



# NEWSLETTER

## *President's Pen*

Summer 2026

### IN THIS ISSUE

Student Success	2
Faculty Feature	3
Athletics	4
Alumni Awards	5
Upcoming Events	6

Dear Piedmont University Community,

I'm excited to share with you that our campus is brimming with activity! Piedmont is hosting three FCA sports camps – a running camp and two football camps - a Music Chamber Retreat, a STEM camp, a Musical Theater camp, two Forensic Science camps (one for teachers and the other Crime Scene), various additional Piedmont-sponsored summer camps, and will be hosting our first wedding in the chapel! These events bring over 1,500 young adults and law enforcement officers to our beautiful campus, providing an excellent opportunity to showcase everything we have to offer.

Additionally, we have three summer orientation opportunities for new freshmen in June and July, summer commencement is right around the corner, and we're preparing to welcome the Fall 2026 freshman class on Saturday, August 8.

I wish you all an enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,  
Marshall M. Criser, III





# Commencement

## May 2026

by Grace Wills



On Friday, May 8, Piedmont University hosted spring Commencement celebrations! 330 students graduated — 221 with bachelor's degrees, 77 with master's degrees, 29 with specialist degrees, and 3 with doctorate degrees. At the first ceremony, 79 students received degrees from the College of Arts and Sciences, and 93 from the College of Education. At the second ceremony, 43 students received degrees from the Walker College of Business, and 115 from the College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

We are especially proud that 38% of this graduating class are first-generation students. This number reflects so much hard work from these students to be the first in their families to attend college, and an ongoing commitment from Piedmont to make education accessible and affordable.



# Art, Heart, and a Lifetime of Impact: Dr. Jackie Ellett's Dedication to Art Education

by Terrie Ellerbee



When Dr. Jackie Ellett changed her major from scientific and medical illustration to art education, it wasn't a pivot. It was a revelation. "Teaching, I discovered, is deeply relational, profoundly human, and unapologetically impactful. It is about presence, service, and creating those spaces for others — our students — to see themselves as capable and valued. Looking back, my path toward art education was not a departure from my desire to make a difference — it was the most honest expression of it," she said.

That spirit of purposeful service has defined more than four decades of Dr. Ellett's career, and since 2013, it has shaped the art education programs at Piedmont University in immeasurable ways. A professor of art education, she is one of the most recognizable and consequential figures in her field in Georgia and beyond.

Before joining Piedmont, Dr. Ellett spent 32 years as an art teacher and leader in Gwinnett County Schools. She taught in large Title I elementary schools, sometimes reaching more than 1,600 students each week. She served on the teacher advisory council for several superintendents and worked at both state and national levels in art education. In 1991, Dr. Ellett began her work in higher education as an adjunct. When she joined Piedmont — first as an adjunct in 2010, then as a Teaching Fellow, and eventually as full-time faculty — her motivation was clear: to extend her reach.

"I believe that all children deserve the best education we can offer, and by mentoring and teaching at Piedmont, the impact becomes further reaching," she said.

Named Graduate Advisor of the Year in 2023, Dr. Ellett brings to advising the same philosophy she brings to teaching: put the student at the center. At Piedmont's most recent commencement, she was honored as Outstanding Undergraduate Advisor of the Year — making her a recognized exemplar of advising at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Her goal is for students to develop genuine autonomy and grow in their own decision-making — to leave not just certified, but confident.

"My greatest success is in how my students taught me and helped me grow as a human," she said. "I learned forgiveness, humility, grace, quiet resilience, perseverance, and hope — from students at every level. My many, many students have made me a better person."



