



SUMMER 2025

# Fireside

A magazine for alumni and friends of Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School



BT's First Senior  
Capstone Cohort

more on page 7

Honoring  
Jeannette James

more on page 14

Congratulations to  
the Class of 2025!

more on page 17

# Notes from Worthington Hall



Dear BT Community,

What an extraordinary school year 2024-2025 has been for our community! The groundbreaking of our Building Together campus transformation has literally taken shape around us, with new buildings and thoughtful connections to existing structures creating a seamless blend of our heritage with our aspirations for tomorrow. As we anticipate the interior work ahead, we celebrate both our achievements and the bright futures our students are crafting.

This issue of *Fireside* showcases inspiring stories of how our graduates and students are actively shaping their paths forward. Our practicum partnership with the University of Nebraska Omaha provides future educators invaluable experience in our preschool program, enriching both our campus and the broader educational community in Omaha (read more on page 5).

Our commitment to expanding opportunities continues with new clubs opening doors to diverse career paths. Mock Trial and DECA reflect our understanding that

learning extends far beyond the classroom, providing hands-on experience in law and business fields (page 6). This connection between current exploration and future possibilities was beautifully demonstrated when the Class of 2025 presented their Capstone Projects at our inaugural Capstone Colloquium. These student-driven investigations showcased how our graduates transform their individual passions into meaningful research and action, exemplifying the critical thinking and creativity that will serve them throughout their careers (page 7).

At this pivotal moment, I'm reminded that while we're building new spaces, we're also building futures—futures filled with possibility, purpose, and the unique BT spirit that will carry our graduates confidently forward.

Thank you for being part of this extraordinary journey.

With gratitude and excitement,

*Kristi N. Gibbs*

Kristi N. Gibbs, Ed.D.  
Head of School

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# WHAT'S HAPPENING ON CAMPUS?



## 1 Roka Earns Prestigious U.S. Presidential Scholars Recognition

Fruzsina Roka, '25, was one of 161 seniors nationwide to be named a U.S. Presidential Scholar.

## 2 Acadec Repeats State Wins

The Academic Decathlon team were State Champions in their division for the second year in a row and third place overall in the entire state for the second year in a row. They earned an outstanding 19 medals total at the competition.

## 3 Fifth Graders Win OPPD Engineering Contest

Vivienne Rhule, '32, Bailey Benjamin, '32, and LJ Marco, '32, placed first in Omaha Public Power District's annual engineering contest, the Marshmallow Challenge.

## 4 Student Art Debuts at Governor's Residence

The exceptional artwork of Sophia Schlueter, '25, was selected for the prestigious eighth annual "My Life in Nebraska" Exhibition at the Governor's Residence.

## 5 Raiders Win at State Speech

Siri Doddapaneni, '25, and Mahalet Kinde, '26 earned first place in Extemporaneous Speaking and Performance of Literature, respectively, at the Class C1 State Speech Championships in Kearney. In addition, Doddapaneni placed fourth in Persuasive Speaking, Kinde second in Poetry, and Jasmine Nlam, '28, second in Serious Speaking. Kinde was also named Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film Class C1 Top 3 Individual Sweeps.

## 6 Olympian Inspires BT Swimming Community

Peter Hudnut, BT parent and three-time Olympic water polo player shared his remarkable journey from Olympic alternate in 2004 to silver medalist and defensive team captain in Beijing 2008, and London Olympic team member in 2012 with swimmers and swim enthusiasts in Swanson Auditorium.

## 7 Success at Nebraska A Cappella Championships!

Upper School's vocal ensemble, Pirate Radio, sailed away with an impressive second place overall across all classifications at the Nebraska A Cappella Championships. They also collected several other awards: Best Class-C Ensemble, Best Class-C Soloist - Addy Haynes, '26, and Best Original Arrangement for "Geronimo" arranged by music teacher J.R. Gould.



**8 Early Years Artistic Vision Brought to Life**  
Upper School National Arts Honor Society members worked with Early Years students to create a stunning classroom mural.

**9 Rise Named Robotics Teacher of the Year**  
BT robotics coach Carrie Rise was named Teacher of the Year at the CREATE US Open, recognizing her exceptional dedication and leadership of BT's robotics program.

**10 Student Athletes Commit to College Teams**  
Ingrid Nelson, '25, will swim for Western Colorado University in the fall.

Abbi Gibbs, '26, made her verbal commitment to play soccer at South Dakota State University.

Katie Picard, '25, will play volleyball at Doane University in the fall.

**11 BT Students Deliver Outstanding Theatre Performances**

Theatre students were recognized with five prestigious awards at the 2025 Omaha Performing Arts ceremony for their contributions to BT's fall musical "Hedestown: Teen Edition." Both A.J. Puskar, '25, and Mahalet Kinde, '26, earned Outstanding Performance in a

Lead Role; Addy Haynes, '26, was recognized for Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Role; Outstanding Achievement in Design went to Katie Picard, '25; and BT's tech crew earned the Backstage Excellence Award.

**12 Science Olympiad Team Reaches Nationals**  
The Science Olympiad B-Division team (grades 6-9) captured first place at the state competition, qualifying for Nationals for the second consecutive year! The C-Division team (grades 10-12) earned an impressive sixth place.

**13 1028 Shines at Vex Worlds**  
BT's robotics teams delivered exceptional results at the VEX Worlds competition:

- Two Middle School teams advanced to their divisional playoffs.
- Upper School's 1028A posted a State record of 114 points and ranked 12th at the World Championships.
- Upper School's 1028Z made school history as a Worlds Division Finalist - the best performance ever by a BT robotics team!

