

ALUMNI ANCHOR

PENSACOLA STATE COLLEGE
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2015
3RD EDITION



Lady Pirates Celebrate 35 Years

Laughter and hugs quickly melted the December chill as 36 alumni Lady Pirates from across the country gathered at the Hartsell Arena to celebrate 35 years of PSC women's basketball.

The festivities tipped off with a fun-filled alumni game and introductions of the players. Athletic Director Bill Hamilton and Lady Pirates alumni presented roses to Coach Vicki Carson, the college's first full-time women's basketball coach.

After leading the Lady Pirates from 1980 to 2005, Coach Carson retired with 515 wins, including the State Championship in 1985, nine Panhandle Conference titles and 15 state final-four contests. But, the statistic she cherished most was that 98 percent of her players graduated from PSC and completed their degrees at four-year universities.

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ALUMNI BOARD SPOTLIGHT

When **Mike Thomas** was a student at PSC (1971-73), fraternities and sororities were vital to the social fiber of the college. As a member of Delta Kappa Alpha fraternity, Thomas remembers some friendly competition among the Greeks and great loyalty among the members.

Greek life has disappeared from PSC, but Thomas and the DKA Brothers have maintained a connection through regular social events that would be enviable to any organization.

Now, as a member of the PSC Alumni Association Board, Thomas is working to build that same connection among all PSC alumni.

"The PSC Alumni Association is about honoring memories created during college days and creating new memories as PSC alumni reconnect," Thomas said.

In that spirit, he hosted a PSC Alumni Meet and Greet at Grover T's BBQ in June, giving alumni the opportunity to enjoy great food, fellowship and plenty of time to swap favorite tales from past PSC/PJC days.

Last fall, Thomas helped orchestrate the alumni association's first fundraiser, a very successful Continental Pheasant Hunt. Through his ownership of Milton Tastee Freez, Grover T's BBQ, and BlackWater Olive Grove, Thomas has gained a sharp eye for business and numerous contacts that greatly benefit the alumni association.

"As we work together to support the college, Mike and other alumni bring a wealth of experience and the capacity to make things happen," said Jerry Maygarden, PSC Alumni Association president.

Adding more excitement to the slam-dunk event, the current Lady Pirates defeated LSU-Eunice in a heart-stopping matchup, 61-60.

The celebration concluded with Lady Pirates Head Coach Penny Jones welcoming all to enjoy a display of PSC memorabilia, a greeting time, and a dinner for all players, coaches and guests.

"This was truly a celebration where the Lady Pirates alumni were joined by many more PSC alumni who donated food, created special alumni T-shirts, and volunteered as photographers and servers," said Alumni Affairs Executive Director Patrice Whitten.

You are invited to join the PSC Alumni Association at www.alumni.pensacolastate.edu or email alumni@pensacolastate.edu.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Jamey Jones Comes Home to PSC

"You don't always know where you are going," says Jamey Jones, Pensacola State alum and English instructor, referring to his meandering route to becoming a teacher, published author and the seventh Poet Laureate of Northwest Florida.

Possessing more passion for skateboarding than for school, Jones readily confesses that in his youth, he didn't like to read or write and wasn't a very good student. However, he had a budding interest in poetry that transcended his lack of interest in school.

"I first discovered poetry while perusing my sister Llis's book shelf," Jones recalls.

Then, on a trip after high school graduation, he began reading "The Dharma Bums," by Jack Kerouac, a pioneer poet of the Beat Generation.

"That book opened a new world for me and made it OK for me to attempt poetry," he says.

So, in fall 1984, he enrolled at PSC where he regularly skipped class and headed to the library. On the shelves he discovered the works of Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and other poets of the Beat Generation. Soon he was hooked.

Unfortunately, his long hours in the library did not lead directly to graduation. He left PSC for the school of life and spent the next 17 years working a series of jobs, caring for his three children, and continuing his quest to write poetry.

In 1986, Jones and his sister Llis were among the initiators of the Back Door Poets downtown. This was the first of many poetry readings and workshops that he has used to give a voice to poets and engage the community.

