

Upcoming Event Dates

SEPTEMBER
22: State of the University, Rainbow City, AL
29: State of the University, Birmingham, AL
OCTOBER
6: Murder Mystery Dinner, Gadsden, AL
7: Gamecock Gathering at KSU, Kennesaw, GA
15: State of the University, Nashville, TN
27: State of the University, Montgomery, AL
30-November 1: International House 80th Reunion
NOVEMBER
6: Golden Gamecocks Class of 1976 Class Reunion
6: ROTC Alumni Banquet
7: HOMECOMING vs Sam Houston
12: State of the University, Huntsville, AL
14: Gamecock Gathering at WKU, Bowling Green, KY
20-21: Southerners 70th Anniversary Reunion
DECEMBER
7: Retirees Holiday Luncheon



Scan to view all engagement opportunities!



Thank you to all who have purchased the Jax State license plate for your vehicle as you’ve renewed this year! Alabama residents can also purchase a motorcycle tag and vessel tag. Whether you’re about to renew or need to renew next year, make a note to share your Jax State spirit on the road and water! Proceeds from the tags allow the Alumni Association to provide scholarships to students.



OFFICE OF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT
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GROWING GAMECOCKS

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY.

The Growing Gamecocks program is open to all Jax State retirees, alumni, friends and family who want to enroll 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 2026

Ways to Engage

Fall semester is starting, and the campus is bustling with students. As we welcome everyone, whether it’s new students, returning students, or faculty and staff, two new buildings have been completed and will add more to the college and campus experience.

West Village Residence Hall opened its doors to our upperclassmen, and The Randy Owen Center for the Performing Arts (The ROC) held its grand opening in May. You’ll read about both in our “Around Campus” section, but you are welcome to come back to campus and tour West Village and attend a performance scheduled at The ROC.

In the last newsletter, the Alumni Engagement Office was preparing to move from Kennamer Hall to a new location along Pelham Road. We have officially completed the move, and you are invited to visit with us and enjoy looking at the memorabilia that has been in storage for the past eight years.

We are now located at 504 Pelham Road, right next to the Wesley Foundation. Our red “Alumni House” sign is in our front yard.

I invite you back to campus to celebrate Homecoming on November 7. The Annual Retiree Holiday Luncheon will be held on campus on December 7. Join us for these engagement opportunities as well as others that you will see noted on the back of the newsletter. Since the spring, the Alumni Engagement Office has hosted 25 events and has interacted with more than 800 alumni, retirees, friends, and family.

Additionally, thanks to the generosity of our supporters and those who purchase our J-Tag license plate, the Alumni Association awarded 49 scholarships for the 2026-2027 school year. Thanks to all who have participated in our activities and engagement opportunities.

We have more exciting news! In May 2027, the alumni office will be

joining Jax State’s A Cappella Choir for the 14th International Johannes Brahms Choir Festival in Germany! I encourage you to travel with us and create a lifetime of memories.

Visit Vienna, Prague and Leipzig before concluding the trip in Wernigerode for the choir festival and competition.

Trip fees include accommodations, airfare, group transportation, sightseeing activities, daily breakfast, choir performances, and a celebration meal with the A Cappella Choir.

Contact Dr. Philip Copeland with Travel Collegiate, LLC, if you need registration assistance at philip@travelcollegiate.com. To learn more about the trip and register, visit https://tri.ps/FFeee.

Alumni Spotlight

Briaunna Buckner Durhal, Criminal Justice/Public Administration (‘15 & ‘18)

Briaunna Buckner Durhal was recently recognized as one of Jax State’s inaugural 22 Under 40 Young Alumni. She has earned significant professional achievements, excelling professionally, and has demonstrated a commitment to leadership, service, and community and university engagement.

She graduated from Jax State in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and in 2018 with a Master of Public Administration, Magna Cum Laude. During her time at the university, Durhal was a member of the Women’s Basketball team and also the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.



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

Greetings, Forever Gamecocks!

As summer is winding down, we are gearing up for an exciting fall season. If you have not visited campus lately, I invite you to come and spend some time with us.

As the alumni team travels this fall, I hope you will make plans to join us, meet other

Gamecocks, and reminisce about your time here on campus.

We have some fun and informative engagements coming up, and I hope you’ll make plans to attend.

Briaunna Buckner Durhal continued

Durhal has worked as an associate at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP in Chicago, Illinois, and represented Fortune 100 companies in high-stakes litigation from inception through appeal.

She has represented a range of clients in major investigations, trials, and appeals throughout the country, including clients in the information technology, automotive, e-commerce, beverage, and entertainment industries. Her extensive work experience expands across all phases of litigation, including involvement in the briefing and oral argument preparation for an 800,000-member class product defect case.

Prior to joining Jones Day in 2025, Durhal clerked on the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the D.C. and Sixth Circuits.

She is active in her community, serving as a board member of The Appellate Project, and maintains an active pro bono practice.



Alumni Association



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!

Retiree Spotlight

Dr. Ouida Susie (Francis) Dempsey, '65

For Dr. Ouida Susie (Francis) Dempsey, a Jax State 1965 alumna and professor emerita, music has been a fulfilling career and lifelong love. She has enriched the lives of Jax State students and the surrounding community with her music, teaching piano and other courses including music theory, ear training, class strings, and piano pedagogy from 1968 to 1996.

She recalled the camaraderie and collaboration among faculty and students, and the joy that was shared through music.



