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Winthrop

Magazine Summer 2026

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Message from the President Dear Friends:

I hope this letter finds you enjoying the final weeks of summer. Winthrop's summer has been bustling with faculty and student research, Orientation sessions, various camps, admissions tours and facilities projects (read more in our latest Investing in Winthrop piece). What positive energy these events inject into our busy days! We cannot wait to welcome our students this month.

I'm pleased to share that we have officially closed out phase II of our strategic plan, Winthrop: United in Excellence. We launched our marketing and branding initiative, debuted a new Presidential Student Ambassadors Program, concluded an organizational assessment survey, further enhanced our club sports offerings, and much more. Now, we are focusing on phase III initiatives, which I'll share with you soon.

In other news, I'm happy to report that our fall enrollment numbers are looking incredibly strong. More than 1,300 freshmen and transfers have put down deposits to attend this fall, an encouraging indicator. Our Division of University Advancement also wrapped up its fiscal year with some record-breaking fundraising numbers. There's tremendous work happening here, and I couldn't be prouder to be a part of it as I begin my fifth year as president.

I hope you enjoy learning more about some of the impressive things taking place on campus and in the lives of our alumni in this edition of the Winthrop Magazine, such as how our Center for Career Development and Internships is helping our students and alumni prepare for the workforce as well as how a piece written by composer James Kevin Gray '99 became the state's official choral anthem. This edition also includes:

- A look back at Macfeat Early Childhood Laboratory School's 130th celebration;
- Our oldest graduate – at 86 years young – who earned her English degree after a 20-year journey;
- The nationally recognized bond between softball player Emmy Cardenas and fifth-grader Raegan Hornung;

- Compelling features on marine scientist Norah Mendoza '20, who took an unconventional career path; and Aaron Fountain '14, whose book was a finalist in the Los Angeles Times' Book Prizes history category; and

- The latest campus happenings, alumni news and giving updates.

As always, thank you for your continued support. I hope you will join us for Convocation on Aug. 24 as we kick off another exciting academic year.

Winthrop Ever Stand,

Winthrop Magazine **WHAT'S INSIDE**

Career Development Gets Students Flight Ready Celebrating 130 Years of Macfeat Jocelyn Davis Completes a 20-Year Journey Teammates Earn National Impact Award James Kevin Gray Composes State's Choral Anthem Women's Flag Football Launches This Fall Aaron Fountain Discusses Lauded Book Norah Mendoza Shares Her Love For Sharks

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About the cover: Norah Mendoza '20 worked odd jobs to pay for her scuba certification and now is a part of trailblazing shark research. Read more about her unconventional career path on pages 18-21.

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INTERSHIPS CENTER HELPS STUDENTS GET FLIGHT READY

CAREER AND CDI Staff

Ross said the center has spent the past year strengthening its career readiness initiatives, expanding employer partnerships and building a foundation for a career ecosystem that supports student success from enrollment through post- graduation outcomes.

This summer, senior Benjamin Byrd headed to Washington, D.C., as one of 47 interns selected nationwide from a pool of 9,000 applicants for a U.S. Chamber of Commerce internship.

What made the political science major from Mauldin stand out?

Byrd credits the Center for Career Development and Internships. He learned about its programs and resources as a freshman and has utilized the office's services to obtain several internships, including one

with the S.C. Chamber of Commerce. On this latest internship, center staff worked with him on his resume and cover letter development, mentored Byrd with mock interviews and provided him with a blazer and tie from its Career Closet to wear to his interview.

"These resources helped me present myself professionally and build confidence throughout the application process," said Byrd, who plans to graduate in December. "The preparation and support I received from the center were instrumental in helping me stand out during the selection process."

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He works within the U.S. Chamber's Government Affairs division, where he supports advocacy efforts on federal policy issues affecting businesses across the country. In addition to assisting with research and policy-related projects, he has attended congressional hearings, networking events, and professional development programs designed to help interns build skills and connections within the public affairs field.

Center Prepares Students for Future

The center's mission is to provide resources and programs to help students — and alumni — develop skills to conduct effective career searches and to make informed decisions.

"Preparing students for the workforce isn't the job of a single campus office — it's the mission of our entire community. When we embed career readiness education into every part of the Winthrop experience, we unlock a lifetime of professional opportunity for our graduates," said Director Becky Ross.

With a five-member staff dedicated to student career readiness, the center also employs a graduate student who supports employer relations, events, appointments and drop-ins, and two undergraduate students who help with marketing and peer career advising.

Winthrop is working to modernize career services with two major initiatives: establishing a new career center facility within the DiGiorgio Campus Center and partnering with the Career Leadership Collective to strengthen collaboration across the Academic Affairs and

Student Affairs divisions for students to have career learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom.

A Year of Firsts What were some of the center's recent firsts?

- Held an Internship Poster Session at the Showcase of Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors (SOURCE), where 29 students who completed internships shared their experiences.
- Hosted an industry meetup networking event, which was a pilot employer-student-faculty networking opportunity within the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Offered the TRiO Career Trek, where 20 students visited Springs Creative and the Baxter Mill Archive to learn about career options, pathways and internships.

Mini-Mock Interviews work like speed

dating with real-world employers.

Students learn to tie a necktie at the Pop-Up Career Closet.

The Spring Etiquette Dinner

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- Created a new format for mock interview events where employers and community partners conducted multiple rounds of 20-minute mock interviews. Students received a scorecard, along with written and verbal feedback from each interviewer.
- Implemented artificial intelligence platforms to help with mock interviews and assist with resume and LinkedIn optimization for online applications.

Support from Workforce Partners Hannah Smith

Hannah Smith '11, '17, marketing manager with the York County Natural Gas Authority, said the center has had a tremendous impact on her life, both personally and professionally. She worked at the center from 2008-10 as a

student and then from 2012-15 as an employee. Her current employer has collaborated with the center on several high impact projects in the past year.

