

# The Pinnacle

## *Destination Known*

Vol. 31 | March 2023

This issue was a difficult one to assemble, and fittingly it discusses difficult topics such as autism, loss of a child, and politics. While we believe it is important to give those with such stories a voice, we also believe it is important to adequately prepare people for what they may engage with—or what they may choose not to engage with. As such, this editor's note serves as a trigger warning for the articles "My Journey" and "Reflections on Autism." Thank you to the authors of those articles for sharing their stories with us and allowing us to publish them for public consumption. Local politics are also discussed in an objective manner in the final article in this volume, "Local Election: Vote April 4th."

It is insane to think we are more than halfway through this semester. There is only one more edition to release this semester, in mid-May right around finals week. Be sure to look for that copy on the Honors Program and PTK Canvas pages or at various print locations around campus when it releases. And, as always, if you would like to contribute to future editions of The Pinnacle, you can reach me at [wilsonda@otc.edu](mailto:wilsonda@otc.edu) to discuss specific details about submissions, or you can get in touch with the Honors Office by emailing [ptk@otc.edu](mailto:ptk@otc.edu) or dropping by ICE 354 on Springfield Campus.

Thank you,  
Darla A. Wilson

**OZARKS TECHNICAL  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

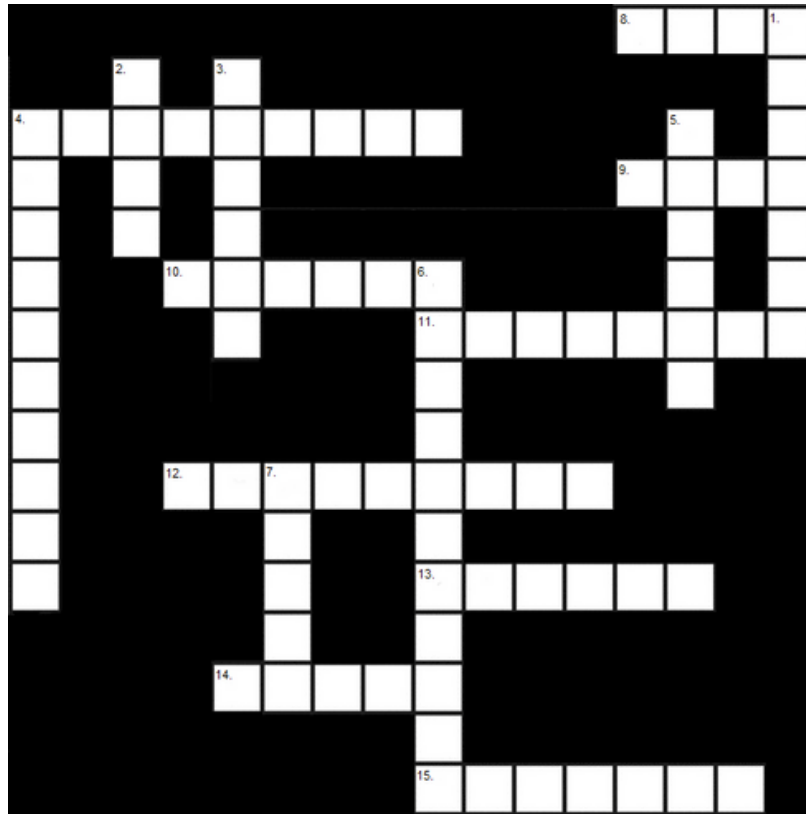
**HONORS PROGRAM**



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# Crossword Puzzle



## Down

1. The title of the fifth novel by Robert Greene.
2. A series of five free courses available to PTK students, e.g. Healthcare and Research.
3. With "Honors in," the yearly project managed by the Vice President of Scholarship.
4. A new method, idea, or product; or, a prized quality for an Honors student.
5. With "ship," one of the positions on the PTK Officer Team.
6. One of the positions on the PTK Officer Team.
7. The first letter of the Greek alphabet; or, the first letter of OTC's Phi Theta Kappa chapter.

## Across

4. With 11-across, as of the publication of this edition, an upcoming PTK event.
8. What the Vice President of Leadership, Vice President of Service, and Editor-in-Chief of The Pinnacle are a part of.
9. A common trial for Honors students.
10. A certificate of specialization one can receive upon graduation from OTC.
11. See 4-across.
12. With 13-across, what Missouri is now a part of.
13. See 12-across.
14. The month of release for volumes 3, 6, 9, 13, 19, and 26 of The Pinnacle.
15. What many PTK Officers must complete.