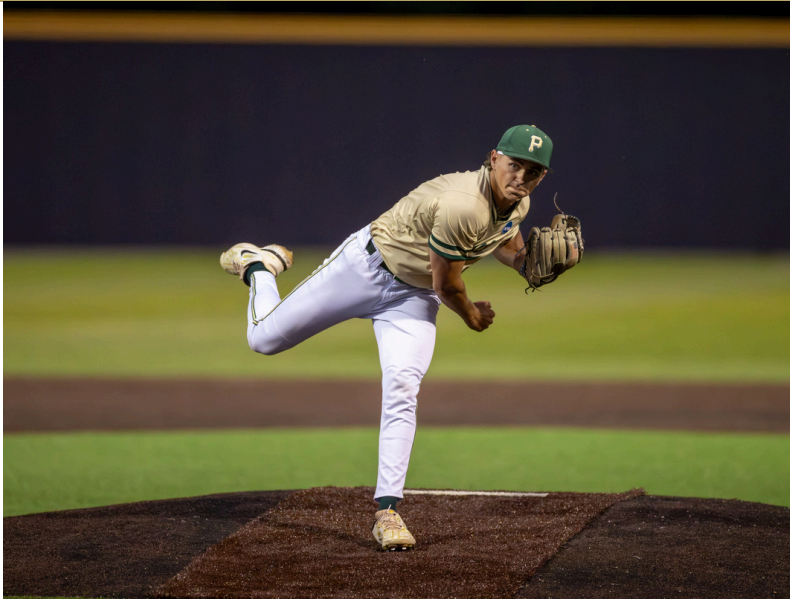
To read the rest of Dr. Ellett's story, click [here](#).



# Piedmont Baseball Makes Historical Run

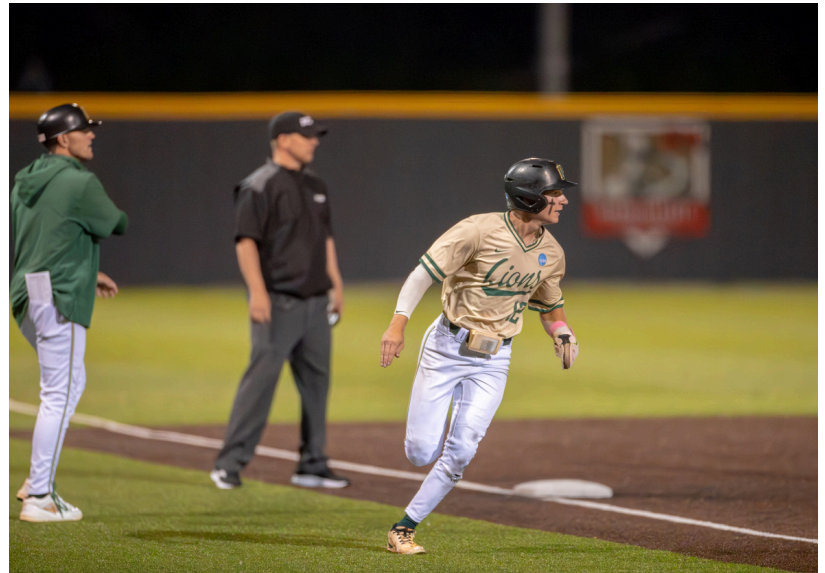


by Timmy McCormack



For the first time since 2011, the Piedmont University baseball team earned a trip to the NCAA Tournament courtesy of its championship at the Collegiate Conference of the South tournament. Having also won the CCS Regular Season Championship, the Lions earned an AQ into the NCAA's courtesy of four straight wins at the CCS tournament. However, Piedmont made history by sweeping three games at the NCAA Regional including two wins over #16 Wash U. to earn the program's first-ever trip to the Super Regional since the NCAA changed the postseason format in 2019.

Though Piedmont's season would come to an end at the hands of the #1 team in the country, Denison University, in that Super Regional round of the NCAA's, the Lions had already become one of the most successful postseason teams in Piedmont history equaling the Sweet Sixteen run of the 2003 men's soccer squad which set the standard in Piedmont's first year of Division III eligibility.



Baseball's championship run through the CCS and the NCAA Regional was powered by five All-Region selections and a pair of All-Americans including Cody Funk and Luke Manry.

Playing right field for the Lions in '26, Funk put up stout offensive numbers hitting just shy of .400 in nearly 200 at-bats while fielding his position at a .980 clip.

