

Alumni Connection

We invite you to join Jax State Alumni Connection, an engagement platform specifically designed to keep you connected to your fellow Jax State family and alumni. It's easy to discover how many Gamecocks are in your area and connect with past team members. To get started, scan the QR code. You'll see a red "click to get started" button below the video and explanation of Alumni Connection. Simply click on the red button, and you'll be able to connect using social media platforms or your email address. A code will be sent to your email for verification and within seconds, you will be on the path to connecting with fellow Jax State professionals and alumni.



Upcoming Dates (Preview)

AUGUST

27-28: Orlando, FL (UCF)

SEPTEMBER

4: State of the University at Otter Creek

9: Montgomery State of the University

13: Statesboro, GA (GA Southern)

19: 1975 Golden Gamecocks Reunion

20: Homecoming vs Murray State

24: Birmingham State of the University

27: Hattiesburg, MS (Southern Miss)

OCTOBER

7: Atlanta State of the University

28: Nashville State of the University

29: Murfreesboro, TN (MTSU)

NOVEMBER

14-15: Southerners Reunion

18: Huntsville State of the University

DECEMBER

10: Retiree Holiday Luncheon



Scan to view all upcoming events!



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GROWING GAMECOCKS

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

The Growing Gamecocks program is open to all alumni and friends of Jax State for the special children in their lives! Enrolled children will receive Jax State promotional items and/or a birthday card each year. Enrolled high school seniors will also be eligible to apply for Growing Gamecocks Legacy Scholarships upon being accepted to Jax State.

If you have a Growing Gamecock in mind, scan the QR code to enroll today!



Alumni Engagement

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FOREVER Gamecocks

The Gateway that connects our Retiree Family

Fall 2025

Ways to Engage

We invite you to the many opportunities we have this fall to network with one another as well as with alumni, friends, and Jax State administration and professionals.

Discover Alaska in 2026 with Fellow Gamecocks

Get ready for the adventure of a lifetime! The Cocky Travelers are setting sail for Alaska, May 30-June 6, 2026, and we'd love for you to join us. This 7-day journey aboard the Norwegian Bliss will begin in Seattle and take us to unforgettable destinations including Sitka, Juneau, Icy Strait Point, Ketchikan, and the awe-inspiring Dawes Glacier.

Alumni SPOTLIGHT



Judge Tomoko Akane, '90, ICC President

The Office of Alumni Engagement proudly spotlights Judge Tomoko Akane, President of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and one of Jacksonville State University's most distinguished graduates. A native of Nagoya, Japan, Judge Akane earned her Master of Science in Criminal Justice from Jax State in

Continued on next page

We're proud to partner with Fun Vacations Travel, featured in this newsletter as our Cocky Businesses, to make this experience seamless and memorable.

Cabin prices start at \$3,428 per couple for an interior stateroom or \$5,529 per couple for a balcony cabin. With just a \$125 per person deposit, fully refundable until January 30, 2026, you can secure your spot without worry.

Reconnect with friends, make new memories, and explore one of the most beautiful regions in the world—all with your Jax State family!

Set sail for Alaska with the Cocky Travelers!



May 30-June 6, 2026

Football Gamecock Gatherings and Fall Engagement Opportunities

Join us for Gamecock Gatherings as we prepare to cheer on Jax State during football season. Whether it's coming back to the Friendliest Campus in the South or traveling to a tailgate at UCF, joining us for a dinner near MTSU, or meeting us for a pre-game event at a local business for Georgia Southern and Southern Miss., we invite you to participate and meet fellow alumni and retirees. Additionally, please view the list of fall engagement opportunities we have scheduled on page 4 and make plans to come and meet other Gamecocks and reconnect with members of the Jax State family. Enjoy activities such as special retiree events (lunches, performances, and day-trips) and other opportunities such as golf, bowling, or join the Gamecock family for updates at our State of the University Addresses.

Greetings FOREVER GAMECOCKS!

We are so excited to launch our Retiree Newsletter, special to our network of retired Jax State family. We want you to continue to engage with Jax State, and we believe it is important to keep you informed and continue to share

news from our beloved university. Please know that you are always welcome to attend any of our engagement opportunities. I hope to see you soon!

Wendy L. Cash, PhD ('00)
Director of Alumni Engagement



Judge Tomoko Akane continued

1990. She now resides in The Hague, leading the ICC at a pivotal time in international justice.

Her journey to global law began as a young prosecutor in Japan, inspired to think internationally by a scholar in Hawaii. She chose Jax State for its strong graduate program, recalling how it “opened a new horizon” and praising the supportive faculty who shaped her experience.

Elected ICC President in March 2023, Judge Akane assumed leadership during turbulent times. Just days into her presidency, the ICC issued high-profile arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and others for the forced deportation of Ukrainian children—actions that placed Judge Akane and her colleagues on Russia’s wanted list. Despite political pressures, she remains steadfast: “Just stay calm and devote ourselves to our judicial work.”

Judge Akane emphasizes the importance of education in advancing justice, encouraging students to pursue their passions while upholding values like democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights. Her advice for future leaders? “Think about the person you want to be in ten or twenty years. Any profession is valuable if it contributes to society. Youth will save the global society.”

We proudly celebrate Judge Akane’s enduring impact and connection to Jax State.

Retiree SPOTLIGHT

Willard “Will” Jackson Butterworth, ‘70/’73

Will Butterworth of Talladega County earned a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Management from Jax State in 1970 and returned in 1973 for his master’s degree. He met his wife, Joan, a Heflin native, at Jax State in 1967. She graduated in 1971, the year they married. “We met and fell in love at Jax State,” Joan said. “It will always hold a place in our hearts.” Will went on to spend over 25 years working

at the Center for Economic Development in the College of Business and Industry.

