



NEWSLETTER

President's Pen

Dear Piedmont University Community,

As the fall semester unfolds, the season brings with it a renewed sense of energy and purpose as we welcome back our students, faculty, and staff to campus.

Last week we were excited to learn that U.S. News & World Report has ranked Piedmont University the No. 2 Best Value in the State of Georgia among regional universities! This ranking reaffirms our commitment to providing a high-quality education that prepares students for successful careers without compromising their financial futures.

As we look ahead, I am confident that our collective efforts will continue to drive the university forward. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to ensuring our success!

Sincerely,
Marshall M. Criser, III

October 2024

IN THIS ISSUE

- Faculty Spotlight.....2
- Student Success.....3
- Piedmont Lions.....4
- Alumni Spotlight..... 5
- Upcoming Events.....5
- Donor Thanks.....6



World-renowned spider expert brings knowledge to Piedmont - and Netflix

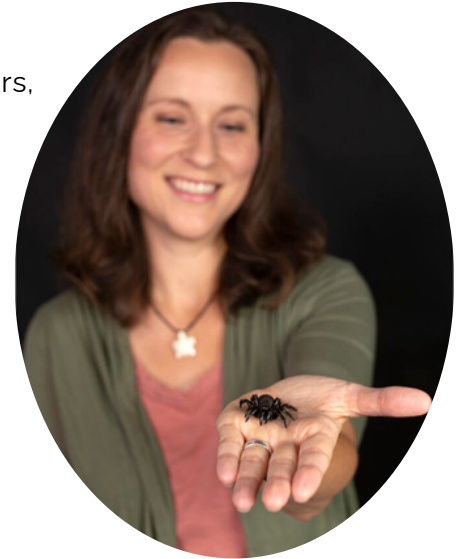
by Grace Wills

For most people, spiders are a minor fright or small nuisance. But for Piedmont's own Dr. Rebecca Godwin, one of the world's foremost experts on trapdoor spiders, they are fascinating, everyday companions.

"I want people to know that they are more than just fangs with legs," says Godwin, assistant professor of biology. Her expertise on trapdoor spiders means she receives inquiries from across the world about spiders; as she speaks, spiders sent to her from across America rest on her desk for her identification.

The latest inquiry came from Netflix; Godwin consulted for and assisted with filming 2023's *Life on Our Planet* documentary series, produced by Steven Spielberg and narrated by Morgan Freeman. A major part of her work was staging scenes with trapdoor spiders, which gave her a glimpse of the rarely-seen world of documentary production.

"Spiders aren't always cooperative," she says, recalling a scene where production wanted a trapdoor spider to lunge for – but ultimately miss – a tiger beetle. "We threw so many beetles at her burrow trying to get her to attack," Godwin laughed, but the resulting shot makes a stunning demonstration of the trapdoor spider's behavior.



Although she now devotes her studies to them, spiders were not always Dr. Godwin's species of choice. Her path wound from studies of carnivorous plants, to museum and science communication work, to science programs with children, then finally to her current position at Piedmont.

"My winding path makes me more confident that I chose the right focus," she says, "because I have tried several things but love this the most."



Dr. Godwin's abundance of experience and knowledge exemplify the excellence of Piedmont University's faculty. The very same faculty helped inspire her to take a position at Piedmont: "I had the opportunity to speak to them when I visited and liked them immediately," she says. In addition, Piedmont's emphasis on undergraduate research and beautiful location influenced her move.

When asked for final thoughts, Dr. Godwin knows immediately her answer: "spiders are incredibly diverse and interesting," she says. "If you can try not to be scared, and try to see them as helpers, you can open yourself up to their whole fascinating little world."





Piedmont freshman Reagen Pattishall is ready to take on the world, one lap at a time



by Grace Wills



At 18 years old, Reagen Pattishall's track cycling prowess has taken her to destinations across the United States and beyond its borders. Now, it brings her right here to Piedmont University.

