE, ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S FOREMOST EXPERTS IN SOCIAL ROBOTICS, SAYS NOT AT ALL.**

// By Brent Donaldson

*Tap tap tap...*

**“Time to wake up, buddy.**

**Sometimes I wonder if I have to send him back.**

**It has sensors on top so it should be responding...**

**Now are you awake?”**

When we use a home appliance, or post a photo to Facebook, the robotic technology and artificial intelligence (A.I.) involved in those exchanges largely occur beneath the surface of our awareness. But that dynamic is set to change dramatically over the next several years as we march toward massive increases in the levels of human-robot interaction. From self-driving cars, to A.I. assistants like Siri and Alexa, to robots pitching you cruise packages at Japanese hotels, soon enough it will be impossible to *not* take notice of the robots that surround us.

Depending on who you are, this prospect either exhilarates or horrifies you. Maybe you side with futurist entrepreneur Elon Musk, tech's top town-crier about the coming “fleet of artificial intelligence-enhanced robots capable of destroying mankind.” Or maybe you're more Mark Zuckerberg, who assures us we can “build A.I. so it works for us and helps us.” (Of course, for Mr. Zuckerberg it already does, through facial recognition algorithms for his company, Facebook.)

Enter Dr. Austin Lee, associate professor of communication studies at Northern Kentucky University. And enter his robots Coconut and Pineapple. Lee, who is quickly becoming one of the country's foremost experts the field of social robotics, is much more Zuckerberg than Musk. Lee's recent research has centered on reciprocity and persuasion between humans and robots, as well as our collective fear of robots and A.I. Despite Lee's findings, he's convinced that robots can make the world a better place.

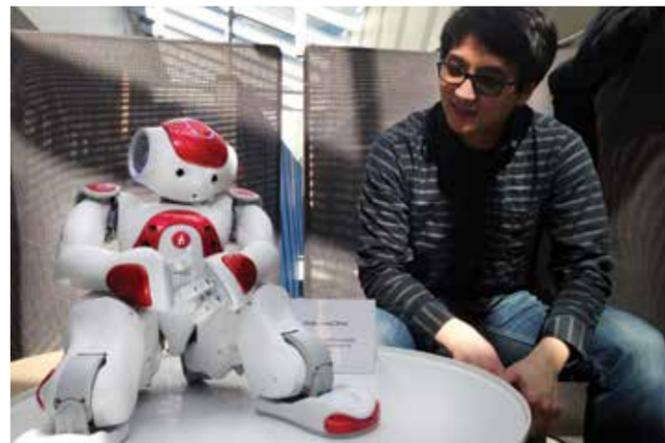
**In your research about human distrust and fear of robots, you specifically measured humans' fear of robots that can make their own decisions. How did you survey this information and what were your findings?**

We had a national survey about fear. Fear of everything—spiders, fear of heights, fear of public speaking, crime. And I was lucky to give [the survey company] some items, like fear of robots, fear of artificial intelligence. And the results said that about 26 percent are either moderately or severely afraid of robots and A.I. Afraid that they may take over the world, afraid that they may become self-aware in the future. Females, the older generation, the less educated, lower income, and ethnic minorities are more fearful toward robots because their jobs are more easily displaced by robots.



AUSTIN LEE

COCONUT



**In one of your class presentations, you show your students a photo of a family gathered happily around an Amazon Echo, and next to the photo you've placed the words “Mindlessness and fixed pattern response.” Are technologies like Siri and Alexa training us to trust A.I.? Is that dangerous?**

I like that picture very much because the family is so immersed in conversation with the Echo. It's not even humanlike—it's just a cylinder. But it has a human voice, so people are talking to Alexa as if it is human. If people think logically, there is no point of complying with a robot's request. But people aren't attentive to the fact that robots are just machines with CPUs and batteries and actuators. People comply, and use the norms of human interaction in the context of human-robot interaction.

**Which is exactly what your co-authored paper, titled “The Role of Reciprocity in Verbally Persuasive Robots,” is all about, right?**

Robots used to be confined in the factory cages, like welding machines and pressing machines. But now they are among us and working with us as a team. The basic skill in team building and collaboration is communication and persuasion.