“As a Winthrop alumna, former employee and now an employer partner, I've had the unique opportunity to see its impact from multiple perspectives. Students who have worked with

the center consistently stand out as confident, well-prepared candidates who are ready to take the next step in their careers,” said Smith. “It's been incredibly rewarding to watch the center continue to grow and expand its influence, helping students and alumni build meaningful paths to success.”

Celeste Tiller

Organizations such as the York County Chamber of Commerce have relied on Winthrop interns for support. “Internships and work-based learning experiences give students the opportunity to connect their education to

meaningful career exploration while building relationships within the community they may one day call home,” said Celeste Tiller ’01, ’04, vice president of talent and workforce development. “For employers, these

internship and job postings made in Handshake, the center’s online career management platform for students and alumni

students participated in career fairs

151,484 960

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IT’S ALL IN THE OUTCOMES 11

Looking at the center’s numbers this past year shows its reach and collaborations with departments, organizations and others across campus. Consider these points of engagement:

professional headshots taken

200

interns placed during the center’s second- year partnership with The Post and Courier’s internship program

career coaching appointments

571 151 drop-in consultations

students shopped the center’s Career Closet, sponsored by the Brazell family. Board members John Brazell ’93 and Isaiah

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Venning '95 are among those who contribute professional clothes to the closet so students can dress for success and feel confident during their interviews.

experiences are an investment in future talent— providing access to fresh perspectives, helping build a workforce pipeline, and creating stronger connections between education and industry. Through our partnership with Winthrop, we've seen firsthand how these experiences create value for students, businesses and our region.”

Center's Future is Bright

The center looks to the future with plenty of ideas for advancement. Ross hopes to add more staff members, prepare for the opening of the new career center and continue partnerships across the campus and in the community.

“These accomplishments represent a year of strategic growth and collaboration, positioning Winthrop to further embed career readiness into the student experience while enhancing workforce and community partnerships,” Ross said.

Learn more about the Center for Career Development and Internships, including how alumni can utilize the center’s offerings, by visiting the center’s website.

DYLAN BOLTON BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF INTERNSHIPS

During my time at Winthrop, I never truly understood the impact an internship could have on my future.

Going into my junior year, it hit me that I had no real connections, professional network, or even a clear idea of where I wanted to land after graduation. That realization became even more significant when I learned I would be graduating a semester early.

Thankfully, the College of Business and Technology consistently shared internship opportunities with students, and through that outreach, I found an opportunity with the York County Regional Chamber of Commerce. This internship helped me truly understand the difference between classroom learning and the real-world application of my studies.

I had the opportunity to learn from

professionals who guided me along the way, encouraged me, and invested in my growth even while I was still a college student trying to find my place in the workforce. By applying myself, working hard, taking initiative, asking questions, and building relationships, many of the concerns I had about my future began to disappear.

As a result of that effort, I was fortunate enough to be invited to stay for a second semester as an intern. I continued to work as hard as I could, knowing I wanted to create

opportunities for myself after graduation. As my senior year progressed, that hard work paid off when I was offered a full- time position with the Chamber, taking a tremendous weight off my shoulders.

Dylan Bolton '25 Business Administration: Marketing LIFT Program Coordinator, York County Chamber of Commerce

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Celebrating Macfeat's

of Teaching & Learning

On April 25, the Macfeat Early Childhood Laboratory School held a special event to celebrate 130 years of teaching and learning. Macfeat is the nation's oldest continuously operating laboratory school. Take a look at photos from the event.

At left, educational studies student Sky Evans worked with a Macfeat student to plant bushes by the playground. As part of their curriculum, Macfeat students learn all about nature, including how plants grow. Below, Nancy Watson Davidson '60, '82, a Macfeat and Winthrop alumna, spotted herself in the Pettus Archives exhibit photos.

Clockwise from top left: Attendees were able to visit the Archives exhibit, featuring digital and print media dating from the school's conception to modern day.

Former longtime Macfeat teacher Mary Watson reunited with Tammy Taylor, who previously worked as a classroom assistant. Also in attendance was Taylor's daughter, Staci Jenkins.

Associate Professor Meredith Jones shared with Polly Ford '48, retired chair of the physical education department, and other attendees the future for the Macfeat playground as part of its selection as a Grow Outdoors South Carolina site.

Macfeat Executive Director Erin Hamel (left) welcomed Macfeat parent Melissa Oehme, who made a generous gift at the event.

Provost Sebastian van Delden chatted with George Land, who was Macfeat's first African-American student in 1967.

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OCTOGENARIAN BECOMES OLDEST GRADUATE: Jocelyn Davis Completes Her 20-year Journey

Graduation remains a proud day of celebration for students who earn their degree. Each graduate's journey is unique.

When diminutive 86-year-old Jocelyn Sturgeon Davis stepped forward to receive her English degree at the May 9 morning Commencement ceremony, the crowd erupted into a standing ovation.

"I was shocked that everyone stood up," said Davis. "I was surprised by the applause."

Winthrop's oldest graduate, Davis has been taking classes for 20 years.

She started in 2006 after transferring from York Technical College with an associate's degree in business and entering with enough hours to be a junior. She took classes slowly, auditing a Spanish class and then a computer science course. "I was kind of feeling my way around," she said.

Support from Faculty

English faculty members said the younger students were glad for Davis' presence and were kind to the soft-spoken woman.

"They included her in group discussions and group presentations, and they listened carefully and encouraged her," said English Professor Amanda Hiner, who was Davis' advisor for the past

three years.

One reason was because Davis displayed so much intellectual curiosity. "She wanted to learn more about each subject we studied and would often stay with me after class to discuss a topic in more depth or to share her insight on a literary text or topic," Hiner said.

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English Professor Emerita Jo Koster said she admired Davis' tenacity, wit and perspective.

Education is a lifelong process of learning and growth, and Davis demonstrates that it's never too late to keep learning, growing and achieving great things, faculty members said. In addition, Hiner said Davis is a remarkable example of perseverance, intellectual

curiosity and sheer joy of learning. “Our students benefitted from seeing her work so diligently and so persistently,” Hiner added, particularly other non-traditional students.