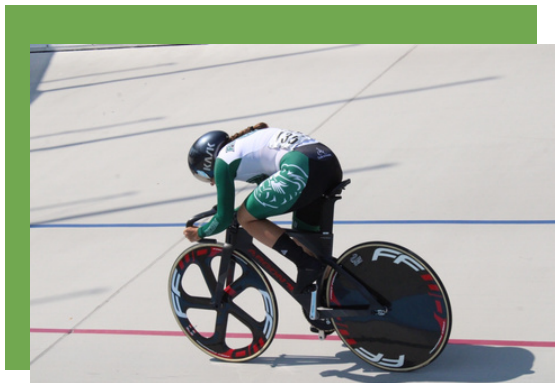
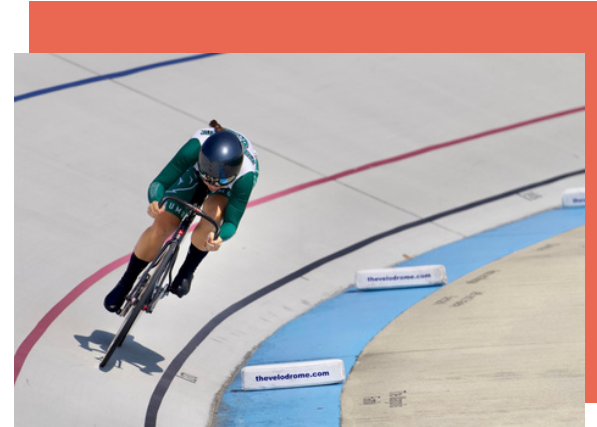
"It's like biking on the inside of a bowl on a banked track," says Reagen of the sport she fell in love with at age seven. Initially a competitive downhill skier, she sought a sport to do in the skiing off-season. She quickly realized her passion and talent for track cycling and began pursuing it full-time.

Throughout her career, Reagen's skills have gained increasing renown; she is now recognized as one of the nation's top track cyclists, competing and training USA Cycling, the sport's national governing body. In August, she traveled with Team USA to Luoyang, China, for the 2024 Junior Track Cycling World Championships.

"It was incredible," Reagen says; though her busy competition schedule kept her from seeing much of the city, she got the opportunity to meet cyclists from all over the world and take part in "top-tier racing." She now graduates from the junior level to begin competing in elite ranks. Last month, she participated in her first competition as part of Team Piedmont at the Collegiate Track Cycling National Championships.

Reagen has impressive goals on and off the track. Outside of cycling, she is working on her first semester as a finance major, inspired by her father's career in financial consulting. She hopes to launch her work in finance when she finishes competing. But before that, she has international aspirations.

"Of course, the big dream is the Olympics," she says while describing her path forward. Through her training with USA Cycling and Piedmont, she hopes to progress through the ranks and compete on the biggest sporting stage. Piedmont's support, Reagen says, is helping make that possible.



"My coach gives me a lot of freedom in my training program," she reports, "and my professors have been really understanding." She believes Piedmont's flexibility and personalized education will help her successfully pursue her academic and athletic goals.

"It's been really good so far," Reagen says with a grin. And with just two months in school under her belt, the Piedmont community is in for a fabulous four years watching her shine.



Training like Olympians: Remel Williams brings Olympic trials experience back to Piedmont

by Danielle Percival



Piedmont was represented in Eugene, Oregon at the U.S. Track & Field Olympic Trials in June, and Remel Williams, an assistant track and field coach for the Lions, is bringing the knowledge she gained home to the Lions.

Williams recently completed her Level 3 certification in Sprints, Hurdles, and Relays through the USA Track & Field Professional Pathway program, the highest level of certification through USATF. Through that opportunity, she was encouraged to apply for the USATF National Championship Mentorship Grant, which afforded her the chance to shadow legendary coach Tonja Buford-Bailey at the U.S. Olympic Trials for Track & Field in June.

