

NEWSLETTER

President's Pen

February 2026

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Dear Piedmont University Community,

I am excited to share that with President Trump's recent signing of the 2026-2027 budget; Piedmont is scheduled to receive \$608,000 for materials and supplies in support of our Forensic Sciences students. Our request was championed by Georgia's US Senator Jon Ossoff.

The request was an alternate track to our Federal Research Grant efforts. Through the efforts of John Lanneau, Kayla Neal, Renee Fargason, and Sandra Maughon, Piedmont received what is now the most significant grant of federal funds in our history. This directly benefits our students and the communities they will ultimately serve across our state.

I hope this good news puts an extra spring in your step as we all shake off the winter blues and push towards the promise of spring. There are lots of opportunities to get involved on campus in the coming months - PAL Games, the Disaster Drill, Symposium, athletics events, and a host of fine arts events in theatre, music, and the arts, I urge you to take advantage of the incredible variety of community offerings this university provides.

Sincerely,
Marshall M. Criser, III

Piedmont's Cycling Team Spent Winter Break Down Under

by Grace Wills



Piedmont may have taken a break from classes in December, but the cycling team was busy competing in Tasmania on one of the biggest stages their sport has to offer. As head cycling coach Jame Carney puts it: "we don't have an off-season."

Shortly before the new year arrived, the coach and his team embarked on a trip across the globe to race in the Tasmanian Christmas Carnivals, which include Burnie, the world's longest-running cycling race. (The carnivals also often include wood chopping, running, and rock drilling!) There, the team competed against and alongside some of the world's top-ranking cyclists, achieving a series of impressive results such as senior Preston Eye's first-place finish in the men's scratch race. Across seven days and several races, the athletes produced high placements in races with internationally ranked cyclists.

Opportunities like this are rare for most college athletes, but Coach Carney tries to make them commonplace for his team. The two-time Olympian understands the value of competing on the world stage and developing his students. Indeed, several athletes, including Eye, reported growth in their performance that even surprised their parents.

Graduate student and assistant coach Emma Frost and Louie Schramm concurred; Frost has tried new forms of cycling since joining the team, and Schramm has risen from a category 4 to a category 2 racer (with category 1 being the strongest).



As proud as they are of their achievements, "it's the memories that last more than the results," says Coach Carney. In agreement, Frost and Schramm first recalled the array of sightseeing and wildlife watching they got to do with their friends.

"We're a close-knit team; we spend a lot of weekends together and generally have a community vibe," said Frost, "so it was cool to take that across the world."

Piedmont Student and Professor Featured in Art Exhibition

by Grace Wills

Piedmont student Davis Knight and Professor Chris Kelly are featured in an exhibition at the Bascom Visual Arts Center. The show, entitled Emergence, highlights the role of mentorship in art education, "emphasizing the transformative role of teaching and guidance in nurturing artistic growth."

Knight and Kelly's ceramics submission is displayed among the works of over 30 other student-professor pairs from universities across the Southeast. The exhibition is on display January 17 through April 25. A free public reception will take place Saturday, March 21 from 3 to 5 PM.

The Bascom is located in Highlands, NC. For 40 years, it has served as a vital cultural resource for Western North Carolina and continues to build on that legacy through work and advocacy for the arts.

Click on this link for more information: [Knight and Kelly's ceramics submission is displayed among the works of over 30 other student-professor pairs from universities across the Southeast. The exhibition is on display January 17 through April 25. A free public reception will take place Saturday, March 21 from 3 to 5 PM.](#)

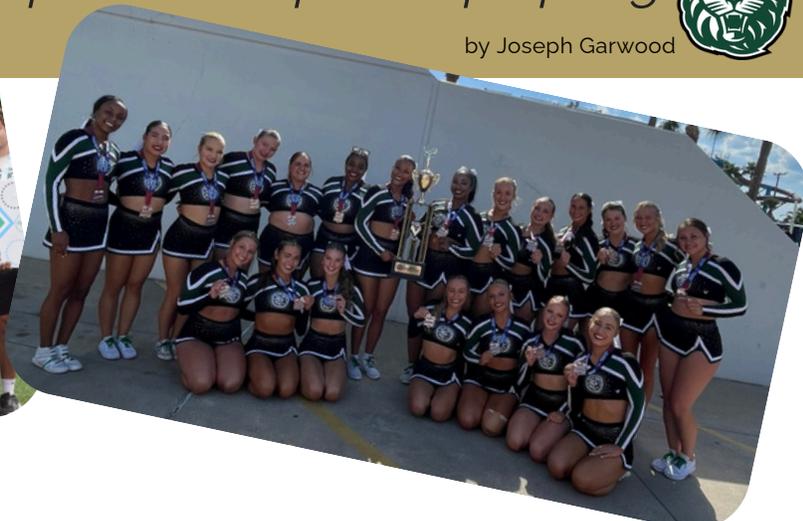


Davis Knight is a senior Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Management major, an Art minor, and a member of the Men's Soccer team. Chris Kelly is a Professor of Art and the Associate Dean of Fine Arts and Communications.

We are so proud of their selection for the exhibition!



by Joseph Garwood



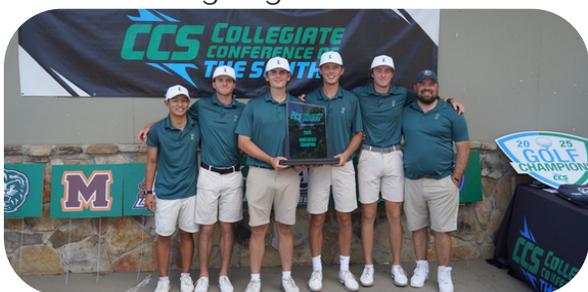
As the calendar turns to February, Piedmont Athletics is buzzing with anticipation as winter sports conclude, and spring sports begin, with multiple title defenses on the line.