# Shaping Future Educators

## UNO Practicum Partnership

Brownell Talbot serves as one of just two institutions partnering with the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) to provide vital early childhood education practicum experiences for elementary education majors.

As part of UNO's comprehensive preparation model, elementary education students pursuing a PK-3 endorsement must complete their Final Practicum in a preschool classroom with children ages 3-5. This crucial field experience at Brownell Talbot helps bridge theoretical knowledge with practical classroom applications before students advance to their clinical practicum, or student teaching, as seniors.

The UNO model intentionally builds classroom comfort and competence through multiple practicum experiences. At Brownell Talbot, practicum students are treated as co-teachers from day one, receiving more independence than they might find in other placements. This approach reflects the school's commitment to authentic professional development.

For many UNO students, their time at Brownell Talbot represents their only experience in a private school setting during their teacher preparation. This distinctive opportunity occasionally sparks unexpected interest in early childhood education among students originally focused on higher elementary grades.

Anna Thomsen, a UNO student placed in Mrs. Snyder's classroom during the 2025 spring semester, exemplifies how the practicum experience impacts developing educators.

Though initially planning to teach second or third grade, Anna now sees new possibilities: "Preschool has been a pretty fun practicum. Mrs. Snyder has done an amazing

job at showing me what earlier childhood should look like."

Snyder embraces this mentoring role with passion. "Early Years is a special place and I love showing future teachers how joyful learning can be for our youngest students. I believe in learning by doing, so I encourage Anna to jump in, try things out, and reflect along the way. I'm here to support her, but I also want her to find her own teaching voice. Teaching isn't about following a script. It's about being present, adaptable, and building real connections with kids."

Like many practicum students, Thomsen has navigated challenges including "knowing when to step in without crossing boundaries" and finding her classroom rhythm. Despite these natural learning curves, her experience at Brownell Talbot has been transformative.

"This experience has shown me my love for learning and the reason I wanted to be a teacher in the first place," said Thomsen. "I love getting to spend my Fridays in Mrs. Snyder's classroom."

The benefits of this arrangement extend beyond the practicum students themselves. Snyder noted, "Practicum students bring fresh energy and curiosity, which the kids pick up on right away. They get more one-on-one time, new activities to explore, and extra hands to help bring their big ideas to life. It's a win-win. The kids get new learning experiences, and the practicum students get to see just how magical early childhood education can be."

Through thoughtful partnerships like the one between Brownell Talbot and UNO, the next generation of educators receives the diverse, hands-on experiences essential for developing into well-rounded, effective teachers ready to inspire young learners.



# DECA and Mock Trial Launch at BT

At Brownell Talbot, preparing students for life means more than academic excellence. It requires exposing them to real-world experiences that build practical skills and professional confidence. This year, two programs have launched on campus to give students hands-on exposure to the worlds of business and law: DECA and Mock Trial. These initiatives provide invaluable opportunities for students to develop the leadership abilities, critical thinking skills, and professional networks they'll need to thrive in their future careers.



## DECA

DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) has quickly become one of BT's fastest-growing clubs, preparing students for careers in business, marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. With over 297,000 members nationally and internationally, DECA offers our students access to a vast network of future business leaders.

The program found its way to BT through the school's Director of Enrollment for Middle and Upper School Taylor Gustafson, who experienced DECA's transformative power firsthand during her own high school years.

"DECA helped me develop skills that guided me to a career when I realized the medical field wasn't what I was looking for," Gustafson explains. Her experience convinced her that BT students would benefit from the program's real-world business exposure.

Claire Birch '26, founder of BT's DECA chapter, was originally drawn to DECA because of its focus on business and real-world skills.

"It felt like the perfect way to challenge myself, build leadership abilities, and prepare for the future in a hands-on, meaningful way," said Birch. "I truly felt like I was building my future firsthand, especially through networking with industry professionals."

The results speak volumes. At the State DECA competition in March, BT students earned multiple top 8 finishes across events, with Perry Anderson, '26, and Angel Bhandari, '26, claiming first place victories that qualified them for the DECA International Career Development Conference in Florida.



## Mock Trial

This year also marked BT's debut in Nebraska's Judge Lyle Strom High School Mock Trial Program, joining over 1,000 students statewide who study, prepare, and present original legal cases before juries.

Leading the charge are coach Baylor Winters and Jamie Kinkaid, principal owner of Spectre Law LLC and parent of BT student Ashtyn Geddings, '33. Winters started Mock Trial at BT because he wanted to give students a chance to experience the legal system in a hands-on, competitive way.

"I found that BT kids are bright and driven, exactly what it takes to succeed in Mock Trial," said Winters. "It's an incredible opportunity to practice public speaking, critical thinking, and teamwork in a real-world setting."

In their first year of competing, BT's team had their work cut out for them. With a small team of eight students (the minimum is 6), each person had to take on major responsibilities—whether as attorneys, witnesses, or both. Despite this, BT ranked 5th in Douglas County out of 15, beating several well-established programs.

"It was our first year in a program that many schools have done for decades, and our students stepped into the courtroom with courage and skill," said Winters.

## Looking Ahead

These programs represent more than extracurricular activities. They are laboratories where tomorrow's leaders practice today. Both programs exemplify how BT continues expanding opportunities for students to develop the leadership, communication, and critical thinking skills essential for success in our interconnected world.



