

ALUMNI ANCHOR

PENSACOLA STATE COLLEGE

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

8TH EDITION

SUMMER 2021

Patrice S. Whitten Leaves Legacy of Accomplishments at Pensacola State College

Former executive director of Alumni Association first came to College as a student

For more than 28 ½ years, Patrice S. Whitten has called Pensacola State College her home away from home.

On Aug. 31, 2020, Whitten retired as the executive director of the PSC Alumni Association and special assistant to the President. Over her tenure at the College, Whitten has been instrumental in many measures including the re-establishment of the PSC Alumni Association, which has raised more than \$700,000 in scholarships to benefit students. \$290,000 of those scholarship dollars were raised as a result of the Distinguished Alumni Awards, one of Whitten's last major events hosted at PSC.

Leading the PSC Foundation, Whitten, raised more than \$24 million, and is credited with the Sesame Street Pre-School Education Program grant as part of WSRE's Educational Outreach Program.

"The College offered an opportunity to become involved with education, public television and charitable giving, and I jumped at the opportunity," said Whitten, who was the marketing director at the Pensacola News Journal before joining PSC. "These qualities really aligned with my interests and provided a path to become more engaged in promoting philanthropy in our community."

Whitten first joined the College as PBS Development Director for WSRE from 1992-1994, and then as Chief Development Officer. She was the Executive Director of the PSC Foundation and Office Development from 1994 until 2012, when she moved into the Alumni Association position.

She has worked for four PSC presidents — Drs. Ed Hartsell, Charles Atwell, Tom Delaino and Ed Meadows.

"I worked with Dr. T. Felton Harrison (as a student in my role as the Student Government Association president, we met monthly to discuss college agenda items and SGA activities), as well as Dr. Hartsell, who promoted me as the Director of

College Development, Alumni Affairs and the PJC Foundation, Dr. Atwell on the capital campaign, Dr. Delaino and Dr. Meadows," Whitten recalled.

Meadows describes Whitten as the essence of Pensacola State College.

"Patrice has been a champion for the College, its students, administrators, faculty and staff for so many years," he said. "She has gone over and beyond in her dedication to ensuring our students have scholarships, our alumni are involved and honored, and our graduates know they always are a part of Pensacola State College."

Meadows added Whitten "has given much of her life to this institution and has changed thousands of lives through her hard work, leadership and service."

Whitten was an active student — serving as SGA president and secretary, a Delta Chi Omega sorority member, recipient of the Faculty Leadership Award and active in intramural sports. She described the period as lifechanging.

"The knowledge, friendships and leadership experiences gained while attending college guided and defined my decisions and deepened my ties to the Pensacola community. Engagement in extracurricular activities broadened my horizons and expanded my social connections. Serving as the SGA president sparked my interest in political science. There I learned to navigate the political landscape of state and local government," she shared.



Patrice S. Whitten

She listed the establishment of the Ross C. and Margaret S. Shiver Endowed Scholarship, naming and dedication of the Kugelman Center for Telecommunications, the M.J. Menge Bell Tower fundraising and dedication, overseeing the College's first comprehensive capital campaign, which raised more than \$5.3 million in cash and cash equivalents, and the dedication and opening of the Anna Lamar Switzer Center for Visual Arts among her most treasured career highlights while at the College.

"Nothing tops the experience of honoring my parents with the establishment of an endowed scholarship ... after my father's passing," Whitten said.

Continued on next page

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"My parents ensured that I had a great education and supported me in my endeavors and the scholarship has been rewarding and regenerative. In the years ahead, we intend to grow the endowment and perpetuate my parents' legacy. My father was in the U.S. Air Force so the scholarship benefits military dependents. At times, my mother and I share the scholarship recipients' stories and enjoy knowing that the funds help them."

Whitten added she most enjoyed engaging with supporters, friends, alumni and community leaders at many PSC Alumni Association and PSC Foundation-hosted events.

Those same supporters, friends and alumni came together in August 2021 and raised \$12,500 to establish the Patrice S. Whitten Endowed Scholarship. The \$25,000 scholarship was matched by \$12,500 from the PSC Alumni Association, and a surprise to Whitten who is still active on the Alumni Association Board.

"I'm stunned, I can't believe this," Whitten said at the surprise reception held in the Milton campus L.I.F.E. Center on Aug. 3. More than 50 family and friends were on hand for the event.

When asked what she most missed most about working at PSC, Whitten responded her colleagues.