In other countries, there are humanoid robots in places like banks, grocery stores, cell phone stores, everywhere. And their job is to sell something to people: a new data plan, an awesome cruise package. But there is no theoretical research behind it. So that study was about demonstrating the robot's potential to influence people, and as you saw from the results it was unequivocal. Robots are very effective at persuading people and utilizing some principles of persuasion from human communication.

**For this research, you programmed one of your robots to assist students who were playing a “Jeopardy”-like quiz game. Essentially, the robots gave some students the correct answers, and gave other students the wrong answers. After the game, the robot then asked the students for assistance. What were your findings?**

If you think logically, there is no point for the participant to help the robot. The robot will not be mad if you don't help him back. The robot will not call you a moocher or an ingrate. But we found that 63 percent of people who received help from the robot for five minutes agreed to help the robot for 15 minutes. When the robot was not really helpful, then only 30 percent (reciprocated). Huge difference.

In other words, it didn't matter whether participants considered the robot friendly or competent or trustworthy—it only mattered whether the robot was viewed as being helpful.

And that is consistent with the literature in human communication. We trust in normal reciprocity because it is one of the most robust norms in human interactions. So that was our first tab, to document the persuasive potential of robots. And now we are expanding into many different types of persuasion strategies.

I'm sure the 26 percent of people who are afraid of robots aren't thrilled that we're teaching them to gain compliance with humans. But you can argue that it can be for the benefit of mankind.

The possibilities are boundless. There is a ton of research on persuasion between humans, and if you apply that theory into the context of human-robot communication, robots can effectively change our attitudes and beliefs and behaviors. As a communications researcher, I want to contribute to society in the future by examining robot potential for doing persuasion for positive changes. My students are working with this robot, programming it. Their task is to develop new applications for social robots. Like an NKU ambassador robot, or a robotic coach at the cafeteria to persuade students to eat healthier, or a robot to promote the tobacco-free policy on campus. Or at our state-of-the-art recreation center to ask people to work out regularly. I'm focusing on creating positive changes using robots rather than making profits. 🍷

# NORSING AROUND

This past semester we honored, we cheered, and we celebrated. Take a look back at the Alumni Awards where we honored four exceptional alumni and supporters, our annual Chili Cookoff, Homecoming, and the men's basketball team's first trip to the big dance. What a ride!

2017 Outstanding Alumni Awardee, Mary Zalla, enjoys the Alumni Awards reception with her daughter Cecilia.



Alumni Board of Directors' president, Tom Wiedemann, addresses the crowd.



Alumni celebrating NKU's berth into the NCAA Tournament at the official NKU Alumni pre-game reception at Punch Bowl Social Indianapolis.



Congratulations to our most spirited alumni, Jason Garner and Ali Hedges, at the Braxton Game Watch! They each received a prize for sharing their Norse pride.



Alumni and NKU friends catch up with each other during the Alumni Awards reception.



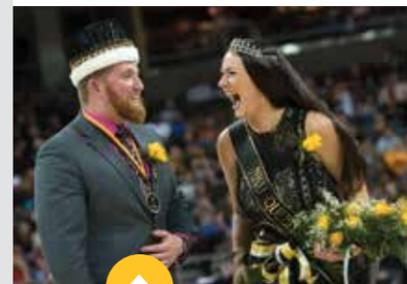
2017 Strongest Influence Awardee, Dr. Lynne Smith with student presenter, Megan Louis.



2017 Outstanding Young Alumnus Awardee, Jason Merrick, accepts the Distinguished Young Alumnus Award.



**ABOVE TOP** Alumnae Stephanie West arrives for the Chili Cookoff.



**ABOVE BOTTOM** Rick Seal and Rudie Ulizio are crowned the 2017 NKU Homecoming King and Queen.



The NKU Black Alumni Council held a reunion brunch to close out Homecoming weekend. They invited undergraduate student leaders from several black student organizations to connect with and network.



Alumni Kelsey Bartlett and Jacqueline Marcy celebrate our first trip to the tournament with other alumni and fans at Punch Bowl Social in Indianapolis.