Unsure About Graduation

When it became clear that Davis had completed most of her degree requirements and could graduate in May, Hiner excitedly encouraged her to apply for graduation. “She was hesitant and looked almost downcast, and she finally said, ‘I’m just not sure I want to graduate.’ That’s the first time I’ve heard that from an advisee!”

Hiner encouraged Davis to finish the degree she had earned, reminding her that she could still take classes or even pursue another degree. Davis believes she probably will return, maybe to take some other classes.

In Davis’ mind, she was just an average student who enjoyed being around younger students. “They thought that if I could succeed in class then so could they,” she said.

A Love for Learning

Born in the nation’s capital, Davis was the eighth child in a family of five sisters and three brothers. Reading was an important part of Davis’ childhood. “I made good grades in elementary and high school,” Davis said,

Provost Sebastian van Delden helped Davis as she walked across the stage at the May Commencement ceremony while the crowd cheered.

graduating second in her high school class from Immaculate Conception Academy in D.C.

A York County resident since 1987, Davis and her husband, Lyman, moved to Rock Hill for his work with the Minkus Stamp and Coin Co.

Supportive of his wife’s efforts, Lyman occasionally accompanied her to campus and could be found waiting for her outside of her classes.

Her overall experience at Winthrop was very positive. Her professors prodded her to think differently about some readings. She sought help when she needed it through visits to the English department’s Writing Center or to her professors’ offices.

Davis learned what many have discovered: you can never learn everything there is to know, so a lifelong learner’s curiosity is never quenched.

Reciprocal Support

The players also turned out for Hornung in her activities, such as cheering her in competitions with her horse, Lars, and in attaining a first- degree black belt in taekwondo.

Cardenas said the fifth grader absolutely inspired the team. “She gives us something bigger to play for and reminds us daily that playing should be fun because it's something we love,” Cardenas said. “While she makes sure we are all having fun, she is also very competitive and will get on us if we start to slack off.”

With her teammate’s support from the dugout, Cardenas put together the best season of her college career.

Fan Favorites

Fifth-grader Raegan Hornung and pitcher Emmy Cardenas of the Winthrop Eagles softball team forged a bond so strong they were nationally recognized.

The Clover student joined the collegiate team through Team IMPACT, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to pairing children with life-changing diagnoses or disabilities with NCAA athletic teams. Hornung has Nystagmus, a condition characterized by rapid, involuntary, and uncontrollable eye movements in both eyes that often causes blurry vision, dizziness, and balance issues. She is legally blind and hearing impaired.

Despite the handicap, her mother, Eryn, describes her daughter as an old soul who is silly, quirky, spirited and fiercely independent, characteristics shared by many of the softball players as well.

Fitting Right In

When Hornung joined the Eagles, Cardenas, as the IMPACT program liaison, felt that Hornung

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should be welcomed and loved. That turned out to be an understatement as the two had an instant connection.

“Raegan was a bit shy at first, but when she learned that we wanted to get to know her and hang out with her just as much as she did us, we all clicked,” said Cardenas, a junior biology major from La Jolla, California. “From there, I quickly became close with Raegan as she's an awesome, funny, and very smart 11 year old.”

The Eagles team gave Hornung her own jerseys that she wore to most home and away games. Players taught her the sport and the team’s cheers.

“Outside of competition on the field, we love to hang out with her doing fun activities such as cookie decorating, going out to ice cream, and having movie nights,” Cardenas said. “Her impairments really don’t hold her back from anything. We treat her as any other teammate, as really that’s what she is.”

Together, the fifth grader and college pitcher won the 2026 Team IMPACT National Teammate of the Year award, which is voted on by fans. Hornung traveled to Boston, Massachusetts, to receive the award at the Game Day Gala. One of the perks was to sit for an interview with NCAA President Charlie Baker.

The softball team and Hornung created lots of memorable moments over the season, which ended with the Eagles as the regular season champs and finalists in the Big South Conference Championship game.

A Transformative Experience

The pairing has been life changing, said Hornung’s mother. “Winthrop softball is her family, and she loves Emmy and her teammates and coaches fiercely. She’s grown in confidence since the beginning of this journey, she’s learned what it’s like to be a great teammate and friend, and she’s experienced highs and lows right alongside her team,” she said.

Hornung has determined she is an Eagle for life, her mother said. “While her official time with Team IMPACT concludes at the end of the year, she will for sure stay for next season and

Hornung threw out the first pitch at a game.

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be celebrated at senior day right alongside Emmy — the way it’s meant to be!”

Meanwhile, Cardenas reflected that Team IMPACT changed her life for the better. “I can’t imagine who I would be without it,” she said. “It not only changes the lives of children who deserve to feel included, loved, and a part of something bigger than their diagnosis, but also, the student-athletes learn to have gratitude for the amazing positions we are in. I hope to spread awareness so that many others can experience the joys of being a part of something so special.”

Hornung enjoyed an interview with NCAA President Charlie Baker.

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Choral Anthem Sings Palmetto State’s Uniqueness

As a son of South Carolina, James Kevin Gray '99 captured the state's hopes and dreams in an anthem to convey his love of the Palmetto State.

He wrote the music and

lyrics for the song, "While I Breathe, I Hope," in 2013 while serving as minister of music at River Hills Community Church in Lake Wylie. Then Governor Nikki Haley was coming to speak at a local gathering, prompting Gray to begin thinking about what kind of musical gift could properly honor both the occasion and the state that has always been home to him.

Listen to the official choral anthem here.

Attention to the anthem comes during the celebration of the nation's founding 250 years ago and South Carolina's pivotal role in the Revolutionary War. The lyrics are rooted in the state motto, "Dum Spiro Spero," translated as "While I Breathe, I Hope."

"The inspiration came from a deep love for South Carolina itself: the mountains and foothills where I was born in Westminster, the beauty of Charleston and the coast, the small towns, the churches, the people, and the generations of families who helped shape the state," Gray said.

He shared the anthem publicly for several years through local performances and online

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recordings. The first of these recordings was by fellow Winthrop alumnus Jay Forrest '87, '90, and his choir, the Clover High School Choraliers.