# BT'S FIRST SENIOR CAPSTONE COHORT SETS NEW STANDARD

Upper School English teachers Dr. Matt Low and Dr. Lynn Ramert share a passion for creating dynamic curriculum that actively engages students, and a little more than a year ago they envisioned an opportunity to enhance the student experience for seniors in their final year. Leveraging one of the primary benefits of the independent school structure (the ability to turn good ideas into reality with remarkable speed), they felt seniors were ready for a capstone experience that would allow them to explore their individual passions while applying all the skills they had developed during their time at Brownell Talbot.

The Class of 2025 made history at BT as the first cohort to complete the school's Senior Capstone Project. The course is designed to give students the opportunity to dive deep into areas of personal interest while preparing them for the advanced writing and research they will encounter in college and beyond.

Dr. Ramert spent considerable time researching how a capstone program could align with Brownell Talbot's Portrait of a Graduate competencies. The result is a project that embodies everything BT strives to develop in its students: strong identity, effective communication, stewardship, and the ability to positively impact the world.

The year-long journey began with brainstorming and reading that included Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle" and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" to explore social issues and ethical questions.

The second quarter focused on research, including trips to the University of Nebraska Omaha to work with librarians and access academic databases.

"The most challenging aspect of my project was finding credible sources," said Siri Doddapaneni, '25. "Going to UNO and

working with their databases and resources for an afternoon was very helpful."

Students then drafted their 15-page papers in the third quarter before polishing and presenting their final projects at the Capstone Colloquium in April.

The diversity of projects completed by the inaugural class demonstrated the program's flexibility and student-centered approach. Some students chose topics aligned with their college plans—engineering, environmental conservation, and government—while others used the opportunity to explore entirely new interests like dance, television comedy, and creative writing.

Students were encouraged to include multimodal elements in their presentations. Some incorporated videos, diving logs, lab notes, and other creative components that showcased their learning in innovative ways. This approach recognizes that effective communication takes many forms in today's world.

"I wanted to do a project with a physical aspect in which I could build something, and I have been super intrigued by space ever since I was young," said Beckett Friesen, '25. "Using knowledge from NASA's Mars rover data, and entry, descent, and landing procedures, I built a scaled model and tested to propose a realistic way to make future human landings on Mars possible."

The success of the pilot program has positioned the Capstone Project to become a focal point of BT's Upper School English experience. Plans are already underway to strengthen community partnerships and provide additional support for future cohorts.

As BT continues to innovate in education, the Senior Capstone Project stands as a powerful example of how traditional academic structures can evolve to better serve students' diverse interests and prepare them for success beyond graduation.



## Siri Doddapaneni

### **Steps of Belonging: Indian Dance Forms and their Role in Diasporic Identity Formation**

This project outlines the varieties of classical, folk, and modern Indian dances and how these dances serve as a predominant form of fostering an Indian identity within the hybrid cultural struggle of Indian-American youth.

“I really enjoy learning about my Indian culture and have grown up dancing. As I attended community events for my field research and spoke to different members of my community, I expanded my project to include more of a psychological perspective, exploring how dance contributes to personal identity, especially those of Indian-American youth like me.”



## Beckett Friesen

### **Human-Compatible Mars Lander: How Do We Start?**

This project examines the build process for an Apollo-style mission and proposed a realistic way to make future human landings on Mars possible.

“I was able to apply my engineering mindset and have full creative freedom over the project. It was also a really solid way to teach time management and responsibility, because most of the time, looming deadlines are an issue for people.”



## Ani McLellan

### **Keeping a Straight Face in the Wake of Cinema Censorship**

This project evaluates the evolution of LGBTQ+ censorship in film while specifically focusing on the evolution of Julian Marsh, a character from the classic Hollywood story: “42nd Street.”

“The Capstone helped me understand how to use my passions to motivate myself. I normally really struggle when it comes to large projects like this, but I was so interested and invested in the project from the beginning that I was able to stay on top of each task.”



## Ingrid Nelson

### **Taking Broken Wings and Learning to Fly**

This project highlights the psychological burden of Type 1 Diabetes (T1D), challenges, harmful misconceptions, and advocates for better mental health resources.

“Allowing myself to be a part of the research, being real and honest about my own mental health both in my paper and in my short film was very difficult. In the end, I’m glad I made it so personal though because it shows strength in vulnerability and makes the topic of mental health less taboo.”

# Building Together: A Year of Transformation and Progress

The 2024-2025 academic year has been remarkable with major construction milestones achieved across multiple phases of development. What began as architectural plans has become a visible reality reshaping the campus landscape.



## Construction Milestones

In February, the school celebrated a memorable beam signing event where the entire school community signed the final structural beam, which was then installed at the highest point of the new building's elevator shaft during the topping out ceremony in April. This installation marked a significant milestone in the construction project and symbolized the collective commitment of faculty, staff, students, parents, trustees, and donors to the new facility.

Representatives from project partners MCL, APMA, Atlas, and Rainwood Development Partners joined BT in celebrating this milestone. The true stars of the ceremony were Mrs. Snyder's Early Years class, who will be among the first students to walk through the doors as first graders when the new buildings open for the 2026-2027 school year.



The project's gymnasium component reached completion of its precast installation by spring, with all structural steel and decking now successfully in place. Designed to serve as a FEMA shelter, the gymnasium required specialized construction techniques, including a 30-day concrete curing period before roofing installation could begin.