A few years later, Jones went to Colorado to participate in Naropa University's Summer Writing Program and study under his muse Allen Ginsberg.

"Ginsberg was larger than life to me," Jones relayed.

Around 2001, Jones returned to PSC as a serious student and became an award winning editor of the college's literary journal, "Halftones to Jubilee," that he managed to rename as "Holy Tomato." It has since been renamed "Hurricane Review."

During this time, Jones says that English professors Karen Sirmans, Tom Bailey and Bill Fisher and Latin professor Charlie Schuler particularly inspired and encouraged his writing.

After graduating from the University of West Florida in 2004, Jones taught language arts for four years at Ferry Pass Middle School.

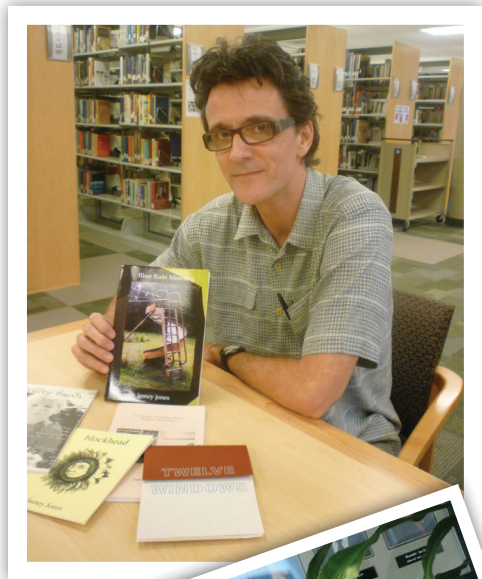
"Ferry Pass was the most difficult, profound and first rewarding job of my life," he says.

From Ferry Pass, Jones headed to New York City where he earned a master's degree in creative writing from Long Island University. This experience allowed him to study and work with many of the great poets he eagerly read while in Pensacola.

Jones' book of poetry, "Blue Rain Morning," was written during his time in New York, yet it has several poems that reflect Pensacola. One selection, "Elsewhere in the Universe," portrays the struggle that Jones, a fifth generation Pensacolian, had with leaving home for Brooklyn.

Although he thrived on the excitement of New York, Jones says he is glad to be "home" at Pensacola State where he can do the things he loves — writing, teaching and learning.

"When I go into the library, I feel like I am in the birthing room of my poetry," Jones says.





PSC alumni Pete and Brenda Pena are winners on and off the field.



Rebecca & Brenda Pena



Photo by Ben Twingley, courtesy of PNJ

Brenda Pena's Field of Dreams

When Pensacola State alum and head softball coach Brenda Nye Pena was a senior at Woodham High School, she was a standout athlete setting an all-time record for earning the most letters in Woodham's history — 12 letters in softball, basketball, track and volleyball.

Division I universities were knocking on her door and in spring 1981, she was ready to pack her bags for an out-of-state university.

Then, PSC Athletic Director Donn Peery called to offer her the very first scholarship to play on PSC's first softball team. At the time, the new softball program didn't even have a coach.

With an adventurous spirit, Brenda Nye took a chance on her hometown college's new plans for women's athletics and began a journey that shaped not only her life but also the lives of scores of PSC softball players for years to come.

"I couldn't pass up a chance to play college ball in my hometown, in front of my family," Brenda says. "Soon after I signed, Mary Bailey signed on to coach and we had a very successful year."

In fact, the rookie PSC softball team ended its first season by winning the first Panhandle Conference Championship for slow-pitch softball in 1981-82.

After PSC, Brenda continued playing with a softball scholarship at the University of Florida and then in the Major Open for Ted Ciano's Key Ford Mustangs.

During her college and Major Open careers, Brenda was a four-time National Champion in Major Open Slow Pitch Softball and a six-time All-American in college and Major Open combined.

Looking back, Brenda doesn't dwell on her accolades. She prefers talking about the mentoring she received from her PSC coaches, Mary Bailey and Sandra Leigh, as well as her UF coach, Frances Cox.

