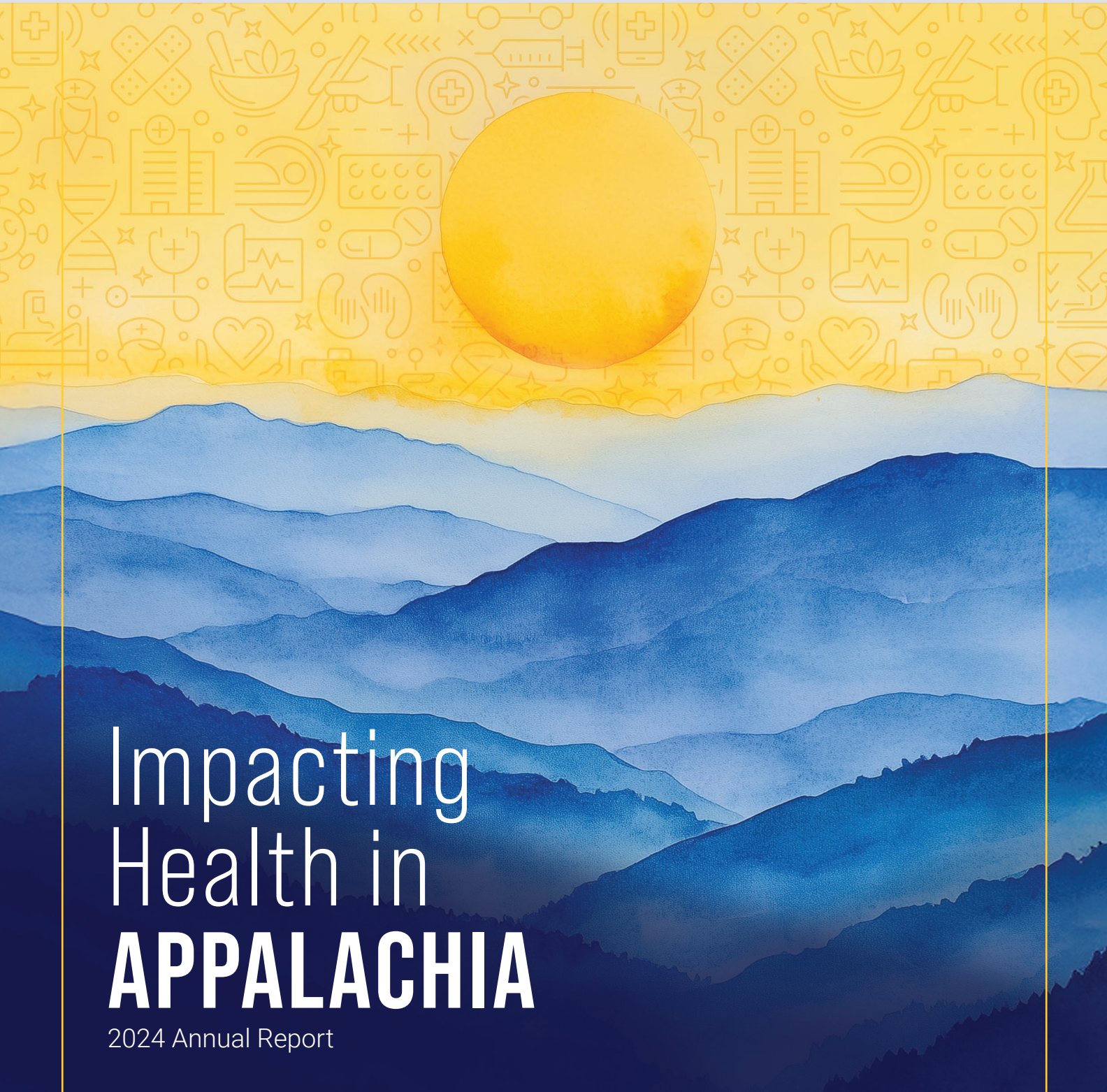




ETSUHealth



Impacting Health in **APPALACHIA**

2024 Annual Report



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FROM THE PROVOST AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS



In 2024, East Tennessee State University faced a year unlike any other – one that will stick with us for the rest of our lives. In

September, our region was devastated by the impact of Hurricane Helene, which brought widespread flooding to many parts of Central Appalachia, collapsing bridges and roadways, and washing away numerous homes and businesses.

In the aftermath, ETSU moved to suspend classes to allow our community time to navigate the storm's challenges. Though our main campus was spared from damage, the impact of Hurricane Helene changed our region – and the lives of our neighbors, families, co-workers, and students – for months and years to come.

But in the face of unimaginable loss and difficulty, I was struck by the resilience, compassion, and kindness of our campus community. In short order they rallied to support our friends and neighbors by donating blood, organizing supply drives, and volunteering their skills and expertise, among numerous other initiatives.

Throughout the pages of this annual report, you will read about the academic successes of our health sciences students, cutting-edge research exploring treatments for critical health issues, and the real-world impact ETSU Health is having, not just in our region but on a national stage.

Perhaps most importantly, however, you will read about the many ways our campus community sprang into action to help the region in the aftermath of one of the most devastating floods this area has ever experienced.

Volunteer groups of students, faculty, and staff stepped up to lend a hand at donation centers across the region and organized a number of supply drives. In the Quillen College of Medicine, one of those efforts delivered needed supplies to Piere's Marketplace and Second Harvest Foodbank.

Meanwhile ETSU Health Family Medicine Johnson City, in partnership with ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy, contacted hundreds of patients in high-risk areas to assess needs and traveled to multiple Northeast Tennessee counties to assist those patients – and to check on the ones who could not be reached.

This is just a sampling of the many ways our campus community stepped up to make an impact, showcasing the dedication, selfless service, and community spirit that make ETSU special. I am immensely proud of all faculty, students, and staff in our health sciences colleges that comprise ETSU Health.

I hope you join me in recognizing the efforts of everyone who helped with recovery efforts in Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina, and enjoy the collection of stories in this year's annual report.

Sincerely,

Kimberly D. McCorkle
Provost and Senior Vice President for
Academic Affairs

Elite in Education

ETSU's HEALTH SCIENCES

colleges are setting a high bar for excellence in education and service in its undergraduate, master's, and professional degree programs – highlighting the university's commitment to providing students with an affordable, high-quality education.

#1 Master of Public Health program in the NATION

(Healthcare Management
Degree Guide)



#1 Online Master of Science in Nursing program in TENNESSEE

(RegisteredNursing.Org)



#12 Online Respiratory Therapy program in the NATION

(Intelligent.com)



#5 in the NATION for most medical school graduates practicing in health professional shortage areas

(U.S. News & World Report)



100% of alumni said they would choose ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy again.

(American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy)



BUCS REBUILD TOGETHER

Coming Together in the Aftermath of a Disaster

IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE HELENE – WHICH BROUGHT DEVASTATING FLOODING TO NORTHEAST TENNESSEE, SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA, AND WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA – STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF FROM ETSU SPRANG INTO ACTION ORGANIZING SUPPLY DRIVES AND VOLUNTEERING COUNTLESS HOURS OF THEIR SKILLS AND EXPERTISE TO SUPPORT OUR NEIGHBORS AFFECTED BY THE DISASTER.

In several Northeast Tennessee counties, the flooding brought by Helene washed away numerous roadways and bridges.



“AS PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS, WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO ASSIST, AND IN THE MIDST OF A DISASTER RESPONSE THAT COMMITMENT TO HELPING OTHERS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER.”

Dr. Randy Wykoff



Volunteers pack boxes of supplies at a supply drive on campus ahead of ETSU's homecoming football game.

It was an almost incomprehensible sight.

In cities and towns across Central Appalachia, raging floodwaters brought by the remnants of Hurricane Helene washed away homes, roadways, bridges, and everything else that stood in its way – a deluge so powerful it physically altered the path of the Nolichucky River, a permanent reminder of one of the worst floods in the region's recorded history.

For many people across Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina, September 27, 2024, is a date that will not soon be forgotten. But even in the face of such unimaginable destruction, stories of hope, resilience, and triumph emerged almost as quickly as the floodwaters receded.

At ETSU, that was certainly the case.

Though its main campus was spared from damage, ETSU suspended classes until Oct. 7 to allow those affected time to navigate challenges brought by the storm. Almost immediately after classes were suspended, students, faculty, and staff sprang into action, finding any way they could to support those communities hit hardest by the storm.

A two-day blood drive at the university set a record for donations, with 674 people taking the time to donate blood on Sept. 30 and Oct. 1. Another effort, "Letters of Love," delivered more than 1,100 handwritten notes to first responders and others affected by the storm.

"Bucs Stuff the Bus," initially planned as part of the celebrations for Founder's Week at ETSU to gather school supplies, was expanded in the wake of Hurricane Helene's impact –

with 30 boxes of supplies donated to local schools.

Similar initiatives began spreading all over campus, with various programs, departments, and colleges pitching in.

In the university's health sciences colleges – the College of Nursing, College of Public Health, College of Health Sciences, Quillen College of Medicine, and Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy – students and educators alike raised thousands of dollars for relief efforts, while many more have rolled up their sleeves to donate blood, supplies, and time to the multitude of relief efforts across Appalachia.

DIRECT OUTREACH

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, 13 physicians with ETSU Health Family Medicine Johnson

City conducted home visits across four counties to conduct welfare checks and deliver needed supplies.

"As primary care physicians at ETSU Health, we have the honor of really getting to know our patients well," said Dr. Christian Timmis. "So, getting word that patients you know are not reachable, and that they and their loved ones are

potentially in harm's way is the motivating factor for us."

The clinic reached out to about 500 patients in high-risk areas to assess needs. Thanks to an interprofessional team effort organized by Dr. McKenzie Highsmith, an Associate Professor and Director of Family Medicine Pharmacy in ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy, they traveled to

communities in Washington, Greene, Carter, and Unicoi counties to assist those patients who identified needs or who the clinic was unable to contact.

In addition to their direct outreach immediately following the storm, Family Medicine Johnson City physicians have continued to support areas impacted, including staffing a pop-up clinic in Elk Mills. Elk Mills is located in Carter County near the North Carolina state line and was effectively cut off from much of the state after floodwaters washed away roads and bridges – limiting access to the small community.

Highsmith noted that the physicians volunteered to purchase supplies to take as they visited patient homes. Patients donated items they no longer needed.

"We had an overwhelming response from our whole family to live out our vision to take great care of our patients and community," said Dr. Jason Moore, Chair of ETSU Quillen College of Medicine's Family Medicine Department.



Hundreds of homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed in the flooding, causing tens of millions of dollars in damage.

"WE HAD AN OVERWHELMING RESPONSE FROM OUR WHOLE FAMILY TO LIVE OUT OUR VISION TO TAKE GREAT CARE OF OUR PATIENTS AND COMMUNITY."

Dr. Jason Moore



ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy faculty, staff, and students volunteered at the Northeast Tennessee Disaster Relief Center for Hurricane Helene, located at Bristol Motor Speedway Collection site.



Hazen Cole, an ETSU Health Family Medicine pharmacy technician, takes a photo with Family Medicine team members who traveled to the hardest-hit communities of East Tennessee for home visits with patients who identified needs or could not be reached.

In the College of Nursing, faculty and staff worked in collaboration with the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement to support health care workers and survivors in Carter, Greene, and Unicoi counties. That included assembling more than 500 care bags which were delivered to Greeneville Community Hospital, Sycamore Shoals Hospital, and a temporary urgent care in Unicoi County, which lost its hospital to the cataclysmic flooding in Erwin.

The Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement and College of Nursing also helped redistribute excess medical supplies to other hard-hit areas in Northeast Tennessee and Western North Carolina.

ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy stepped up in a multitude of ways, including packing medicine boxes and working with local pharmacies to collect donated medications.

Students in the college's Rural and Underserved Pharmacy Care Track prepared multiple boxes that included a variety of first aid supplies, over-the-counter medications, and education handouts on safe medication disposal and basic first aid, along with notes of encouragement.

In partnership with Mooney's Pharmacy, the college also worked to collect medications for those in need. Alumnus Chris Lopez, a pharmacist at Mooney's, initially launched the "Appalachians Uniting Appalachia: Watch Us Rise" initiative to get toys to children in Western North Carolina, which was particularly hard-hit by Helene's devastating flood waters.

In conjunction with faculty from the Gatton College of Pharmacy, however, that toy drive was expanded to collect sealed, unexpired medications – culminating with a delivery of supplies that fully loaded a 38-foot trailer to Black Mountain, North Carolina.

assist Unicoi, Carter, Washington, Greene, and Johnson counties with relief efforts.

In the College of Health Sciences, dental hygiene students Katherin Brewer and Brooklyn Maupin saw their community needed help and jumped into action.

Brewer, a military veteran, started by launching a wish list for people to purchase and donate supplies. Maupin, meanwhile, decided to leverage her creative passion by raffling off a one-hour photoshoot

– raising more than \$1,200 to support recovery efforts in less than three days.