Gray reached out to State Rep. John King (D-Rock Hill) after meeting him at a community event in Rock Hill. King introduced the first bill in 2016 to make the song the official state anthem. He continued to introduce the bill each session, then in 2025, King joined forces with Gray's high school friend, State Rep. Adam Duncan, (R-Oconee) and added co-sponsor, State Rep. Kambrell Garvin (D-Columbia), a 2013 Winthrop graduate.

In its sixth introduction, House Bill 3949 ultimately passed the House and Senate before being signed into law by Governor Henry McMaster on May 15, 2026.

Gray couldn't attend the official signing because he recently moved to France to work as director of music ministries at the American Church in Paris.

Creating a Timeless Piece

South Carolina already had an official state song, "Carolina," with lyrics written by Henry Timrod around the time of the American Civil War. Gray, whose family roots in South Carolina date to before the Revolutionary War, wanted to write a timeless piece that could

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speak to the present and future of the state while still honoring its history.

“Choral music has long been part of South Carolina’s cultural and spiritual life, and I hoped this anthem could become something people would sing together during meaningful civic and educational occasions,” he said. “I want our children to actually know what our Latin motto means.”

The phrase “While I Breathe, I Hope” expresses something universal. In a time when so many things can divide us, Gray wanted the anthem to remind people that despite our differences, we share a common future and a common love for home.

Anthem Is Versatile for Performances

Early performances came from choirs connected to Winthrop, York County schools and community ensembles. In 2022, the song was featured as a virtual choral project

by the South Carolina American Choral Directors Association (SCACDA). Craig Allen, a Winthrop adjunct instructor of music, produced and designed a video that brought together singers from across South Carolina to contribute to a broader public awareness of the composition.

As a composer, Gray said he cannot imagine a greater honor than contributing something musical to the story of the state he loves. “My hope is that this anthem reminds future generations that hope, unity and possibility are part of South Carolina’s identity,” he said.

Gray plans to partner with SCACDA to be one of the distributors of “While I Breathe, I Hope — South Carolina’s Official State Choral Anthem.” In the future its webpage will offer a free downloadable version.

In the meantime, feel free to contact Gray via his Facebook Messenger.

Winthrop Club Sports will embrace one of the fastest-growing sports in the country by establishing a women’s flag football team in the fall.

This emerging collegiate sport is appropriate for Rock Hill, which identifies itself as Football City USA due to the number of players who have entered the NFL. A women’s club program honors the region’s football heritage by offering opportunities to a new generation of female student-athletes, said Athletic Director Chuck Rey.

The Winthrop Collegiate Choir, under the direction of Phil Suggs, performed the piece in 2016.

He said several converging factors will make this new program possible. The university's strategic plan – Winthrop: United in Excellence – calls for a comprehensive club sports strategy to expand its athletic offerings as well as the hiring of a new club sports director.

“At the same time the Big South Conference has made history as the first conference to sponsor women's flag football as an NCAA sport and club sport,” Rey said. “This clears a pathway and creates a competitive structure for student-athletes.”

The Big South has partnered with the NFL on this initiative, and there will be financial support for each school that adds the sport.

Rey said the addition of women's flag football demonstrates Winthrop's commitment to providing innovative opportunities for

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students in terms of participation, leadership development and competitive excellence.

New Coach and Team Support

The inaugural flag football team will be led by Head Coach Reggie Cespedes, an accomplished coach and player with more than 25 years of experience.

“I'm honored and humbled

to have been chosen as the inaugural head coach,” Cespedes said.

One of Winthrop's faculty members, Joni Boyd '07, '20, '21, professor of exercise science, will serve as a key consultant to the club. She is a former women's professional football quarterback and current girls flag football coach at Northwestern High School.

As flag football continues to gain national recognition, including its upcoming debut at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games, Winthrop seeks to provide students with the opportunity to create unforgettable experiences on and off the field.

Mikaela Sites, director of Club Sports, said the university is eager to build a championship-caliber culture from the very beginning. Tryouts will be held this fall with competition beginning in spring 2027.

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material that has disappeared everywhere else. Those records became central to my research methodology because they documented a movement that otherwise would have been much harder to reconstruct.

Q: Is there a moment that seems to surprise readers?

Former McNair Scholar Aaron Fountain '14 has been on a whirlwind international tour – including a stop at Winthrop – talking about his LA Book Prize-nominated book, “High School Students Unite!” He took time between stops to answer questions for the Winthrop Magazine.

Q: Congrats! Tell us about your book.

A: It examines high-school student activism during the 1960s and 1970s as a teenage- led movement for educational reform that was national, and even international, in scope. One of my main goals was to show readers and scholars that these young activists did not operate in isolation. Through underground newspapers, conferences, and personal networks, students followed and learned from one another's

campaigns across the country. Their

activism attracted the attention of local police and the FBI.

Q: What sparked your interest in this?

A: The project began in 2012 after I completed a public speaking assignment. During my research, I came across political scientist Richard Ellis' “To the Flag,” which included a brief discussion of junior high and high school students who sat during the Pledge of Allegiance as a form of protest in the 1960s and 1970s. That led me down a rabbit hole. As someone who has had a lifelong interest in the Vietnam War, I began wondering how the conflict affected students, teachers, and administrators. That question stayed with me through graduate school.

Q: Did you wade through stacks of historical documents?

A: Absolutely! Like most historians, I spent years in archives, scrolling through microfilm, reading underground newspapers and conducting oral history interviews. The challenge was that teenagers rarely leave behind any types of records that historians usually rely on. Instead, I had to track down materials that former activists had saved in their homes, which often came down to persistence and a little luck.

One of my biggest discoveries was just how valuable FBI and police records could be. Historians sometimes avoid those sources because they contain inaccuracies and bias. While that's true, law enforcement agencies also preserved an enormous amount of

14 16

A: I realized early on that the material about parents working with the FBI to monitor their own children would surprise readers. Not everyone has children, but everyone has parents or guardians, so those stories resonate on a very personal level. The letters between families, schools and law enforcement offered an unusually intimate look at household conflicts.

