

THE

COLUMN

ATHENS STATE
UNIVERSITY

ATHENS.EDU

WINTER 2022

A portrait of a young woman with brown hair styled in a bun, wearing a brown patterned headband and a blue denim jacket. She is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is a textured grey with large yellow brushstrokes. The portrait is framed by a blue and white decorative border.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

LAUREN RANDALLS

PG. 8

OUR VISION

Athens State University will be the premier destination for transfer students seeking the highest quality education and cutting-edge delivery at the most affordable cost. As the upper division university in Alabama, building on a tradition that began in 1822, Athens State University will be the catalyst for positive change in the lives of its students.

OUR MISSION

The University advances the best interests of its students and the State of Alabama through teaching, service, research, and other creative activities to empower students to make valuable contributions in their professional, civic, educational, and economic endeavors. Through innovative communication and course delivery for high-quality undergraduate and select graduate programs, Athens State University provides a supporting environment for each student, demonstrating the importance of the diverse and interdependent nature of our state and society. Athens State University changes the face of Alabama by changing the lives of its students.

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CONNECT WITH US



A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT WAY

Athens State University is an “anchor institution” that has been here for 200 years. We are a resource for the city, county, and region, more generally, and we aren’t going anywhere. Our communities can depend on our support, our supply of needed talent, our local spending, our contribution to the quality of life, and the consequent attraction of visitors and long-term residents.



That’s a bold statement, but we have data to back it up. Recently, we engaged EMSI, a company which was founded on assessing the economic impact of institutions, to assess our University’s impact on the local economy in the year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

EMSI reports that the University has an impact on our five local counties (Limestone, Madison, Morgan, Marshall, and Lauderdale) of just over \$200 million each year. How can this be? Well, we are known for retaining our students in-state, especially in the north, and naturally enable students to earn more than they would otherwise. This results in an additional \$166 million in income in our five-county area every year. Just think about it — a teacher from Athens State who stays locally earning so much more than a non-degreed person adds to regional income. Then there are ripple effects as the teacher spends money, creating income for others. With all our alumni, it adds up.

The remainder of the economic impact results from the University’s spending on local businesses — that’s a priority for us — and a small amount of spending from visitors from outside the region attending Fiddlers and other events.

EMSI used a conservative approach that avoids exaggerating our economic impact, so we’re confident in the results. Furthermore, the analysis excludes non-economic impacts and all effects outside the immediate five-county area.

This issue of “The Column” magazine includes examples of the effect the University is having on its communities. Our Learning Partnerships allow employees of participating organizations to pay reduced tuition rates at Athens State University, and in return the organization helps refine curricula and creates internships and potential job openings for students. Huntsville Hospital recently signed such a win-win agreement.

Several articles reveal how the University contributes to the quality of life. Fiddlers returned this year, with attendance surpassing 8,000. The concert series is also back. We have a special series of events to celebrate the Bicentennial. The alumni golf outing on a typically beautiful autumn day provided much fun and raised record funds for scholarships.

This edition also emphasizes that in order to have the impact we do, resources are required. Articles focus on our success in obtaining grants and how you can make a difference through planned giving or purchasing a paver!

We may be a small university, but we sure have a big impact! Help us do more as we celebrate our 200th year of continuous operation!

Philip K. Way

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ATHENS FOREVER 2022 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY



**An Evening with
Dr. Temple Grandin**



**Fiddlers Concert
Series Performance**
*Featuring Kenny
& Amanda Smith*

FEBRUARY



**Lunch & Learn:
Black History Month**



**Athens Forever
Event (TBD)**

MARCH



**International
Women's Day Event**



**Fiddlers Concert
Series Performance**
*Featuring Appalachian
Road Show*

APRIL



**Foundation
Scholarship
Reception & Alumni
Awards Ceremony**



**Earth Day:
Athens Forever
Historic Tree Tours**

MAY



**Fiddlers Concert
Series Performance**
*Featuring Joe Mullins
& the Radio Ramblers*

JUNE



**Jillian Gardner
Organ Recital**



**Lunch & Learn:
Methodist Church
& Southern Colleges**

JULY



**Lunch & Learn:
Bicentennial
Review of Athens
State's History**



**Fiddlers Concert
Series Performance**
*Featuring the
Quebe Sisters*



**Homecoming
Dinner Celebration**



**Summer
Commencement
with 50-Year Club
Special Guests**

For more information on
upcoming events, visit
AthensForever.org/events
or call 256-233-8185.

