

SAIL 2026



NEWSLETTER

President's Pen

Dear Piedmont University Community,

As we move forward through the semester, I want to thank each of you for the energy, dedication, and resilience you bring to our university community. The weeks ahead will bring challenges, but they will also bring opportunities to learn, grow, and support one another.

Let's keep working together with the same spirit of collaboration and perseverance that makes our campus so special. I look forward to finishing this semester strong - together.

Sincerely,
Marshall M. Criser, III

September 2026

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Making an Impact: Spencer Davis Gains Hands-On Experience at Grady Health System



This past summer, Grady Memorial Hospital – Atlanta's level 1 trauma center – hosted a healthcare business internship program over the span of eight weeks. The Grady Health System prides itself on the delivery of essential care with humanity, compassion, and kindness. In the heart of Atlanta, six undergraduate students had the opportunity to explore five departments: human resources, information technology, operations, revenue cycle, or supply chain. Piedmont's own, Spencer Davis, was selected to participate in the program, where she worked under the supervision of supply chain executives and healthcare operations leadership.

The following is her reflection.

The Grady Healthcare Business Internship Program was nothing short of amazing! To preface, I had been applying to summer internships for years prior but never got a "yes." This year, before I gave up, I applied to this program just days before the application closed and miraculously got accepted after an interview I thought I failed. Stepping foot on Grady's campus opened my eyes to the true capabilities of healthcare – what it means to be a high reliance organization and how community aid matters.

During my time at Grady, I participated in numerous community outreach events, collaborated with various operational departments, learned the organization's history, and witnessed first-hand what Grady means to Atlanta. There was a phrase I heard throughout my time there: Atlanta can't live without Grady – a phrase which I now know to be true. Grady is always trying to improve the health outcomes of its community and to make a difference. Every Thursday they serve the unhoused – providing laundry services, haircuts, showers, and hot meals. They've built satellite locations to address the lack of healthcare in underserved areas, developed mobile mammograms, and more. And that's just been great to be a part of.

As far as my actual focus areas are concerned – supply chain and operations – I split my time between the two departments. In supply chain, my primary focus area, I contributed to the optimization of time in the form of meeting minutes, attended briefings about systemwide supply needs, spent time with executives and discussed saving strategies, and generated a proposal for departmental centralization. In my secondary focus area, operations, I got to learn the roles of a Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt, by participating in Gemba Walks, conducting rounds in clinical service areas, and participating in Grady's true north: anticipating needs, ensuring patient safety, and exceeding expectations.

Everyone at Grady tries to have a positive impact on a guest, even though their reason for being there may not be positive. With the operations department, I saw staff's continuous effort to provide that safety and address that need. Due to this, everyday my expectation was to go in and make an impact somehow – and I believe that was one of many deliverables from this experience.



Meet Jennifer Stenander: Piedmont's New Director of Administrative Services, Athens Campus

by Terrie Ellerbee



Jennifer Stenander comes to Piedmont University after a career built almost entirely around one idea: enrollment is personal. She served as Vice President for Enrollment Management at Middle Georgia State University, where she led the institution through 10 consecutive semesters of growth, and spent more than a decade at the University of North Georgia helping guide it through a major multi-campus consolidation and enrollment growth of over 10,000 students. In between, she ran her own enrollment consulting firm, working with institutions across the University System of Georgia and beyond. "Our Athens campus is perfectly positioned, not only by location, but by vision to educate the whole student from academics to health and wellness. It's an incredible opportunity for us to grow the campus," Stenander said. "There are so many wonderful students who want to be here."

Since arriving, Stenander's been struck by something she said she rarely sees, even after years of consulting with universities across the country: faculty and staff are fully invested in students. They take the extra time to assist students and to build relationships.

"I have worked for numerous universities, I have consulted for numerous universities, and I honestly do not know that I have ever seen faculty and staff that care like our faculty and staff do," she said. "I'm extremely impressed."

Two campuses, two experiences, one Piedmont.

Ask Stenander what she's building in Athens, and she doesn't talk about org charts. She talks about belonging.

"Demorest has the traditional college experience," she said. "Athens has the university experience, built around your life. You come for the degree, you stay for the relationships, you leave prepared."

Her vision, still taking shape with the campus's task force, centers on preparing the whole student and making the Athens campus a place where students are known and feel valued and connected from the moment they walk through the door. She describes creating an environment where academic support, wellness, career preparation, personal connection, and a sense of belonging are woven into the student experience, not simply offered as separate services.

"We have an opportunity to build something distinctive in Athens — a student-centered campus where every interaction with students reinforces one message to our students: You are known here. You belong here. And we are invested in your success."



Meet Jennifer Stenander: Piedmont's New Director of Administrative Services, Athens Campus, cont. by Terrie Ellerbee

Her leadership style is shaped by decades of experience and a belief that student success begins by creating clear pathways, removing barriers, and building meaningful relationships that empower students to reach their full potential.

Stenander's path to Athens runs through some unexpected places — including a stint working in Georgia's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and volunteer work following 9/11 and the 2017 Las Vegas shooting.

She also spent time as Assistant Head of School at Piedmont Academy in Monticello, her own alma mater, where she says she learned something that shapes how she leads today. In a smaller environment, "students and families don't care whose job description something falls under. They just want to know that you truly care and have the student's best interest in mind."

Outside of work, she recently completed a lifelong bucket-list project: writing a children's book, *Lulabelle and Friends* about helping kids name and understand their feelings has already been adopted by one elementary school. She's also an adventure traveler who once rappelled 200 feet down a Puerto Rican waterfall, and, by her own account, a proud small-town girl from Monticello, Georgia, at heart.



Ask her what matters most, and the answer is immediate: being a mom to her 16-year-old son, Fischer.