2017 Distinguished Service Awardee, Marty Butler, enjoys the reception.





## THEY CALL ME COACH FIELDS

Warner Bros.' Derek Fields turned collegiate hobby into lifelong career

**L**earn from your losses. Evaluate your competitors. Practice, practice, practice. Derek Fields learned many lessons during his time on Northern Kentucky University's basketball court. The 1990 graduate of NKU's radio, television, and film program is still motivating his team and teaching them the strategies of success. But these days it's far beyond the three-point line.

Today, Fields serves as the vice president of sales and retail business development at Warner Bros. Entertainment. There, he focuses on strategies to get Warner Bros. brands into the hands of consumers, and collaborates with the right people to make it happen. But his experience on the court and status as a member of NKU's Basketball Hall of Fame has never left him. "They call me Coach Fields at work," Fields says. "I think

that's been one thing I've been blessed with—to take everything that's been given to me and give that back to the people I work with. I want someone to take away what they've learned from me and instill it in someone else. That's how we get better as individuals. I'm all about building other people up and creating something dynamic."

Fields teaches his team to play fast, play fair, and always work for something better—

inside and outside the office. He has his coaching hat on no matter where he goes.

That might be because the former point guard, who ranks No. 6 on NKU's all-time scoring list with 1,664 points, always has the principles of basketball on his mind. His dedication to the Norse earned him NCAA Division II third team All-America honors and The Great Lakes Valley Conference Player of the Year title in 1989.

After graduating from NKU, Fields was drafted into the Continental Basketball Association (CBA), a now-defunct professional men's basketball minor league, and shot hoops for a few seasons with the Columbus Horizon.

He was offered a chance to play professionally in England, but Fields had his heart set on something bigger.

"I wanted to be an NBA All-Star," he says. "Honestly, I didn't know a whole lot about playing overseas and making money to get experience and come back. When I got my first offer, they said they would pay me \$20,000 to go overseas. I was like, England? No, I'm going to the NBA. We all had that dream."

When Fields stopped playing basketball professionally a few years later, he took his court skills and radio, television, and film degree and went into another competitive arena: sales. He began in an entry-level sales position at Kraft selling perishable and nonperishable food items to area grocery stores. For the next 20 years, Fields worked his way up the corporate ladder, keeping his eyes open for any opportunity to advance—from Kraft, to Corning Consumer Products, to Sara Lee, to Schwarz Retail Supply Services, to a 12-year stint as the director of sales at Disney.

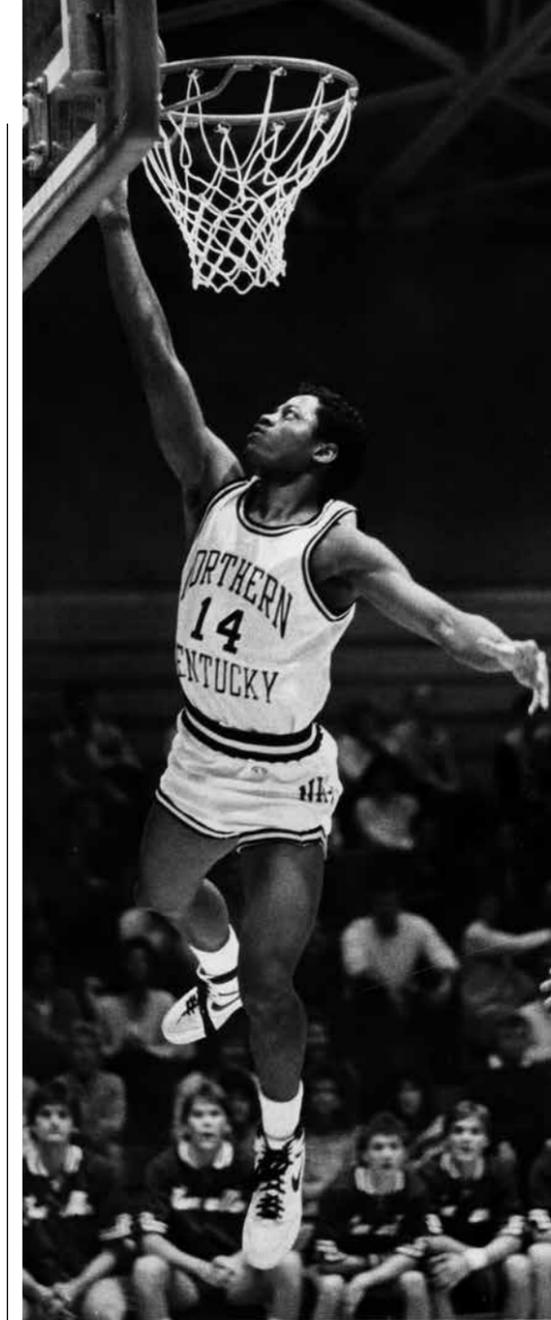
When it comes to the myriad of consumer products being marketed to the world, chances are Fields has had a hand in touching almost every category. But if there's one thing he's learned from his tenure in sales, it's that the nature of success is tied directly to success in building partnerships.