The education wing achieved a significant milestone in May with the installation of its final precast panel, a moment that marked the completion of all exterior walls. A 275-ton crane, nicknamed "Ichabod" through a school-wide naming contest, handled the heavy lifting throughout the construction process before being replaced by a smaller 130-ton crane for remaining steel installation work.



Aerial photo of campus on April 16 before the final precast panels were set

The new welcome atrium has progressed with concrete pours for both levels, including critical connections to the existing Swanson Lobby. Underground mechanical, electrical, and plumbing work has been completed in multiple areas, allowing construction to advance to interior phases.

### **Engaging Students in the Process**

The construction process has provided valuable educational opportunities for students across multiple grade levels. Classes toured the construction site during less restrictive phases of work. Project partners presented during class time to give students insight into careers in engineering and construction management. The school also worked with architecture partners to host student focus groups that informed the experiential design work for building interiors.

Lower School students participated in playground design through surveys conducted with grades 2-4. Their top three equipment selections have been incorporated into the final plans. In exciting news for current students, unlike other project components scheduled for spring 2026 completion, the new playground is expected to be ready for use this fall.

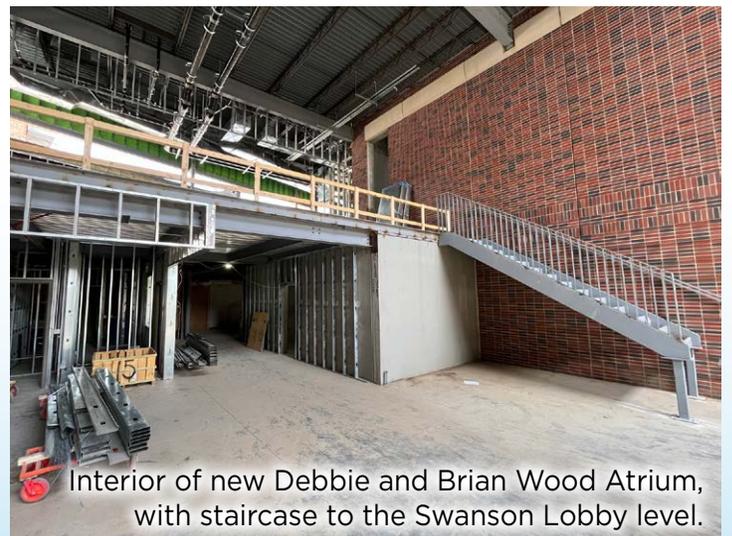
These experiences allowed students to interact with BT's project partners and observe large-scale building techniques firsthand, turning the building process into a comprehensive learning experience.

### **Project Status and Timeline**

Head of School Dr. Kristi Gibbs reports that the project remains on schedule.

Construction teams are currently focusing on interior wall layout and framing in areas where concrete floors have been completed. Mechanical, electrical, and plumbing rough-in work continues throughout the interior spaces.

The project represents a significant expansion of campus facilities while maintaining the school's commitment to thoughtful planning and community involvement in the development process.



Interior of new Debbie and Brian Wood Atrium, with staircase to the Swanson Lobby level.

**To learn more and support the project, visit [buildingBTtogether.org](http://buildingBTtogether.org).**

# Brownell Talbot Fever: Celebrating Community Spirit at BT's Annual Gala



The electric energy of “Brownell Talbot Fever” pulsed through the BT community as 250 guests gathered on campus on Saturday, May 10 for an extraordinary gala celebration! From the moment the first beat dropped, it was clear this wasn't just another school event.

Under the thoughtful guidance of Honorary Chairs, Dr. Rudy and Suzanne Kotula, the evening transformed into a meaningful celebration of everything that makes the BT community special. Familiar faces of returning alumni mingled with enthusiastic new BT parents, creating connections spanning generations of BT families.

Gala Chairs Casie and Dr. Vernon Schlueter masterfully orchestrated an unforgettable experience, supported by passionate parent volunteers and dedicated BT staff. Pirate Radio kicked off the evening with a moving a cappella performance of ABBA's “Dancing Queen,” which was followed by a formal dinner and an eventful live auction. Guests then boogied over to the “Studio 1863” after party and rotated between bidding on silent auction items, capturing memories at the 360-degree video booth, testing their luck at the popular wine pull, and dancing under the disco lights to music courtesy of DJ Kobra Kyle.

Beyond the festivities, the community's generosity shone brightly as “Brownell Talbot Fever” raised crucial funds that will directly enhance BT students' educational journey through scholarships, academic programs, athletics, fine arts, extracurricular activities, and professional development for the school's exceptional faculty and staff.

Every contribution, whether through sponsorship, donation, volunteering, or simply sharing in the celebration, has strengthened our ability to know, inspire, and challenge every student, heart, and mind at Brownell Talbot.

*If you missed the opportunity to support Brownell Talbot through gala and would still like to invest in BT students, faculty, and staff, visit [brownell.edu/gala](http://brownell.edu/gala) to make your tax-deductible gift.*

*View this year's gala video and the gala leadership video on BT's Youtube channel!*



**HONORARY CHAIRS**

Dr. Rudy & Suzanne Kotula

**GALA CHAIRS**

Casie & Vernon Schlueter

**THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:**

Presenting Sponsor

**Dr. Rudy and Suzanne Kotula**

Hero Sponsors and Underwriters



**Gale Etherton and Fedja Rochling**

Champion Sponsors  
and Underwriters

**Friends of BT**



**SUPPORTING OUR  
MISSION**

# BT FUND

## Year in Review

Every year contributions to The BT Fund empower the school to offer student experiences that define a BT education. **This year, we asked the BT community to support the school in a special way by giving to both The BT Fund and the Building Together Capital Campaign - for the present and future of BT.**

The BT Fund provides *for our present*, by supporting students during the current school year. The Building Together Capital Campaign is raising money *for the future*, to fund an all-new Lower School, main entrance, welcome atrium, collaboration and technology spaces, gymnasium, outdoor play areas, and so much more.