LET A PAVER AT FOUNDERS HALL TELL YOUR STORY



[ATHENSFOREVER.ORG/PAVERS](https://athensforever.org/pavers)

The sample inscription above shows how you can memorialize your loved ones and let their legacy live on.



**PAVING THE WAY
PAVER CAMPAIGN**

Visit the link above or contact
University Advancement
at 256.233.8185.



CHEESECAKES & MORE CHANGES NAME TO PRYOR STREET CAFÉ AND BAKERY

A few months after becoming Athens State University's new food service provider, Cheesecakes & More has announced its decision to change its name to Pryor Street Café and Bakery. The restaurant revealed their new name during the 2021 Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention.

Originally founded in Decatur, Alabama, the restaurant relocated to Athens State's campus in July 2021. Located at 402 East Pryor Street inside Sandridge Hall, Pryor Street Café and Bakery offers fresh, home cooked meals daily including sandwiches, salads, and soups as well as hot daily lunch specials. The restaurant also offers several options to satisfy your sweet tooth including delicious made-from-scratch baked goods such as cookies, cakes, assorted pastries, and their specialty, original recipe cheesecakes.

In addition, Pryor Street Café and Bakery also offers individual and family-sized to-go meals as well as catering services for events of all sizes. Orders can be placed at 256-233-8244.

Pryor Street Café and Bakery is open to the public as well as Athens State students, faculty, and staff on Monday - Friday from 8:00 am - 2:00 pm. ■



ATTENTION DREAMERS YOUNG AND OLD:

ATHENS STATE ALUM BRADLEY SIDES
HAS STORIES FOR YOU

by Carol Chamberlain

Athens State University alum Bradley Sides (class of '09) writes stories that explore loss, loneliness, and transformation, all with an aspect of the fantastic in each. Monsters, ghosts, and talking dolls emerge regularly in them because Sides sees life as being a magical experience. "Imagination dictates so much of our lives," he said. "That imagination in stories makes them more real."

However, imagination aside, what is really real is Sides' determination to become a successful writer and critic, and his unwavering, credit-is-due to Athens State University for launching his career.

Although the road from Sides' Goodsprings, Alabama hometown to Athens State University

is a mere 27 miles, the commute marked the beginning of Sides' creative writing destiny. A farm boy, who by his estimation encountered more cows than people in his formative years, was encouraged to take flight and soar by his factory-worker parents who also worked the farm. No wonder a story in Sides' recently published *Those Fantastic Lives and Other Strange Stories: Blacklight Press (October 1, 2021)* includes one where a father discovers wings growing from his son's back.

Sides, then a self-described rudderless student, big fella, and introvert, showed up for class at Calhoun Community College. There the first-gen college student encountered the work of William Faulkner, the American writer known

for his novels and short stories set in Mississippi. Sides was hooked.

"I always felt like an outsider and always had an internal desire to find myself and find my place," Sides says, explaining his devotion to Faulkner. "I saw the world he wrote about. I saw myself in his stories. They seemed like places I knew."

Inspired, Sides moved on to Athens State knowing what words can do and wanting more. Once on campus, Sides (to his amazement) fit in. "I met other people who were interested in reading and books," Sides recalls. "I finally found my people."

And he found his mentor, Dr. Kevin Dupre, Sides' professor of English. "He was so inspiring," says Sides of Dr. Dupre. "I felt like I was in a classroom with a master. His enthusiasm captured the spirit of the authors we were reading. His excitement spilled out of the classroom."

Sides says Dr. Dupre remains one of the most influential teachers he's had. Through Dr. Dupre's rigorous syllabus of classic and contemporary literary works, Sides became more and more comfortable with himself, and vowed to keep pursuing literature.

According to Dr. Dupre, the admiration is mutual. He says, "Bradley was a pleasure to have in classes! Some students raise the bar for everyone around them; Bradley is among the very

best of those." Dr. Dupre adds that Sides' discerning sense of humor and perceptive observations garnered him respect from all around, and he expects that Sides' new collection of short stories will reveal, as his writing and reviews have begun to do in publications across the country, his boundless talent as a writer.

Sides considers Athens State an important part of his success story. "It's a place where I was inspired and encouraged. It's a place that helped my writing dreams come true. I'll be forever grateful to Athens State and Dr. Dupre for helping me find my way." One more take away from his college experience that Sides would pass along to current students is something he had to overcome. "Don't be afraid to be you," he advises.