One of the best parts of giving talks is seeing people's reactions in real time, something writing alone doesn't provide. Many people are surprised to learn how widespread high school activism actually was. Others are shocked that the FBI investigated teenagers and that school administrators, teachers, and even fellow students sometimes cooperated with those investigations.

Q: What is your next project?

A: My next book is a political and cultural history of teenagers and the Vietnam War across North America. It explores the many ways young people protested the conflict. The project also expands beyond the United States to include Canada. By examining both countries together, I hope to show that opposition to the Vietnam War was part of a shared North American history.

Q: Have you always wanted to be a historian?

A: No. When I was younger, I wanted to be either an astronaut or a mathematician. I didn't become interested in history until my junior year of high school. Once I discovered how historians investigate the past and tell stories through evidence, I was hooked.

Bottom: Fountain discussed his book and research during his time on campus.

More about Fountain:

Education: B.A., history, Winthrop; M.A. and Ph.D., history, Indiana University

Current Position: Research Specialist and Curator of Black Play at The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York

Top: Fountain signed copies of the book during his March visit to Winthrop.

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Sharng Sharks

HER LOVE FOR No matter what it takes.

That's the mantra Norah Mendoza '20 kept repeating to herself while encountering obstacle after obstacle in her quest to become a marine scientist. Those obstacles ranged from the Florida university dean who told her it was "laughable" to apply for a master's program without a science background to the high cost of becoming a dive professional to the countless "no's" she received.

"I was so frustrated with the system because I had made a decision at 18 to major in painting, and it felt like that one choice had decided my whole future," said the Seneca native. "At that age, I didn't have all the pieces to the puzzle yet, and I didn't even know there was a puzzle."

Did You Know?

Mendoza's relentless passion and unique journey to becoming a marine scientist caught the attention of Forbes Magazine. She was featured in an Oct. 2025 article that you may read [here](#).

Mendoza found one of those pieces when she switched her major to modern languages at Winthrop. She

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chose to study abroad in Costa Rica, which included opportunities to take courses in two topics that had long interested her: surfing and tropical marine biology.

A Wave of Change

"Taking that tropical marine biology course, especially with it being led by a Costa Rican woman, really changed things for me," she said. "I had never seen someone who looked like me highlighted in that kind of space, and it made something click. I knew that moment was important, and I felt like I had to follow it."

Back in Rock Hill, Mendoza fed her voracious appetite for the ocean with Geology Professor Diana Boyer's oceanography class, followed by another of Boyer's courses: a three-week stint at San Salvador Island in the Bahamas.

“The course sounded like a dream, but honestly, another big reason I signed up was because Dr. Boyer made science feel accessible,” she said. “She approached it with kindness and understanding. I was nervous going into oceanography because it was so far outside anything I had

studied before, but she made the material understandable and exciting. I really credit her with helping foster my love for marine science.”

While in the Bahamas, Mendoza snorkeled off the beach and studied the ratios of ripple heights to wavelengths, connecting those measurements to how geologists can study ancient weather patterns through sediment. She and her peers also collected sand and water samples for a project looking at pollution levels in different areas. These experiences marked Mendoza’s first introduction to making and recording observations, developing a research question, collecting and analyzing data, and interpreting results.

“It made science feel a lot more real and a lot more accessible to me,” she said.

Taking the Next Step

After completing her Winthrop degree in 2020, Mendoza scraped together \$3,000 through odd jobs to return to Costa Rica and take a two-week field course to earn her open water scuba certification. More odd jobs followed and she took any opportunity to be in or on the water — liveaboard gigs as a divemaster in the Florida Keys, anchoring boats, and reading winds and currents. She started connecting with others in the same field via LinkedIn and completing master’s degree applications. And then the dreaded “No, you can’ts” started flooding in.

Mendoza then heard something else while she was planting a flower bed and listening to a podcast called “So You Want to Be a Marine Biologist.”

“Jasmin Graham from Minorities in Shark Sciences (MISS) was on the episode,” she explained. “She talked about how they are creating free opportunities in the field for people who are underrepresented, no matter

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what stage of their career they’re in. She talked about building experience, knowledge and network, and that really moved me because that was exactly what I had been looking for, just someone to give me a chance to prove myself and show my passion for this field.”

Through MISS, a nonprofit advancing the field of shark, ray and other marine sciences through better representation, Mendoza has embarked on trailblazing shark research.

“I was originally more interested in coral, but as I kept doing field work and spending more time in the diving world, I was exposed to sharks almost every day,” she said. “I started getting curious about their movements and how they use their habitats. Then, through the Mendoza collected a blood sample from a Tiger shark.

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Mendoza and her team performed an ultrasound on a female Bull shark as part of the North Carolina Bull Shark Project.

opportunities I had with MISS, my love for sharks just kept growing. So did my curiosity.”

Research in the Works

The insatiable desire to learn more led to Mendoza’s current research projects:

*In Sarasota, Florida, she and her team are looking at how the toxins produced by the algae that causes red tide, a harmful algal bloom that can cause serious respiratory issues for both people and fish, is concentrated in sharks’ bodies. They’re measuring brevetoxin concentrations in the brain, gill, muscle, liver, stomach and blood of bonnethead sharks before, during and after red tide events.

“We are trying to understand whether and how they process these toxins, and what threshold they can withstand,” she explained. “That project is helping us also look at maternal offloading and red tide recovery.”

*The North Carolina Bull Shark Project, which looks at the northward migration of bull sharks to Pamlico Sound, which is considered an important nursery area for bull sharks.

“The goal is to understand how both mothers and pups are using that waterway, and why they may be using Pamlico Sound instead of the waterways through Georgia and South Carolina as they migrate up from Florida.”

Coming Full Circle

Mendoza now serves as the program director for MISS, and she spends time designing programs to make the field accessible for people like her, who may be encountering their own obstacles.

