

2023

Founders' Day



THIEL[™]
COLLEGE

Founders' Day Convocation

11 a.m. Thursday, February 2, 2023

Lutheran Heritage Room, Howard Miller Student Center

PRELUDE

Steve Repasky, *Pianist*

***PROCESSIONAL**

Thanks be to Thee..... G. F. Handel (1685-1759)

***PLACING OF COLLEGE MACE**..... Anna Reinsel, Ph.D. '06

Professor of Environmental Science and Chemistry

***OPENING PRAYER**..... Pastor Brian Riddle '07

Campus Pastor

WELCOME..... Susan Traverso, Ph.D.

President

CHORAL MUSIC

E Ala E (*Ruth Morris Gray - b. 1961*)..... Thiel Choir

If Ye Love Me (*Philip Wilby - b. 1949*)..... Thiel Singers

Brianne Samson, *Director of Choral Activities;*

Steve Repasky, *Pianist*

PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL STAFF AWARDS

Michael McKinney, Ed.D. '02

Vice President for Student Life and Athletics, Dean of Students

Ashley Zullo

Vice President for Enrollment Management and Financial Aid

Greg Butcher, Ph.D.

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College

Distinguished Staff Award..... Tyler North

Head Women's Volleyball Coach

Distinguished Staff Award..... Sonya Lapikas

Director of Admission

Distinguished Staff Award.... Morgan (Steiner) Bodnar '16, MBA '21

Assistant Director of Admission, Graduate Counselor

Distinguished Staff Award..... Jennifer Gongaware

Speech-Language Pathology Administrative Assistant

Distinguished Staff Award..... Erin Bain

Coordinator of Accessibility Resource Center

PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL FACULTY AWARDS

Greg Butcher, Ph.D.

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College

Distinguished Adjunct..... Julie Harris

Adjunct Professor of Education

Distinguished Scholar..... Jared Johnson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of English, Department Chair

Distinguished Service..... Christopher M. Stanisky, Ph.D.

Professor of Chemistry, Department Chair

Distinguished Teacher..... Mary O'Donnell, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biology

Distinguished Professor..... Jared Hanneman, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Sociology, Department Chair

PRESENTATION OF THE LOUIS AND BARBARA THIEL DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

President Traverso

Rod Wilt '86

An honor bestowed in recognition of
advocacy of the region, College & students.

***HAIL ALMA MATER.....** *Led by Thiel College Choir*

Music by Friedrich F. Flemming
and lyrics by E. Grace Hunton 1900



Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter, on thy hill en - thron - ed,
Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter, may thy torch for - ev - er
Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter, we, thy chil - dren pledge thee



Firm as a moun - tain may'st thou stand en - dur - ing, Fair as the
Shed light re - splen - dent for thy God and coun - try; Send the flame
Here our de - vo - tion, loy - al, true and ten - der, Thee will we



val - ley of thine own She - nan - go, Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter!
on - ward to all gen - er - a - tions. Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter!
cher - ish, praise thy name for - ev - er. Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter!

***CLOSING PRAYER.....** Pastor Riddle
POSTLUDE

Steve Repasky, *Pianist*

***AUDIENCE WILL PLEASE RISE IF ABLE.**

The Louis and Barbara Thiel Distinguished Service Award is presented annually to community members who demonstrate exemplary character, continuity of leadership and long-term service to Greenville and its environs. The recipients must demonstrate a commitment to the common good above private interests. The award is named after Louis and Barbara Thiel, whose generosity made the founding of Thiel College possible in 1866. The Thiels dedicated themselves to the welfare of others. The German couple immigrated to western Pennsylvania in the 1840s, and as their work was blessed with success, they faithfully served family, community, and the church.



Rod E. Wilt '86

Accepting the Barbara and Louis Thiel Award is **Rod E. Wilt '86**. He is a 1986 graduate of Thiel College and the vice chair of the College's Board of Trustees. Wilt has had careers in finance, public service and most recently as the lead officer for the Mercer County economic development group, Penn-Northwest Development Corporation.

Wilt also played a key role in operating the Keystone Energy Forum, a statewide outreach and education program focused on mission-critical state and federal oil and gas legislative initiatives (2015-2019).

In 2020, Wilt was named the executive director of the Penn Northwest Development Corporation. In that role, Wilt works with government officials, corporate executives, commercial banks, real estate developers and investors to bring and retain business and industry in Mercer County. As a graduate of Greenville High School and Thiel, he has deep roots in Mercer County. After spending his early professional years working in finance, he was elected in 1996 to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and served five two-year terms.

In November 2022, Penn-Northwest announced a \$3.5 million funding package from the state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program to attract a manufacturer and nearly 300 full-time jobs to the Greenville-Reynolds Industrial Park. Earlier that month, Penn-Northwest also announced it had approved a \$500,000 grant to repair the roof and replace lighting and concrete for installation of production lines in hopes of attracting a tenant to the former Wheatland Tube/Sharon Tube plant in Sharon.

Starting in 2008 and continuing today, Wilt has successfully identified, purchased, financed, managed and sold nearly 3,500 multi-family apartment units in more than 25 properties in several different markets. Wilt has experience in legislative outreach, issues education and government relations from his experience working with several clients in the oil & gas, pharmaceutical and manufacturing industries.

Rod met his wife, Jill (Gardner) '85, while they were at Thiel. They have remained active with their alma mater throughout the years. In 1996, Wilt was inducted into the Thiel College Athletic Hall of Fame. He compiled a three-year wrestling record of 75-16. Wilt was a three-time NCAA national qualifier and twice earned All-American status. In 2015, Rod and Jill endowed Thiel's wrestling coach position. Jill Wilt previously served as Thiel College Alumni Director and was a past member of the Alumni Board of Directors.