Sides' preferred genre, magical realism, is the anchor that has guided Sides' trajectory to literary heights. It is as old as mankind, yet new and as relevant as ever. With the harsh actuality of existence that many

Americans are experiencing during these pandemic days, fantasy, horror and make-believe can be a welcomed respite. A respite that Sides is all too happy to deliver. "Everything we write contains our social selves and our political selves," Sides says. "I see myself not in my characters but in the world they inhabit."

And if Sides' imagination was to inhabit the Athens State campus as a backdrop for a new story, would it also include the macabre he is now well known for? "Of course! The sense of history in the campus' incredible architecture would play a role," he says. "There would definitely be a haunting."

Those Fantastic Lives and Other Strange Stories received glowing reviews from Fiction Writers Review, Heavy Feather Review, Horror Obsessive and Nashville Scene. It was selected as a best southern book of the month at Southern Review of Books and was featured at prominent literary outlets such as Electric Literature and Lit Hub. ■

Bradley Sides' writing appears at Chapter 16, Chicago Review of Books, Electric Literature, Los Angeles Review of Books, The Millions, The Rumpus, and Southern Review of Books. He holds a BA in English from Athens State, an MA from the University of North Alabama, and is an MFA candidate at Queens University of Charlotte, where he serves as Fiction Editor of Qu. He lives in Florence, Alabama, with his wife. Those Fantastic Lives is his debut. For more, visit www.bradley-sides.com.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: LAUREN RANDALLS

Lauren was ready for a change. After graduating high school in 2012 and beginning to pursue what she thought would be her dream job in healthcare, she quickly realized it was not for her. Not sure what she wanted to do instead, she continued working full-time in a hospital while gradually taking classes at Calhoun Community College to earn her Associate Degree.

"I've always been interested in art and illustrations and stuff like that. I've been drawing since I was a kid, but I never thought it was possible to have a degree in some kind of arts. Growing up, I was always told that you can't pursue art as an actual job."

However, she realized that wasn't the case when she met a friend who was a talented watercolor artist and graphic designer.

"I was interested in graphic design from the get-go after talking to her about it. I thought that maybe that's what I should do, but it took years for my wife to finally convince me. After eight years of working in a hospital, I was kind of over it. I needed something new. I needed to start a new chapter."

Lauren graduated from Calhoun with an Associate Degree in General Education and began taking classes at the Alabama Center for the Arts to pursue a Graphic Design art degree. "Taking classes at the Alabama Center for the Arts has been an honor, honestly. This campus is amazing, and the staff here at Athens State are just wonderful, and I can't say enough good things about them. I genuinely feel like they are all amazing. They're so supportive and super helpful. It's honestly an honor to get to work and learn from them. It makes a huge difference."

GETTING NOTICED

Lauren draws inspiration for her art from lots of different places — pop culture, music, politics — you name it. But one of her favorite things to draw is fan art. "Any kind of TV show I watch, I just have the urge to draw it and make my own design. I'm a huge Saturday Night Live fan, and we watch that every Saturday. I get a lot of inspiration from the sketches and stuff that they do. Sometimes based on whatever sketch that they're doing, I'll do a movie poster out of it or something like that. It's a lot of fun."

While Lauren has never formally submitted any of her fan art, she occasionally posts it on her Twitter or Instagram account. Her work hasn't gone unnoticed — it's actually been acknowledged by some big stars! "I've had my fan art recognized by a couple of really cool actors. I did some fan art for a Hulu television series called Miss America. There were several big name actors in that like Kate Blanchet, Sarah Paulson, Elizabeth Banks, and a couple of other people. A few cast members noticed it and said something about it, including



Elizabeth Banks. It was really cool. Also, the TV show Killing Eve, I did some fan art for it, and the Killing Eve account noticed it and gave me a shout-out."

BIG BREAK

Despite the occasional Hollywood shout-outs, a podcast was about to take her fan art recognition to a new level. "Heidi Gardner is one of

my favorite Saturday Night Live cast members. I had done a drawing of her as one of her Weekend Update characters and posted it on Twitter. Her brother, Justin Gardner, found me somehow and actually messaged me and asked if he could purchase that piece, and I was like, 'Yeah, of course!'

"We ended up establishing a relationship through social media, and months later he announced on Twitter that he was going to be doing a podcast with his sister called 'Where We Were When.' It's a podcast based on movies and nostalgia about where you were when you were watching certain movies. That podcast started tagging me in all of its posts and allowed me to be a part of it.

"I told Justin how excited I was about the podcast, and he replied, 'Well I wonder who's going to do the first fan art for it?' And I was like, 'That would be me!' I felt like I had to, of course, and I was more than happy to.