Men's and women's basketball are in the heart of conference play, with each closing the seasons with a crucial four-game homestand. Women's basketball will aim to cut down the nets again and defend its 2025 CCS Tournament Title.

Also pursuing a repeat title is Piedmont Men's Swimming, which raced ahead of the pack to capture last season's Independent South Swimming Conference Championship. The women's team will look to reclaim a trophy as the conference meet takes place this weekend in Columbus, Georgia.



As one season concludes, new opportunities begin. Piedmont women's tennis will seek to extend its unbeaten streak in CCS play after winning the past three regular season conference crowns and two of the three conference tournaments. Men's tennis has been eying a championship as well, having reached the CCS Tournament Final in each of the past three seasons, and will look to break through in 2026. Track and Field has its eyes on continued dominance as well, with the men striving for a CCS Championship four-peat and the women looking to go back-to-back.



Men's golf will strive to for a CCS three-peat and is ranked in the top 25 nationally entering the spring season. Women's golf is also knocking on the door of the national rankings as Erin Donovan will strive to build upon her record-breaking career.

Elsewhere, men's and women's lacrosse are expected to have strong teams in 2026, with both predicted second in the USA South Preseason Coaches Polls. Baseball and softball are coming off winning seasons and have been picked in the top half of the league in the CCS Preseason Polls.

Piedmont Cheerleading will take center stage later this month, heading to Florida for NCA Nationals after bringing home a second place finish in 2025.

To stay up to date on all information regarding Piedmont University Athletics, follow the Lions on [X @PiedmontLions](https://twitter.com/PiedmontLions), [Instagram: @PiedmontLions](https://www.instagram.com/PiedmontLions).

Gracie Tipton: Piedmont Bright Star Alumna Lights the Way for Young Performers

by Terrie Ellerbee



Tipton In 9 to 5

Gracie Tipton was majoring in musical theatre when she found herself drawn to something unexpected: the classroom. While working as a choreographer at a high school, she discovered that teaching, mentoring, and building relationships with students mattered just as much to her as performing. That realization led her to Piedmont University and a career in theatre education.

"Piedmont is one of only two schools in Georgia that offer a Drama Education degree," Tipton said. "Once I knew I wanted to teach theatre, transferring felt like the right move."

Almost immediately, it was clear that Tipton had made the right choice. When she arrived on campus, the Piedmont Theatre Department was preparing to produce *Bright Star*. Tipton auditioned for the lead — her longtime dream role of Alice — not knowing what to expect as a new transfer student.

"I didn't know if I would have a real chance," she said. "And then I got it. I was over the moon."

The moment was special for a couple of reasons. First, she hadn't performed in more than a year because of COVID. Second, Piedmont did not sideline a drama education major who wanted to perform.

"At other schools, performance majors often get preference in casting. At Piedmont, I wasn't put in a box. I was able to grow as a teacher and continue honing my performance skills," Tipton said.

She went on to perform in several major productions, including *RENT*, *A Piece of My Heart*, and *9 to 5*.

All the while, she gained confidence as a future educator. She served as the Theatre Department's social media and marketing manager, including for *9 to 5*, which set a box office record at Piedmont. She collaborated with faculty members to create a summer drama camp at Piedmont, directed a completely student-led production (*Where the Sidewalk Ends*), and gained real-world experience managing programs from the ground up.

"I was trusted with real responsibility. Those leadership roles made a huge difference in how prepared I felt entering the classroom," Tipton said.



Tipton as Alice in *Brightstar*

Tipton has taken her talent, passion, and experience to Banks County High School as its Theatre and Drama teacher and director and recently attracted an audience of 250 people for a student production.

Gracie Tipton: Piedmont Bright Star Alumna Lights the Way for Young Performers, cont. from page 2



"I am truly starting from zero, and already, I can see how much progress we've made in the school's culture," Tipton said.

The young educator said Piedmont's personalized approach to learning helped set her up for success. Tipton came to the university with classroom experience from her choreography work, and she was no stranger to directing. Dr. Kathy Blandin, theatre professor and department chair, tailored coursework to build on Tipton's experience and help her meet specific goals.

"Dr. Blandin really created the curriculum around what I needed," Tipton said. "Instead of focusing only on directing or performance, we worked on things like communicating with parents, managing small budgets, and building relationships with administrators and the community."

Tipton's success reflects both her passion and the power of Piedmont's Drama Education program. It is one of only two in the state and has a near 100 percent placement rate for graduates.

"Piedmont gives you intimate, one-on-one learning experiences that you don't get everywhere," Tipton said. "They prepare you for what the job actually looks like — not just what it looks like on paper."

Tipton's story reflects the student experience at Piedmont, where talent is nurtured, curiosity is encouraged, and learners are empowered to step confidently into their futures as leaders.

For more information about Piedmont's Drama Education degree, click [here](#).

Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

- 2/16 Admissions Open House
- 2/19-22 Theatre: The Revolutionists
- 2/28 Piedmont Goes Red 5K
- 2/28 Museum Community Workshop: Kids' Arts & Crafts with Imani Spence
- 2/28 Pro Musica Singers, directed by Wallace Hinson

MARCH

- 3/5 Art Reception: Handwork 2026: Jennifer Graff & Thaddeus Erdhaul
- 3/9-13 Spring Break
- 3/17 Forensic Science & Criminal Justice Preview
- 3/19 Piedmont Athletic Lions (PAL) Games
- 3/26 Piedmont University Singers
- 3/28 Museum Community Workshop: Sculpture Workshop with Normando Ismay
- 3/29 Louise Bass, organ

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