“First and foremost, I want to make others feel as supported in this field as I did when I first found MISS,” she said. “That is why it is so important. We are giving voices to people who

never thought this was an option. As we like to say at MISS, ‘Diversity in scientists leads to diversity in thought, which leads to innovation.’”

To learn more about MISS, please visit the organization’s website.

Mendoza also spends

time educating students about marine life and conservation.

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SUMMER **2026**

ADVANCEMENT NEWS

CAMPUS NEWS

TRUSTEES ENDORSE NEW FORT MILL SITE

Board of Trustees members endorsed a plan to open a downtown instructional site in nearby Fort Mill in the next year.

The concept of a 10-year partnership with the town of Fort Mill was approved April 30 at the board’s quarterly meeting. The partnership is contingent upon the finalization of the 2026-27 budget and resources for updating the location.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be finalized as soon as funding to upfit the instructional site location is secured. The instructional site may replicate several programs on Winthrop’s main campus, including an early childhood laboratory school setting, Dual Enrollment program options, and advanced degree programs, certifications and industry engagements.

Fort Mill Mayor Gwynn Savage ’78 and Board Chair Joel Hamilton ’06.

Work on a new four-story, 400-bed residence hall will soon begin along Cherry Road near the site where two former high-rise residence halls—Wofford and Richardson— were demolished in 2024. The nearly 100,000-square-foot project will help meet the university’s surging demand for housing driven by climbing enrollment and a growing slate of new degree programs.

Groundbreaking is expected to take place in September. Vertical construction is set to begin in January 2027, with interior work commencing in February. Final inspections are targeted for November 2027 to keep the project on track for a soft opening in January 2028.

WORK ON NEW 400-BED RESIDENCE HALL BEGINS

WINTHROP HISTORIANS CONTRIBUTE TO S.C.'S 250TH CELEBRATIONS

This summer, America noted the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4.

History Professor Eddie Lee '83 is part of the SC250 State Commission created to draw attention to the state's pivotal role in the American Revolution. He attended Carolina Day on Sullivan's Island in June, held to mark one of the first significant victories for the Patriot cause.

Jennifer Dixon-McKnight, associate professor of history, is a member of a York County 250

WINTHROP FORMS FIRST COLLEGIATE INSPIRE SOCCER TEAM

The university has joined the Inspire Soccer League (ISL), the first nationwide, year-long competitive soccer league tailored for individuals with intellectual impairment.

ALISON HAMILTON JOINS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Alison Jean Hamilton '92, '95, of North Myrtle Beach was recently elected by the S.C. General Assembly to the Winthrop Board of Trustees. She now holds the seat for the 7th Congressional District.

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Hamilton, a financial advisor who works with her father, Haden Hamilton, is a former member of the Winthrop University Alumni Executive Board. In addition, she started the Myrtle Beach Alumni Association Chapter.

Hamilton earned a B.S. in business administration with an option in economics and an M.B.A. from Winthrop.

The initiative is drawing together former Eagle soccer players, alumni and coaches to make the program successful as the league's first collegiate team. The ISL co-founder is Nil Vinyals '18, who played on Winthrop's soccer team and is an active professional currently playing for Spokane Velocity. Several other Winthrop alumni — Alex Isern '12, Sam Jones '22, Kristen McMillan '20, '22, and Alice Garcia '17 — are involved in various capacities with ISL.

Rock Hill's team will be coed, open to players 16 and older, for those athletes with an IQ of 75 or less, autism or Down syndrome.

Dean Takita Sumter cut the ribbon for the newly renovated Sims Science Building.

NEW CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT LAUNCHED

Winthrop has launched the Center for the Environment, a university-wide initiative designed to accelerate interdisciplinary collaboration, deepen community partnerships and equip the next generation of environmental leaders with the skills to drive lasting, meaningful change.

The center's soft launch coincided with the ribbon-cutting for the newly renovated Sims Science Building and Dalton Hall on April 21. The center is not housed in a single building. It spans faculty offices, outdoor learning laboratories and regional partnerships.

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Commission committee. In addition, Winthrop hosted a traveling exhibit this spring of some of the most important state documents from the early years of the American Revolution.

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ADVANCEMENT NEWS TWO SPACES NAMED FOR LONGTIME BUSINESS FACULTY spaces named for them in Thurmond Building.

Dean Emeritus Roger Weikle, Padgett, Dean P.N. Saksena and Provost Sebastian van Delden at the April 9 dedication.

On April 9, the College of Business and Technology honored two men who had nearly 45 years of combined service that helped shape the college into the respected and distinctive program that it is today.

Dean Emeritus Jerry Padgett and the late Professor Emeritus Toby Haynsworth were recognized for their exceptional contributions to the college and Winthrop by having separate

Padgett, known as the "Founding Father" of the Small Business Development Center housed at Winthrop, spent more than two decades leading the college as dean, and provided valuable service to the York County Economic Development Board and the South Carolina Council of Economic Education. Upon his retirement, the S.C. Senate passed a

resolution to honor his many contributions to Winthrop, York County and the state. The dean's suite is now named the Jerry Padgett Dean's Suite.

Haynsworth was a notable professor of quantitative methods and often shared his expertise through opinion pieces and interviews in the local press. He co-authored two history books with History Professor Eddie Lee '83. He was a mentor, political activist and philanthropist. The second-floor conference room is now named the Hugh C. Haynsworth III Conference Room.

The naming of these spaces was made possible through generous philanthropic gifts.

AI SEED GRANTS HELP FACULTY PREPARE STUDENTS IN LATEST TECH

Thurmond Building is home to the
College of Business and Technology.

This year's funded projects focus on providing students with experience in writing effective prompts, evaluating AI-generated outputs, identifying errors or bias, documenting their reasoning, and determining when human judgment must guide or override automated recommendations. Other projects extend this work into professional practice and research.

The College of Business and Technology is thoughtfully incorporating AI across its curriculum and research agenda. With support from business leaders and donors who serve on the college's Leadership Council, AI Seed Grants are helping faculty prepare students to use emerging technologies with skill, judgment and ethical awareness.