"Everyone is so amazing here," said Brewer. "We are a tight-knit group, and we always try to help each other when we can."

Amy Clark, an Executive Aide in the Dental Hygiene program who coordinated the delivery of supplies, said there was "not enough words for me to describe how amazing these students are."

ETSU's Dr. Monaco Briggs poses for a photo with Dr. Sofia Aragon of the Washington Center for Nursing at a donation site.



"Our whole interprofessional team pulled together: from the front office sorting out patients by location, to nursing doing donations, to the pharmacy team coordinating the efforts, to medical students volunteering to make phone calls, to residents and faculty giving up their wellness time to do home visits," he said. "It was truly amazing how quickly things came together with a common vision to serve. We had numerous patients in tears, thanking us for what we did."

HANDS-ON SUPPORT

Volunteer groups of students, faculty, and staff joined the community's inspirational efforts to supply and serve at donation centers and places of critical need throughout the region.

Multiple ETSU Health clinics immediately began collecting needed supplies such as water, food, hygiene kits, clothing, and cleaning supplies used to create flood buckets.

STUDENTS STEP UP

With classes canceled, students took charge and launched numerous initiatives, packaging countless boxes of supplies and raising thousands of dollars for disaster relief.

Among these student-led efforts, Quillen College of Medicine faculty, staff, and students donated \$3,300 worth of supplies to Piere's Marketplace, which partnered with Second Harvest Food Bank to



Volunteers help load supplies during ETSU's homecoming weekend in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.



Students pose with handwritten notes that were delivered to survivors and first responders.



ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy students packed supply boxes for those affected by the storm.



to donate blood.



Quillen College of Medicine faculty, staff, and students donated \$3,300 worth of supplies to Piere's Marketplace

"I continue to get emotional about it. I mean, you really can't ask for better students, and we are so blessed to be part of this program, and proud to work at a college that recognizes the need in our community," Clark added.

■ **EXPERT GUIDANCE**

ETSU is home to no shortage of expert faculty. They lent their expertise wherever possible after the storm.

In the College of Public Health, Dean Dr. Randy Wykoff shifted his podcast series – "Bare Bones Approach to Better Health" – to provide timely public health guidance for those affected.

With water service disrupted for tens of thousands of people as a result of the storm, large swaths of the region were under boil water advisories for multiple days. Wykoff used his platform to provide crucial guidance on staying safe during a boil water advisory, emphasizing the importance of using bottled or boiled water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene to avoid serious health risks. He also offered practical

tips for filtering and boiling water, while cautioning against unreliable methods for water purification.

In another episode, Wykoff provided tips for staying safe in hard-hit areas, stressing the importance of remaining vigilant for falling debris, avoiding entering damaged structures, proper use of a generator, and more. He also provided advice for preparing disaster preparedness kits in a third episode following Hurricane Helene.

Few schools in the nation are better prepared to step up in times of disaster than ETSU's College of Public Health, which is home to Project EARTH and the Niswonger VILLAGE, a unique public health simulation lab.

Project EARTH and the Niswonger VILLAGE give students the tools to save lives in remote, resource-limited areas around the world and respond and assist when natural or human-caused disasters strike. In 2017, Project EARTH and the Niswonger VILLAGE helped the college earn the Delta Omega Award for the most innovative public health curriculum

in the country. They also played a critical role in the college receiving the 2024 Harrison C. Spencer Award for Outstanding Community Service.

"As public health officials, we are always looking for ways to assist, and in the midst of a disaster response that commitment to helping others is more important than ever," said Wykoff. "I am incredibly proud of how the College of Public Health helped prepare our students for an unexpected disaster in their own backyard."

■ **HELPING THE HELPERS**

At the Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health, faculty and staff moved to quickly find ways to support survivors and mental health care providers, hosting a specially called webinar to assist providers in how to provide mental health care to those affected by the storm.

"It's a lot of health care education efforts, which definitely feels like it's in our lane," Dr. Jodi Polaha, Director of the Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health, said of their work after the storm.

"I CONTINUE TO GET EMOTIONAL ABOUT IT. I MEAN, YOU REALLY CAN'T ASK FOR BETTER STUDENTS, AND WE ARE SO BLESSED TO BE PART OF THIS PROGRAM, AND PROUD TO WORK AT A COLLEGE THAT RECOGNIZES THE NEED IN OUR COMMUNITY."

Amy Clark

"We're just helping our health care providers be more knowledgeable and responsive and know when to leverage their in-house mental health providers."

That work has also included support for providers themselves, many of whom have struggled with fatigue, sadness, survivors' guilt, and other struggles commonly seen in response to a community disaster. Those symptoms can often be attributed to secondary traumatic stress, which can emerge when people see, hear, or learn about the traumatic experiences of others.

Dr. Diana Morelen, an Associate Professor in ETSU's Department of Psychology who has been part of the institute's efforts to support providers and survivors, explained that people "are hard-wired to form connections, and we truly neurobiologically feel with others."

"And so, when you're helping others, and you're hearing stories of loss and traumatic events, we soak that in – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually," she continued.

Fortunately, ETSU "helped prepare our helpers and our region to be resilient in the face of community trauma," Morelen said, pointing to the establishment of programs that have trained numerous providers



ETSU College of Public Health students volunteer at a supply drive.



The Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement delivered more than 500 care bags to several local hospitals to support health care workers after the storm.

in the region in a variety of fields – ensuring Northeast Tennessee had a community full of trained helpers ready to jump into action.

"It's because of the intentional work folks at ETSU have been doing for decades to help take care of our

region that we were able to respond in such a robust way," Morelen said. "We have an incredible workforce and many brilliant, caring minds that are well-positioned and well-coordinated to continue to support the community's needs."



ETSU Dental Hygiene students gathered while classes were canceled to pack supply boxes for hurricane survivors.



Year in PHOTOS

2024 was a year of milestones and smiles across ETSU's five health sciences colleges, including celebrating Match Day and Commencement, kicking off a new era for the College of Health Sciences, and supporting our community through health fairs and Drug Take Back events.





Center for Rural Health and Research Continues to Make an Impact in Appalachia

PART OF THE COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH, THE ETSU CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH AND RESEARCH HAD AN EXCELLENT YEAR IN 2024, PUBLISHING MULTIPLE MAJOR REPORTS AND EARNING MILLIONS IN GRANT FUNDING TO SUPPORT RURAL HEALTH-FOCUSED INITIATIVES.

Located in the heart of Appalachia, ETSU's Center for Rural Health and Research is uniquely positioned to impact health and well-being across rural America through its research, community engagement, training, and policy.

That includes heading up a novel approach to address health professional shortages and foster economic development in Appalachia as part of the Appalachian Regional Commission's Appalachia Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) program.

Dubbed the Regional Public Colleges and Universities (RPCU) Central Appalachia Health Consortium, this ground-breaking initiative will explore collaboration across regional universities to impact health and economic outcomes in Central Appalachia. These include articulation

agreements, local pipeline development, cross-institution internships, in-state tuition arrangements, elective options, streamlined applications, and preferred admissions.

In addition to ETSU, universities that are part of this collaboration include Appalachian State University, Eastern Kentucky University, Marshall University, Ohio University, Radford University, and Shawnee State University.

"Central Appalachia faces persistent challenges in health care recruitment, and this collaborative effort seeks to address these issues to increase economic vitality in this region," said Michael Meit, Director of the Center for Rural Health and Research and co-lead at ETSU for this initiative. "Together, the institutions involved in this project will play a pivotal role in preparing a health care workforce tailored to address the specific needs of local communities."

This project encompasses 235 counties in six states: Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Of those, only six counties are not in an area designated a primary care health professional shortage area, and just four are not in a dental care health professional shortage area.

ETSU boasts extensive leadership in Appalachian health and economic development, and the university will serve as a guiding force within the consortium, offering insights and strategies deeply rooted in the unique challenges and opportunities of the Appalachian region.

On another impactful front, the center learned in 2024 that its ETSU/NORC Rural Health Research Center (RHRC) again received one of only a few highly competitive Rural Health Research Center grants, providing four more years of funding for the center.

Awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, the four-year award totals \$2.8 million and will provide funding for the RHRC to continue conducting robust research related to rural health.

The RHRC is a joint venture between ETSU and the NORC at the University of Chicago's Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis. This successful partnership has brought together NORC's long history of rural health research and evaluation and ETSU's commitment to honor its rural heritage through research, education, and service.

It is the second time the center has received this grant, also securing it in 2020, shortly after the creation of the Center for Rural Health and Research.

"We are delighted to be awarded another four years of funding to conduct RHRC's important research that informs health policy and supports rural communities' vitality. A healthy and vibrant rural America is foundational to our country's success," Alana Knudson, Director of the NORC Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis and the ETSU/NORC Rural Health Research Center, said at the time.

Overall, 2024 was a big year for the center, which added seven new grant-funded projects totaling more than \$1.6 million in the 2023-24 fiscal year – adding to the more than \$30 million in funding the center has received since 2020.

Over the same timeframe, center faculty and staff also had nearly three-dozen publications and presented at more than 100 conferences nationwide.

That includes the center's critically important "Appalachian Diseases of Despair," an annual report from the Appalachian Regional Commission co-authored by Meit.

This report tracks mortality from "diseases of despair" – drug and/or alcohol overdose, suicide, and alcoholic liver disease – and found that, while overall mortality from those causes declined by 4% from 2021 to 2022, it was still 37% higher than the rest of the United States.

Other key projects from the CRHR included partnering with NORC and the University of Minnesota to work with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to create recommendations and considerations for rural and frontier local health departments to improve public health emergency preparedness.

The center is also working with TennCare and the Center for Health Care Strategies to help develop the Tennessee Multi-Sector Plan for Aging. As part of this project, CRHR created an online dashboard with comprehensive data related to various aspects of aging, such as demographics, health and well-being, economic security, social engagement, and community support.

"This past year has been another outstanding year of growth and visibility for our center," said Meit. "I could not be prouder of the team that we have developed – their passion, commitment, and expertise shine through in all that we do. They bring well-deserved recognition to ETSU, our College of Public Health, and our region."

By Jonathan Roberts

ETSU Health Clinical Locations

JOHNSON CITY

BucSports Medicine
1043 Jack Vest Drive
orthopedic sports medicine, physical therapy

Concussion Management Program
Lamb Hall
156. S. Dossett Drive

Cardiology
2428 Knob Creek Road, Suite 201

Dental Hygiene Clinic
156 S. Dossett Drive
Lamb Hall Breezeway

Family Medicine Johnson City
917 W. Walnut Street
acute and chronic care, behavioral health, clinical pharmacy, adult and pediatric care, preventive care, sports medicine, women's health

Pediatric Cardiology & Rheumatology
329 N. State of Franklin Road
ETSU Health
325 N. State of Franklin Road
Internal Medicine: internal medicine, endocrinology, hematology, behavioral health, clinical pharmacy

OB/GYN: general OB/GYN, high risk obstetrics, minimally invasive gynecologic surgery, behavioral health
Surgery & Ophthalmology: general surgery, hepatobiliary surgery, general and pediatric ophthalmology, pediatric surgery, plastic and reconstructive, trauma & critical care

Pediatrics: general pediatrics, adolescent medicine, critical care, genetics, hospital medicine, infectious diseases, nephrology, pulmonology, neonatology, behavioral health, clinical pharmacy

Fertility & Urogynecology
1319 Sunset Drive, Suite 103

Infectious Diseases
615 N. State of Franklin Road

Johnson City Community Health Center
2151 Century Lane
behavioral health, preventive and restorative dental, family medicine, newborn and pediatric care, Nurse Family Partnership, psychiatric and neurologic pharmacy and onsite pharmacy, pre-natal care, radiography, mammography and sonography,

substance abuse services, women's health

Johnson City Downtown Day Center
202 W. Fairview Avenue
behavioral health, family medicine, substance abuse services, case management, homeless social services

Oncology
1 Professional Park Drive, Suite 21
Pediatric Subspecialties
408 N. State of Franklin Road, Suite 31B
endocrinology, gastroenterology, hospital medicine, neurology, rheumatology and pulmonology

Psychiatry
2 Professional Park Drive, Suite 21
VA Medical Center Campus
adult psychiatry, child & adolescent psychiatry, general psychiatry, individual & family therapy

St. Jude Tri-Cities Affiliate Clinic (Niswonger Children's Hospital)
400 N. State of Franklin Road
neonatology, pediatric hematology, pediatric oncology, pediatric critical care

Support Clinic
2 Professional Park Drive, Suite 11
substance use disorder and behavioral addiction care, behavioral health, case management, certified peer recovery specialist, Hep-C treatment

University Health Center
365 Stout Drive, Roy Nicks Hall, Suite 160
behavioral health, immunizations, medication management, physicals, primary care, women's health

University School Clinic
68 Martha Culp Drive

KINGSPORT

Family Medicine Kingsport
102 E. Ravine Road
acute & chronic care, adult care, addiction medicine, behavioral health, clinical pharmacy, newborn & pediatric care, preventive care, women's health, including OB, physical therapy, sports medicine

Infectious Diseases Kingsport
105 W. Park Drive, Suite 2A

Internal Medicine Kingsport
Four Sheridan Square, Suite 200
behavioral health, endocrinology, internal medicine, rheumatology, psychotherapy

BRISTOL

Family Medicine Bristol
208 Medical Park Boulevard
acute & chronic care, adult care, addiction medicine, behavioral health, clinical pharmacy, newborn & pediatric care, preventive care, women's health, including OB, sports medicine

ELIZABETHTON

Center for Outpatient Rehabilitation
1000 Jason Witten Way
audiology (adult & pediatric), speech-language pathology (adult & pediatric), pediatric feeding program, adult balance assessment/treatment, pediatric occupational therapy, and adult physical therapy

Gary E. Shealy Memorial ALS Clinic
1000 Jason Witten Way
OB/GYN Elizabethton
1505 W. Elk Avenue, Suite 1
high-risk obstetrics, minimally invasive gynecologic surgery, behavioral health

Pediatrics Elizabethton
1505 W. Elk Avenue, Suite 2b
general pediatrics, behavioral health

GREENEVILLE

Cardiology Greeneville
1410 Tusculum Blvd., Suite 1500

SNEEDVILLE

Hancock County Elementary School Based Health Center
391 Court Street
behavioral health, family medicine, pediatrics

Hancock County Middle/High School Based Health Center
2700 Main Street
behavioral health, family medicine, pediatrics

MOUNTAIN CITY

Cardiology Mountain City
1901 S. Shady Street, Suite 1

A New Leader for the College of Nursing

FOLLOWING A NATIONAL SEARCH IN 2024, ETSU NAMED DR. DENA EVANS AS DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF NURSING.