# Heartland Regional Meeting

Dee Lancaster

**This year, the Missouri Region of Phi Theta Kappa merged with the Kansas/Nebraska Region, and is now officially the Heartland Region. It is an exciting change for our chapter, with the ability to greatly increase our participation and learning opportunities for our members. Our first full regional activity was the Heartland Regional Meeting, held in Wichita, Kansas on March 3rd through 5th. The Alpha Psi Tau chapter sent eight students as well as the advisor team of Todd Yerby and Cassidy Bright to the 2023 Phi Theta Kappa Regional Meeting.**

**While they were there, the members participated in several activities including the Channing Competition and rallies for the new Regional Officer Candidates, and the election of officers. The attending retiring Regional Officers led General Sessions, Breakout Sessions, and hosted the Regional Award Ceremonies. Alpha Psi Tau saw four Regional Officers retire and the election of Robert-Thomas Gumersell as the new Regional Vice President of Leadership.**

**During the awards ceremony, our Chapter of Alpha Psi Tau distinguished itself with several awards. Dr. Tracy McGrady (our Administrative Advisor/Provost and Vice Chancellor) won the award for Distinguished Administrator of 2022! Our advisors, Todd Yerby and Cassidy Bright, won 2nd place for the Distinguished Advisor Team, and Mr. Yerby was also elected to serve on the 2023-24 Heartland Region Advisory Committee. Ms. Bright additionally won 1st place for the Paragon Award for New Advisors as well as the Horizon award and was recognized for 5-Star Advisor training completion.**

**Some of our Chapter Members were also winners including April Bollinger in 3rd place for most Distinguished Chapter Member. Autumn Seely (VP of Fellowship and Regional Officer) won 5th place for Distinguished Officer and our past alumnus Breann Pierfelice won 2nd place for Distinguished Alumni (posthumously). Alpha Psi Tau also received an honorable mention for their College Project on Sleep Deprivation.**

**Two Alpha Psi Tau members received scholarships from the new Heartland Region: Robert-Thomas Gumersell received the Life Happens Scholarship, and I received the Alumni Association Scholarship.**

**Alpha Psi Tau is now looking forward to celebrating the induction, where we will swear in new members and new Chapter Officers on April 4, 2023, and attending Catalyst April 20-24.**





Regional Officers 2022-2023.

Todd Yerby



5 Star Chapter Award—Alpha Psi Tau

# Thank You Letter

## Service-Learning Advocates Association

**To those of you who donated your time, your money, and your compassion to the foster children in our area by providing stuffed animals for the SLAA's first annual Stuffed Animal Drive - we say thank you.**

**Little in life is as horrible or traumatic as being torn from your family, and the repercussions last a lifetime. Some statistics about foster care from The Foster Project include:**

- **Every two minutes a child enters the foster care system**
- **Foster kids suffer from PTSD at 2× the rate of returning veterans**
- **23,000 youth age out of foster care each year**
- **60% of those that are human trafficked come from the foster care system**
- **Approximately 25% of former foster youth experience homelessness within 4 years of being emancipated from the foster care system**
- **3% of foster youth will graduate with a college degree**
- **There are over 400,000 kids in foster care on any given day**
- **100,000 kids are eligible to be adopted**

**Foster kids aren't always placed in foster homes.**

**Despite the promises of the foster care system, some of the children get placed into group homes and children's homes due to the shortage of foster homes.**

**According to the Missouri Department of Social Services, more than 14,000 children and youth were in Missouri foster care as of May 2, 2022. 1,500 of these children have no identified adoptive parents. Clara Bates with the Missouri Independent reported that Missouri brings kids into foster care at a rate among the highest in the country. Foster Care Action says the median age of children in foster care is 6 ½ years old. While many people stereotype foster children as troubled teens, most foster children are just that — children. Their biological parents are taken from them at a very young age, which can have a huge impact on their cognitive and emotional development growing up if they are not cared for properly in their youth.**

**Right here in our own communities there are children in care that need our help. You don't have to be a foster parent or social worker to help them. You can be a CASA, a mentor, volunteer with**



a foster care closet, volunteer at a foster care event, be a baby sitter to a foster parent, or simply donate a stuffed animal or even clothes that no longer fit you or your children. Do you have luggage or a backpack you no longer use? Oftentimes our youth in care travel in trash bags, you can donate duffel bags, luggage, backpacks to foster closets and your local children's division office. Do you have toys that your kids have outgrown? Donate them to a foster closet or even your local children's division office. You don't need to be perfect person to help, you just need empathy and compassion. You can make a difference!

