



# NEWSLETTER

## *President's Pen*

Dear Piedmont University Community,

As we begin a new semester, I am filled with gratitude and excitement for our journey ahead. Piedmont continues to thrive, thanks to the dedication of our campus community and the unwavering commitment to excellence in education, student success, and service.

In the following pages you will read about success stories of the ones who make this university great - the people. Whether you are a trustee, faculty, staff, students or alumni, together, we are shaping the future and making a lasting impact.

Let us continue to work together to uphold the values that define us and to foster an environment where everyone can flourish.

Sincerely,  
Marshall M. Criser, III

January 2025

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# John Spiegel Answers to Professor, President/CEO, and Commanding Officer

by Terrie Ellerbee



John Spiegel has some impressive titles — Piedmont Assoc. Theatre Professor and President/CEO of Spiegel Films — but perhaps none more impressive than Commanding Officer in the Georgia State Defense Force (GSDF). Spiegel joined the GSDF, similar to the National Guard and referred to as the Georgia State Guard, 15 years ago.

Service is a family tradition. His grandfather, Charles “Cy” Perkins, was an admiral and a hero pilot in the U.S. Navy who earned the Navy Cross for actions during the World War II battle of Midway.

“His plane got all shot up, but he saved his guys,” Spiegel said. He remembers a talk he had with his grandfather about joining the service. The military hero told his grandson: “I served. You don’t have to.”

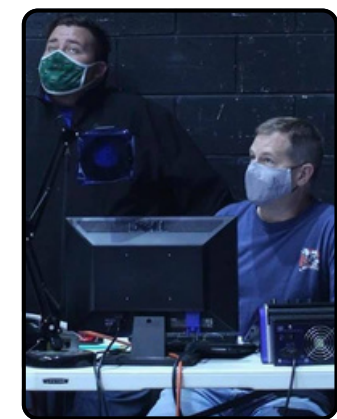
Spiegel went to Davidson College in NC to earn his undergraduate degree in theatre. He achieved a Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He started his teaching career in 2003 and joined Piedmont in 2009.

Two years later, Spiegel enlisted in the State Guard as a private, worked his way up to Staff Sergeant, and soon after completed Officer Candidate School. He is now a captain and commanding officer of the 3rd Battalion 1st Brigade based in Winder.

The Georgia State Defense Force is a component of the Georgia Department of Defense. Its members wear uniforms but don’t carry weapons. Spiegel’s unit participates in opposing force exercises and provides disaster relief and recovery.

Last September, Spiegel’s unit was sent to Augusta, where Hurricane Helene left significant damage. Soaking rains and 80-100 mph winds caused trees to topple, and more than 8,000 power poles were damaged or destroyed.

Members of the Brigade cut trees, removed debris, and unblocked roads. They cleared the way to the four-unit nuclear Plant Vogtle. They distributed food, water, and blankets.



Theatre productions and military operations have much in common — planning the production/operation, assembling the right team(s), and meeting deadlines on or under budget. Spiegel’s MFA is in directing. He has taught theatre history, script analysis, and, more recently, design. He also builds sets.

About a decade ago, Spiegel directed a production of Macbeth with a modern take using contemporary weapons. The production included 42 blank guns and a tank. Where did he get a tank? He bought it from a British museum that was going out of business.

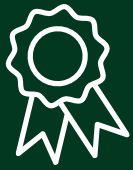
The tank was parked outside the Swanson Center for Performing Arts. Someone with Netflix saw the tank and asked Spiegel where he’d rented it.

“I said, ‘Oh, no. I own it.’ And he said, ‘Let’s talk.’ And we did,” Spiegel said. “Coffee and a tea and a dinner, and this, that, and the other, and then all of a sudden, he’s renting things from me, and someone else says, ‘Hey, where did you guys find this guy?’ And there it is.”

“It” is Spiegel Films. Captain/Professor John Spiegel is President and CEO.



[Want the rest of the story? Click here.](#)



# Piedmont ROAR Social Media Students win 15 Pinnacle Awards



by Dr. Joe Dennis



Piedmont students involved in Roar Student Media won 15 Pinnacle Awards at the National College Media Conference, held last fall in New Orleans.

"This proves that some of the best student media in the nation is being produced at Piedmont University," said Dr. Joe Dennis, chair of the mass communications department. "These awards not only showcase the outstanding talent of our mass communications students but also demonstrate the array of educational activities happening at Piedmont."

Competing in the Division III classification, which includes colleges and universities with less than 5,000 students, Piedmont students earned a record five first-place Pinnacle Awards, the highest award in college media.

From left: Eric Edmonson, Jessica Sconyers, Paige Kluba, Nahomi Solorzano, Sophie Haines, Alexis Baumgardner, Chloe Spradlin. Not pictured is Michelle Cates.

Senior film and documentary production major **Sophie Haines** took top honors in the Best Video/PSA category for her "Pardon My Overmodulating Promo," a 60-second commercial for a radio show hosted by a fellow student. The multitasking Haines also earned first-place recognition for Best Column, "Bent, Torn & Shredded," a personal essay reflecting how women are sexualized from an early age.