ETSU named Dr. Dena Evans as Dean of the College of Nursing last year, a role she assumed in January.

Evans, Ed.D., MPH, MSN, RN, CNL, CNE, previously served as Vice Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs at the University of South Florida College of Nursing.

“WE WERE DEEPLY IMPRESSED BY HER VISION FOR THE COLLEGE...”
Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle

“Dr. Evans emerged as the leading candidate from an exceptional pool of applicants,” said Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle, ETSU Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic

Affairs. “We were deeply impressed by her vision for the college and her commitment to training nurses and nurse educators – and to the College of Nursing’s important role in providing care to underserved communities in our region. Her leadership and experience make her an outstanding fit for the college.”

She received her doctoral degree in education (2010) from North Carolina State University and master’s degrees in nursing (2014) and public health (2000) from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2019, Evans completed a fellowship with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s AACN-Wharton Executive Leadership Program.

She has earned numerous awards and honors for her teaching, research, and service, such as the Emerging Leaders Institute and the

Niner Research Recognition Award. She has also served in local, state, and national leadership roles. Most recently, Evans was elected to chair the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education’s Nominating Committee.

Evans’ research has focused on developing strategies to increase opportunities for disadvantaged and underrepresented students, enhancing their success, and fostering a more diverse workforce. She has served as principal investigator and co-investigator on local, state, and federal grants totaling over \$6 million to remove access to education barriers, expand the nursing workforce, and advance nursing’s role in achieving health equity.

“The ETSU College of Nursing is widely respected across the state, houses the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement, is part of a nationally recognized interprofessional education program, and is critical to meeting the health care needs in Tennessee,” said ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland. “We are excited to have Dr. Evans join us in our mission to improve the quality of life for the people of our region and beyond.”

“I am deeply honored to lead the ETSU College of Nursing,” Evans said. “Having grown up in rural North Carolina, I have a profound appreciation for nursing’s role in addressing the unique needs of rural communities. I am eager to collaborate with our dedicated faculty, staff, students, and community members to build upon the college’s outstanding reputation.”



A New Era for the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement

SUPPORTING CURRENT, FUTURE NURSES THROUGH TENNESSEE CENTER FOR NURSING ADVANCEMENT

Established in 2021 with financial support from Ballad Health, the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement has remained steadfast in its commitment to support nurses and bolster the workforce pipeline in Tennessee and Central Appalachia, launching new programs and welcoming a new director over the last year.

Housed at ETSU, the center serves as a pivotal statewide and regional resource focused on integrating academic nursing, clinical practice, and educational systems. Born from a partnership among ETSU, Ballad Health, and the State of Tennessee, its mission is to expand opportunities for aspiring nurses and enhance the overall supply of nurses and nursing support throughout Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.



Dr. Jennifer Hitt

Entering 2025, it welcomed a new director in Dr. Jennifer Hitt.

“Dr. Hitt has an impressive background in nursing research, education, and administration,” said Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle, ETSU Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. “She brings a commitment to addressing the workforce needs in the state and the region, and I am excited about the role that the ETSU College of Nursing will continue to play in this work.”

Hitt previously served as Nursing Program Director and Chair of Health Sciences at Christian Brothers University in Memphis and is currently President-Elect of the Tennessee Nurses Association.

“The Center brings nurses from across the state together to collaborate, strengthen the workforce, and drive meaningful change in healthcare, and I am excited to advance initiatives that support and empower nurses – ensuring we have the resources and advocacy needed to elevate our profession,” said Hitt.

Hitt joins the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement as it comes off a busy year, including the launch of two marquee programs: the Nurse Narratives Initiative and its Nurse Leadership Program.

In collaboration with ETSU, Ballad Health, and StoryCollab, the Nurse Narratives Initiative is a unique effort to support current nurses

– and encourage new ones – by sharing stories of nursing from nurses themselves.

It spotlights the profound stories of resilience in the face of adversity, both personal and professional, from nurses in and around our region. It aims to further illustrate why nursing is one of the nation’s most trusted professions while providing current nurses with an opportunity to acknowledge the burnout and stress they’ve experienced in the midst of a historic labor shortage.

It also includes an educational component that will provide nurses

and nursing students at Ballad Health, ETSU, and other regional nursing programs with the tools that emphasize the importance of empathy and communication along with critical clinical skills to lead to a successful nursing career.

Curriculum will be developed and integrated into existing courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels at the ETSU College of Nursing.

It will feature interactive learning techniques, student-guided learning, peer-to-peer learning, personal reflection, and other components.

In 2024, the center also celebrated the inaugural cohort from its Nurse Leadership Program, a weeks-long, instructor-led online course designed to hone the skills of nurse leaders across the state. The program was done in partnership with OpusVi.

The 15 participants in the program represented eight health care organizations from Johnson City to Memphis, including five from Ballad Health, highlighting the center’s commitment to strengthening the nursing workforce across Tennessee.

“Housing the Tennessee Center for Nursing Advancement within the ETSU College of Nursing offers unparalleled benefits to our students, nurse researchers, and those invested in nursing workforce issues in Appalachia and Tennessee,” said Dr. Dena Evans, Dean of the ETSU College of Nursing. “The center provides unique opportunities for students and faculty to engage in nursing workforce research while simultaneously providing healthcare industries resources and collaborative opportunities to address the nursing shortage.



Learn more about the Nurse Narratives Initiative, and watch some of the stories.

“I AM EXCITED TO ADVANCE INITIATIVES THAT SUPPORT AND EMPOWER NURSES.”

Dr. Jennifer Hitt

“By focusing on regional and state nursing workforce challenges, the center ensures we lead in developing strategies to meet our citizens’ evolving needs,” Evans continued. “This integration fosters a dynamic environment where education, research, and community health initiatives thrive, ultimately enhancing care quality and health outcomes across Tennessee and beyond.”

By Jonathan Roberts and Melissa Nipper

College Updates

NUTRITION PROGRAM GUIDES TEENS TO HEALTHIER FUTURE

Students in Carter County received an opportunity to learn important skills about how to select and prepare healthy foods thanks to a partnership between an ETSU Health provider and the Boys and Girls Club of Elizabethton.

Dr. Evelyn Artz, an ETSU Health provider who is board-certified in pediatrics, pediatric endocrinology, and lifestyle medicine, is passionate about helping children learn to make healthy choices. She received a Community Access to Child Health Program grant from the American Academy of Pediatrics that allowed her to develop an interactive after-school program in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Elizabethton/Carter County.

Residents and medical students with ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine have assisted Dr. Artz, giving them the opportunity to appreciate the importance of community outreach as providers.

PHARMACY PROFESSOR SETS BAR FOR EXCELLENCE IN INFECTIOUS DISEASE



Dr. David Cluck, an Associate Professor in the Gatton College of Pharmacy's Department of Pharmacy Practice, earned a rare honor for a pharmacist in 2024 – being named a fellow of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA).

The IDSA is the nation's leading infectious diseases professional society, and fellowship in IDSA is one of the highest honors in the field of infectious diseases.

It is given to those who have achieved professional excellence and provided significant service to the profession. Since 2018, approximately 4% of those chosen were pharmacists.

"This honor represents a milestone in my career that is indicative of the time and effort I have put into caring for patients, educating trainees, and engaging in clinical research," said Cluck.

ETSU HEALTH CELEBRATES 'HEALTH CARE HEROES'

Three ETSU Health physicians received high honors during *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities TN/VA's* 2024 Healthcare Heroes Awards Ceremony in August 2024.

Dr. Karen Schetzina received the "Cup of Kindness Innovation Award," while Drs. Josh Henry and Blair Reece received "Health Care Hero" awards. Each year, the Business Journal honors individuals and organizations that "go above and beyond the call of duty in the provision of healthcare in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia."

ETSU ALUM HEADING TENNESSEE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



ETSU alum Dr. Landon Combs (right), a two-time graduate of ETSU with a B.S. in History and an M.D., was installed as President of the Tennessee Medical Association in 2024. His one-year term comes to an end in May 2025.

Originally from Northeast Tennessee, Combs was drawn in by the Quillen College of Medicine's commitment to training primary care physicians

and found a home at ETSU not too far from where he grew up – or where he currently resides in Gray.

"If I can help one physician, that's one more than before I started, so that's an accomplishment," said Combs. "Whether it's billing, coding – any difference you can make on the life of a patient, or the stress level of a physician is a win. Anything we can do to make their practice life better will make their life better, which will help patient care overall."

STUDENT PHARMACIST SETS WEIGHTLIFTING RECORDS



Brie Levy, a fourth-year student pharmacist at ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy, competed for Team USA at the International Powerlifting League Drug Tested World Powerlifting Championships – cementing herself as the top female powerlifter of all time in her weight class with a historic performance.



At the competition, held in November 2024 in Las Vegas, Levy set world records for squat, bench press, deadlift, and total weight lifted, earning the competition's top female competitor award and first place in overall female bench press, as well as first place in the 100-kilogram open division.

In November, Levy also set numerous national records at the American Pro 3 Powerlifting competition in Winchester, Virginia – including records for squat, bench press, deadlift, and total weight.

STUDENT RESEARCHER EXPLORES COVID RESPONSE IN FAITH COMMUNITIES

Cindy Yang, a medical student at the Quillen College of Medicine, published an article in the *Journal of Religion and Health* exploring the local response to the COVID-19 pandemic in faith communities in Johnson City.

Yang worked with Dr. Kenneth Olive, Quillen's Associate Dean for Accreditation Compliance and a Professor of Internal Medicine.

Yang's research emphasizes the importance of collaboration between faith and health sectors in times of crisis, enhancing spiritual and physical well-being – highlighting the need to establish communication channels between faith community representatives and local health authorities.

"This integration not only supports a holistic approach to health but also ensures a more resilient infrastructure for managing future public health challenges," the study concluded.



ETSU FACULTY, STUDENT PUBLISH EDITORIAL ON MISINFORMATION

ETSU faculty Dr. Randy Wykoff, Dr. David Harker, and Roan Scholar Leah Loveday authored an editorial in the *American Journal of Public Health* on the role public health professionals play in addressing misinformation in 2024.

Wykoff is Dean of the ETSU College of Public Health and Harker is Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Humanities in the ETSU College of Arts and Sciences. Loveday is an undergraduate student majoring in public health.

"Misinformation is a major challenge facing all aspects of our society, and health, health care, and public health are no exceptions," said Wykoff. "It is important to understand why misinformation is believed in order to help address it."

The article describes six types of misinformation and suggests ways health professionals may be able to counter them: intentional, conspiracy-based, intuitive, identity-based, normalized, and recent.

It reflects the university's hallmark interdisciplinary approach to researching critical issues and its commitment to giving students hands-on learning opportunities.



Visit the American Journal of Public Health to read more

GRANT HELPS EXPAND SERVICES AT ETSU HEALTH CLINIC

ETSU Health’s Gary E. Shealy Memorial ALS Clinic celebrated its seventh anniversary in April 2024 – and celebrated by receiving a \$75,000 grant from the ALS Association to expand telehealth services, purchase equipment, and increase their hours.

Housed at the Center for Outpatient Rehabilitation at the Nave in Elizabethton and established in partnership with the ALS Association, the free clinic has experienced substantial growth since its inception seven years ago, offering a multidisciplinary approach to the care of people diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease.