"PSC is such a family-friendly work environment. My advice for newer employees would be to get involved," she said. "Participate in the volunteer and leadership opportunities, make time to serve on policy and event committees and work closely with colleagues. You will find that you form lasting friendships and have accumulated a wealth of professional development and career opportunities."

Pensacola State employees who worked with Whitten say she is sorely missed.

"As Executive Director of the Alumni Association and in former roles, Patrice led the way building meaningful and lasting relationships within the community. Pensacola State College has been enriched by her efforts," said Hailey Lotz, the current PSC Alumni Association Director.

"She is first class, full of integrity, and has been a strong example for young professionals like me. I find it to be a tremendous compliment and honor to pick up where she left off with the Alumni Association."

Lindsey Garner, Alumni Affairs administrative assistant, has worked with Whitten for years and touted her positive attitude and outstanding customer service skills.

"She supports her coworkers 100 percent. She provides suggestions, advice and encourages them often. She makes sure their work doesn't go unnoticed and gives credit where credit is due," Garner said. "She respects them just as much as they respect her. ...She is a joy to work with."

For the Whitten household, Pensacola State is a tradition. Whitten met her husband, Larry, while they were both PSC students. The couple's five daughters – Roxanne, Jessica, Nikki, Megan and Dana – also began their collegiate journeys at the College.

"We wanted them to start out in a student-focused and safe environment. They were impressed with the professors and the personalized attention. As they advance in their chosen career

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— Patrice S. Whitten

fields, they agree that starting out at PSC was a good decision," Whitten noted.

Active in the community, Whitten has served on numerous boards including the United Way of West Florida, Five Flags Rotary, Impact 100, Pensacola's Women Alliance, Junior League of Pensacola, Symphony Orchestra Guild, Pensacola Museum of Art and American Red Cross to name just a few.

AT A GLANCE

Patrice S. Whitten

Employment: Retired Executive Director of Pensacola State College Alumni Association

Education: Attended PSC; earned bachelor's degree in communication, broadcast journalism and marketing, University of West Florida; Certified Fund Raising Executive since 2002

Accolades: 2020 PSC Professional Employee of the Year, the PSC Patrice S. Whitten Endowed Scholarship, the Association of Fundraising Professional West Florida Chapter's 2000 Fundraising Professional of the Year

Family: Husband, Larry Whitten; five daughters – Nikki (Barry) Whitten Pate, Jessica Whitten, Roxanne Rachel Lavelle, Dana (Josh) McDonald and Megan (David) Cordingly; and two grandchildren, Lilly and Dillan



Patrice S. Whitten as a PSC student



Hailey Lotz

Introducing Hailey Lotz

Hailey Lotz is Director of the Alumni Association and Booster Club Operations at Pensacola State College. She oversees the PSC Alumni Association, works with the association's Board of Directors and organizes PSC Athletics Booster events.

Lotz joined Pensacola State as the Booster Club Operations Coordinator in 2017. Because of proven event-planning experience, she was selected for her current role following the August 2020 retirement of Executive Director of Alumni Affairs Patrice S. Whitten. Since then, Lotz has continued to build relationships with Pensacola State supporters, business and corporate sponsors and worked with alumni to provide scholarships and program funds.

Lotz also has cultivated an enhanced Booster Club member presence and increased corporate

sponsorship. She successfully managed the Inaugural PSC Athletics Hall of Fame (now in its third year), improved the annual Athletics Awards Sports Banquet, re-envisioned the Pirate Experience, and secured significant sponsorships.

A team player with relationship-building skills, she has worked with the community to build the College's visibility and increased Booster Club membership.

Lotz served on the committee for the Inaugural Distinguished Alumni Awards held in May 2019 and volunteered at the Annual Alumni and Friends Quail Hunt and Pheasant Shoot. The experiences made her the natural choice to work with the Alumni Association board and members.

PIRATES GIVING BACK

Rebecca Merlin finds a sense of belonging at Waffle House, PSC

Hungry? Pensacola State College alumna Rebecca Merlin has you covered.

Actually, if you're like me, she'll have you scattered, covered, chunked and diced. That's Waffle House code for hash browns with cheese, ham and tomatoes.

Merlin, who earned a Bachelor of Applied Science in Business and Management from the College in 2019, is the Waffle House recruiting director in Northwest Florida. And though she's part of Waffle House district management now, she's still prone to throw on an apron and use a little bacon-scented elbow grease to help out at any of the 27 Waffle House restaurants that are in her recruitment territory.

"One of my favorite things when I'm in a unit is to throw on an apron and help out," she said. "I'll check the bathrooms or grab a broom."

Or work the line.