Manry held down the mound in relief making 21 such appearances with a 1.74 ERA and 1.23 WHIP which helped him collect 10 saves on the season.



The Lions finished the 2026 season with a 33-15 record and was ranked 25th nationally by the ABCA Coaches Poll heading into the NCAA National Tournament.

# 2026 Alumni Award Winners Honored

by Haley Watts



Piedmont University celebrated its 2026 Alumni Awards as the centerpiece of Alumni Day on Saturday, April 25. Selected from a competitive pool of nominations, four exceptional alumni were honored for their achievements. Each recipient was joined by family and friends for a special luncheon and shared remarks upon receiving their award from President Marshall Criser and Alumni Association Board President Cale Padgett.

Pictured L to R: Michael Ross, Brian Rickman, Jessie Owensby, Theresa Ray, Dan Ray (accepting on behalf of Meredith Ray)

The **Pacesetter Award** was presented to **Jessie Owensby**, a 2015 graduate who earned a BA in Mass Communications. She also holds a Master of Public Administration from University of North Georgia and currently serves as Director of Community and Economic Development for White County Government.

The **Distinguished Alumni Award** honored **Dr. Meredith Ray**, a 2007 magna cum laude graduate with a BS in Mathematics. She earned her MPH in biostatistics from University of Georgia and her PhD in Biostatistics from University of South Carolina. Dr. Ray is now Associate Professor of Biostatistics and Program Coordinator at the University of Memphis School of Public Health.

The **Excellence in Education Award** was awarded to **Dr. Michael Ross**, a 2012 graduate with a BA in History. He holds an MS in Kinesiology from the University of Georgia and a PhD in Sport Management from Troy University. Dr. Ross serves as Department Chair, Full Professor, and Faculty Athletics Representative at Shorter University.

The **Alumni Service Award**, recognizing outstanding service to the University, was presented to **Judge Brian Rickman**, a 1998 graduate with a BA in Sociology. He earned his JD from the University of Georgia School of Law and currently serves on the Georgia Court of Appeals. He was appointed in 2015 by Governor Nathan Deal and has since been elected statewide in 2018 and again in 2024.

Alumni Awards are presented annually to recognize graduates who exemplify excellence in their professions and service to their communities. Nominations are welcomed each year through the Office of Advancement and Alumni Relations. Email Ann Sutton at [asutton@piedmont.edu](mailto:asutton@piedmont.edu) or call 706.776.0148.

# Congrats!

# FACULTY PROMOTIONS

**Congratulations to these talented faculty on their well-deserved promotions!**

**From Assistant Professor to Associate Professor of Business**

Savannah Brookshire ('21)      B.B.A., M.Acc., University of Georgia

**From Assistant Professor to Associate Professor of Education**

Toni Bailey ('21)      B.A., M.A.T., Xavier University of Louisiana  
Ph.D., Mercer University

Mark Evans ('21)      A.A., New Mexico Military Institute  
B.A., University of Maryland Baltimore County  
M.Ed., University of North Georgia  
Ed.S., University of Georgia

**From Assistant Professor to Associate Professor of Nursing**

Tina Smith ('21)      B.S.N., Brenau University  
M.S.N., Emory University  
D.N.P., Wilkes University

# STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

Piedmont University is proud to congratulate **Alisha Dickerson** on her recent achievement of becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). Alisha's dedication to supporting students, commitment to professional growth, and compassionate approach to counseling have made a meaningful impact on the campus community. This accomplishment reflects her hard work and passion for helping others, and we are excited to celebrate this important milestone with her.



## Calendar of Events

### JUNE

- 6/12 Summer Orientation #1
- 6/15 Triple Threats Musical Theatre Intensive
- 6/15 ARTime '26
- 6/26 Summer Orientation #2

### JULY

- 7/17 Summer Commencement
- 7/24 Summer Orientation #3

### AUGUST

- 8/8 Freshmen Move-in
- 8/11 Convocation