"It turned out to be one of my favorite pieces that I've drawn. Luckily, I drew it, and he and his sister both loved it. He asked me if they could use it for a giveaway for the podcast and I was like, 'Yeah, absolutely! That's awesome!' I didn't know that they would be announcing the giveaway on the podcast. I just thought that they would post about it on social media, so it was a really big surprise

when I was watching the podcast on YouTube and they started talking about my artwork and the giveaway. It was really cool!"

A CREATIVE FUTURE

Thanks to Lauren's artist friend who showed her that having a career in the arts is definitely a reality, Lauren is well on her way to a fulfilling career that serves as a way for her to express herself creatively. Careers in the arts are limitless and include many career paths that provide a good, stable income. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average salary for graphic designers in 2020 was over \$53,000, with higher salaries for digital designers (\$73,000) and art

directors (\$97,000). The job outlook for these careers is very positive and is expected to grow at up to 13 percent over the next decade, which is faster than average.

To help satisfy the area's growing need for highly-qualified and talented artists, Athens State University recently launched a Bachelor of Fine Arts program, which provides studio-based education in visual arts and design. BFA degrees have become the industry standard and are highly sought-after, allowing students to specialize in a concentration area (ceramics, graphic design, painting & drawing, or multimedia design) and become experts in their chosen field.

Lauren plans to graduate with her Bachelor of Fine Arts (Graphic Design) in 2022 and begin a career in the entertainment industry creating graphics or illustrations for magazines and TV shows. Her ultimate dream job: working in the graphics department at Saturday Night Live, of course! With the success and connections she's already made, along with the skills she's currently developing, we know Lauren will be prepared to live out her wildest dreams. ■



2021 FIDDLERS CONVENTION: RECAP

After taking a year off due to COVID-19, the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention was back in full swing this year with one of the highest attendance numbers in the Convention's 54-year history. Old time music lovers of all ages (and some from as far away as Zambia, Africa!) gathered on Athens State's campus to enjoy delicious food, fellowship, and of course, the sounds of bluegrass music.

The convention ran from September 30 - October 2 and treated guests to concerts from a star-packed line-up that included Volume Five, Jimmy Fortune, Dailey & Vincent, and Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver.

Justin Branum from Murfreesboro, Tennessee was named the "Alabama State Fiddle Champion," marking the Convention's first new Fiddle Champion since 2018. Branum won the title by winning the "fiddle off," which pits the top fiddlers from the junior, intermediate, and senior divisions, earning the Convention's top prize of \$1,200. Tyler Andal from Nashville, Tennessee finished runner-up.

The 2021 Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention was presented by Aetos Systems, Inc., with stage sponsorships by Alabama Farmers Cooperative (Founders Hall Main Stage), Pettus Plumbing and Piping (Brown Hall Stage), and Blake Williams Communications (Delmore Brothers Stage). Other sponsors included Redstone Federal Credit Union, Bank Independent, Nanny's Old Fashion Lemonade, Pepsi, Listerhill Credit Union, The Orthopaedic Center (TOC), and Rocket RV.

The Convention contributes to Athens State by funding student scholarships and University projects. This project was made possible in part by a grant from the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area. ■

2022 CONCERT SERIES:

- 1.20.22 | Kenny & Amanda Smith
- 3.17.22 | Appalachian Roadshow
- 5.19.22 | Joe Mullins & The Radio Ramblers
- 7.14.22 | The Quebe Sisters
- 9.29.22 | Mile Twelve



SCHOLARSHIPS



GOLF CLASSIC RAISES OVER \$40,000 FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

The Athens State University Alumni Association hosted the 30th Annual Golf Classic on September 23 at Canebrake Club in Athens. The event raised over \$40,000 for student scholarships, a new record for the most money ever raised at the event.

Thanks to the generosity of golfers, donors, and volunteers, the following students were recipients of the annual golf scholarship during the 2020-2021 academic year: Colton Putman, Valerie Davis, Kayla Hale, Alex Higginbotham, Kara Kelsey, Olivia Logan, Shannon Longshore, Branigan McPeters, Cassie Norris, Rebecca Rotermund, Denver Satterlee, Anna Schrimsher, Tyler Stevens, Corbin Stueve, Kayla Thompson, and Ashlyn McDonald.

Athens State would like to express its sincerest gratitude to all donors and everyone who came together to make this event a success. The 31st Annual Golf Classic is scheduled for Thursday, September 22, 2022. ■



part-ner /pärtner/

One that is united or associated with another or others in an activity or a sphere of common interest.