**Thanks to the generous support of the BT community, we had a lot to celebrate this year!**

**17 Classes/Grades/Houses hit at least 50% and made it onto our Generosity Wall.**



**6** Pizza Parties



**9** Ice Cream Parties



**The Classes/Grades/Houses that hit 60% managed to unlock \$90,000 in matching funds for the Building Together Capital Campaign.**

**5** Houses hit 100% participation in both The BT Fund and the Building Together Capital Campaign: Butterfield, Gillmore, Hitchcock, Ingalls, and Saratoga.



**SUPPORTING OUR MISSION**

Thank you for being a part of BT's culture of philanthropy!

# HONORING JEANNETTE JAMES

JUNE 25, 1925 - MARCH 8, 2025



The Brownell Talbot community honors the remarkable legacy of Mrs. Jeannette James. Jeannette embodied the spirit of service that defines the BT community. Her deep commitment to education was evident in every role she embraced, from her service on the Brownell Talbot Friends Board and Board of Trustees to her hands-on involvement in fundraising initiatives like Wine Tasters and Family Affair events. In 1982, she brought the innovative idea of a fundraising gala to BT, chairing the inaugural “Golden Gala” that raised \$39,000 and established a tradition now spanning four decades.



Jeannette and her husband Larry had an enduring love for the school’s libraries. Jeannette was instrumental in renovating the Lower School library in both 1980 and 2001, but her involvement went far beyond financial support. Jeannette became a beloved figure to Lower School students, regularly visiting to read aloud and foster their love of literature. Both the original library and the renovations were dedicated to the memory of Larry and Jeannette’s eldest daughter, Laura Jeannette James. Jeannette’s enduring affection for these libraries reflected her understanding that great education begins with inspiring young minds to discover the joy of learning.



The James family’s commitment to Brownell Talbot spans generations. The family’s philanthropic impact includes support for Project ’88, the James Middle and Upper School Library Automation Project (1996), the Building on the Tradition of Excellence Capital Campaign (1998-2001), the Teaching for Technology grant matching funds (2001), the lifeTRACKS Program (2006), and initial support for BT’s Robotics Program (2007). Their children continue this legacy: Barrett (x’77), Allison (’78), and Lawrence R. “Chip” (’88), who currently serves as a BT trustee and chairs the Building and Grounds Committee.



We extend heartfelt gratitude to the James family for over 40 years of dedication to Brownell Talbot. Jeannette’s impact was immeasurable, and through Chip’s continued Board service and the family’s ongoing connection to BT, her legacy of love for learning, community, and educational excellence lives on, enriching our school for generations to come.

# Congratulations to BT's Retirees!



## John Gardner

**Facilities and Campus Safety**

After concluding his 31-year career in landscaping and irrigation, John came to BT as a jack of all trades and a man willing to help in any way possible. John has been a part of BT's Facilities and Campus Safety Team for four years and now plans to enter semi-retirement, while still helping out on campus two days a week. He is a familiar face to students and parents, especially as he assists with student drop-off in the mornings, where many students cannot start their day without a high five or sly joke shared with John.

### **Favorite BT Memory**

*I have so many BT memories it's hard to pick one. I enjoyed working gala, football games, and theatre productions.*

### **What Will You Miss Most About BT?**

*I will miss my daily interaction with BT faculty and staff. I've come to admire the total commitment BT folks display on a daily basis. I think the kids here will leave a void with me. Their relentless pursuit to be one up on me is fun.*

### **Retirement Plans**

*I will be very busy with home projects, old truck restoration, fishing, and spending time with kids and grandkids.*



## Jenn Morgan

**Theatre Teacher**

After a 37-year career in education, with 30 years in secondary education and seven years teaching at the university level, Jenn brought her passion for theatre and education to BT four years ago. While stepping into retirement, Jenn's love for BT runs deep, and she plans to continue supporting the theatre department and exploring new after-school offerings for younger students.

### **Favorite BT Memory**

*Guiding the creation of The Sleeping Beau with students and watching them live the dream of performing at The Fringe was amazing. Directing our students to create and perform Hadestown was incredibly special as this show was on my bucket list. The show spoke to all of those who worked on it and the magic just carried over to the stage performance.*

### **What Will You Miss Most About BT?**

*I will miss the magic of working with amazing young humans every day. Our students inspire me and fill me with joy. I will miss the collaboration with students and our production team. I will miss watching our students have their moments whether on the stage or watching a performance—when their eyes light up with excitement and they are filled with wonder.*

### **Retirement Plans**

*I will spend time with family, including my wonderful new granddaughter in Beijing. I will continue my work on The Nebraska Thesians State Board as their grant writer, the Nebraska Department of Education, and will direct The Writers' Theatre for The Omaha Film Festival and serve on their leadership team. Advocacy is so close to my heart, and thus I will continue serving as Chair for The Educational Theatre Association's Advocacy Leadership Network for the next year.*

# BT's Board of Trustees

## WELCOME BT'S NEWEST TRUSTEE



In May, BT's Board of Trustees welcomed Michaela O'Donnell, Ph.D., bringing valuable leadership expertise to guide our school's strategic vision.