"You should have seen me Tuesday," she said. "I was covered in waffle batter before I had to start an interview."

Merlin began working as a waitress at Waffle House in 1996 at age 16.

"It was around Christmastime and I remember I got this Christmas card from everyone at Unit 393 (a Waffle House restaurant on Highway 29),"

she recalled. "It said, 'Thanks for making Waffle House your home' and everyone signed it. It was a sense of belonging, a feeling that this is my home."

In 2003, Merlin thought she might like to be a schoolteacher, so she started taking classes to earn a degree in education, while still working at Waffle House. But she soon decided teaching "wasn't for me."

She left Pensacola State but returned years later to pursue a

IT WAS A GREAT PROGRAM AND IT WAS AFFORDABLE... I LOVED MY TIME AT PENSACOLA STATE."

—Rebecca Merlin

business degree.

"It was an amazing experience," Merlin said. "It was a great program and it was affordable. I decided to start with online classes, and I had the greatest teachers. I loved my time at Pensacola State."

She had already moved up the ladder at Waffle House, moving to a division trainer position in 2015.

"Recruiting was my end goal," Merlin said. "I love my job and I'm

making more money than I ever thought I would make. My job is to find good people and offer them good-paying jobs in our town."

Merlin's daughter, Lillian Sellers, is a Pensacola State nursing student and Merlin herself is always encouraging Waffle House employees to pursue a college education at PSC if possible.

Her best friend, Toni Smith, is a PSC graduate and Waffle House manager. Her fiancé, Don Pursell, is also a PSC graduate and current Waffle House manager.

Merlin also has a son, Brendan Sellers, who works for Boogie Inc. and is pursuing a career in music.

"She's enjoying it," Merlin said of her daughter's experience at Pensacola State. "She's working hard and taking five summer classes."

Merlin said she truly loves Waffle House Inc. Based near Atlanta, the company is a cultural icon, especially in the South where it is even widely revered in song. Songs about Waffle House run from Danny Jones' "Raisins in my Toast" to Grammy Award-winning Sturgill Simpson's "Waffle House" love letter.

"Our founder said we're not in the food business, we're in the people business," she said. "That's really stuck with me. I love the people and



Rebecca Merlin

AT A GLANCE

Rebecca Merlin

Education: Bachelor of Applied Science in Business and Management, 2019 PSC

Employer: Recruiting director, Waffle House Northwest Florida

Family: Fiancé, Don Pursell; children, Lillian Sellers and Brendan Sellers

the surroundings and my customers and my associates. All of them have helped make me what I am today. And besides, the food is great."

And her hash browns: scattered, smothered, chunked and well done.

"And an omelet," she said. "I love the omelets."

Board Member FOCUS

Whibbs, Bradley join PSC Alumni Association Board of Directors

JP Whibbs and James W. Bradley have joined the Pensacola State College Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Whibbs, a lifelong resident of Pensacola, earned his associate degree from Pensacola State. In 1988, he graduated from Florida State University with a bachelor's degree in finance.

After college, Whibbs accepted a position with a prominent wealth management company in Raleigh, North Carolina. However, his father, the late Vince Whibbs Sr., asked him to come work in the family business — Vince Whibbs Pontiac-GMC — he founded in 1958.

Over the next 30 years, Whibbs and his partners grew the business to include many additional franchises, and eventually sold the company in 2018. He now owns and operates Whibbs Real Estate Group, a real estate network servicing Florida and Alabama.

Whibbs and his wife, Rachael, live on Pensacola Beach. The couple has two sons, JP Whibbs II and Nick Whibbs, and one daughter, Delaney O'Grady, and her husband Brian.

A 1976 Pensacola State graduate, Bradley is a native of Pensacola and general manager and chief financial officer of Bradley Masonry Inc. — a primarily commercial and residential

contractor that has served the area for more than 50 years.

Bradley is a 1974 Tate High School graduate. After Pensacola State, he went on to the University of West Florida where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1978.

Along with serving on the board of the Masonry Association of Florida, Bradley also is active in his community.

Bradley and his wife, Lisa, have one son, Jonathan Bradley, a criminal justice major and U.S. Air Force ROTC student at the University of South Alabama in Mobile.



JP Whibbs



James W. Bradley

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PIRATES IN THE COMMUNITY

Local builder establishes Student Constructors Endowed Scholarship at Pensacola State College

Local builder Amir Fooladi didn't put his or his company's name on the endowed scholarship he established to help Pensacola State College students hoping to enter the construction field.

Because the goal of the PSC Student Constructors Endowed Scholarship isn't to build the Fooladi name. It is to help strengthen the College's workforce commitment and supply Northwest Florida with more qualified workers in the construction and contracting trade.