But, best of all was her Major Open coach, her dad, Charlie Nye.

"My dad didn't want to be one of those parent-coaches, so he didn't coach me until after college," Brenda remembers. "He never asked me about ball; he always waited for me to say, 'Dad, want to throw some?'"

"My favorite memories are of my coaches and teammates," Brenda adds. "Beckie Yon was a PSC teammate from Blountstown. She also transferred to Florida with me and has been a lifelong friend."

No doubt, Brenda's biggest win was meeting her future husband Pete Pena when they were both PSC students. After completing their bachelor's degrees, Brenda coached softball at Woodham High and Pete coached at Pensacola Catholic High for several years.

In 1997, Donn Peery once again called Brenda — this time to be head coach of the PSC softball team. In 1999, Dr. Peery also hired Pete as the PSC head coach for volleyball and assistant coach for softball. He is now the head coach for men's basketball.

For almost two decades, Brenda and Pete have devoted their careers to helping PSC players reach their potential, to excel in academics and community service as well as sports.

And, they quite literally added to the family atmosphere at PSC with their daughter Rebecca, now 18, growing up with their players.

"Rebecca has never felt like an only child," Brenda says. "She has an extended family of about 200!"

With the close of the 2015 softball season, Brenda is looking forward to a well-earned retirement and more time to spend with Rebecca, a student in the musical theatre program at New York University. For the past 15 years, Brenda has also worked as the PSC academic adviser for athletics and will continue that position in the coming year.

Although she is happy that her final team enjoyed a winning season and earned a berth in the state championship tournament, the score sheet is not her top priority.

For instance, ask Coach Pena about her players over the past 18 years and in a flash she is reciting their names with details about their careers and children. She pulls up Facebook on her phone and shares their messages about plans to meet her for lunch when they are in town.

"Facebook is amazing; it lets me stay in contact with my players," she says with the same enthusiasm usually reserved for doting grandparents who have a wallet loaded with photos.

Next, ask Coach Pena about her number of career wins and she spends several minutes looking through her office files before she finds the score sheet. Then it takes a few more minutes to add the end-of-season wins for the impressive total — 891 wins.

It isn't that the enviable number of wins is unimportant to Coach Pena. It's just that her players are so much more important.

"It is gratifying to have wins, but it is much more gratifying when I talk with these young women and hear that the two years they spent at PSC have meant something as they go through life," she says.

"One thing that I am really proud of is that in the last 18 years, our players have had a 95 percent graduation rate and this year all of our sophomore players graduated."



Dr. Meadows and Butch Branch support the teams.



Dean Amos competes in the Women's Cross-cut competition.

Timberrrrrrrrr!

PSC alumni donned their favorite flannel shirts and joined the fun at the 27th Annual Lumberjack Festival and Flower and Garden Show on the picturesque Milton campus in March.

More than 250 visitors, including 69 PSC alumni, stopped by the Alumni Association display to check out upcoming events and membership opportunities.

PSC President Edward Meadows and Milton campus Dean Anthea Amos were among the hearty competitors in events like axe throwing, log rolling, cross-cut sawing, and pulpwood tossing.

Amos, a PSC alum, said the two-day event drew about 5,000 participants who enjoyed food, bluegrass music, children's activities, and nature exhibits.



Chair of Board of Trustees, Herb Woll, takes photos at the hunt.



L to R: Warren Whitfield (Cerex), Deryl Hargett (Gulf Power), Ashley Woodward (International Paper) & Vincent Andry (Gulf Power).

First Continental Pheasant Hunt

The brisk November day was perfect for PSC alumni and sportsmen who bagged funds for the Alumni Association's first fundraiser, a Continental Pheasant Hunt.

PSC alum Gerry Goldstein initiated the daylong hunt at idyllic Dennis Lake Wing Club in Alabama. Alumni Board members Mike Thomas and Joe Herring chaired the committee that included Lane Harper, Deryl Hargett, Chris Jones, Vaughn Nichols and President Edward Meadows.

www.alumni.pensacolastate.edu

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