According to the ALS Association, the clinic is the only one in Tennessee that offers its services for free to patients. The center’s volunteer clinicians have collectively donated hundreds of hours at the clinic, serving nearly one hundred patients across thousands of visits.

“These services are critically needed in our area, and we are committed to doing everything we can to improve the quality of life for those living with ALS in our region,” said Clinic Coordinator and ETSU Professor Courtney Andrews.

A TRAILBLAZER IN CHILD ADVOCACY

Dr. Michele Moser, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences with the Quillen College of Medicine, earned the 2024 Jim Pryor Child Advocacy Award from the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth.

Moser’s work helped lead to the establishment of the Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee, and she serves with ETSU’s Center of Excellence for Children in State Custody and the ETSU/Ballad Health Strong BRAIN Institute.

INAUGURAL CELEBRATION OF RESEARCH AWARDS

At its annual Celebration of Research, ETSU highlighted a record-breaking year in research achievements across the campus and introduced five new awards to honor faculty and staff who have made outstanding contributions to advancing research at the university.

Two of those were claimed by faculty in the College of Health Sciences and the Gatton College of Pharmacy.

For his scholarship that enhances the understanding of clinical and educational practices in physical therapy, Dr. Michael Bourassa, Associate Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, earned the Outstanding Faculty Scholar Award. Dr. Ashana Puri, Assistant Professor in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, earned the Early Career Scholar Award, recognizing her exceptional contributions to the field of pharmaceutical sciences and drug delivery systems.



ANALYZING EXCESS DEATHS IN 2020

Using publicly available funeral and obituary data, researchers from ETSU identified more than 300 excess deaths in Washington County alone in 2020 – of which just over half were specifically identified as being related to COVID-19 – in an article published in the *Journal of Appalachian Health*.

The study, “Using Public Funeral and Obituary Listings to Identify Spikes in Excess Mortality in One Appalachian County,” underscores the value in public health officials using such data to quickly and accurately identify “real-time” indications of excess mortality, such as in the aftermath of a natural disaster or during a pandemic.

Allen Archer, a medical student in ETSU’s Quillen College of Medicine, served as the study’s lead author. Archer was an undergraduate in the College of Public Health at the time the study was conducted. Dr. Melissa White-Archer, a Research Associate in the College of Public Health’s Department of Health Services Management and Policy, Dr. Megan Quinn, a Professor in the college’s Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, and

Dr. Randy Wykoff, Dean of the College of Public Health, also contributed to the study.

By using official death reports, obituaries, and funeral home data from 2017-19, researchers were able to set a baseline for expected deaths for 2020.

In 2020, the first year COVID-19 cases were documented in Washington County, Tennessee, the total number of deaths exceeded that baseline by 322, of which 165 were official, state-reported deaths from COVID-19. In fact, before the first official COVID-related fatality in the county, researchers identified 96 excess deaths.

“We believe that these methods could open the door for earlier identification and intervention at the local level in future disasters,” said Archer. “I also believe this study highlights the importance of understanding epidemiology and public health in the context of community. Our community was able to tell us, through newspaper obituaries and local funeral home listings, what was going on in real-time.”

COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIR A ROUSING SUCCESS

Though it was moved to September from its typical date in August, the annual Community Health Fair hosted by the Johnson City Community Health Center was a rousing success this year, featuring the largest number of community partners in attendance the event has ever seen.

More than a hundred people attended the fair, receiving free health supplies such as hygiene kits and having an opportunity to get blood pressure screenings and flu shots, make appointments, and meet the clinic’s providers.



COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES
LAUNCHES NEW PROGRAM



The College of Health Sciences officially launched its master's program in Orthotics and Prosthetics in 2024, cutting the ribbon on the Karl Fillauer Learning Center (located in Charles Ed Allen Hall) over the summer before welcoming the first cohort of students in January 2025.

The program is a two-year advanced degree that will offer a unique and comprehensive curriculum to equip students with the knowledge, skills and techniques necessary to excel in the field of orthotics and prosthetics. It will emphasize interprofessional collaboration and promote teamwork with other health care disciplines to enhance patient outcomes.

It is the first of its kind in Tennessee and one of only 14 such programs nationwide.

NURSING STUDENT EARNS NODA AWARD

College of Nursing student Mattie Smith earned the prestigious National Orientation Directors Association Outstanding Undergraduate Leader award in December 2024.

ETSU's Director for Undergraduate Recruitment Timothy Lewis, formerly the Director of New Student and Family Programs, nominated her for the award as a well-deserved surprise. Smith, who graduated in 2024, spent two years in ETSU's Preview and Orientation Leader Organization.



"To me, leadership can embody the idea of being able to guide others toward the same goal. It can be about recognizing strengths and weaknesses of a team and using a team's talents and passions to give back to others," said Smith. "I believe that leadership involves empathy, integrity, and a willingness to listen to others."

19TH ANNUAL ETSU
COACHES COLLEGE

The ETSU Center of Excellence for Sport Science and Coach Education held its 19th annual Coaches College event in November – the first since the center became part of the College of Health Sciences.

The 2024 event featured more than a dozen speakers on a variety of topics relating to coaching, sports science, and research.



CARE WOMEN'S HEALTH MAKING AN IMPACT

The ETSU Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE) in Women's Health continues to make a significant impact in our region through scholarship, presentations, and planning.

In 2024, Dr. Wondi Manalew, a Research Assistant Professor with the center, secured one of 12 Changemaker in Family Planning grant awards from the Society for Family Planning, an award recognizing outstanding scholars of color and providing them with dedicated support to expand their research skills and expertise.

Manalew and the center's Research Director Dr. Nathan Hale also received a grant from the Health Resources and

Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau to examine postpartum screening for diabetes and primary care transitions among mothers experiencing gestational diabetes during pregnancy.

In addition, the center, with Dr. Mike Smith's leadership, worked with the Tennessee Department of Health to complete a statewide assessment and develop a strategic plan for improving maternal health in Tennessee.

Since it was officially established in 2020, CARE Women's Health has secured more than \$18.6 million in external grant funding.



ETSU RECEIVES GRANT TO SUPPORT
UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS

ETSU's Dr. Judy Rice, Interim Associate Dean for Graduate Programs in the College of Nursing, received \$185,113 in grant funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) fund to help support mental health services for unhoused people in Johnson City.

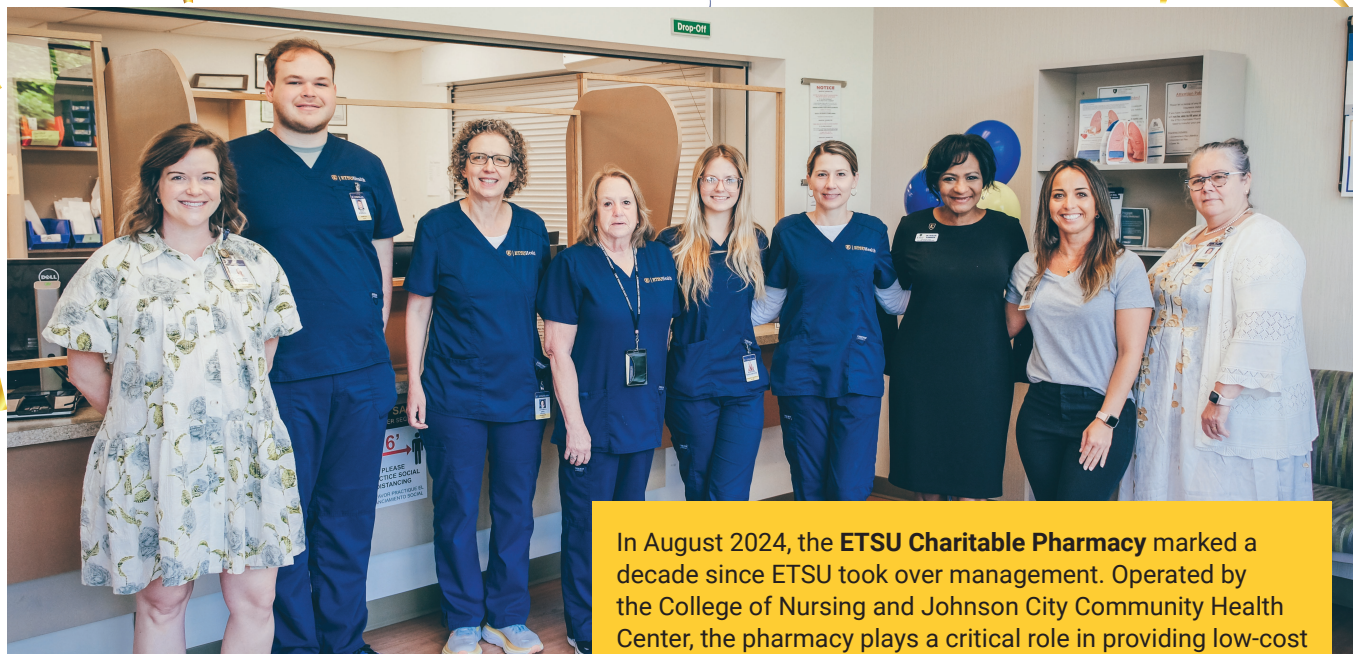
Rice, who applies for the grant annually, also received a supplemental grant of \$13,900 in additional funding from SAMHSA's PATH – money that will be used to support the Johnson City Downtown Day Center, a nurse-managed clinic in the College of Nursing that provides essential services to the local unhoused population.

PATH funds services for people with serious mental illness who are experiencing homelessness.



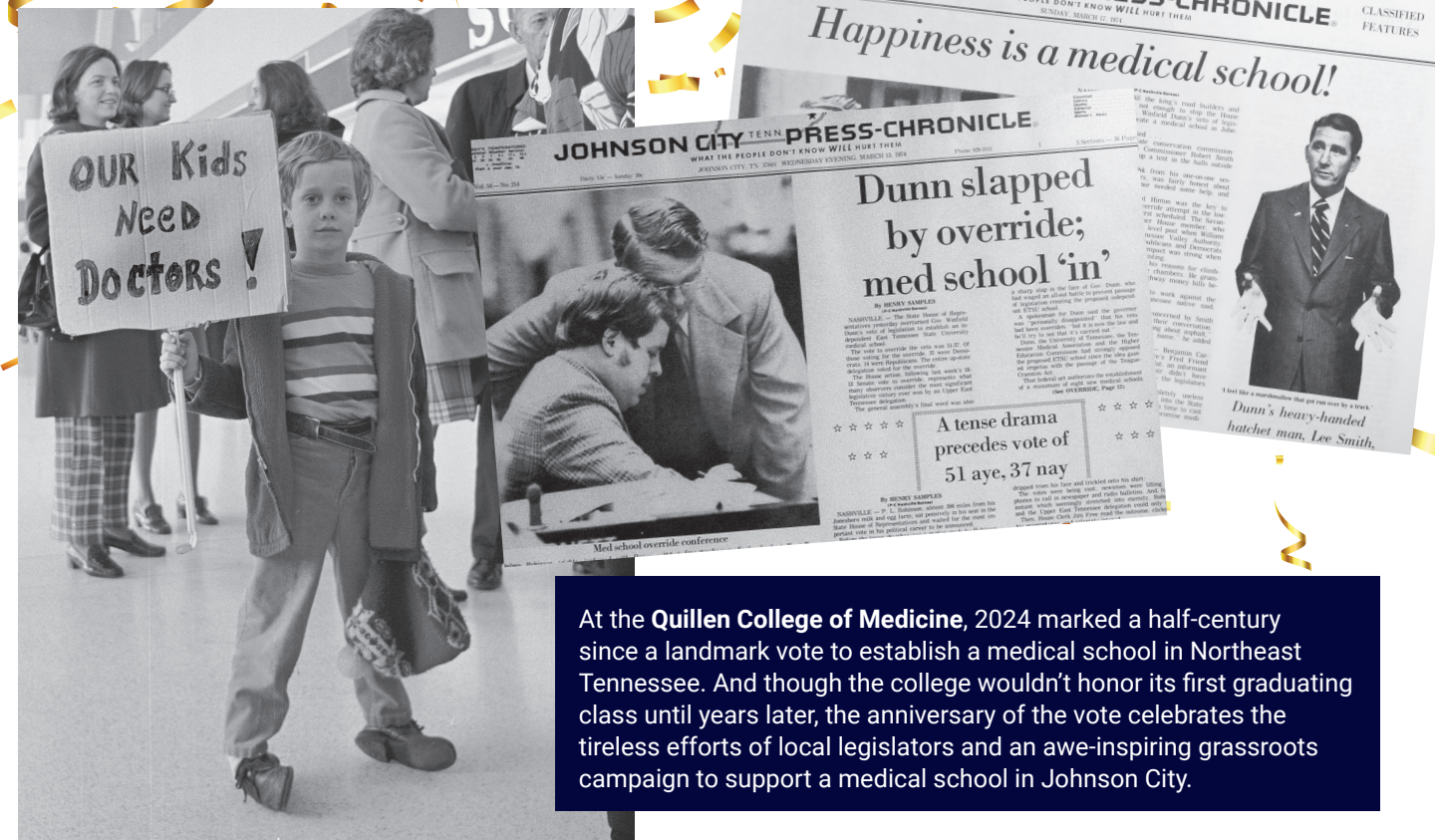
Celebrating Milestones in Academics and Community Service

IN 2024, THE ETSU CHARITABLE PHARMACY CELEBRATED 10 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY, WHILE THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND QUILLEN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE MARKED A GOLDEN JUBILEE. AND IN 2025, ETSU GATTON COLLEGE OF PHARMACY ALSO MARKS A MAJOR MILESTONE.



