



# NEWSLETTER

## *President's Pen*

Dear Piedmont University Community,

Congratulations to our graduates! We are proud of all of your accomplishments and excited to see the impact you will make.

As the semester winds down and the holiday season begins, I hope you're able to slow the pace a bit and enjoy some well-deserved rest. May the holiday season bring you peace, joy, and renewed hope as we look ahead to the new year together.

Warmest wishes and happy holidays,  
Marshall M. Criser, III

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# "I Get to Do This" - Valerie Romero's Journey to Leading

by Terrie Ellerbee



With her best boy, Pete

By the time Valerie Romero entered her senior year at Piedmont University, she had already worked three jobs, interned at a domestic violence shelter, led new student orientation, and helped a small business transition to a digital insurance system. But perhaps the most remarkable thing about Romero is not how much she does—it's how deeply she understands why she does it.

"I don't say, 'I have to do this,'" she said. "I say, 'I get to do this.'"

That simple shift in language tells you everything about her. Valerie is a first-generation college student, double majoring in criminal justice and sociology with a minor in criminology. She hopes to earn her master's in social work and already serves as president of Tri-Alpha, the honor society for First-Gen students at Piedmont. But her road here hasn't been smooth.

Her freshman year nearly broke her. From the beginning, Valerie's college experience was complicated. She started strong with a summer bridge program and moved into the newly completed Mystic Hall. But within weeks, her living situation became untenable. There was a long stretch when Valerie didn't know if she could stay at Piedmont. But she did.

And then she got sick.

A series of health crises — COVID, strep, flu, and complications from a chronic skin condition — forced Valerie to take medical leave and miss two months of class. Still, she returned in time for finals and passed every class but one.

"I had to retake statistics," she said. "But I still don't know how I got a 64 after missing half the semester. That felt like a win."

What got her through? People like Sean Williamson in Counseling Services. Lyn St. Louis in the Student Success Center. Her parents, who always told her it was OK to fall apart — once — but then she had to get back up.

"My parents didn't finish college," she says. "But they told me, you are going."

They didn't say if. They said when.

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# "I Get to Do This" - Valerie Romero's Journey to Leading

by Terrie Ellerbee

Valerie didn't know she was a First-Gen student until someone at Piedmont used the term. She went home and asked. Her mom and stepdad confirmed: "Yeah, we didn't finish." Valerie describes the moment like a light turning on.

"It was like learning a new word for something I already felt," she said. "It didn't change who I was. It helped me understand who I was."

Once she claimed the First-Gen identity, she claimed it fully. She joined Tri-Alpha and now leads the organization. She dreams of organizing a special trip— a museum, an aquarium, anything that gives other First-Gen students the kind of firsts she's had to find on her own.

"You don't always realize what you've never experienced until someone takes you there," she said.

As a survivor advocate at Circle of Hope, Valerie works with women and children navigating trauma.

"Sometimes a mom just needs someone to watch her kids so she can go to a doctor's appointment," Valerie said. "I can be that person."

Valerie's story is about survival, yes. But it's more than that. It's about choosing to lead after you've barely made it through yourself. It's about understanding that pain doesn't disqualify you from helping others — in fact, it might be the reason you're called to do it.

"I want to be someone else's person," she said. "The way Sean was for me. The way Lyn was. The way my parents were. I want someone to look at me one day and say, 'because of you, I kept going.'"

"And maybe they'll say, 'Because of you, I believed I could do more.'"



Valerie's family: Dad, AJ; brother, Gracin; mom, Crystal; with her best good boy, Pete.

For more information about Piedmont's Student Support Services, click [here](#).



# New Role, Still Winning

by Joseph Garwood



They say when everything is in the process of changing, the slightest hint of familiarity can bring a sense of calm.

There is no doubt that it has been a transformative fall semester for Piedmont Athletics. In late July, it was announced that longtime Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Jim Peebles was departing. Weeks later, Jamie Purdy was chosen to lead Piedmont Athletics into the future as the new AD.

Best known as a championship winning coach and leader of the Piedmont women's basketball program for 20 seasons, Purdy's accolades are abundant. She has raised trophies across three different conferences, winning three Great South Athletic Conference Championships (2007, 2008, 2011), three USA South Championships (2017, 2018, 2019) and last season, she added one more to her ledger, cutting down the nets for the first time in the Collegiate Conference of the South.

Honored to take on her new role to help the department continue to grow and evolve, she expressed gratitude, "It is a tremendous honor to be selected to lead a department that means so much to me," Purdy said. "This place has been home for more than two decades, and I am excited to continue building on the foundation of success."

While navigating the new challenges of leading the department, she was on the cusp of a significant milestone on the court. Beginning the season with 398 wins as a head coach, she needed two more to reach the prestigious 400 mark for her career.

On the weekend of November 15-16, the Lions played host to the CCS / SAA Classic. After the Lions dispatched SAA foe Sewanee in the first game of the event, Purdy sat on the cusp of the milestone accomplishment, but a tough Berry team stood in the way.

In a classic defensive battle, Purdy led her team to a dramatic two-point victory, with a crucial defensive stand on the final possession to capture number 400.



# 37th Annual Lessons and Carols



Piedmont's 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Lessons and Carols welcomed over 900 guests to our historic University Chapel for two nights of music and worship. Singers from Piedmont's Chorale and Cherokee Bluff High School Bella Voce were accompanied by local musicians as they performed hymns. Interspersed were readings of the Christmas story and lessons by lectors from the Piedmont community. We are grateful for the privilege of putting this program on for the community and thank you for your continued support.

# Thank you for an Incredible Giving Day!



Piedmont University's Giving Day campaign was a success once again this year! To date, we have raised \$205,000 - surpassing our \$125,000 goal - and donations from over 200 individual supporters. This campus-wide effort to address student needs in the colleges, athletics, and student support services engaged even more students, faculty, staff, trustees and alumni donors than in the past. Students will directly benefit through the food pantry, travel opportunities, research funding, course equipment, emergency food boxes, and scholarships.

Athletics raised \$25,600 toward their hefty goal of \$65,000 to build a much-needed soccer/lacrosse press box and are still working hard to get there. The Giving Day campaign [link](#) will remain open as we continue to accept donations for all of Piedmont colleges, student support services, and athletics.

To everyone who donated, shared, volunteered, or cheered us on — thank you. Your generosity and support made this Giving Day truly special. Because of you, we're able to continue our mission and make an even greater impact in our Piedmont community. We are so grateful for every contribution, big or small. Together, we make a difference in the lives of our students.

# Thank you!



# Merry Christmas

Wishing you a holiday season filled with warmth, laughter, and cherished moments with loved ones!  
— President Marshall and First Lady Kimberly Criser

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For event details, or to view the full calendar, please visit [here](#).

## Calendar of Events

### JANUARY

1/22 Art Reception: Handwork 2026: Jennifer Graff and Thaddeus Erdhaul  
1/30 Admissions Counselor Day

### FEBRUARY

2/1 Jeri-Mae G, Astolfi, piano  
2/16 Admissions Open House  
2/19-22 Theatre: The Revolutionists  
2/28 Pro Musica Singers, directed by Wallace Hinson

### MARCH

3/9-13 Spring Break  
3/17 Forensic Science & Criminal Justice Preview  
3/19 Piedmont Athletic Lions (PAL) Games  
3/26 Piedmont University Singers  
3/29 Louise Bass, organ