"One of the biggest hurdles in our industry right now is finding good people and having a skilled labor force," said Fooladi, president and CEO of ParsCo, a Pensacola-based construction firm. "This scholarship isn't about me. It's about our industry."

Fooladi's initial scholarship gift was \$13,500, with \$1,000 of that immediately awardable. The PSC Alumni Association matched the remainder — \$12,500 — to establish the current \$25,000 endowment fund.

"This endowed scholarship may be the first for our construction program," said PSC President Ed Meadows. "The nice thing about Mr. Fooladi's endowment is that he is challenging other construction companies to add to this endowment for the purpose of assisting more students enroll in this program."

"Currently, there is a national shortage of skilled construction workers and that certainly holds true for Northwest Florida. Mr. Fooladi's generosity is greatly appreciated and comes at a critical time to help meet the major shortage of skilled workers in the construction field."

Fooladi earned a bachelor's degree in Construction Engineering from the University of Southern Mississippi, where he graduated with honors. He is an adjunct instructor at the University of West Florida where he teaches construction administration and contract law.

After graduating from USM, Fooladi worked for various general contractors, including some of the largest firms in the nation.

He started ParsCo in 2005. Company projects include Brent Lofts

in downtown Pensacola and the historic Marston Quina renovation that was completed in 2019.

The Marston Quina project won the 2019 Excellence in Construction Eagle Award for Best Historical Renovation in Florida.

ParsCo also recently completed construction of the new Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range at Eglin Air Force Base.

"I just love building things," Fooladi said. "There is a sense of accomplishment when you have something to show for your hard work."

Fooladi began considering funding a Pensacola State scholarship after attending the annual PSC Alumni Association Quail Hunt and Pheasant Shoot held in November at Dennis Lake Wing Club in Bay Minette, Alabama. He became a PSC Alumni Association Lifetime Charter member shortly after the fundraiser.

The financial assistance has been a game changer for some PSC students — including Miranda Magaha, a 2021 Student Constructors Endowed Scholarship recipient.

"Awards such as the Student Constructors Endowed Scholarship have given me the opportunity to take more courses and finish my degree in a timely manner," she said.

"It has aided me in the purchase of books and materials needed for my courses and the continuation of my education. After graduation, I hope to start my career in the design world through either freelancing or local jobs. Thank you Mr. Fooladi for supporting my dream."

"The scholarship was something that happened organically after Amir was invited to spend the weekend (at the event)," said Hailey Lotz, director of the PSC Alumni Association and Booster Club Operations.

"Amir, being the businessman he is and working in the construction field himself, wanted to do something that would impact students seeking construction jobs. It is my understanding that he comes from a family that is passionate about education. And PSC was not the first college that they have worked with in establishing a scholarship."

Fooladi, who was born in Mississippi and raised in West Texas, has previously established scholarships at UWF, USM and the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. Both his parents work in the medical field.

"This is basically my way of giving back to the industry that has given me so much," said Fooladi, a married father of three.

"I want to help aspiring young students find their paths the way I found mine."

Fooladi said he also kept his name off the scholarship because he hopes that other local construction field leaders will consider helping fund the scholarship.

"If we get other builders to donate and get behind the program, we'll have the potential to improve the construction industry here locally," he added.

"A lot of times we don't have the skilled labor we need. Some of the biggest hurdles we face in our industry right now are finding good people and having a skilled labor force. We want to help our community by creating high-paying jobs for an industry that's really in need of people."

Students who apply for the Student Constructors Endowed Scholarship must be enrolled in a construction industry program such as Carpentry, Electrical, Mechanical, Plumbing, Drafting Design and similar programs.

"After hearing about the programs, we had to offer, Amir saw an opportunity to help his local community," Lotz added. "What's even better, he hopes this scholarship will not only bring students into these programs but become an avenue for other business leaders to be involved."



Amir Fooladi

AT A GLANCE

Amir Fooladi

Established PSC Student Constructors Endowed Scholarship in 2020

Employment: President and CEO of ParsCo, adjunct instructor, University of West Florida

Education: Bachelor's degree in Construction Engineering, University of Southern Mississippi

Family: Wife, Amy; one son, Miland; two daughters, Amari and Malia





PSC Alumni Association raises over \$32,000 during fundraisers

PSC Alumni Association annual fundraisers have generated more than \$32,000 for student scholarships.

Over \$23,000 was raised during the annual **Quail Hunt and Pheasant Shoot** held Nov. 6-7, 2020, at Dennis Lake Wing Club in Bay Minette, Alabama.