As the Mary and Dale Andringa Executive Director Chair at the Max De Pree Center for Leadership at Fuller Seminary, Michaela oversees the center's vision, strategy, and team while working remotely. She also created and leads the Doctor of Global Leadership in the Marketplace program, mentoring cohorts of entrepreneurs, C-suite professionals, and nonprofit executives.

An Omaha native, Michaela's journey took her across the country to play collegiate softball, teach middle school in Hawaii, and spend years in Los Angeles, where she met her husband, Daniel Long. Together, they launched a film production company and raised two children—Evelyn, '34, and Sage, '37—before returning home to Omaha in 2022.

Michaela's experience developing leaders in diverse sectors brings fresh perspective to BT's board as we continue strengthening our educational mission.

## 2025-2026 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees charts the school's course and maintains strategic focus on delivering exceptional educational experiences for our students, families, faculty, staff, and broader school community.



Christopher Hedican  
*Chair*



Gale Etherton  
*Vice Chair*



Jerry Reimer  
*Treasurer*



Marc DuBois  
*Secretary*



Megan Belcher



Laura Crosby



Stephen George



Chip James II, '88



Fatima Khan



Deepak Khazanchi



Rudy Kotula



Nikhil Mehta



Michaela O'Donnell



Karalee Picard



Pirzada Sattar



Corrie Shumaker



Renee Wessels



Brian Wood

# Congratulations

to the Class of 2025!

The 24 members of Brownell Talbot's Class of 2025 were offered admission to 91 colleges and universities in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Ireland.

**Mean GPA:**  
**3.66** (through fall 2024)

**MORE THAN \$4.6 MILLION** in scholarships were offered.

**15**

graduates were eligible for the Frontier Academic All-Conference Award based on their standardized test and GPA achievements.

The Class of 2025 completed more than 1,300 hours of community service during their Upper School years.



**NEW  
BEGINNINGS**

# What's Next?

**Are there any Raiders coming to your campus or alma mater?**

Baylor University

Brigham Young University (Idaho)

Colorado State University

Doane University

Fordham University

Grinnell College

Harvard College

Iowa State University

Metropolitan Community College

Northwestern University

Purdue University

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute/Albany Medical College

Savannah College of Art and Design

Scripps College

St. Olaf College

University of Michigan

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

University of Pittsburgh

Western Colorado University



**NEW  
BEGINNINGS**

# ALUMNI on Campus



## Alumni Speakers

**1** The Class of 2025 had the opportunity to hear from BT alumni Charley Pugsley, '20, Tommy Pugsley, '21, Calvin Snyder, '24, and Clare Schinzel, '24, during Adulting 101 sessions.

## Alumni Community Connections

**2** Julie Adams Anderson, '89, (standing, second from the right) arranged a pen pal program between some members of the Class of 2029 and residents at the Bloomfield Retirement Community.

## Alumni Visitors

**3** This spring Pranaya Salaria, x'25, and Adi Pillai, '21, stopped by to visit former teachers and to see the campus. Adi is finishing his degree at

Creighton University and will be getting his law degree at the University of Iowa. From there, he will go onto the JAG in the United States Marines.

## Multicultural Fair

**4** Ruben Zendejas, '12, shared a Hoop Dance at the school's annual Multicultural Fair. Ruben is a member of the Omaha Tribe.

## Gala

**5** Charlotte Hedican, '15, and Emily Tosoni

**6** Chris Pomerleau and Shivani Sharma, '04

**7** Colesun Wood, '19, with parents Debbie and Brian Wood (BT trustee)

**8** Nicole (Rossi) Lanum, '98, and Wade Lanum

**9** Alicia Millard and Jennifer Jones, '06

As an alum, you are always welcome to drop by and say hi!  
 Contact the BT team at [hello@brownell.edu](mailto:hello@brownell.edu) to schedule a visit!



*In reference to the  
 September 2024  
 Steven Balters, '07,  
 memorial dedication event:*

Dear BT Family,

The family of Steven Balters, '07, and I would like to express our loving gratitude to all who contributed to the beautiful and serene memorial seating area on campus. Our hearts are broken, but the outpouring of love and support from you all has meant the world to us. We would like to especially thank Steven's beloved classmates, their families, and all his teachers involved in the project. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge Andrew "Drew" Mazzotta, Aaron Parsow, Sandra Trinh, and Aaron Passer who raised funds and saw the project through to the end. You truly are special young people.

Love,

Chris Webster and Steven's extended family

**10** Ciaran Rochling, '20, Tori Keyte, along with his parents Gale Etherton (BT trustee) and Fedja Rochling

## Graduation

Celebrating this year's Class of 2025 were alumni:

- 11** Henrik Nelson, '22, with sister Ingrid
- 13** Bavishya Bachu, '22, with sister Tanya
- 12** Sy Lim, '19, with brother Simon
- 14** Audrey Graves, '18, Bethany Beavers, '86, Amelia Bell, '25, Amelia's mother Bindy Beavers, '87, and Brett Graves, '17
- 15** Abhinav Suresh, '16, was this year's commencement speaker. After BT, Abhinav attended Columbia University, from which he graduated in 2020. Abhinav began his career in investment banking and currently works in private equity. He will be joining the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania for

his MBA in healthcare management this fall. Abhinav is also one of BT's Upper School speech team coaches.

