



PHOTO, 4B

Event comes to A-State to help recruit students.



Student voter registration remains important as election approaches

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NEWS WRITER

"The right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives people control over their own destinies" - President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Voting matters. The individual voice in the crowd matters. In the upcoming 2020 election, every single vote counts.

To vote, however, one must first be registered. Voter turnout in the United States is notoriously low, even in presidential elections, but the numbers for Arkansas are even worse. A new student-run organization on campus seeks to change that.

In February 2020, the VOTE A-State organization was created to help people in Northeast Arkansas register to vote, and to inform them about local candidates and issues. Dean MacDonald, a senior political science major from Paragould and vice president of VOTE A-State, hopes the organization can inspire hope and togetherness in the

polarized world we've created.

"Community is something that's important to me. You've got people that are liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, but scrap all of that. Focus on people. We've got students, farmers, doctors, lawyers, Walmart employees, pastors, I could go on. We want to bring those people together. We need to inspire people from all different areas," MacDonald said.

MacDonald, along with organization president Ryan Baldwin and three others, started the organization with the sole goal of registering people to vote. In the first two weeks, they registered 27 potential new voters before COVID-19 wrecked their plans.

However, in the wake of an election that will shape Northeast Arkansas and the United States for years to come, they are back at full force. With an upcoming presidential election as well as vacant mayor seats for the two biggest cities in the region, getting people to the polls is critical.

Of course, things are

different than in the pre-COVID world. VOTE A-State is taking the typical precautions that have become commonplace in the pandemic-ridden United States. They've combated these obstacles, though, to create a safe environment capable of achieving their goals.

"Our goal is in the name. We don't care who you vote for, how you're going to vote, what you're going to vote for, what party you support. We're a non-partisan organization. We just want to get people to vote," MacDonald said.

On the name, "VOTE" is actually an acronym, standing for "Voting Opportunities To Everyone". And by "everyone", they don't just mean students on campus. This organization encourages participation by people of all walks of life in the NEA community.

To do so, they've partnered with other SROs on campus to establish registration drives to occur prior to the election. The Black Student Association is hosting one on Sept. 17, and another will be held at Centennial Bank Stadium

prior to the football game versus Central Arkansas on Sept. 19. The finer details of these drives are still being worked out, but one certainty is the need for volunteers.

Getting involved with VOTE A-State is rather simple. For contact, volunteering, or just further information, inquisitors can visit their Facebook page, @VoteAState.

Overall, MacDonald and VOTE A-State strive to inspire change and promote positivity in a very negative time.

"If you watch the news, it's all negative. From all angles. You don't want that. You want positivity. You want things to strive for. There's so much good going on in the world that doesn't get coverage. We want to focus on the good and then see what things we can fix," MacDonald said.

"You do matter. You do. You need to wake up and see how you can positively contribute in any small form or fashion. The little things are the big things. We need to reach out and get people involved and let them know they have a seat at the table, too."



PHOTO COURTESY OF VOTE A-STATE

(Left to right) VOTE A-State members Dean MacDonald, Markus Pillow and Ryan Baldwin participate in a voter registration drive.



Graduate School dean hits the ground running

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Vaughn Endowed Professor of History Dr. Cherrise Jones-Branch accepted the appointment to become the dean of the reestablished Graduate School at A-State last semester and officially started in her new position July 1.

Although she officially started in July, Jones-Branch hit the ground running after months of earlier preparation. The new Graduate School dean started working on getting the school reestablished before the coronavirus pandemic broke out.

"Well I have a staff now and we pretty much hit the ground running," Jones-Branch said. "Even though I officially started July 1, I have actually sort of been working in this capacity since I was appointed back at the end of February, early March. So I've already been dealing with student issues and things like that."

The new dean said she already established a strong relationship with the graduate student council. Jones-Branch and the council will meet once a month so she can hear directly from the graduate student representatives.

"I want to know what's going well, what's not going so well and what's going on generally with graduate students around campus," Jones-Branch said. "If there are concerns that need to be addressed, I want to know as quickly as possible so I can get in front of them."

Most of Jones-Branch's communication with the graduate student council has been through Zoom. Zoom and other types of video chat became more commonplace throughout the coronavirus pandemic and still prove very useful as the COVID-19 threat is still high.

However, the transition to virtual communication has been smooth for Jones-Branch.

CONTINUED: DEAN, 4A

International students from different backgrounds deal with coronavirus

ERIC MCGEE

NEWS WRITER

COVID-19 has presented numerous challenges to the average A-State student. Imagine having to tackle these challenges when your family is over 10,000 miles away on another continent.

There are over 450 international students enrolled at A-State this semester. The pandemic has created many complications for these students. Travel restrictions due to the pandemic have prevented many of them from being able to go home for the summer. The disparity between how the United States and their

home countries deal with the pandemic creates confusion. Perhaps most importantly, concern about family members at home has to be high.

To better understand the international student perspective three students from three different countries gave their views. Each student discusses how their country dealt with the pandemic, the consequences of their government's policies and how it all affected their family.

Yoshika Shibata is from Osaka, Japan. She is a multimedia creative student at A-State.

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