The **Delta Kappa Alpha Fishing Excursion** brought in another \$9,236.26 for the DKA Endowed Scholarship which was established in 2019. The fundraiser was held April 8-11, 2021, at Dufour's Fishing Charters in Lafitte, Louisiana.

Nine participants turned out for the quail hunt on Nov. 6. On Nov. 7, about 30 hunters took part in the pheasant shoot. Husband-wife teams, individual hunters, and groups from Synovus Bank and Gulf Power Co. participated in both events.

"Thanks to great weather and the wonderful hosts at Dennis Lake Wing Club, participants spent two days enjoying the outdoors and each

other's company all while raising money," said Hailey Lotz, the College's Director of the Alumni Association and Booster Club Operations.

Faithful PSC supporter Gerry Goldstein helped PSC President Ed Meadows and the Alumni Association bring the pieces together to make the event a success. JP Whibbs, Vaughn Nichols and Mike Thomas also were instrumental in the annual fundraiser.

FISHING EXCURSION

After being cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19, the Delta Kappa Alpha Fishing Excursion was back on this past spring with a full group who raised funds for the DKA scholarship.

Active from the 1960s until the 1990s. Delta Kappa Alpha "Deke" Brothers, PSC alumni and friends can contribute to the fund.

Participating in the "fishing fundraiser" were Charles "Rocky" Barnes, Robert Doss, Patrick Emmanuel, Dave Finehout, Gerry

Goldstein, Lane Harper, Bryan Head, Chad Head, Rodger Head, Tanner Illian, Denis McKinnon III, Denis McKinnon Jr., Bill McLendon, Ed Meadows, Mike Thomas, Phillip Turner and Herb Woll.

When fully funded, the scholarship will benefit Pensacola State College students who demonstrate a financial need, have and maintain a minimum 2.0 grade point average, be a United States citizen or resident alien and be enrolled part-time or full-time. The awards can cover tuition, fees, books or supplies.

Scholarship recipients can receive funds for up to two years if pursuing an associate degree or up to four years for a bachelor's degree.

"The fundraisers were successful, and registration is open for both events," added Lotz.



Seventeen sportsmen participated in the DKA Fishing Excursion held in April in Lafitte, Louisiana. David Finehout shows off the redfish he caught during the three-day fishing trip.



TO PARTICIPATE

The 2021 Annual PSC Alumni Association Quail Hunt and Pheasant Shoot will be held Nov. 5-6, 2021, at Dennis Lake Wing Club in Bay Minette, Alabama.

The Delta Kappa Alpha Fishing Excursion is set for April 28-30, 2022, at Dufour's Fishing Charters in Lafitte, Louisiana.



DKA Fishing Excursion participants were treated to boiled crawfish during the trip which generated more than \$10,000 for scholarships. At right, the annual Quail Hunt and Pheasant Shoot was held in November at Dennis Lake Wing Club.



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PSC President Ed Meadows

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The dictionary defines an alumnus as a graduate or student of a school, college or university.

As of August 2021, more than 115,500 graduates have earned degrees or certificates from Pensacola State College.

However, that number does not reflect the thousands of others who have taken classes for university transfer, dual-enrollment, adult education, continuing

education students and corporate training participants, and who consider themselves PSC alumni. Pensacola State remains dedicated to improving the lives and investing in

the futures of not only our students but the community, as well.

Since that inaugural class of 136 students gathered in the Aiken Boarding House nearly 73 years ago, our alumni have been and continue to be innovators, pioneers, groundbreakers, trendsetters and more. As you will see in this edition, one priority of our alumni association is recognizing alumni who have been successful in life and who have given back to the community and the College with their time, talent, and resources.

Along with student enrollment, the College has grown to three campuses — Pensacola, Milton and Warrington and four centers — Century, Downtown, South Santa Rosa and our soon-to-open fourth center in the Santa Rosa Industrial Park for truck driver training and other programs such as diesel

mechanics, lineman training and heavy equipment operation.

This fall, students will take classes in our new \$15 million STEM facility. The 25,389-square-foot Baars Technology Center will be home to various programs, including mathematics and cybersecurity.

A second 46,000-square foot STEM facility that will connect to the Baars Technology Center will be constructed this coming year, and a groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled.

I am sure you will enjoy reading about alumni spotlighted in this edition who are supporters of Pensacola State College.

The PSC Alumni Association, under the leadership of its Board of Directors and staff, looks forward to exploring new and expanded opportunities to serve its members and the College.



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