"Our number one objective is to ensure that not only are we growing our business, but it's important to have great relationships," Field says. "That's how you find ways to get your end consumer to touch your brands."

Fields has come a long way since his days on the court in Regents Hall. He never made it to the NBA like he dreamt throughout his childhood, but he's established himself as a coach, a leader, a mentor at a one of the most well-known companies in the world. And he couldn't be happier.

"Everything that happens to us—good and bad—happens for a reason," Fields says. "We are where we are in our lives because that's the way it's supposed to be. Warner Bros. is where I want to end my career, but I'm not finished. I'm a VP, and I love what I do. But I'd like to be an executive vice president or president before I'm done. I'd like to be on top. I'd like to be leading and building a team, being a person that's developing people, and helping and growing our brand."

—Jayna Morris



Derek Fields (1985-89) - Fields ranks No. 6 on the pre-Division I era NKU all-time scoring list with 1,664 points (15.3 ppg). He was named Great Lakes Valley Conference Player of the Year in 1989 after scoring an NKU single-season record 664 points (23.7 ppg). Fields also earned NCAA Division II third team All-America honors in 1989. During his senior season, he scored 39 points and dished out 11 assists to lead NKU to a 121-111 win at Kentucky State. Fields made his final collegiate game a memorable occasion by pouring in 35 points, dishing out 10 assists and grabbing six rebounds as NKU posted a 124-118 win over Indianapolis.



## SCRIPTED TOGETHER

Suzanne Fitzpatrick and her former teacher Ken Jones celebrate 30 years of screenwriting



**S**uzanne Fitzpatrick ('89) and Ken Jones have a tale of friendship that's

straight out of Hollywood. Jones—director of Northern Kentucky University's School of the Arts (SOTA)—calls Fitzpatrick his “first and best writing student” at Northern Kentucky University, where the two met when she was a journalism major who had signed up for his playwriting class.

“I was a journalism major, but I realized that I was better at making up things than sticking to the truth,” Fitzpatrick says. After receiving her master's at the University of Virginia, Fitzpatrick moved to Los Angeles to get her foot in the door in television writing. Her career began slowly until, as chance would have it, Fitzpatrick found work as a receptionist for Carol Burnett. It was a networking dream job that landed Fitzpatrick work on a short-lived Dolly Parton sitcom. That, in turn, led to Fitzpatrick being hired as a script coordinator for “The Nanny” and a writer for “7th Heaven”

during the 1990s. Not bad for a journalism major 10 years out of school.

It was during this time that Jones and Fitzpatrick reconnected. Jones had taken the head writing job at Lightpoint Entertainment at Disney/MGM Studios in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. When he asked Fitzpatrick to join him in Buena Vista as a writing partner, the former teacher and student became a two-person team writing for television and animation at Disney.

“Even when Suzanne was a young student, she understood the whole idea that playwriting isn't just writing a script and then walking away from it. In television, you may have to rewrite scripts 10 to 15 times, and you have to do it very quickly. I knew I needed someone who could keep up with that.”

While working for Disney, Jones and Fitzpatrick became like family. When William Jones, the son of Ken and his wife Christine, was born in February of 1998, Fitzpatrick took care of the couple's other two children. “That is how close we were,” Jones says.

Fast-forward to 2017. Fitzpatrick still lives in L.A. with her husband and two children,

while Jones is going on his 30th year teaching at NKU. He is also an active member of the Dramatist Guild and the Stage Directors and Choreographers society while producing shows for NKU and theaters around the region.