In August 2024, the **ETSU Charitable Pharmacy** marked a decade since ETSU took over management. Operated by the College of Nursing and Johnson City Community Health Center, the pharmacy plays a critical role in providing low-cost medications for uninsured patients in Washington County.

The **Department of Social Work** celebrated 50 years since the establishment of the university's bachelor of social work degree, a significant milestone that speaks to the university's commitment to bettering the lives of those across Appalachia. Whether it's training more practice-ready clinicians through its master's program or implementing entirely new programs to train child welfare advocates, the department has always been eager to make a difference.



At the **Quillen College of Medicine**, 2024 marked a half-century since a landmark vote to establish a medical school in Northeast Tennessee. And though the college wouldn't honor its first graduating class until years later, the anniversary of the vote celebrates the tireless efforts of local legislators and an awe-inspiring grassroots campaign to support a medical school in Johnson City.

Looking ahead in 2025, **ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy** will mark 20 years since receiving approval for the establishment of the college. Founded in 2005, the college has earned numerous national awards and accolades for service, scholastic achievement, and clinical training – all while providing an elite educational experience to its student pharmacists.



A New Era for the College of Health Sciences

NEW NAME. NEW SCHOOLS. NEW DEAN. THE ETSU COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES ENTERS A NEW ERA IN 2025.



In 2024, the ETSU College of Health Sciences underwent a lot of change. Much of that change was the result of an academic restructure at ETSU that was implemented July 1, 2024. That restructuring moved programs into the college, led to the establishment of new schools, and most visibly, introduced a new name for the college. Formerly known as the College of Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences, the name was shortened to the College of Health Sciences.

The newly named College of Health Sciences is now divided into two schools: the School of Clinical Sciences and the School of Human Performance and Sport Science. It is also now home to the Department of Counseling and Human Services, which was previously housed in the Clemmer College of Education and Human Development. The overarching purpose of creating schools is to strengthen ties throughout the organization, align units toward strategic goals, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration.

The School of Clinical Sciences, which comprises most of the college's programs, is led by Interim Director Dr. Don Lewis, who also serves as Director of ETSU's Occupational Therapy Program. The School of Human Performance and Sport Science is home to programs focusing on sport science, physical education, and movement and is led by Interim Director Dr. Michael Ramsey. Ramsey also serves as Interim Chair of the Department of Exercise and Sport Science.



Overseeing this new era in the history of the College of Health Sciences is Dr. Jeff Snodgrass, who was named Dean in late 2024, beginning in his role on January 1, 2025. Snodgrass served as Interim Associate Dean for Academic and Clinical Affairs in the college from 2022-24, overseeing curriculum and training environments for clinical training programs in the college. Before that, he was Chair of Rehabilitative Health Sciences at ETSU from 2018-23 and Chair and Program Director for the Department of Occupational Therapy at Milligan University from 2006-18. "By focusing on academic excellence and strategic partnerships, I aim to elevate the College of Health Sciences as a nationally recognized hub for outcomes-based research,

exceptional education, evidence-based clinical practice, and impactful community engagement," Snodgrass said. As Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the college, Dr. Snodgrass oversaw accreditation, institutional effectiveness, and curriculum development by the faculty in 21 clinical health sciences programs, 14 of which have specialized accreditation. He also led the college's Clinical Affairs division, which includes services in audiology, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and social work. These clinics provide over 11,000 patient encounters annually, account for \$1.3 million in billable services, and provide \$600,000 in charitable care.

"The College of Health Sciences is central to our mission as a university, which is to improve the quality of life for the people of our region and beyond," ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland said. "As our region grows, it is imperative that we work with partners such as Ballad Health and the James H. Quillen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center to develop and expand a world-class health care system and a strong pipeline of health care professionals and specialists. "Dr. Snodgrass is both an excellent teacher who serves to inspire and guide our students and an exemplary administrator who can ensure our work, particularly in our clinics, makes a positive impact in our communities." By Jonathan Roberts



Interprofessional Education Continues Growth

ETSU’S INTERPROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM, WHICH TRAINS STUDENTS ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY’S HEALTH SCIENCES COLLEGES TO EXCEL IN TEAM-BASED HEALTH CARE ENVIRONMENTS, HAS SEEN A LOT OF GROWTH IN RECENT YEARS, WITH A RECORD NUMBER OF STUDENTS GRADUATING FROM THE PROGRAM IN THE 2023-24 ACADEMIC YEAR.

Step into Bishop Hall on a given day during the academic year, and you are likely to find it buzzing with activity.

Bishop Hall, also known as the Center for Interprofessional Collaboration, is home to ETSU’s Interprofessional Education (IPE) program – a unique approach to hands-on learning that trains health sciences students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs to work together in collaborative health care teams.

ETSU’s commitment to IPE began more than 30 years ago, and the program has seen an explosion of growth in the years since, particularly in the last two academic years, which saw a record number of students graduate from the program.

“It’s amazing to see such buy-in from students, faculty, and staff both in our building and across both of ETSU’s campuses,” said Dr. Brian Cross, Assistant Vice Provost and Director of the Center for Interprofessional

Collaboration. “Ultimately, our goal is to improve patient outcomes. To have an opportunity to train so many of our excellent health sciences students before they enter the workforce is going to not only benefit patients but also the students who will have the tools to be agents of change wherever they end up in their careers.”

In 2023, the program celebrated a decade of interprofessional education at ETSU, marked by its largest graduating class with 161 students. In the 2023-24 academic year, that number jumped to 350 across both of the program’s educational models, which include a two-year program that students complete in-person and a one-year asynchronous model that students complete online.

“This is something we as a university truly believe makes a difference in the lives of our students and the patients they will treat in their careers,” said Cross. “To see such growth among our programs really validates we are doing the right thing.”

By Jonathan Roberts

Initiative Aims to Promote Physical Activity on Campus

When it comes to taking care of your physical as well as mental well-being, exercise can be a highly effective therapy.

And ETSU has taken that to heart, earning the gold designation from Exercise is Medicine® On Campus (EIM-OC) for its efforts to foster a culture of wellness through a variety of initiatives aimed at increasing physical activity on campus among students, faculty, and staff. ETSU has been part of the EIM-OC program since 2021.

Exercise is Medicine is a global health initiative managed by the American College of Sports Medicine aimed at making physical activity assessment and promotion a standard in clinical care. EIM-OC launched its recognition program in 2014.

For the past three years ETSU has met all of the criteria for gold – one of 83 campuses worldwide to do so in 2023-24.

“This is something our team is really passionate about, and we are working on gaining more momentum across different campus and community entities,” said Brandi Eveland-Sayers, an Associate Professor of Exercise Science at ETSU and EIM-OC Team Advisor. “We want to have an umbrella approach to events that are happening on campus that fit under this initiative to bring colleges together, because then it becomes

a unified approach that fits into the university’s mission of improving the lives of the people of this region.”

Initiatives at ETSU included:

- ♦ Continued use of physical activity as a vital sign and as a criterion in patient care at the University Health Center.
- ♦ Buccaneer Bootcamp, an incentive program focused on increasing participation in exercise.
- ♦ Community outreach programming with the Girl Scouts of Southern Appalachia, Gentle Move Colon Foundation, Communities in Schools in Appalachian Highlands, and Empassion Pelvic Health.
- ♦ Wellness consultations conducted by Fitness and Wellness Assistants offered through Campus Recreation.
- ♦ Proclamation of October as Exercise is Medicine month.

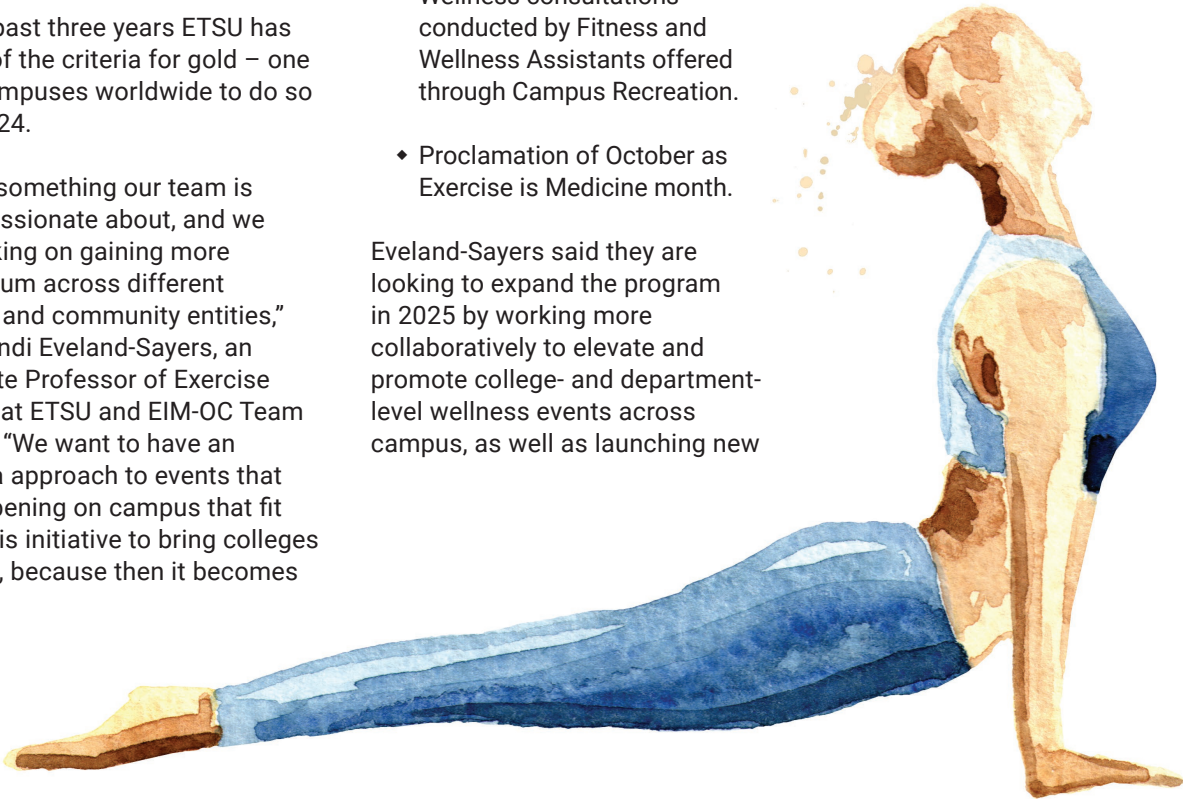
Eveland-Sayers said they are looking to expand the program in 2025 by working more collaboratively to elevate and promote college- and department-level wellness events across campus, as well as launching new

initiatives such as step challenges and fostering more community outreach and partnerships.

Halie Darby, Assistant Director for Student Wellness with ETSU Campus Recreation and part of the EIM-OC team at ETSU, said a lot of this work comes down to creating more movement opportunities for people – including the promotion of items such as standing desks or walking pads for people working at a desk.

“In my work I talk a lot about creating a culture of wellbeing, and I think this initiative really fits squarely into that,” said Darby. “It’s about creating a culture on campus where we’re less sedentary and making healthier choices.”

By Jonathan Roberts





ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy Honored for Practice Transformation

ETSU BILL GATTON COLLEGE OF Pharmacy's impact on the transformation of community pharmacy was recognized with a prestigious national award to the Greater Appalachian Transformation Effort (GATE), an effort the college has helped lead since its inception.

At the October annual meeting of the National Community Pharmacy Association in Columbus, Ohio, GATE won the 2024 Flip the Pharmacy (FtP) Team

of the Year Award. GATE is one of several teams across the country selected to participate in the Flip the Pharmacy initiative, which was established in 2019 to help equip community pharmacies across the country with the tools, resources and coaching they need to adapt from point-in-time, prescription-level care processes to outcomes-based, patient-level care models.

While the grant funding for Flip the Pharmacy ended in 2024, the program's impact will continue to be felt across the region for years to come.

The college's faculty helped lead GATE: Dr. Jessica Robinson, Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice, served as Lead Coach; Dr. Katelyn Alexander, Director of Experiential Education, served as a Coach; Dr. KariLynn Dowling-McClay, Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice, served as Program Consultant; and Jeff Gray, Associate Professor of Pharmacy Practice, served as Coach and Program Administrator.