"I was allowed to follow around Tonja Buford-Bailey, Gabby Thomas' coach, for three days," Williams said. "I got to interact with her athletes, follow them around, and ask her questions about her training. She was a great resource and said I could continue to contact her and keep in touch."

Gabby Thomas went on to win three gold medals at the 2024 Olympics including the individual 200-meter. Despite the level of competition being some of the highest in the sport, Williams saw many correlations to the work she does daily with Piedmont's student-athletes.

"Even though these individuals are Olympians or trying to be Olympians, my student-athletes are doing the exact same workouts sometimes or having some of the same issues," Williams said. "Now I have these resources, and I can call them and say 'Hey, I'm having this same issue you talked about last year. How do I help my athletes succeed?'"

To qualify for the mentorship opportunity, a coach must have led student-athletes to a championship at their level, and during her time at Piedmont, Williams guided Anthony Jordan to a historic season in the long jump in 2022.

Jordan earned All-American honors at the NCAA Division III Indoor Track & Field Championship finishing third in the event and became Piedmont's first track & field athlete to earn NCAA All-American honors.

Williams enters her fifth season with the Lions in the fall of 2024 and is currently completing her doctoral program in education through Lincoln Memorial University.



Kanler Cumbass would choose Piedmont. Again.

by Terrie Ellerbee



Kanler Cumbass was a stellar Piedmont University student. A tennis player and academic scholar, he was also involved in the campus community, including serving as president of the Student Government Association (SGA).

It was not always so. As a freshman, Cumbass struggled with so much freedom and living far away from home. It can be lonely and overwhelming. He considered transferring to a school nearer to his parents in southern Georgia.

Then Cumbass got an up-close look at leadership. Piedmont's Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Kim Crawford, nudged him to participate in SGA. Biology Professor Dr. Julia Schmitz also mentored Cumbass, including him as Piedmont embarked on "High-Impact Practices." These include travel study, leadership, community engagement, and the university's annual undergraduate research celebration, Symposium.

"Piedmont University's dedication to these core high-impact practices sets it apart and ensures that every student is well-prepared for future endeavors," Cumbass said. "While at Piedmont, I had access to rigorous undergraduate research opportunities that allowed me to deeply explore my academic interests. The high-quality experiential learning activities, both at home and away, provided invaluable hands-on experiences that enriched my education and prepared me for real-world challenges."



Cumbass is now an associate with Education Strategy Group (ESG), and spends his days thinking about education policy, getting students into higher education, and retaining them through graduation. It is his passion.

And he knows Piedmont University. He understands the value of mentorship and still serves Piedmont as an Alumni Association Board of Directors representative on the university's board of trustees.

The once-shy freshman is forever a Lion. He would choose Piedmont again and again, he said.

“

As an alumnus, I am continuously proud of the university's unwavering commitment to student success. I extend my warmest welcome to new lions whose lives will forever be positively impacted by the Piedmont University community. Welcome home, Lions!"

Calendar of Events

OCTOBER

10/8-11/2 Art Exhibit: Camden Goddard

10/18 EYES: Exploring Your Environment Through Science

10/24 Piedmont Cantabile

NOVEMBER

11/14 Piedmont Singers

11/14 Art Reception: Audrey Davenport

11/14-05/31 Art Exhibit:

Audrey Davenport

11/19 Piedmont String Orchestra

11/21 Piedmont Wind Ensemble

11/25 Preview Piedmont

DECEMBER

12/6-7 36th Annual Service of Lessons & Carols

12/13 Fall Commencement

JANUARY

1/8 Spring Classes Begin

1/12 Jacqueline Zander-Wall, Mezzo-Soprano & Louise Bass, Piano

1/16 Art Reception: Alice Stone-Collins Exhibit

1/16-2/25 Art Exhibit: Alice Stone-Collins

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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