As our 31st president, Herbert Hoover, famously said, "Children are our most valuable natural resource." Yet every day, our most valuable resource is placed in the care of the system.

These precious children, who are a part of our future, need love, comfort, familiarity, stability. The stuffed animals you provided offer all of that; a small gesture with a potential vast payoff.

You can read more about this on the Missouri Department of Social Service's website (<https://dss.mo.gov/>) and the Missouri Heart Gallery's website (<https://moheartgallery.org/>).



Photo of Donations to SLAA/

# My Journey

## Ashley Wesenberg

I am a little older in the college scene. I dropped out of high school at 17 years old in 1999 when I discovered not only was I pregnant, but there were some complications. I was in and out of labor starting at five months gestation, my kidneys were failing, and my womb was running out of amniotic fluids. My daughter was born prematurely, and I devoted myself to her health. Over the years I attempted to get my GED, but something catastrophic happened every time.

When my daughter was three years old, she was diagnosed with a rare syndrome that she was the only known recorded case of within the last one hundred years, Glucocorticoid Resistance Syndrome. In simple terms she was resistant to cortisol. Your brain tells your pituitary gland to tell your adrenal gland to give off your cortisol, testosterone, and saltine, which hers did, but it did not register back up. We were told she would never live a normal healthy life and she would not see her tenth birthday. I was petrified for her. Countless doctor appointments and no answers took all of my free time, so my education was put on hold.

Over the years, she had to go to thousands of appointments and get multiple tests done to see how her body was maintaining. You see, we never treated her syndrome; we only treated the other medical issues it caused. I did not have time for me, and that was okay. Over the years we were told horrible things that were going to happen, and she always beat every single one with such strength and inspiration. If she was sick or having a bad day, you did not know. After my divorce in 2012, she remained strong and even gave me strength to get through it. In 2018, now recently re-married, my husband heard a commercial for the Excel Center in Springfield. I was reluctant to call because it sounded too good to be true. A free do-over for adults twenty-one and over to get their high school diploma with free on-site daycare. How can that be true?

However, my daughter encouraged me to let go of my fear and give them a call. I enrolled that day. I did four years of high school in two years. Just as I was to graduate and receive my long-awaited high school diploma, my daughter passed away in 2020. All I wanted to do at that point was quit. I could not see finishing. How could I walk across that stage without my biggest cheerleader in the stands? However, something told me that my daughter would not want me to give up, and that she was still cheering me on. I pushed on to graduate from the Excel Center, and then enrolled at OTC for my AAT in Elementary Education, knowing that every step I was taking, she was still there cheering me on. I am now set to graduate from OTC after this semester, and just as my graduation from Excel, I know she will be there cheering me on.



# Chivalry Must Die

Brianna Barrett

It is seen as honorable  
For a man to open a woman's door  
Placing her on a pedestal  
As he clears the way for his queen

Yet if a female is treated as royalty  
Someone who holds the power  
Then why must she bide her time for a man  
Who will only claim her as his property

One of the qualities of Chivalry  
Is the readiness to help the weak  
A knight in shining armor  
Expected to save the damsel in distress

A female can not call herself strong  
If she idly sits on her hands  
Patiently staring at the heavy door  
Conforming to the public who calls her fragile

Yet there are still who scream for change  
While others just nod their heads  
There are women who wear their own armor  
Then there are those who criticize the meaning.

# Reflections on Autism

Jonah Blake

Have you ever seen people as a color? Have you ever experienced emotions as not just a feeling, but a whole-body-consuming sensation, almost like instinct? Have you ever believed you could feel every single atom of an article of clothing or in the satin on the edge of a blanket? Have you ever been able to hear every conversation in a room at the same volume, yet been unable to pick out a single one? Is your sense of smell so bizarre you can attain a dossier on a person's entire week from six feet away? This may sound strange, but for me, it's how I've experienced the world since birth.

At age 6, I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, now deemed a high-functioning form of Autism Spectrum Disorder. I interpret the world drastically differently from others on both a sensory and neurological level. According to Hannah Furfaro with the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative after a study conducted in 2018, autistic brains have a higher volume of gray matter compared to neurotypical brains, which can have a myriad of effects on perception and processing of information. When I describe how my senses work, I use "normal experiences" as the frame of reference.