"People remember how you make them feel, and whether they believe you genuinely care about them," she said. "That's something I try to bring into every role I have."

Please join us in welcoming Jennifer Stenander to the Piedmont family — and to Athens.





A Tradition of Support: Coach Cave Tournament Benefits Piedmont Student-Athletes



by Timmy McCormack



The 38th Annual Coach Cave Memorial Golf Tournament took place on Tuesday, Aug. 25th at The Orchard Golf and Country Club with full support from the administration, the alumni, and the athletic department all in plain sight on a beautiful day in Northeast Georgia.

The field was made up of teams featuring a four-person scramble format who competed for the title of this year's event. All proceeds went to the athletic department to continue to enhance the student-athlete experience on campus. Perhaps the most impressive addition to the upgrades in athletics made possible through support like at the Coach Cave tourney is seen in a brand-new press box at the turf field at Walker Athletic Complex. It has been home to the men's and women's soccer teams since the early 90's, as well as the men's and women's lacrosse teams since the early 2010's.

The new press box will replace a tent which has housed the operations of athletic communications since 2014, and allow for enhanced video coverage on the broadcast network that covers the more than 100 student-athletes who compete on the turf field, the Mane Event Broadcasting Network.

A total of 96 golfers spread over 24 teams at this year's event represented the largest field in recent memory. Sponsorships were abundant as well, providing great support for the event through contests like "Closest to the Pin," "Longest Drive," and a "Hole-in-One" opportunity.

While the support was high for the tournament itself, the competition for the title of 1st place was even tighter than expected. The winning score was 22-under-par but was a score shared by a pair of teams in the event. To separate the two and declare a champion, a scorecard playoff was used to determine a winner.

Incredibly, several teams shot below par in the event, which was hosted under the direction of Head Women's Golf Coach Blake Watson. He led his Lions golf team to the USA South Tournament Championship just this past spring in his first season in charge in Demorest.

The Coach Cave Memorial Golf Tournament was established in recognition of the work that Coach Leon O'Neal Cave performed during his 36 years at Piedmont serving as the athletic director, coach of several sports, supervisor of the Piedmont golf course, and various other roles on campus including Dean of the College and Dean of Men.

The tournament is held annually in his honor.



A Love of Learning, Shared Across Generations

by Haley Watts



Karen Shayne earned her BA in Psychology from Piedmont in 1988. She returned for her master's degree in 1997. What she didn't expect was to find herself sitting in class alongside her mother, Brenda Thurmond.

Brenda had always loved working with children. She spent time in the Woodville Elementary library and enjoyed putting on programs at church but had never taken the time to earn a degree in the field she loved. At age 50, she enrolled at Piedmont to earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

One of Karen and Brenda's favorite memories is a geology course they took together. Both admit they were a little competitive about grades. Brenda also takes pride in her punctuality, with one memorable exception.

"I was late to class once because of the geese," Brenda said. "I was scared of them. There were a bunch, and they wouldn't move." At the time, Demorest Lake remained on campus, and geese roamed freely, apparently believing campus belonged to them.

After earning her degree, Brenda began teaching in Hall County, where she remained until her retirement. As she recounts stories from her classroom, it's easy to understand why she says teaching was always her calling. When more Hispanic students entered her classes, Brenda took Spanish courses so she could better connect with them. Brenda firmly believes you are never too old to try something new. She is putting that belief into practice in a remarkable way--becoming a published author at age 82!

Brenda has always been a writer, although she usually kept that part of herself private. She would tuck her pages away in a desk drawer or toss them in the trash. That changed when Karen found one of her stories and sent it to a contact in publishing. They were impressed and wanted more of Brenda's writing. There was just one small problem: Karen had to confess that she had shared her mother's story without permission. Thankfully, Brenda forgave her daughter—and she had more stories ready to share. This fall, Brenda is releasing three of her Christmas-themed children's books: *Liora, the Littlest Angel*, *The Christmas Cup*, and *Ruby Mae's Christmas Gift*.

It is a fitting new chapter for someone who has spent her life encouraging children to learn, imagine and grow. Of course, Brenda and Karen are enjoying this adventure together along with their usual pastimes of cooking, visiting the Clarkesville library and talking about books.

From a mother and daughter sharing a geology classroom to a mother now sharing her stories with countless children, Karen and Brenda's Piedmont story is one of family, dedication, and a love of learning that never stops.



Christmas Cocoa and Storytime
with Brenda

2 p.m. Dec. 12

Mason-Scharfenstein Museum of Art

All children are welcome!

Admissions Tour Rockstars

Admissions could not be successful without the support of the amazing faculty and staff on campus that help to provide a personalized tour for each student that visits campus.



Dr. Jeff Bruns (95)

Dr. Tony Frye (54)

Prof. John Lanneau (44)

Dr. Elaine Bailey (23)

Dr. Haley Barnett (21)

Dr. Lindsay Dilbeck (18)

Dr. Jaime Johnson-Huff (18)

Dr. Kristin Whitlock (18)

Prof. Sandra Maughon (15)

Prof. Chanda Carlan (15)

Numbers indicate # of tours given.

Calendar of Events

SEPTEMBER

9/12 Fall Family Day

9/17 Fine Arts College Experience
(FACE)

9/24 Art Reception - Tales in Shape
and Color: Mountain Laurel Quilters
- BeeArtful

OCTOBER

10/4 Lux, Professional Treble
Ensemble

10/8 Forensic Science & Criminal
Justice Preview

10/12 Fall Break

10/29-11/1 Theatre: The Addams
Family Musical

NOVEMBER

11/10 Piedmont University
Chamber Ensembles

11/12 Piedmont University Singers

11/17 Piedmont University String
Orchestra

11/19 Piedmont University Wind
Ensemble

11/20 Admissions Open House

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