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For example, Professor Tracy Griggs' proposal is a strong model for integrating AI into leadership education. Her GUIDE framework — Ground, Use, Inspect, Decide, and Explain — prepares students to oversee AI-supported work while remaining accountable for outcomes.

SUMMER 2026

ADVANCEMENT NEWS THANK YOU, DONORS, FOR A SUPERB BLEED GARNET GIVE GOLD DAY!

The annual Bleed Garnet Give Gold Day of Giving (or BG3 as it was affectionately called this year!) was held April 21-22 and raised over \$339,700 to support 121 funds. Thank you to the nearly 1,100 generous donors who helped make the day unforgettable. Check out some of the highlights and listen to a special thank you message.

DONORS: 1,084 RAISED: \$339,716 FUNDS SUPPORTED: 121 TOTAL GIFTS: 1,316

TOP FUNDS: Winthrop Fund Macfeat Laboratory School Women's Lacrosse Excellence
Fund Volleyball Excellence Fund

Who Gave

\$77,022, 14%

\$194,187, 57%

\$20,962, 6%

\$22,879, 6%

\$24,666, 7%

Alumni Friends Parents

Faculty/ Staff

Other

FACULTY MEMBERS HONORED, REMEMBERED WITH ENDOWED FUNDS

Two funds have been fully endowed to honor the legacies of longtime faculty members.

The Dr. Chris Van Aller International Relations Restricted Fund honors the former Model UN director of 26 years. It provides support to the College of Arts and Sciences' Model UN Program, such as scholarships, travel and conference expenses. Make a gift to this fund.

The Janet Gray & Russell Luke Memorial Scholarship is an endowed fund that honors the legacies of the late Janet Gray and Russell Luke, beloved artists and educators who served as mentors to students in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Two awards are given annually to College of Visual and Performing Arts students. Make a gift to this fund.

Gray

For more information on giving opportunities, please visit www.winthrop.edu/give or call **803/323-2275**.

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Van Aller

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ALUMNI NEWS

CALLING ALL GRADUATES FROM 2017-2026!

FOUR JOIN ALUMNI EXECUTIVE BOARD

Four alumni were selected to serve on the Alumni Association Executive Board. The newest members — Christina Alexander '05, Bob Bazemore '85, James Hammond '88 and Tadean Page '18 — are all serving their first term and will partner with the Alumni Association to connect with more than 66,000 alumni.

The Alumni Association is recruiting for the Young Alumni Council for alumni from Charlotte, North Carolina; Columbia; and Orlando, Florida.

Members of the Young Alumni Council

- represent Winthrop in their communities
- connect with fellow young alumni
- promote a culture of philanthropy and engagement
- and more!

If you're looking for a way to build your resume as a young professional, this is a great opportunity for you!

E-mail alumni@winthrop.edu for more information.

FLIGHT PATHS WITH THE PROVOST COMING TO ROCK HILL, CHARLESTON James Hammond SAVE THE DATE!

The next Black Alumni Weekend will be held April 22-24, 2027! Registration will open in early 2027. If you are interested in serving as a sponsor or vendor for the weekend, e-mail the Black Alumni Council at bac@winthropalumni.com.

Tadean Page

Fresh off the success of Flight Paths with the Provost events in Greenville, Myrtle Beach and Atlanta, the Alumni Association is hosting two more events on Aug. 13 in Rock Hill and Sept. 10 in Charleston. Provost Sebastian van Delden will talk with alumni about Winthrop's new and upcoming academic programs, including aviation, financial technology, artificial intelligence, supply chain and logistics, game design, software engineering, the first doctoral program and more! Register here.

26 27 The Senior Class Gift Christina Alexander Bob Bazemore

The Alumni Association invited members of the Class of 2026 to celebrate their final days as students with Senior Week, May 4-7. A variety of events were hosted to honor their accomplishments, aid in the transition from student to alumnus and get connected with the Alumni Association. The Senior Class Gift campaign raised \$938 from 48 donors from the Class of 2026!

For more information on the board, please visit www.winthrop.edu/alumni.

SUMMER 2026

ALUMNI NEWS

SENIOR WEEK EVENTS RECOGNIZE CLASS OF 2026

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CLASS NOTES

1981 The York County Regional Chamber presented Frank Greene of Rock Hill with the Robert F. Youngblood Lifetime Business Achievement Award.

1984 The Camden City Council recognized Johnny Deal of Camden for his 15 years of service to the Camden Planning Commission.

1989 Wofford College named Jay Dowd of Bradley as the institution's 12th president. He also was awarded the Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest civilian honor.

The York County Regional Chamber presented Susan Fischer of Rock Hill with the Robert F. Youngblood Lifetime Business Achievement Award.

1993 Mid-Carolina High School welcomed Jody Haltiwanger of Prosperity as its head football coach.

1997 Trustmark Bank named Thomas Owens of Madison, Mississippi, as its chief operating officer.

2000 Henkel Adhesive Technologies hired Holly Cotton Blackwell of Rock Hill as its director of sales excellence.

2001 HunterMaclean attorney Rachel Young Fields, of Savannah, Georgia, was recognized as a 2026 Georgia Super Lawyer in Business Litigation.

The York County Regional Chamber named Beth Black White of York as the York Area Business Person of the Year.

2002 Shawn Suber of Blythewood was named superintendent of Florence School District 3.

2003 The Avett Brothers bassist Bob Crawford, of Hillsborough, North Carolina, published a book, "America's Founding Son: John Quincy Adams, from President to Political Maverick."

Norris Williams of Fort Mill was named superintendent of Lancaster County School District.

2005 The S.C. Association of School Administrators named Kristal Bailey Stefanov '05, '09, of Fort Mill as the 2026 S.C. Elementary Assistant Principal of the Year.

2006 Ashley Nelson of Pawleys Island was selected to the Liberty Fellowship Class of 2027.

2007 Eric Ferri of Charlotte, North Carolina, was named executive vice president and chief risk officer of Pathward, N.A. and Pathward Financial, Inc.