Though separated by more than 2,000 miles, the two have collaborated on multiple award-winning scripts. A few years ago, Jones and Fitzpatrick co-wrote “Divine Will,” an award-winning film currently on PureFlix that was produced by Christine Jones—a professor at NKU who happens to be the wife of Ken Jones. Over the years, Suzanne and Ken have collaborated on several screenplays, including “The Abject,” “Dream Thief,” and “Over the Moon,” which won Jones and Fitzpatrick 1st Place in Outstanding Achievement at the Hollywood International Moving Pictures Film Festival.

“One of the biggest gifts that Ken ever gave me was believing in me,” Fitzpatrick says. “All it ever takes is that one person who you look up to, to give you that boost, that push, that confidence to keep going. And he continues to do that even now, 30 years later.” —Madison Borland '18



## A PATH TO CURING PARKINSON'S

Dr. Elmer Price's new research shows great promise against a debilitating disease

**A**t this very moment, a sobering number of us are unaware of a subtle, devastating process taking place within our own bodies. In the beginning stages, we might notice a change in the ways we speak, write, or stand. We may develop unfamiliar and uncontrollable movements while we sleep. Or, we might begin to experience tremors in our hands and feet. Those of us afflicted—estimated somewhere in the 10 million range—are suffering from Parkinson's Disease, a chronic and progressive neurological illness. Until recently, not much has been discovered in the way of potential cures.

Enter Dr. Elmer Price—a Northern Kentucky University graduate and professor of biological sciences at Marshall University. Over the past eight years, Price has conducted research that could make this road to recovery much, much shorter. Featured in *Stem Cells and Development* (2016) and funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, Price's research focuses on utilizing adult stem cells—cells that help various parts of the body mend themselves daily—to repair the damage

caused by Parkinson's.

“When someone has Parkinson's disease,” he explains, “there are certain neurons that die. And those neurons are involved [in] muscle control.” However, there are also areas of the human brain that contain adult neural stem cells, such as the olfactory bulb that gives us our sense of smell, that can regenerate new neurons. The challenge for Price and his team of undergraduate students was finding a way to re-route those neural stem cells away from the olfactory bulb and toward the damaged parts of the Parkinson's-afflicted brain.

Price and his team were able to implant a small cylinder into the rats' brains that could be used as a pathway for the naturally occurring stem cells to travel to the region affected by Parkinson's. “So, we're not transplanting stem cells,” Price says. “We're just transplanting these little cylindrical structures that create new pathways that take the brain's own natural stem cells and re-route them to a brand-new location in the brain where they function as the same types of neurons that were lost in Parkinson's.”

Crucially, the cylinder—made of what

Price describes as a “gelatinous, Jell-O like” substance—uses materials already federally approved in neurosurgery. Vital to the process's success is the fact the cells are being redirected toward the damaged areas rather than transplanted. In other words, the patient's body will not reject them. One of the most promising aspects of Price's work is that the same approach could be used for many other brain disorders, such as traumatic brain injuries. “Traumatic brain injuries are just devastating because you lose big regions of the brain,” Price says. “Those neurons are gone. So, if we can re-grow that region of the brain that's lost due to physical trauma, that could benefit a huge number of individuals.”

With the NSF grant, Price is able to continue with his research on Parkinson's disease. Despite the seriousness of the disease and the magnitude of his discovery, he says that every day in the lab is a new adventure, and a throwback to his third-grade self.

“You know, when I was a kid, I would make believe I was a scientist,” he says. “And now I am one, and it's just like *Dexter's Lab* every day.” —Kirsten Hurst '17

NKU SCHLACHTER UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES PRESENTS...

# MYSTERY PHOTO!



## SOLVE THE MYSTERY FOR NKU HISTORY!

The clues are hard to come by in this busy, colorful photo of NKU days gone by. You may recognize a couple of era-specific hairstyles, perhaps, or notice a few fashion choices that betray the era. A major clue, however, is Loch Norse—clearly pictured here before the lake's renovation in 2006. Of course, the biggest clues of all are the dozens

of friendly Norse faces pictured at this sunny celebration. Recognize anyone? Do you know the name of the event, or the year it took place? Email your guesses to [nkumagazine@nku.edu](mailto:nkumagazine@nku.edu) today, and have a great summer!