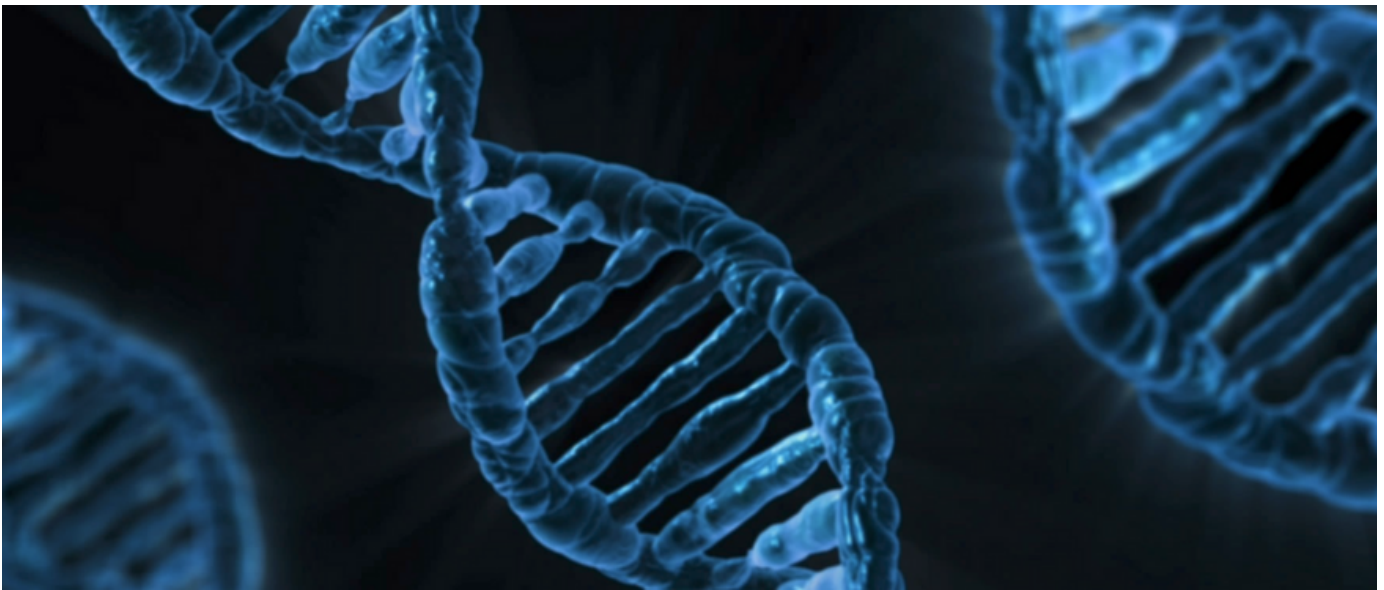
When I was young, peer interaction did not come naturally, so my mom taught me to watch people and situations for context clues before injecting myself into them. As a result, I find the study of people, culture, human history, and politics fascinating. When I fully developed consciousness at about age 11 I began studying Zen Buddhism. It emphasizes being hyper-present with yourself through life's journey via intense reflection and meditation. Meditation has been invaluable as a means to process and translate sensory information. But I also learned to understand and accept how differences in experience shape people's personalities, world view, and sense of purpose in the world.

In elementary school I was confused, isolated, misunderstood, and horribly bullied. Insatiable curiosity became my best friend, especially for my fixation topics. But it was a double edged sword. Diving into non-fiction books and documentaries, I became - literally - an expert on many topics. I could hold advanced conversations with university professors, but my peers felt overwhelmed and disconnected when I power pelted them with minutia facts as my form of conversation.

Eventually my fixation knowledge became useful because I have been Scholar Bowl nationally ranked since 8th grade. This gave/gives me notoriety at school but didn't/doesn't help make and keep meaningful friendships. When I started to get comfortable making friends and interacting in classes, the pandemic hit. Online learning nearly destroyed my soul and lockdowns stunted my social-emotional growth. Learning in-person again, I adore collaborative experiences with friends, colleagues, classmates, strangers - everyone encountered in life's theater.

In elementary school I participated in CBM Therapy to control my stomping, hand flapping, vocalizations, and other sensory stemming used to sooth my brain. Through all of 4th grade I sat on my hands every day to train my brain against its flapping addiction. I chewed gum to refrain from humming or tongue clicking. Some days it's so exhausting to "look normal" so my classmates can be more comfortable that I collapse into a deep nap after school.