**16** Owen Ohnoutka, '27, Jana Ohnoutka, '25, and Kate Ohnoutka, '22

## Alumni Legacy

**17** Bindy Beavers, '87, is pictured with her daughter Amelia, '25, and husband Shelby at the Celebrate Your Senior lunch.

## Alumni Connections Across the World

**18** Tenley Propst, '15, and Charlotte Hedican, '15, were both in the United Kingdom recently on vacations. When talking to each other prior to their trips, they realized they were both going to the Harry Potter - Warner Bros Studio Tour on the same day!

After spending nearly a decade in Kansas City, I recently moved to Palo Alto with my husband and our mini-Australian Shepherd. I began my career as a patent attorney, with a background in materials engineering and chemistry, a little less than five years ago. During this time, I practiced at boutique law firms based in Kansas City and Washington, D.C. I also help lead philanthropic initiatives at my alma mater as chair of its Alumni Council's Giving Committee. Outside of my professional life, I'm a devoted Chiefs and Huskers fan, and when I'm not managing my fantasy football team, I'm likely on a soccer field, out biking, or deep into a quirky fiction novel.

### Can you tell us about your educational journey after leaving BT?

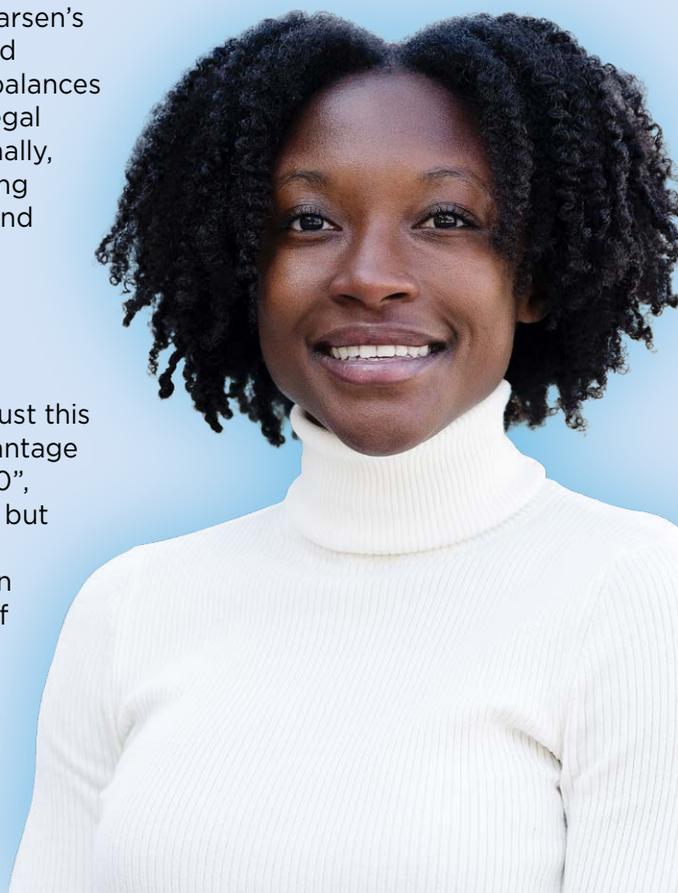
I earned my B.S. in chemistry from MidAmerica Nazarene University, where I also ran track and played soccer. Upon graduating, I decided to go to law school. At the University of Kansas School of Law, I was the first woman of color to serve as editor-in-chief of the *Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy*, served in several roles, and received the Samuel Mellinger Award for scholarship, leadership, and service at graduation. About two years into my practice, I realized that, while my chemistry background served as a great foundation for understanding the science behind innovations, there was a clear opportunity for me to strengthen my understanding of the engineering principles driving these real-world solutions. To bridge these gaps and gain foundational knowledge, I decided to pursue a master's degree in materials science and engineering in view of its interdisciplinary nature, leading me to Stanford University, where I graduated in June and received the School of Engineering Dean's Exceptional Graduate Student Award.

### How did BT help prepare you for what you are doing now?

BT gave me the analytical and quantitative foundation—kudos to Mrs. Simkins, Mrs. Anderson, and Mrs. Rise—I use every day. Furthermore, Mr. Larsen's emphasis on active writing, along with Mr. Hamel's Beatles-inspired sentence diagramming, taught me that good, persuasive writing balances precision with informed intuition. This training is essential to my legal practice, which relies on both legal and technical writing. Additionally, participating on the BT speech team was equally formative, offering early opportunities to think creatively, articulate under pressure, and shape ideas depending on the audience and subject matter.

### What advice would you give to current BT students?

Quite frankly, at BT, you are surrounded by exceptional people. Trust this foundation, as you'll see its strength over time. Also, take full advantage of BT's scale; its small size gives you room to try everything. At 5'0", I had absolutely NO business on a basketball court in high school, but it served as another opportunity and context, of many, to learn a lifelong lesson. And, of course, what may seem peripheral now can become central later, so sign up for Mr. Gould's choir class—even if you've never formally sung before.



# Alumni News and Notes

The Alumni News and Notes section of Fireside celebrates your recent accomplishments and those of your fellow alums. Share your news of births, weddings, career moves, and any life-changing events. We publish alumni submissions and any other news we receive from friends, employers, and media sources.

## IN MEMORIAM

### ALUMNI

**Eleanor “Lannie” (Burritt) McNichols, ’52, D. April 24, 2025.** She is predeceased by sister, Margaret (Burritt) Brown, ’53. Lannie served as editor of the yearbook, student council, Brownell Belles, basketball, volleyball, hockey, style show, and on the honor roll. Having lived in Dundee for over 80 years, she was a champion for the neighborhood and kept a watchful eye on BT.