In a society where goals and aspirations intersect at the corner of community, local partnerships are vital for growth – but nowhere more than in education.

Athens State University is working to develop and foster partnerships with local business and industry to lay the foundation of high-quality education for generations to come. Our recent partnership with Listerhill Credit Union is one of those building blocks.

Listerhill Credit Union (listerhill.com) was founded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama in 1952 to combat the growing issue of predatory lending practices to vulnerable plant workers of Reynolds Metals. Nearly 70 years later, Listerhill continues its mission of improving lives in communities by offering comprehensive financial products, employing sound


financial wellness. As a full-service financial cooperative with eighteen local branches, speedy online applications, a versatile mobile app, state-of-the-art Smart ATMs, and a nationwide shared branching network, Listerhill currently serves over 98,000 members across the country.

One of Listerhill's newest community initiatives includes providing new shoes to elementary school children through a program called Kicks for Kids (listerhill.com/foundation), funded through the Listerhill Foundation. Because many children throughout Tennessee and Alabama face poverty and a lack of proper shoes, Kicks for Kids provides a "step up" to improve behavior, learning, and confidence through a pair of name-brand athletic shoes (and five pairs of socks) given to every child in the school. In 2021 alone, Listerhill has provided nearly 1,600 pairs of shoes to four area elementary schools in north Alabama. Because Listerhill also serves



the Athens and Limestone County (Alabama) communities, Listerhill recently partnered with Athens State to provide \$25,000 for the University's Reading and Literacy Lab. This partnership contribution will allow for the purchase and provision of a smart board, books, software, games, journals, assessment tools, technology, and site visits so the Lab can better prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom.

The partnership not only extends to growing common membership and engagement, but it also seeks to add value to each relationship. Beginning in 2021, Athens State Alumni Association and Listerhill Credit Union partnered to provide access to Listerhill's financial products and services for anyone outside Listerhill's traditional field of membership (northwest Alabama and south central

 **It's all about We.**



Tennessee). Here's how it works:

- Regardless of where someone lives, individuals are now eligible to become a member of the credit union to apply for a loan or open an account through membership in the Athens State Alumni Association.
- Listerhill will pay for the first year of membership in Athens State Alumni Association and membership with Listerhill continues as long as someone wishes to remain a member.
- More information on this partnership (including benefits available to Athens State alumni, students, and faculty) is available at listerhill.com/athensstate.

As with any working partnership, we continue to look toward the future in enhancing opportunities

for growth. In addition to the aforementioned initiatives, Athens State University and Listerhill Credit Union are currently working together to provide even more free financial literacy courses to complement what the University offers to students and staff members for personal development. These course offerings will be online and in-person to accommodate the schedules and preferences of students and faculty.

Partnerships succeed as a result of sharing common values and striving together toward common goals. Athens State University, with the help of local partners like Listerhill Credit Union, will continue to advance the best interests of its students and the State of Alabama toward academic and professional excellence. ■

LEAVE A LEGACY TO HONOR THE PAST AND INVEST IN THE FUTURE

Invest in the future of Athens State University by becoming a Legacy Club member

Athens State University has a history of changing lives and shaping our communities. You can leave a lasting impression on the place that has left its mark on so many. By designating Athens State in your will or living trust, you can help ensure we continue to fulfill our mission of advancing students and the

State of Alabama through teaching, service, research, and other creative activities that empower students to make valuable contributions in their professional, civic, educational, and economic endeavors.

Charitable bequests are an ideal way to combine sound estate planning

with thoughtful giving. It is a way for your legacy to continue in perpetuity. A charitable bequest is an instruction of your will, or personal trust, to provide a future gift of cash or other assets to a charitable organization such as Athens State University, for the future benefit of students.

For more information, contact the Office of University Advancement at 256-233-8215 or advancement@athens.edu

FALL HEERF III GRANT FUND DISTRIBUTION

Athens State University distributed Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund III (HEERF III) grant funds for the Fall semester in the amount of \$623,424, which accounted for 40% of funds awarded. The other 60% (\$935,136) will be disbursed in the spring.

The funds were made available to every currently-enrolled Athens State student. While students with exceptional financial need were prioritized, each student received a minimum of \$100 in assistance. An application process for students who have additional need was available on the Athens State University website.