Last year, the Butterworths joined an alumni trip to Normandy, France, to honor family members who gave their lives on D-Day. But visiting the Normandy American Cemetery proved challenging. Closed for the 80th anniversary memorial, the alumni tour bus was repeatedly turned away. Finally, the driver tried a back road that



Cocky Business

Any traveler can tell you that the key to a great vacation is preparation. Learning where to stay, where to eat and where not to do those things can take hours, but it’s essential for creating the best trip possible. “When my wife and I got married in 2012, we blended our family and took five of our six kids on our honeymoon cruise, along with other friends and family,” said Scott Elliott, a 2015 graduate. “I spent tens and tens of hours researching and trying to find the right cruise at the best price for us.” The couple fell in love with cruising and realized it was not just for those with deep pockets. “Once you figure out that the food is included and the largest portion of your cost on a family vacation

is food, it is comparable or cheaper to do a cruise or a vacation at an all-inclusive resort.”

Scott holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from Jax State—a degree some might not consider helpful in the travel industry. However, he says his higher education has given him many tools he uses daily in his career. “My degree from Jax State gave me the discipline to have the patience needed, and it honed my research ability so I can gather information faster, in order to help save customers money and time for their impending vacations.” In addition, Elliott notes that his video and photo editing skills, along with his writing skills received at Jax State, have helped Fun Vacations Travel build their client base.

In 2020, Scott and Julie decided to open their own full-service travel agency. Today, they have several agents employed in five states and are seeking to become leaders in what they call the “mom-and-pop” travel business.

If you’re interested in supporting this Cocky Business, visit Fun Vacations Travel at funvacationstravel.com.



ended behind the cemetery—also roped off.

“But we’d come more than 4,000 miles,” said Will, who turned 80 in November. “I wasn’t going to let some rope keep me out. I had relatives buried there, and I was going to see those graves.”

Navigating 28 acres of rolling farmland and 4,404 graves was daunting, but the younger travelers helped Will locate his family’s resting places. “If it wasn’t for those young people, I’d still be wandering around,” he said.

By late afternoon, he found the graves. “It was incredible ... just seeing those names,” he said. “It was a hard trip, but worth it.”

What the Butterworths discovered along the way was more than history—it was a deeply moving reminder of sacrifice, service, and the connections that last a lifetime.

University UPDATES

Forensics Facilities Continue to Advance at Jax State

Last fall, Jax State celebrated the dedication of Ramona Wood Hall as the new home for the Department of Criminal Justice and Forensic Investigation. Guests explored cutting-edge spaces like the mock courtroom, mock crime scene house, and the H. Dean Buttram, Jr. Lecture Hall.

Now, the department has taken another major step forward with the cadaver lab officially operational, providing students with rare, hands-on learning opportunities that set Jax State apart in applied forensics education. Combined with plans for a state-of-the-art digital forensics lab, these resources ensure students are prepared for real-world careers in criminal justice and forensic investigation.



Jax State Earns High Ranking for In-State Freshman Enrollment

Reported recently, Jacksonville State University ranked fourth among Alabama colleges enrolling the most in-state high school graduates for Fall 2024, according to data from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. Despite its smaller size of 9,955 students, Jax State closely follows the University of Alabama, Auburn, and UAB—each with far larger enrollments. The university was the top choice for graduates in Calhoun, Cleburne, St. Clair, and Talladega counties, reinforcing its strong regional influence. Statewide, public universities saw a 2.6% increase in enrollment, with Jax State contributing to the upward trend. Its position near the top of the list underscores its importance as a leading destination for Alabama students. Known as the Friendliest Campus in the South, Jax State continues to blend accessibility, community support, and academic excellence, making it one of the top choices for Alabama high school graduates.

West Village Housing Project Reaches Topping-Off Milestone

Jacksonville State University celebrated a major milestone on July 15, 2025, with the topping-off ceremony for the West Village Housing Project, marking the placement of the final structural beam on what will soon become the university’s largest residence hall.

Located at the western gateway of campus, the 700-bed, apartment-style complex is designed for upperclassmen and will include full kitchens or kitchenettes, student organization spaces, and chapter rooms overlooking the soccer and baseball facilities.

University leaders, construction partners, and community members gathered to commemorate the progress since breaking ground in April.

West Village is scheduled to open in Fall 2026, complementing the recently completed North Village freshman housing and further transforming the campus living experience.

Giving Back

We are excited to announce our new campaign, “It’s a Jax State of Mind.” The pillars of the campaign are to enhance the student experience, strengthen our academic reputation, and focus on athletic programming and championships. With these three pillars, our mission is to remember and honor the past, transform the present, and shape the future.

As part of the campaign, we aim to increase scholarship support, provide meeting space for students where they can collaborate and build relationships that last a lifetime, and provide a better experience for our Gamecock fans, community, and athletes.

As part of the promise to enhance the student experience and shape our future, creating a scholarship is one of the most meaningful ways to support Jax State students for generations to come. For as little as

\$83 per month, you can establish an annual namesake scholarship that makes a direct impact. Whether honoring a loved one or supporting a specific program, your scholarship can open doors for future Gamecocks. To learn more about starting a namesake scholarship, contact the Office for Philanthropy at 256-782-5306 or Roseh@jsu.edu

JAX STATE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
Jacksonville State University



Join today!

Even if you are not a graduate of Jax State, retirees can join the Alumni Association, too! Show your Jax State spirit with membership swag and receive discounts at The Caf and other local and national businesses with a membership!

It's a
JAX STATE
of Mind