According to the CDC's Data & Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder, in 2020, about 1 in 36 children were born with autism. For my age group, the statistic was 1 in 59. There is likely an individual in your classes with autism. We are typically described as "weird", but, as you can see, the word folks really mean is "unique".



# Regional VP of Leadership

Robert-Thomas Gumersell

The campaign process for becoming the Heartland Region Vice President of Leadership was truly life-changing for me. This process taught me how to run a campaign, give a good speech, work as a team and how to manage my time responsibly. This was the first time in my life I've truly campaigned for something, so I was a bit nervous. Even though there were some intimidating tasks involved with the campaign, such as making flyers and having to give a speech in front of hundreds of people, I had full support from my PTK Chapter every step of the way. My fellow chapter members helped me design and print flyers, helped me perfect my speech and gave me confidence while running for office.

Now that I've been elected Vice President of Leadership for the Heartland Region of Phi Theta Kappa, it's up to me to not only represent my region to the best of my ability, but also to represent my chapter, Alpha Psi Tau, to the best of my ability as well. This is especially true since I'm the only regional officer from the Alpha Psi Tau chapter this year. I plan to serve out my 1-year officer term by presiding over regional conferences, leading breakout sessions at regional conventions, giving a speech at the Regional Officer Retreat and encouraging PTK members across the Heartland Region to be more active in this great honor society.



# Indian Bowls Creek & Colorado Creek

Mitchell Eddings



Indian Bowls Creek



Colorado Creek

# Local Election: Vote April 4th

Darla Wilson

Whether or not to vote is one of the most important decisions most students will make this semester as we prepare for the Springfield City Council and School Board elections on Tuesday, April 4th. While it's not my place to tell students whether to vote or not to vote, those who are planning to do so might want to be informed about the candidates available to them. Fortunately, one of OTC's student organizations, Politically Active, held an event on Wednesday, March 22nd to allow students to meet and speak with the candidates.

In General Seat C, the two candidates are Callie Carroll and Jeremy Dean.



Photos via the Springfield News Leader.

Callie Carroll is who is campaigning on the idea of unifying Springfield and increasing communication between City Council and regular citizens. She told me that she wants to consult more with local experts, rather than relying on uninformed guesses to run the city. I asked her about police budgeting, homelessness, housing development, and environmental issues, and all of her answers ultimately led back to that. She was particularly interested in homelessness prevention and the ways that we can restore old buildings rather than focusing on new development to address the problem of homelessness in Springfield.

Similarly to his opponent, Jeremy Dean wants to uplift the people, with a focus on returning elections to average citizens rather than local corporations such as Springfield's Good Government Committee, a PAC. Also similarly to his opponent, much of his ideas for addressing local issues involved consulting local experts-- but Dean's experts are non-profit organizations such as Harmony House and the Rare Breed. He also talked about plans to address issues with Springfield's public transportation system, including the introduction of electric buses and expansion of routes to cover currently inaccessible areas of town.

**Derek Lee and Bruce K. Adib-Yazdi are the two candidates competing for General Seat D.**



Photos via the Springfield News Leader.

**Derek Lee was endorsed by the Springfield Police Officers Association, so I was especially interested in his stance on police budgeting and other issues related to policing. I was surprised when he said he thought our police force was actually overbudgeted. Instead of increasing police funding, Lee wants to focus on recruitment. In his own words, "We can't find people to fill the roles." He supported current police practices, such as sending police respondents to mental health crises, but felt that our city could do more in preventative action to take care of people and reduce crime rates. As a small business owner, he framed much of the issue within the context of running a business. When you introduce more benefits, you have a healthier workplace.**

**Unfortunately, with only an hour and a half at the event, there wasn't time to interview all of the candidates. Furthermore, the issues that I care enough to ask about may not be the issues that are important to you as a voter. If you're interested in becoming more informed about the upcoming local election, you can watch KSMU's interviews with each of the candidates at the following website: <https://www.ksmu.org/tags/april-4-candidate-interviews>**

**They interviewed not only Callie Carroll, Jeremy Dean, and Derek Lee, but Bruce K. Adib-Yadzi, mayoral candidates Melanie Bach and Ken McClure (the current mayor of Springfield), Zone 3 candidates Brandon Jenson and David Nokes, and Springfield Board of Education candidates Shurita Thomas-Tate, Landon McCarter, Chad Rollins, and Judy Brunner.**

**Whether you decide to vote or not, it's valuable to know who may be on your city council, making decisions that will impact you on a day-to-day level. And if you do decide to vote, the election will be Tuesday, April 4th!**

# Crossword Puzzle Answers