Athens State University recognizes the hardships the pandemic has placed on so many of its students, through lost income, healthcare costs, childcare issues, and more. Therefore, Athens State University is striving to ensure that students who need additional financial assistance to meet the needs brought on by the pandemic can apply for aid. While the initial disbursement was based on information students previously provided to the University, if there are additional needs students will be able to apply for additional funding if needs persist.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 was signed in March 2021, adding additional funds to the

Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund. This fund provides colleges and universities the means to provide support to students who saw financial hardships as a result of the pandemic and ensure learning continues during the pandemic. Hardships may include added technology expenses, lost wages, overdue charges on student accounts, healthcare costs, and unexpected childcare expenses, among others.

HEERF III aid acts like a grant; therefore, students will not have to pay back Athens State University or the federal government. Funding received can be used to assist students with financial needs such as educational costs, housing, food, technology, childcare, and healthcare expenses. ■

ATHENS STATE AWARDED \$2.8 MILLION FIPSE GRANT

Athens State University has been selected to receive a \$2,808,082.00 grant under the Higher Education Relief Fund. The purpose of the grant is to provide funding to institutions of higher education to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus.

Providing necessary technology and flexible learning opportunities will allow students the flexibility they require not only during the pandemic, but also in their normal lives. The University will expand the number of Active

HyFlex courses and sections offered, the number of students taught in Active HyFlex, upgrade classrooms, and provide professional development for faculty.

In order to better serve students, Athens State will use the funds received by the grant to better implement an Active HyFlex learning model that will allow for flexibility and opportunities for students to continue their education. This innovative approach has multiple phases to benefit students:

1. Athens State will provide all Pell Grant receiving students with an award that will allow them to purchase a laptop from the campus bookstore. By providing technology and accessibility, students will have flexibility to learn regardless of their location or possible time constraints. They will no longer be reliant on their employers, on-campus computer labs, library computers, or their phone for completion of their upper level course work.
2. Athens State will invest in six new Active HyFlex classrooms. In Fall 2020, Athens State converted one classroom to this format and began a pilot study with five faculty members each teaching one section. The pilot allowed the students to choose the delivery method of their instruction on a weekly basis to match their needs (traditional, synchronous online, asynchronous online). These classrooms will allow greater

student interaction, engagement, and access to instruction.

3. Athens State will invest in

faculty training and support.

The goal is to train faculty in active learning concepts, implementation of those concepts

in HyFlex instruction, and the technology needed to facilitate student and faculty interaction. ■

ATHENS STATE AND HUNTSVILLE HOSPITAL SYSTEM CREATE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Athens State University and the Huntsville Hospital System have finalized a Learning Partnership for all Huntsville Hospital Health System employees who wish to continue their education in the health field. The partnership will primarily focus on Athens State's RN to BSN program and Health Science programs including Health Care Management and Health Care Administration.

The Learning Partnership provides a financial incentive for RN's within the health system to complete their BSN degree at Athens State University. The professional BSN-prepared nurse is associated with improved patient care focused on quality, evidence-based practices, and an overall reduction in patient morbidity and mortality. The BSN degree provides expanded career advancement opportunities as well as advanced knowledge and skills for RN's. "The Learning Partnership is a great opportunity for both institutions," said Dr. Mark Reynolds, Assistant Professor of Nursing. "The health care organization will benefit by having more quality BSN-prepared



RN's caring for the consumers of healthcare which are those within the community."

As a Learning Partner, all employees of the Huntsville Hospital Health System, not just nurses, will be assisted in achieving their educational goals through accessible online and traditional classroom platforms and an affordable, low cost tuition structure. Benefits include:

- 10% tuition discount on all classes and waiver of the application fee
- Complimentary evaluation of previously earned educational credits and training/ professional certifications/ portfolio for consideration of transfer credit
- Complimentary access to our lab tutors/specialists in our statistics, math, and writing centers

These benefits also extend to parents, spouses, and children of the employee as well.

"We're excited to have the

Huntsville Hospital Health System as a Learning Partner," said Dr. Philip Way, President of Athens State University. "In addition to standard Learning Partner benefits, students will gain real world experience through internships at Huntsville Hospital, create connections for pathways in career placement, and further serve the needs of the North Alabama region."

In addition to the Learning Partnership, Athens State just completed and signed an Educational Affiliation Agreement with the Huntsville Hospital Health System for its BSN nursing students to complete clinical experiences with Huntsville Hospital and any of their affiliates, which includes numerous hospitals, healthcare facilities, and clinics. "This agreement provides immense opportunities for our BSN program students to engage in direct practice experiences to ensure a quality and professional BSN-prepared RN," said Dr. Reynolds. ■



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