**Jessie Gifford Shestack, ’57, D. January 27, 2025.** Jessie participated in student council, class leadership positions, service league, Triangle yearbook, Belles student newspaper, as well as hockey, basketball, and volleyball. Jessie’s artist name is Jessie Nebraska Gifford. In addition to abstract painting, she also created art in printmaking, drawing, and sculpture.

**Mary Elizabeth “Zibby” (Bisgard) Oneal, ’52, D. January 23, 2025.** Among her survivors is sister Karen (Bisgard) Alexander, x’54. Zibby, as she was affectionately known, participated in student council, Red Cross club, Brownell Belles, the Housekeeping Committee, Style Show, Modern Dance, Altar Guild, National Honor Society, and was on the Honor Roll. Zibby was best known as the author of three young adult novels, two of which won awards. She was also the author of two picture books, a novel for young readers, and a biography of the painter Grandma Moses.

**Anlouise (Ziesemann) Glen Hall, ’63, D. May 9, 2018**

### FRIENDS

**Dr. John Christensen, D. May 28, 2025.** Past BT trustee (2007-2017).

**Dr. Davender Singh Malik, D. May 13, 2025.** Survived by daughter, Shelly Malik, x’07.

**Dr. Dan Wilson, D. April 24, 2025.** Survived by daughter, Victoria Wilson, ’11.

**Dawn Wood, D. April 8, 2025.** Survived by grandchildren Conner Crosby, ’19, and Colten Crosby, ’20, and daughter Laura Crosby, BT trustee.

**Nancy Webster, D. March 20, 2025.** Nancy is predeceased by her son, Tim Dunning, x’90. She is survived by husband John Webster, x’66, former BT trustee, and daughter Holly Dunning, ’87. Nancy was a beloved preschool teacher at Brownell Talbot from 1982 to 1987 and later served as a dedicated member of the school’s Board of Trustees. She and John served as gala chairs in 1994 and were recognized for their devoted years of service to BT as the gala honorary chairs in 2003.

**F. Andrew “Andy” Ketterson, D. March 8, 2025.** Among his survivors are: son Andy, ’82, daughter Hilary, x’87, grandchildren Drew, ’15, and Mylie, ’18, and wife, Pat, a former third grade teacher at BT.



**Glenn Ballard, D. February 3, 2025, Former Headmaster.** Mr. Ballard served as Headmaster from 1967 to 1971. Among his survivors are son Glenn, Jr., x’74, and daughter Paula (Polly), x’78. From the 1969 Triangle yearbook, “...we are indeed fortunate to have Mr. Ballard as headmaster. His firm handshake and cheerful smile welcomes us to school every morning, and he conveys his enthusiasm for learning throughout the day. He certainly inspires pride in our school and encourages respect for education.” His impact on the Brownell Talbot community was immeasurable, and we are grateful for his many contributions to our school.

**Julie Madsen, D. January 10, 2025.** Survived by son, Kirk Swartzbaugh, ’88, predeceased by daughter, Carrie (Swartzbaugh) Meiers, ’83.

**Howard L. Hawks, D. December 6, 2024.** Survived by son, Troy Hawks, x’87.

**Glennis Peterson, D. November 24, 2024.** Survived by son, Brett Peterson, ’86.

## NEWS

**Walt Duda, ’93,** was named vice president, marketing acquisitions for Physicians Mutual.

**Katie (Anderson) McCarville, ’05,** is working as the Human Resources Manager for CyncHealth.



**Cygne Cooper, ’10,** is making waves in the beverage industry as chief brand officer of Hiyo! This innovative functional social tonic brand, co-founded by Cygne, has recently secured investment from Constellation Brands, the parent company of Corona.

**Powers Dicus, ’15,** married Heather Lillystone on June 7 at Brownell Talbot’s St. Matthias Chapel.

**Maddie Klinger Atterberry, ’15,** was named 4-H program coordinator for Sangamon County, Illinois.

**Charlotte Hedican, ’15,** portrayed Kate McGowan in the Omaha Community Playhouse’s production of *Titanic The Musical*.



**Sean Gardner, ’17,** served as technical director for the Elkhorn Community Theatre’s summer production of *Shrek, The Musical*. Gardner has been a member of their Board of Directors since 2023.

**Peter Rice, ’18,** is working as a multimedia journalist for News Channel Nebraska. In addition to writing and filming stories, he is also anchoring some broadcasts.

**Grace Thaden, ’20,** is working as a law clerk with Erickson Sederstrom Law Firm.

**Kyra George, ’20,** and **Emalie Wightman, ’20,** were selected as 2025 summer associates at the law firm, Koley Jessen, P.C., L.L.O.

**Ava Mumgaard, ’20,** was selected as a summer associate at the law firm, Baird Holm LLP.

**Andrew Vinci, ’22,** was elected as the next vice president of special events for Sports Business Scholars, a highly selective group at Arizona State University. Additionally, he was chosen by the USGA for the prestigious PJ Boatright Internship this summer in Phoenix.

**Jordan Haase, ’24,** self published two fiction novels in the zombie survival adventure genre.



# It was a great year at Brownell Talbot!



It's not too late to enroll for the 2025-2026 school year.  
Space is limited - contact our Enrollment Office today to secure your child's spot!

[admissions@brownell.edu](mailto:admissions@brownell.edu)