"Teaching music becomes your life, and if you love music, you enjoy collaboration with other musicians. Giving of yourself to guide students and make music is what you live for," Dr. Dempsey said. "Several of my piano students were able to pursue graduate degrees and become excellent piano teachers, composers and music educators."

Dempsey has lived close to the university throughout her life and has continued to support Jax

Cocky Business

After 25 years in the financial services industry, Jax State alum Stephen LaFollette ('87) saw an opportunity to build something personal and impactful. In 2020, he formed Pine Bend Wealth Management in Anniston, Alabama, and has committed to serving his community ever since.

Pine Bend Wealth Management offers wealth management services through financial planning, savings plans for children's education, investment planning, retirement planning, estate planning and asset management.

"Founding Pine Bend Wealth Management allowed me to create a firm centered on relationships where each client receives thoughtful, individually tailored guidance with their specific goals in mind," LaFollette said. "I wanted to close the gap between large financial institutions and bring the kind of hands-on, accessible service that people truly value right to their backyard. In building my own practice,

I've been able to stay closely connected to the community I love while delivering a higher level of care, trust, and long-term partnership for the families I'm privileged to serve."

LaFollette intentionally curates the feel of the office with help from his team and family, making sure visitors know exactly what to expect and who the team is – genuine, approachable, and deeply invested in the people they serve.

At the end of the day, it is his clients' goals that matter most. "Our role is to help design a clear roadmap and then stay alongside them –keeping them on track as life evolves."



State and the local community since retirement. She and her late husband, Wayne Dempsey, Jax State alumnus and professor of mathematics, continued to participate in the Jax State Civic Chorale, served on advisory boards (Arts and Humanities), and were able to provide financial support through various scholarships and donations, including her colored pencil art donated to the Jax State 1883 Red Tie Silent Auction and Dinner. The Dempseys made significant contributions by the naming of The ROC's Rehearsal/Lecture Suite, and the piano studio in Mason Hall is also named in her honor because they donated a grand piano to the Department of Music.

She serves as a church organist (pianist) at the First Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville and has continued to teach piano to pre-college-age students from home, some entering Jax State on music scholarship. She stays engaged with Jax State through the Retiree Network, and attends and donates to the many performing arts ensembles.

Most recently, she has formed various clubs to support other pianists in the community. "This has been one of the most joyful and surprisingly fulfilling musical experiences I have had as a music teacher!" Dempsey said.

University Updates

Jax State Celebrates Opening of West Village Residence Hall

Jax State celebrated another milestone in its ongoing campus transformation with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and community open house celebrating the completion of West Village, the university's largest residence hall and one of the largest construction projects in institutional history.

Located on the west side of campus, West Village features 717 beds across 206 apartment- and suite-style units within a 256,545-square-foot, four-story complex. The development

includes ample parking, 16 meeting rooms for student organizations, study spaces, social lounges, a game room, and other amenities designed to enhance the upperclass student experience.

Jax State Opens Randy Owen Center for the Performing Arts

Jacksonville State University officially opened the Randy Owen Center for the Performing Arts (ROC) on May 27, 2026, marking a historic milestone for the university and unveiling a performance season bringing nationally recognized artists, educational programming, and cultural events to Northeast Alabama. Named in honor of Jax State alumnus, Board of Trustees member, and ALABAMA lead vocalist Randy Owen, the center stands as a major investment in arts education and cultural enrichment for the region.

Jax State Partners with Sanders Flight Training Center to Support Aviation Program

The university approved a partnership with Sanders Flight Training Center, an FAA Part 141 flight school based in Jasper, to provide flight instruction for

students pursuing the Commercial Aviation concentration in Jax State's new Bachelor of Science in Aviation program. Grounded in a strong foundation of aviation science, safety, and industry best practices, the program offers three concentrations to support students' career goals: Aviation Management, Commercial Aviation, and Public Safety Aviation.

Jax State Partners with APOSTC to Launch Innovative Law Enforcement Workforce Pipeline

The partnership creates a direct pathway for students to graduate with both a bachelor's degree and Alabama law enforcement certification. This makes Jax State the first institution in Alabama to offer the model, allowing qualified criminal justice students pursuing the university's law enforcement academy minor to complete the academic requirements for a bachelor's degree while simultaneously meeting the state's training and certification standards needed for employment as a law enforcement officer.

Read more at jsu.edu/news

Giving Back

In 2024, the university launched the "It's a Jax State of Mind" \$100 million-dollar comprehensive campaign. Our supporters have shown their Jax State spirit and risen to the challenge. To date, \$55.7 million has been secured toward the campaign goal. Thank you to all who have supported the university, whether it's been to come back to visit, participated in alumni engagement activities, or supported campaign endeavors.

Our Red Tie Dinner and Auction took on a new format in 2026, allowing all alumni to purchase tickets rather than limiting attendance to invited guests. The auction featured 100 items, 19 of which were live auction experiences. We raised a record-breaking \$177,395.50 in one evening, with proceeds benefiting various departments, programming, alumni networks, and our 1883 Greatest

Needs Fund. Our 1883 Red Tie Dinner and Auction will take place on Friday, February 5, 2027 – mark your calendars and plan to join us for another wonderful evening that supports Jax State, our growth, and our students.

It's a
JAX
STATE
of Mind

If you are interested in supporting our campaign endeavors, please visit [It's a Jax State of Mind](https://itsajaxstateofmind.com).