Together with GATE leaders, they collaborated closely with the Community Pharmacy Foundation, the Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network (CPESN® USA) FtP Coordinating Center; CPESN® local community pharmacy networks; and a team of coaches across East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina to oversee the implementation of practice transformation efforts in more than 200 pharmacies in South Central Appalachia.

GATE was the only multi-state team to compete for and receive funding in all four funding cycles, achieving unprecedented success in the number of community pharmacies reached and in creating alternative revenue opportunities.

"The success of this program is due to the hard work of our partner pharmacies who together envision a new frontier for community-based pharmacy practice. Their willingness to challenge the status quo of health care is opening new doors for pharmacist-provided patient care services," said Robinson, who graduated from ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy in 2017 and later became a faculty member.

She attributed her time as a student as critical to her understanding of the need for pharmacy practice transformation.

"I wanted to be an independent pharmacy owner when I came here, but the more I learned, the more I realized we needed to transform the way we care for patients to remain competitive in a rapidly changing market," said Robinson, who is also the Lead Network Facilitator for the Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network (CPESN® USA) in Tennessee. "I could see that health care trends were pointing toward a different model of care that focused on value and outcomes and felt that I

could be a resource for pharmacists approaching this new frontier."

The impact extends beyond pharmacies, as students are now trained to "operate at the top of their license," according to Robinson. She highlighted a dual approach with the college's curriculum enhanced to prepare students to be practice- and business-ready.

"ETSU has positioned itself to be a resource for not only students but also for our preceptors and alumni, as well," said Robinson. "We want to be a resource so these community pharmacists don't feel alone – that they've got somebody they can call."

It's a fitting commitment for a college that was founded to address a critical shortage of local pharmacists – professionals who would train, and remain, in rural and underserved communities here and across the region.

"I think ETSU has become synonymous with community pharmacy practice transformation in the Southeast U.S.," said Robinson.

By Stephen Woodward



Robinson (third from left) and Gray (second from left) pose for a photo with their award at the October annual meeting of the National Community Pharmacy Association.

Partnership Gives Students Hands-On Learning Experience

ETSU OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENTS WORKED WITH EMPLOYEES AT THE JEREMIAH CAFE

If you stopped by the Jeremiah Café on a Tuesday during the fall 2024 semester, chances are you were greeted by the smiling faces of its staff – and a lot of blue and gold.

In addition to the regular customers who come to support the café and its mission to provide employment opportunities to people with autism, inside you'd also find a lot of people wearing ETSU's signature colors worn by people like Makenzie Smith – a second-year student in ETSU's occupational therapy program.

Smith is one of the more than two dozen students in the program who benefited from an opportunity to receive hands-on, community-engaged learning at the Jeremiah Café, 603 W. Walnut St.

Between August and December, students were able to practice what they learned in the classroom while supporting the restaurant's autistic and neurodivergent staff as they developed the skills necessary to succeed and thrive in a work environment.

"This has been a wonderful experience that will stay with us during our careers," said Smith. "I feel like this experience has shown me all that occupational therapists can do and given me an opportunity to apply the knowledge I learned in the classroom."



Occupational therapists, as the name implies, are trained to help people develop, recover, improve, and maintain skills needed for daily living and working. ETSU launched its Doctor of Occupational Therapy program in May 2022 and will see its first graduates in 2025.

Dr. Kathryn Halsted, an Assistant Professor and Academic Fieldwork Coordinator in the ETSU College of Health Sciences' Department of Occupational Therapy, said the partnership benefited both students and staff at the café.



"I just cannot emphasize enough how great of a learning opportunity this was for everyone involved," said Halsted. "I see this as teaching the students the way we treat as occupational therapists – it's not just theory, it's not just slides on a screen, this is real life, and these are real people. This is more realistic and much closer to what they will experience working in the field as a clinician."

"Our goal was to aid in the mission of the cafe to enable the neurodivergent staff to be successful in job skill development," Halsted added. "This collaboration

enabled our students to develop and practice their skills in a real-world environment, and the engagement with the community enhances the depth of learning and integration of these skills."

Gabby Rambo and Janki Patel, also second-year students in the program, can certainly attest to that.

"This has been a great experience for me because I feel you don't get these kinds of experiences everywhere, and ETSU gives you great opportunities to get community-based experiences," said Patel. "Having an experience like this is very unique,



"I FEEL LIKE THIS EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN ME ALL THAT OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS CAN DO."

Makenzie Smith

and just getting this hands-on learning helps us prepare for when we are practicing occupational therapists in the future."

Rambo said being immersed in a real-world setting helps them better understand what it will be like to work as an occupational therapist, highlighting the importance of being able to serve in a variety of settings.

"When you're working with clients, you don't just want to be seen in the clinic; you want to go out in the community and be immersed in their world to understand their needs and goals better," said Rambo. "I've lived in Johnson City my entire life, and it's been really rewarding to be able to give back to my community."

For the Jeremiah Café, the partnership has been just as rewarding.

"We wanted to give these kids, after they finished school, an opportunity to be part of this workplace and learn," said Jennifer Sweet, owner of the Jeremiah Café. "We wanted this to be a learning environment, and we're very happy to partner with ETSU to help us with that. This was my vision all along, and to see it come to fruition, it's hard to put into words."

By Jonathan Roberts

Cutting-Edge Research on Pressing Health Issues

RESEARCHERS AT ETSU'S QUILLEN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE ARE SEEKING ANSWERS THAT COULD LEAD TO NOVEL TREATMENTS FOR HEART FAILURE AND A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SEPSIS.

Researchers with ETSU's Quillen College of Medicine secured more than \$5 million in federal funding in 2024 to study sepsis, a life-threatening condition that arises when the body's immune response to an infection causes injury to tissue and organs.

In total, Drs. Chuanfu Li (Department of Surgery) and Xiaohui Wang (Department of Biomedical Sciences), received \$5.17 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

Renowned for its commitment and dedication to training physicians to practice in rural and underserved areas, the Quillen College of Medicine has also made its mark as a research institution – regularly receiving significant grant funding to investigate health issues affecting those in the region and beyond.

Li's research seeks to better understand how lactate affects immune cells called macrophages during sepsis infection. Increased lactate levels can be a predictor of the severity of sepsis, but it is not clear whether lactate levels continue to impact the graveness of immune dysfunction and infectious comorbidities.

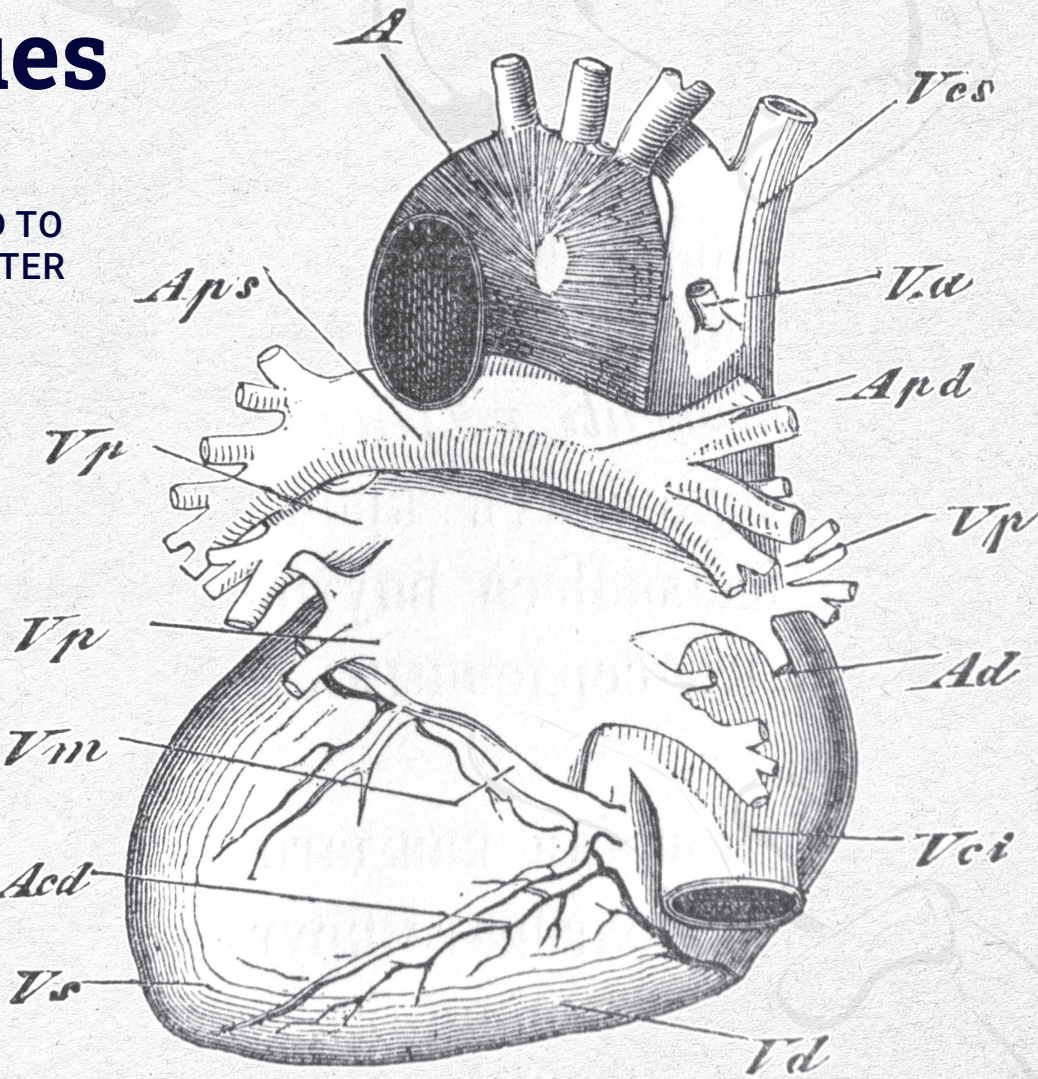
"Successful completion of the proposed studies will yield a wealth of new and novel data, highlighting the crucial and previously undiscovered role of lactate in the regulation of immune responses during sepsis," said Li.

Li is a Professor in the Department of Surgery and a member of the Center of Excellence in Inflammation, Infectious Disease, and Immunity.

Wang's research, meanwhile, is aimed at better understanding the role liver sinusoidal endothelial cells (LESCs) – critical in maintaining the liver's immune and metabolic functions – play in bacterial infection and sepsis.

Patients with liver conditions such as non-alcoholic steatohepatitis or cirrhosis are at increased risk of bacterial infections and sepsis, and their research suggests severe changes to LESCs may lead to liver immune and metabolic dysfunction, making them more prone to infection.

"By clarifying these mechanisms, the findings could provide valuable insights into potential therapeutic targets, improving outcomes for patients," said Wang, an Assistant Professor in the college. "I would like to express my gratitude to Dr.



Chuanfu Li and Dr. David L. Williams in the Department of Surgery for their invaluable support and guidance.

"I also wish to extend my appreciation to our lab members, Tingting Li, Joseph Adams, Amy Gail Gravitte and Peilin Zhu, whose hard work and dedication have been crucial to our research projects."

EXPLORING NOVEL TREATMENT FOR HEART FAILURE

ETSU's Dr. Eric Beaumont, a Professor in the Quillen College of Medicine's Department of Biomedical Sciences, received a grant to study a potential treatment for heart failure by stimulating the vagus nerve – a key part of the nervous system that controls involuntary functions such as heart rate and blood pressure.

The \$2.7 million grant is funded by the National Institutes of Health's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

The project, "Afferent Mechanisms of Vagal Neuromodulation Therapy," will further study preliminary evidence that suggests signals from a specific part of the hypothalamus – the paraventricular nucleus – could serve as a treatment for heart failure. Thus far, large patient trials of vagal nerve stimulation to treat heart failure have failed despite preclinical evidence of success.

Beaumont, an expert in neuroscience and neurocardiology who has previously studied vagal nerve stimulation as a treatment for heart failure, is seeking to understand why.

"During heart failure, there's an autonomic imbalance – there's too much sympathetic output, and that, over time, will cause the heart to fail," said Beaumont, who also serves as associate dean for Research and Graduate Education for the Biomedical Science Graduate Program.

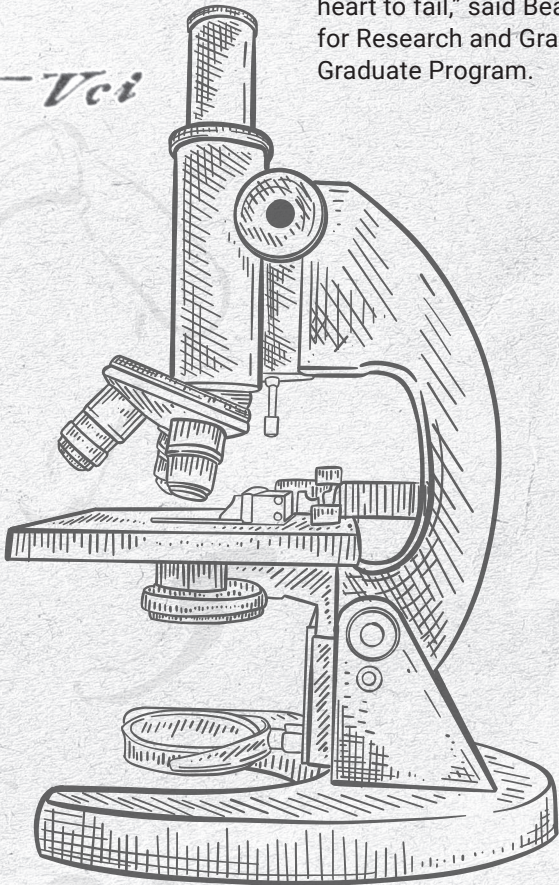
"What we're trying to do by stimulating the vagus nerve is to slow down the heart and give it a chance to recover so it does not fail."