The Pelham Jewish Center recognized Emily Stevenson Pauley of Pelham, New York, as a Woman of Valor— Eishet Chayil and Young Leadership Honoree.

Sunset Park Center for Accelerated Studies' new assistant principal is Standrick Rhodes '07, '09, '24, of Rock Hill.

SUMMER 2026

2008 Kelly Gold Hall of Beaufort was recognized as best performer in a musical at the 2025 Broadway World South Carolina Awards for her role in "9 to 5: The Musical" with the Beaufort Theater Company.

2010 Stacey Troop Walden '10, '19 of Clover was recognized as one of the Artsonia Art Education Leadership Award recipients.

The S.C. Association of Middle Level Education named Audrey Bell Wallace of Mountville a Regional Teacher to Watch.

2011 Jessie Haynes of Fort Mill was named a quarterfinalist for the 2027 Music Educator Award. The award is presented by the Recording Academy and GRAMMY Museum.

The York County Regional Chamber named Hannah Smith '11, '17, of Rock Hill the Young Professional of the Year.

2012 D'Angelo Edwards of Richburg was named assistant principal of York Intermediate School.

CLASS NOTES

2018 Jefferson Elementary School's new principal is Lindsey Dessecker Lawson of Dover, Ohio.

Tanner Slagle of Rock Hill was named principal of Lesslie Elementary School.

2024 Ryan Harris '24, '25, of Florence, was named the 2024-25 Rookie Teacher of the Year for Chesterfield County School District.

Thank You, Donors!

The Winthrop University Foundation recently surpassed \$100 million in investment assets, marking an important milestone in the foundation's continued growth and long-term financial stewardship. This achievement reflects the generosity of our donors, the careful oversight of the Winthrop University Foundation Board, and a disciplined investment strategy designed to strengthen Winthrop's future. A strong foundation creates a stronger university, providing greater capacity to support scholarships, academic excellence, faculty and strategic priorities for generations of students to come.

To learn more about giving to Winthrop, please visit www.winthrop.edu/give.

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MILESTONES

BIRTHS Madison Altman '15 and Ryan Turner '13, a girl, Briley Greer Turner

MARRIAGES

Madalyn (Maddy) Hodgson '25 to Nathaniel (Nate) Chronis '25

IN MEMORIAM 1940s Sallie Lathrop Kapps '40 Catherine Findley Merritt '45 Hilma Floyd Prosser '45 Ruby (Rubie) Fore Floyd '47

1950s Margaret McCandless Hausman '50 Barbara Easterly Brown '52 Patricia McGuinn Oxley '52 Sarah Nance Burns '54 Mary (Eloise) McMeekin Clyburn '54 Jacqueline Harmon McRae '54 Betty Kelly Byars '55 Julianne Sinclair Gasque '55 Rebecca McDaniel Williams '56 Rebecca Hollis Wolfe '56 Emily (Carolyn) Brunson Boudreaux '57 Nancy Dodson Christopher '57 Jane Hall Barfield '58 Janie Gibson Nirk '58 Mary Ann Dusenbury Carlson '59 Mary (Mary Jo) Warren Dewar '59 Myra Robbins Simmons '59

1960s Sadie Clamp Mincey '60 Mary Thompson Odom '60 Charlotte Mullis Shaw '60 Jane Bolt Nettles '62 Lois Steinkuhler Voyles '62

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Judith (Judy) DuBard Howard '63 Henrietta Huggins '63 Judith (Judy) Boone Williams '63 Sallie Cantrell '64 Rebecca Mallard Murphy '64 Donna Gowan Skinner '64 Patricia Cochrane Alexander '65 Sharon Lore Slagle '65 Esther Barber Dance '66 Cheryll Long Crouch '68 Mary Boyd McCall '68 Vivian Traywick Harris '69 Faith Nelson Pyle '69 Catherine (Lynn) Koon Roberts '69 Janet Roberts Schneider '69

1970s Bettye (Lynn) Mann Hornsby '70 Ann Edwards Martin '70 Nancy Templeton Stroble '70 Mary McClain Everhart '71 Joe Wren '71 Jacqueline Benenhaley '73 Marsha Miller Wilson '73 Lillie Edwards '74 Martha Turner Leazer '74 Norma Sells '74 Katie Howell '75 Reesa Gibson McCrorey '76 Joyce Martin Wallace '76 Deborah Glenn Wilson '76

Vicki Hullander Lundy '78

1980s George Gardner Jr. '80 David Jackson '80 Martha Campbell Warner '80 Tracy Gill '81 Sarah Ackerman '82 Richard Molony '82 Jana Hurt Harston '83 Marietta Morrison '83, '86 Elizabeth (Miller) Barker '85 Nancy Cahaly Braswell '85 Linda Walker '85 Peter Espina '86 Donald (Don) Gregory '86 Emma (Lisa) Bigger '88 Earl Godfrey Jr. '89

1990s Neile Greenway Manning '95 Michael Neelands '97 Alan Dupas '98 Laura Bishop '99

2000s Jennifer Schexnayder Gazda '00 Kaminer Haislip Quinn '02, '05

2020s Dakota Perry '25

Meghan Jones Sanders '15 and Daniel Sanders '17, a boy, James Erik Sanders

Brianna Rae DiCicco '17, '18, a girl, Alexandra Faith DiCicco

Show Your Alumni Pride

DURING HOMECOMING AND REUNION WEEKEND

Come home to Winthrop this November in style! Purchase your 2026 Homecoming T-shirt via the Homecoming website from Aug. 1-Sept. 30. T-shirts are \$25. Wear your shirt proudly to Homecoming and Reunion Weekend, Nov. 13-14. Join the tailgate festivities before cheering on the Eagles at the coliseum, and reconnect with classmates and friends all weekend. If your class year ends in '6 or '1, then your weekend is extra special as you're celebrating a milestone reunion. Registration for Class Reunions and Homecoming events will open in August so be on the lookout for more information in your mailbox and e-mail inbox. Order a T-shirt and learn more about class reunions and events at

WWW.WINTHROP.EDU/HOMECOMING.

2026

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