Senior sports communications major **Jessica Sconyers** also earned two first-place awards, both for photography. An action photo of Piedmont Lions baseball player Kolton Hicks took the crown for Best Sports News Photo. Sconyers and senior mass communications major **Michelle Cates** took first place in Best Photo Package for their photo story "Nursing students learn through disaster," showcasing highlights of a disaster drill exercise held on Piedmont's campus in April.

Senior mass communications major **Paige Kluba** won the top prize for Best Sports Feature for "Kicking Cancer: Still's 2023 season 13 years in the making," a story about Piedmont soccer player Ashley Still's battle with cancer and return to the pitch.

Roar Student Media earned its first-ever podcasting award, with senior sports communication major **Eric Edmondson** taking second place for Best Podcast for his narrative podcast, "Against All Odds, Against All Comers: The Story of the 2021 Atlanta Braves."

Sports communications graduate **Matt Kodrowski** earned a second-place award for Best Audio Talk/Entertainment Program, "Pardon My Overmodulation."

Senior sports communications major **Chloe Spradlin** (Fall 2024 graduate) earned two second-place awards for her writing. Her story "Division Bri," about Piedmont women's tennis player Bri Laidman's life-changing decision to pursue a Division III school, earned an award for Best Profile. She also took second place for Best Game Story for "Men's and Women's Swimming Top Independent South Conference Mountain," an article about the conference champion Piedmont swimming teams.

Additionally, Piedmont students collected four third-place awards, and two honorable mentions, at the conference.

The 15 national awards — a record haul for Piedmont — caps off an incredibly successful year for Roar Student Media. Last spring, students took home 14 awards from the Georgia College Press Association, including an overall first-place award for www.piedmontroar.com as the top small-college student media website in the state.



# Trophies, Titles and the Moments That Matter: The Best of Fall 2024



by Joseph Garwood



The fall semester at Piedmont was another successful one filled with trophies, titles and moments that matter.

While wins on the field are celebrated, the biggest win of the semester was creating an unforgettable moment for senior Anna Lassiter who got to "ring the bell" to celebrate the completion of her cancer treatment.

"'Ringing the Bell' for Anna was one of the most memorable moments for me in my 23 years working at Piedmont," said Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Jim Peeples. "The real joy shown by all the student-athletes, coaches and support staff from all our teams

who came that evening to see her ring the bell spoke to one of our athletic department's values of 'family' and what a great example of that value being put into action. I will remember that night for the rest of my life."

Lassiter was also celebrated with her own Senior Day, marking the completion of her collegiate career as she graduated in December with her undergraduate degree.

On the field, three student-athletes earned all-region honors (Walker Capelle, Men's Cross Country; Sophie Wells, Women's Soccer; Sierra Judson, Women's Soccer). Twelve student-athletes across five sports earned All-Conference honors and Piedmont took the individual cross-country titles on both the men's and women's side (Walker Capelle, Men's Cross Country & Skyler Seeber, Women's Cross Country).



"Adversity is a very real part of life, and I believe our student-athletes demonstrated the skills of resilience in how they navigated the challenges that came our way this fall," Peeples said.



For a full, visual recap of the Fall 2024 semester, [click here](#).

# Travel Study, Small Class Sizes Made Tench's Time at Piedmont Memorable

by Terrie Ellerbee



A lot happened during Josh Tench's time as a student at Piedmont University, especially during his senior year. Tench graduated in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in business after studying abroad in Prague and Munich.

"I still talk about that trip often. I made some great memories and friendships from my time on that trip," Tench said.

Tench grew up in Cornelia and enjoyed attending sports camps at Piedmont as a kid.

He later took a few courses during the summer in Demorest, but most of his classes were at Piedmont's Athens campus. Tench has lived in Oconee County for the past decade.

"I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Piedmont and would definitely recommend it to others. I loved the smaller class sizes to grow relationships with professors and other students and the accountability that comes with it."

While still a Piedmont student, Tench began working for Watkinsville, Georgia-based LAD Truck Lines. The company announced in November that it had promoted Tench to Vice President of Sales and Logistics. Tench is a tenured member of the logistics and trucking firm.

Tench is actively involved in his community as a deacon at Briarwood Baptist Church and a member of The Georgia Club and the Touchdown Club of Athens.

Piedmont University congratulates Josh Tench on his success and recent promotion!



## Calendar of Events

### January

- 1/16 Art Reception: Alice Stone-Collins Exhibit
- 1/20 Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
- 1/23 Fine Arts College Experience (FACE)
- 1/25 Museum Family Workshop
- 1/26 Jeri-Mae Astolfi, Piano
- 1/31 Counselor Day

### February

- 2/13-16 9 to 5 The Musical
- 2/15 Museum Family Workshop
- 2/17 Preview Piedmont
- 2/27 Conservatory of Music Faculty Showcase Recital
- 2/27 Art Reception: Ben Steele Exhibit

### March

- 3/7 Criminal Justice & Forensic Science Prospective Student Day
- 3/10-14 Spring Break
- 3/18 Piedmont Camerata
- 3/22 Museum Family Workshop
- 3/25 Piedmont Singers
- 3/28 Living Like a Lion

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



We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our Yonahian Society and donors. Your generosity and support have made a significant impact on Piedmont University. Your contributions have enabled us to continue our work, reach our goals, and make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve.

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*Thank You*

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