Beaumont's research will utilize a Faraday cage, an enclosure used to block electromagnetic fields, to properly record the small amplitude signals from the neurons in the brain.

The line between success and failure, however, is a fine one. Stimulating the vagus too strongly or too weakly would cause the study to fail. Beaumont, however, firmly believes that treating heart failure in this way is possible.

"Success will be to cure heart failure," Beaumont said of his research.

By Jonathan Roberts





Mother, Daughter Conquer Nursing School Together

EVA JESSEE AND KALI HOLT, MOTHER AND DAUGHTER, ARE BOTH WORKING ON THEIR MASTER'S DEGREES TOGETHER IN THE ETSU COLLEGE OF NURSING.



After seeing both her parents deal with life-threatening health issues, Kali Holt knew she wanted to go into health care.

Fortunately, her mother set a "wonderful example" for her to follow.

As a nurse for nearly two decades herself, Eva Jessee, Holt's mom, had dedicated her life to service, including serving in the military during Operation Desert Storm. But days prior to graduating with her licensed practical nurse degree, Jessee gave birth and went into postpartum cardiomyopathy, a rare form of heart failure.

"She was in full blown heart failure with 20% of her heart working," said Holt. "And then previous to that, my dad was seriously injured after being hit head-on by another driver, who was under the influence of drugs."

"Both fortunately and unfortunately, as the oldest daughter, I had a front row seat to what my mom and dad were going through, and I wanted to be able to know how to take care of my family and follow in her footsteps," said Holt.

It wasn't long after she earned her licensed practical nurse degree that

she approached her mom with a "crazy" idea.

"I said, 'You're an LPN. I'm an LPN. Why don't we be a little crazy and get our bachelor's degrees together?'" Holt said.

And that they did, with both graduating from ETSU's College of Nursing together in fall of 2022.

One degree, however, wasn't enough.

Passionate about forensic nursing and teaching, both enrolled in ETSU's family nurse practitioner master's program, beginning the next chapter of their journey together in the fall of 2023.

Jessee said as a parent, she's always tried to encourage her children to do whatever they wanted in life, something she credits to their faith.

"I set a high bar because I believe I am raising world-changers," said Jessee. "I have always told them they're not average children, and that God created them with a plan and purpose."

"And for me, this is about getting as much education as I can get, and letting my children know that you're



never too old to go back to school – never too old to start your life over again," Jessee continued. "It's been a surreal journey getting to experience this with Kali."

"WE'VE HAD SUCH A GREAT FOUNDATION LAID FOR US AT ETSU THAT WE NEVER ANTICIPATED."

Eva Jessee

In addition to their coursework, both are sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE) and teach as adjunct professors in the ETSU College of Nursing. It's that experience and passion that earned them an opportunity to help develop a postmortem sexual assault examination course for certification in conjunction with the International Association of Forensic Nurses.

"My mom and I, we're both very, very passionate about pursuing all these

different things and being a jack-of-all-trades because all of these things ultimately help us better contribute to society to make things better for the next generation," said Holt.

Of course, their journey is far from over. Ultimately, they want to establish a crisis center to support those struggling with addiction, mental health issues, and survivors of domestic abuse.

Jessee pointed to the educators who inspired them to want to be the best they could be as the reason she and her daughter are so driven to make an impact on others.

"These were people that didn't have to care about us, didn't have to love us, didn't have to invest in us, but these people impacted us and made us want to be better, go higher," Jessee said. "It's like every level of education at ETSU builds upon itself and we've had such a great foundation laid for us at ETSU that we never anticipated, and where we end up is a direct reflection and credit to where we came from."

By Jonathan Roberts



Eight Health Sciences Students Named to Prestigious 1911 Society

Eight health sciences students representing the College of Health Sciences, College of Public Health, and Gatton College of Pharmacy were among the 11 named to the prestigious 1911 Society, which honors some of ETSU’s most notable graduates from undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. Two of the students have been accepted to the Quillen College of Medicine for fall 2025.

Established in 2020 and named in commemoration of the year ETSU was founded, the 1911 Society recognizes students who have distinguished themselves for academic excellence, service, and leadership.

“The members of this distinguished group of graduates exemplify the commitment to service and excellence that has been the hallmark of our institution for more than 100 years,” said ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland.

The selection committee evaluates applicants on academic achievement; sustained service; honors, awards, recognitions, publications, and presentations; demonstrated leadership; work experience, such as study abroad, internships, externships, and clinicals; and personal narratives.

One of the inductees, Dr. Opal Frye-Clark, was honored at ETSU’s December 2024 Commencement ceremony. The remaining 10 honorees will be recognized at ETSU’s May 2025 Commencement exercises.

By Melissa Nipper

THE HONOREES INCLUDE:



SKYLAR BRACKETT of Harriman will graduate with a B.S. in health sciences and attend the ETSU Quillen College of Medicine in fall 2025. Brackett served as Sigma Kappa president and in various Student Government positions, where she organized flood relief efforts for the region. She attended the Tennessee Intercollegiate

State Legislature as a legislative delegate and serves on the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.



DR. OPAL FRYE-CLARK of Johnson City holds a master’s degree in professional communication and a doctorate in public health from ETSU. She is the founder and president of Unity Housing, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that focuses on research-driven interventions to combat homelessness in East Tennessee. She has

worked with the City of Johnson City and numerous service providers to develop a strategic plan for reducing homelessness in the region and is a recipient of the Harold Love Outstanding Community Service Award.



SARA MADISON GOODWIN of Greeneville will graduate with a B.S. in human services and a minor in trauma and resilience. Goodwin served new students as a Preview and Orientation Leader and was awarded the Hoot and Holler Award in 2023 and the Dr. Bonnie Burchett Spirit of POLO (Preview and Orientation Leaders Organization) Award in 2024.

She also served as a Buccaneer Involvement Guide (BIG), volunteered at Coalition for Kids, and represented ETSU at the Southern Regional Orientation Workshop.



MORGAN TEETERS of Athens, Tennessee, is a fourth-year pharmacy student at Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy. She has represented ETSU at national research and clinical skills competitions and was the National Remember the Ribbon Chair for the Student National Pharmaceutical Association, where she coordinated over 100

chapters’ HIV awareness and education efforts. She has organized health outreach clinics at Tri-Pride and Umoja festivals and worked as a peer tutor. Teeters was selected by faculty and staff as the Pharmacy Student of the Year.



TAYLOR LEONARD of Jonesborough will graduate with a B.S. in social work and in psychology. She is the public relations officer for the Student Social Work Association. She has worked at the Isaiah 117 House to provide physical and emotional support for children awaiting foster care placement. While working

with Coalition for Kids, she led a backpack, personal hygiene, and toy drive for children impacted by Hurricane Helene. She also met with legislators during the Social Work Day on the Hill.



SHAINA THOMPSON of Elizabethton is graduating with a B.S. in social work and a minor in Spanish for the professions. She is a Roan Scholar and served as a Preview and Orientation Leader. She founded Letters of Love, a campus organization that spreads kindness and encourages and celebrates people

through letter writing. She has also used her Spanish and social work skills to advocate and empower community members in Appalachia and on trips to South America.



ABIGAIL SIMPSON of Church Hill will graduate with a B.S. in rehabilitative health sciences and a minor in communicative disorders and psychology. As a Roan Scholar, she interned for Holston Home for Children and Therapy Abroad. She has served as a Preview and Orientation Leader, BIG, and outreach chair for Letters of Love. She started Looking Ahead, a program to prepare

individuals for life after high school. She received the Twenty under 20 award and placed second in the 2023 ETSU Elevates competition.



AVA YOBST of Johnson City is graduating with a B.S. in health sciences and a minor in public health. Yobst is a four-year member of the ETSU Cheerleading Team. She founded Power Speakers and was a speaker for TEDxETSU 2023, where she advocated for access to health care in rural communities. She researched women’s cardiovascular health and

earned a grant for her research on the Lavengel Project. Yobst will continue her education at the ETSU Quillen College of Medicine.



ETSU Matriculates First Legacy Student Pharmacist

By Stephen Woodward

KYHRAN BALL IS FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS AT ETSU BILL GATTON COLLEGE OF PHARMACY AS ITS FIRST LEGACY STUDENT.

In 2007, J.P. Ball from Somerset, Kentucky, walked across the stage at the newly founded ETSU Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy as a member of the college's inaugural Class of 2010 and received his white coat.

Flash forward 17 years to August 2024. Dr. J.P. Ball sat in the audience of the ETSU Martin Center for the Arts as an alumnus and watched his son, Kyhran Ball, follow in his footsteps as he, too, walked across the stage to receive his white coat, a member of the Class of 2028. Kyhran is ETSU's first legacy student pharmacist.

"That moment was a bit emotional for me because I know firsthand how hard and competitive it can be to fulfill your dreams of becoming a pharmacist," said J.P. "I'm very thankful the college had enough confidence in me when

I applied for the inaugural class, and I'm even more thankful for their confidence in my son, Kyhran. I know he will be able to graduate from there with a Doctor of Pharmacy and will make everyone there as proud of him as I am."

When J.P. first began seeking out pharmacy schools, there were much fewer options before a national expansion that started in the early 2000s. He took a risk on the new program at ETSU.

"I CHOSE GATTON BECAUSE OF THE REPUTATION OF EXCELLENCE THAT IT HAS."

Kyhran Ball

"I came to ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy because I wanted to be involved in helping our college become one of the best pharmacy schools in the nation," said J.P., "and I was confident we would definitely see that come to fruition with time."

Since J.P.'s 2010 graduation, the college quickly rose to national prominence, earning numerous awards. For Kyhran, the college's culture and nationally ranked outcomes were big factors in his decision to attend ETSU.

"I wanted to explore my options to find where I fit best, and the best fit for me was ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy," said Kyhran. "I chose Gatton because of the reputation of excellence that it has. The culture of student-centered learning, the beautiful scenery of the location, and its 95% NAPLEX pass rate were all factors in my choice."



"The deciding factor, however, was the proximity to other health care programs on the Mountain Home VA campus and the interprofessional experiences that Gatton offers," Kyhran continued.

"Matriculating the college's first legacy student is a major step forward in the history of ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy," said Dr. Debbie Byrd, Dean of the college. "It demonstrates that Gatton's commitment to excellence has continued over generations and has become not only an integral part of the patient population in the region but also the hearts and minds of our alumni."

Improving health care in rural and underserved communities is the college's mission, and Kyhran plans to make that part of his pharmacy career after graduation and return home to Kentucky to serve in his family's community pharmacy, Burgess Drugs.

Burgess Drugs was founded in 1940 by the Burgess family, and ownership passed to one of their sons, Dr. Jerry Burgess, physician, and James Ball, J.P.'s father and a local businessman.

Later, J.P. joined the partnership, and in the past several years, he has grown their independent pharmacy business in Eastern Kentucky from a single store to three pharmacies in Whitley City and Sterns with plans to open a fourth near Somerset.

"The stores have gone through a lot of changes since the original location's opening in 1940, but the one thing that hasn't changed is the dedication to the community and the love of serving the region," said Kyhran.

As ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy's first legacy student, Kyhran and his father reflected on the importance of that title.

"It's a testament to the confidence that we both have in ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy being the best choice he could have made pursuing his doctorate within the profession of pharmacy," said J.P.

Kyhran echoed a similar feeling.

"It shows that the college doesn't just make pharmacists but fosters a love for the profession that is passed down through generations," he said.



Regional Collaboration Nets Major Funding for Addiction Treatment

**IN 2024, ETSU AND ITS REGIONAL PARTNERS
SECURED MORE THAN \$7 MILLION IN FUNDING
TO COMBAT ADDICTION AND BOLSTER THE
REGION'S RECOVERY ECOSYSTEM.**

When Frontier Health and ETSU's Addiction Science Center (ASC) established the Regional Recovery Ecosystem Advisory Council (RREAC) in 2022, its goal was to prioritize opportunities to strengthen addiction recovery in the region.

From the beginning, the RREAC included elected officials, leaders from recovery community organizations,

Ballad Health, and the First Tennessee Development District.

Members of the RREAC spent much of the last year working on a coordinated effort to secure grant funding to address gaps in the region's recovery ecosystem, a term that describes the factors in a community that support individuals in recovery from substance use disorder.

On March 18, 2024, they learned their efforts were successful – securing an incredible \$7.4 million in first-year grant

funding from the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council to bolster recovery resources in Northeast Tennessee.

"Our strategy for securing the funds worked," said Dr. Robert Pack, ETSU's Executive Vice Provost and Co-Director of the ASC, which is housed in the College of Public Health. "Now, it is time for us to shift our focus to ensuring that we maximize the impact of this funding to benefit the most people in our region."

Fourteen projects in total received funding, thanks to the coordinated efforts of the RREAC. ETSU received grant funding for 10 projects alone, totaling roughly \$4 million.

Other local organizations receiving funding include:

- ♦ Ballad Health
- ♦ Carter County Drug Prevention Coalition
- ♦ Fairview Housing Management Corporation
- ♦ First Tennessee Development District
- ♦ Frontier Health

"We are very excited to see that \$7.4 million in grants submitted to the Opioid Abatement Council were recently awarded funding in our region," said Kristie Hammonds, President and CEO of Frontier Health and Co-Leader of the RREAC.

"This will add many additional needed resources that were identified as priorities by the RREAC, a regional group of diversified local leaders, community members, and provider organizations," Hammonds continued. "This is a huge win for our region, and we are grateful to be a part of such a passionate, caring community who advocates and works together to grow a healthier community."

The funding was part of the first round of community grants from the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council, which awarded 116 grants to entities across the state, totaling nearly \$81 million.

"It takes a village to work together to support the individual needs in the continuum of care for our communities. This funding is a testament to the power of collaboration and the collective impact each organization can make in our region's relentless fight against the opioid crisis," said Tammy Albright, Chief Executive Officer of Ballad Health Behavioral Health. "Together, we're not just confronting a challenge; we're changing lives and shaping the future for generations to come."

The grant funding will directly impact those in the region recovering from addiction, something made possible through partnerships among key community partners such as Frontier Health, Ballad Health, ETSU, elected officials and many others.

By Jonathan Roberts

ETSU Health Drives Research to Help Infants

A better future for our region’s most vulnerable population is the motivating driver for Dr. Marty Olsen, an obstetrician and gynecologist with ETSU Health who has dedicated much of his career to assisting patients with opioid use disorder.

More of East Tennessee’s children are born facing health challenges related to opioid exposure than children born in many other states.

Under Olsen’s supervision, Summer Shore, a fourth-year medical student at ETSU’s Quillen College of Medicine at the time, uncovered a correlation between the buprenorphine prescription rate and the rate of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).

The higher the prescription rate within the region, the higher the rate of babies born with NAS symptoms – tremors, slow weight gain, vomiting, diarrhea, and even such challenges as smaller heads and altered brain structure.

Data show that from 2010 to 2018, the NAS rate in Southern Appalachia rose by 335%. At the same time, buprenorphine prescriptions increased by 413%. This shows an association over time but does not prove one caused the other.

Shore’s research was published in the *Southern Medical Journal*.

“A medical student stepped up and did what a government agency should have done a long time ago,” Dr. Olsen said. “Because of this association, it’s my belief that as a



society, we need to grapple with the safety of the mother and the long-term effects for the babies.”

Olsen and Shore hope that their research helps to prompt a reassessment of the standards of care and the risks and benefits that relate to lowering buprenorphine dosages during pregnancy.

Shore said that participating in her research study and learning more about the patients who struggle with opioid use disorder has prepared her to be a better physician.

“I want to be the type of physician who values improving the patient experience and values their life experiences, where they’re not treated as a problem, but as a person,” she said. “It’s a really good opportunity to be a part of advocating for a patient population that might not always be advocated for.”

At ETSU Health’s OB/GYN clinic, Olsen offers a trailblazing program for expecting patients with opioid use disorder who are receiving buprenorphine medication-assisted therapy (MAT). This voluntary program helps patients to lower their dosages over time.

Many of these patients wish to discontinue this medication while pregnant to reduce the likelihood of their children being born with neonatal abstinence syndrome.

Through the program, the women receive MAT treatments, prenatal care, counseling, and case management all at one site. This allows for consistent, comprehensive care that is also respectful of the patient’s autonomy, time and resources.

By Kristen Early



Former ETSU Vice Provost Plays Role in Establishing NIH Office

DR. WILLIAM DUNCAN, who retired as ETSU’s Vice Provost for Research in 2021, continues to represent the university in retirement – playing a key role in helping to establish the Office of Autoimmune Disease Research (OADR) with the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

This years-long effort began in 2020 when Duncan was selected to serve on the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) committee on Assessment of NIH Research on Autoimmune Diseases.

Duncan and the other committee members were charged with providing a general overview of epidemiologic trends in autoimmune

diseases, with particular focus on research efforts by the NIH.

Duncan noted the NIH has more than a dozen institutes and offices that conduct research on autoimmune diseases, “and the concern was, ‘Is there good coordination across those entities?’”

In 2022, that committee completed its report and recommended establishing an office to elevate the visibility of autoimmune diseases and establish a clear focus for autoimmune disease research. After hearing their findings, in 2023 Congress agreed to establish the OADR within the Office of Research on Women’s Health.

While autoimmune diseases – conditions in which someone’s immune system mistakenly attacks itself – can affect everyone, they are more common in women.

After years of work, and months of waiting, the committee learned its work paid off in 2024, with Congress setting aside \$10 million to jumpstart the new office.

“This whole effort is to improve the quality of life for patients with autoimmune diseases,” said Duncan.

Offices, Duncan said, do not have the same resources and power as an institute, but they do have the ability to coordinate research across institutes. He likened it to the Office of AIDS Research, which was established to perform a similar role, coordinating research across institutes.

“That had an effect, and was helpful for us moving forward,” said Duncan, who served as Associate Director of the Therapeutics Research Program in the Division of AIDS at the NIH around that same time.

Prior to joining ETSU in 2008, Duncan was Chief Operating Officer and Chief Scientific Officer of the Baylor Research Institute. Before that, he spent nearly two decades with the NIH in a variety of roles related to autoimmune disease research.

For Duncan, being tabbed to serve on the committee – which was comprised of a dozen people from a variety of backgrounds – was rewarding.

“I’m grateful that I could contribute to this,” said Duncan. “To be selected, and being able to contribute – it’s a good feeling.”

By Jonathan Roberts

Faculty Earn High Honors

FACULTY MEMBERS HONORED IN 2024 FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE



Pictured above (l-r) Drs. Cuihong Jia, Andrew Joyner, and Tom Kwasigroch

Two Quillen College of Medicine faculty, Drs. Cuihong Jia and Tom Kwasigroch, earned ETSU's Distinguished Faculty Award in the areas of teaching and research. This award is the highest honor given to an ETSU professor.

Each honoree receives a one-of-a-kind, hand-blown glass piece and a \$7,500 prize provided by the ETSU Foundation.

"These exceptional faculty embody the spirit of ETSU and our mission with unwavering dedication," said Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. "Their work is deeply rooted in improving student outcomes and improving our region through their teaching, research, and service."

An Associate Professor in the ETSU Quillen College of Medicine's Department of Biomedical Sciences, Jia earned the Distinguished Faculty Award in Research.

Jia, who joined ETSU in 2014, has nearly three dozen publications under her belt and has quickly established

herself as one of the university's premier researchers – translating \$50,000 in internal college grants to more than \$2.5 million in federal funding, including \$662,499 from the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Defense in 2024.

Much of Jia's research is on neurological issues, including the sense of smell, post-traumatic stress disorder, and multiple sclerosis.

The Distinguished Faculty Award in Teaching was presented to Kwasigroch, who has guided medical students through the intricacies of medical gross anatomy at Quillen College of Medicine for 45 years.

Kwasigroch has received numerous teaching accolades throughout his academic career, including two national awards, the Alpha Omega Alpha Robert J. Glaser Distinguished Teacher Award and the McCann National Award in Teaching and Mentoring. He was also honored with the Quillen Dean's Distinguished Award, is a 15-time recipient of the Quillen Course of the Year award, a 16-time recipient of the Quillen

Professor of the Year award and a faculty hooder at commencement for 15 graduating classes.

Kwasigroch's nomination packet for the Distinguished Faculty Award emphasizes his innovation in teaching coupled with his dedication to students.

Dr. Andrew Joyner, Associate Professor in the Department of Geosciences, earned the Distinguished Faculty Award in Service.

By Jonathan Roberts



NOTABLE WOMEN OF ETSU

ETSU's Dr. Dottie Greene and Melissa Shafer were named as 2024 recipients of the Notable Women of ETSU Award, presented by the ETSU Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program.

Greene is a Professor Emerita in the ETSU College of Health Sciences' Department of Social Work, and has a long history of providing addiction recovery services and safe spaces for all backgrounds.

Among Greene's highlights: Bringing the first recovery community center to Johnson City. Greene also developed the Clinical Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counseling Studies certification program in the Department of Social Work.

College of Public Health

etsu.edu/cph
(423) 439-4243 publichealth@etsu.edu

- › Bachelor of Science in Public Health–Community Health
- › Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Health Sciences
- › Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences
- › Bachelor of Science in Health Administration
- › Bachelor of Science in Microbiology
- › Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health
- › Minors in Emergency/Disaster Response Management, Environmental Health, Epidemiology, Global Health and Development (includes Peace Corps Prep program), Health Administration, Health Sciences, Microbiology, Public Health, and Safety
- › Master of Public Health–Biostatistics, Community Health, Environmental and Occupational Health, Epidemiology, Public Health Leadership and Policy
- › Master of Health Administration
- › MD/MPH dual degree programs
- › PharmD/MPH dual degree programs
- › Doctor of Public Health (DrPH)–Community Health, Epidemiology, Health Management and Policy
- › Graduate certificates in Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Gerontology, Global Health, Health Care Management, Health Data Analytics, One Health and Climate Studies, Public Health, Recovery Research, and Rural Health

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- › Bachelor of Social Work
- › Bachelor of Science Degree Completion Programs in Dental Hygiene, Radiologic Science, & Respiratory Therapy
- › Minors in Allied Health, American Sign Language, Communicative Disorders, Nutrition, Social Work, Human Development and Learning, Family Studies, Trauma and Resilience, and Clinical Exercise Science
- › Undergraduate career certificates in Child Advocacy Studies, Computed Tomography (CT), and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- › Master of Arts in Counseling
- › Master of Science in Individual, Family, and Community Sciences
- › Master of Science in Sport Science and Coach Education
- › Master of Science in Allied Health
- › Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition
- › Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology
- › Master of Social Work
- › Doctor of Audiology
- › Doctor of Occupational Therapy
- › Doctor of Physical Therapy
- › Doctor of Sport Physiology and Performance
- › Graduate certificates in Child Advocacy Studies, Clinical Addiction Counseling Studies, Child Advocacy Studies, Social Work/Psychology Dual Degree Program, and Sport Nutrition, Interprofessional Pediatric Feeding Disorders, and Nature-Based Therapy

Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy

etsu.edu/pharmacy
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- › Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy Studies
- › PharmD
- › PharmD/MPH dual degree program
- › PharmD/MBA dual degree program

Quillen College of Medicine

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- › Accelerated MD Program

- › PhD Program
- › MD/MPH dual degree program
- › MD/MBA dual degree program

College of Nursing

etsu.edu/nursing
(423) 439-4578

- › Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) (Johnson City, Kingsport, Sevierville campuses)
- › LPN to BSN (for licensed practical nurses)
- › RN to BSN (for diploma or associate degree nurses)
- › AAS/BSN Dual Degree
- › Post-Bachelor of Science in Nursing Certificate in Health Care Genetics and Genomics
- › Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) - Family Nurse Practitioner, Nursing Administration, Nursing Education, and Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing
- › Post-Master's Certificate Program in Nursing Administration and Nursing Education
- › RN-MSN degree in another field and RN license)
- › Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)–Adult Gerontological Primary Care Nurse Practitioner, Executive Leadership, Family Nurse Practitioner, and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner
- › Post-DNP Certificate in Executive Leadership
- › Post-Graduate APRN Certificate Program in Adult Gerontological Primary Care Nurse Practitioner, Family Nurse Practitioner, and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner
- › ETSU-Tennessee Technological University (TTU) Joint DNP Program – Adult Gerontological Acute Care Nurse Practitioner, Executive Leadership, Family Nurse Practitioner, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner-Primary Care, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, and Women's Health Care Nurse Practitioner

- › BSN-DNP
- › BSN-PhD
- › DNP-PhD
- › PhD



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
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ETSU Health Annual Report
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A Tradition in Caring for Our Community

ETSU Health proudly operates at more than 30 clinical sites with over 250 health care providers across Northeast Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina. We provide expert care across numerous specialties.

We seek to serve our communities with quality, affordable care while training the next generation of health care providers with expertise and compassion - so that they may carry out our mission for the next generations.

Thank you for letting us serve you, care for your family and help our region thrive. It's a tradition in caring for our community that we hope to continue for many generations to come.



Discover what ETSU Health has to offer.



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