The couple live on a 66-acre farm in Sugar Grove Township. They have one adult son, Tanner, who resides in Wexford, Pa. In his spare time, Wilt enjoys golfing, riding his motorcycle through rural Pennsylvania and walking in the woods around the farm.



Tyler North

When you think of Thiel College women's volleyball, you think of **Tyler North**. North is entering his sixth season as head coach.

In the 2022 season, North led the Tomcats to the Presidents' Athletic Conference women's volleyball championship tournament, including their first finals appearance since 2012. This was the program's fourth consecutive postseason appearance. North and his team also clinched the top seed for the 2022 tournament for the first time in program history.

Before arriving at Thiel, North spent three seasons as the assistant women's volleyball coach at the College at Brockport, State University of New York. The Golden Eagles went 90-18 over the last three years and won State University of New York Athletic Conference titles in 2015 and 2016. Both conference championship teams made NCAA Tournament appearances with the 2016 team advancing to the Sweet 16.

Prior to his time at SUNY Brockport, North served as an assistant coach for the Iroquois Empire Volleyball Association High Performance Program and the Paradigm Volleyball Club. He also served as a coach for multiple volleyball camps and clinics, some of which were affiliated with USA Volleyball.

North received a master's degree in athletic administration and a bachelor's in kinesiology from SUNY Brockport. He was a three-time state champion and two-year starter for SUNY Brockport's men's club volleyball team.



Sonya Lapikas

As the director of admissions, **Sonya Lapikas** has worked with many students and families to ensure they have a straightforward application process. Aside from working in the admissions office, Lapikas is tasked with recruiting international students. In 2022, she collaborated diligently with the PA India Hub to secure Thiel's first international MBA students arriving in February. She cultivated relationships with this partner school, amongst other schools in India, over the past two years.

Lapikas received her Bachelor of Science in business administration with an emphasis in marketing from Clarion University in 1995. She is a familiar face to many on campus, as she has been working at Thiel for 27 years, starting as an admissions counselor.

During her time at Thiel, Lapikas served on several different committees, including Strategic Planning Committee, IPBC, Joint Enrollment Committee, Financial Clearance Working Group, IT Steering Committee, New Student Orientation and Welcome Weekend. In 2016, she graduated from Leadership Shenango.

Away from Thiel, she is also involved with the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the Pennsylvania Association for College Admission Counseling organizations, the Friendship Program with international students and recently joined the Lady Scouts, a local community service organization.

She and her husband, **Jon**, are residents of Sharon, Pa. along with their daughter, **Katie** (17).



Morgan (Steiner) Bodnar '16, MBA'21

Morgan Bodnar '16, MBA'21 is the assistant director of admissions and serves as a graduate counselor, assisting in the everyday recruitment of graduate students. She is constantly reaching out to students to share information on graduate programs, this also includes reaching out to local businesses, companies and other colleges and universities to promote the graduate programs. She makes it a priority to ensure graduate students have a smooth process from the application to financial aid to the first day of classes.

Bodnar mainly focuses on graduate students, but she also works with undergraduate students who are interested in any of the five-year graduate program pathways. This includes ensuring that all supplemental application information is collected and shared with program directors and decision letters are processed.

Bodnar is an alumna of Thiel College. She received her B.A. in business administration, marketing, and management in 2016 and her MBA in 2021. Outside of the office, she is Thiel's majorette advisor. She is also the band front advisor at West Middlesex High School. Bodnar is the owner and coach of Sun Star Baton Twirling in Greenville.

She lives in Greenville with her husband, **Michael Bodnar M.A. '24**. Bodnar and her husband enjoy spending time with their beagle, Chansey. In her spare time, she enjoys doing projects around the house and crafting.



Jennifer Gongaware

Jennifer Gongaware is a familiar face to those in the Speech Language Pathology program. As the administrative assistant of SLP, she has played a key role in establishing the graduate program and developing admission and onboarding procedures for graduate students. Gongaware oversees all student workers and graduate assistants in the program, helping them manage their work schedule and responsibilities.

Graduate and undergraduate students can always rely on Gongaware to answer questions about the program, give support when needed, or provide words of encouragement to students when they are feeling stressed.

Gongaware earned her Bachelor of Arts in speech and hearing disorders from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 1999. Before Thiel, Gongaware worked as a substitute teacher for Greenville Area School District (2015-2019).

Gongaware and her husband, **Chad**, live in Greenville with their two children, **Emily** (17) and **Addison** (15). Away from Thiel, she volunteers for the Greenville Area Soccer Association and serves as their registrar. Gongaware enjoys spending time with her family, shopping, crafting and drinking iced coffees. In addition to her hobbies, you can find her cheering her children on during sporting events.

Staff Awards

Erin Bain



As the coordinator of the Accessibility Resource Center, **Erin Bain** works to develop program policies, procedures, and services. She is responsible for meeting with students or their parents to arrange and develop individualized accommodations. She also works with students to ensure they have all the necessary resources and support to achieve success in both the classroom and their residential environments. Bain is always advocating for students who face physical and mental health challenges by conducting campus-wide disability awareness activities.

Before coming to Thiel College, she worked as a behavior consultant and autism specialist for 21 years at Sharon Regional Medical Center. She received her Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Juniata College in 2000 and earned her Master of Education from Slippery Rock University in 2006. Bain has also acquired professional affiliations throughout her studies. In 2005, Bain received her Board-Certified Associate Behavior Analyst certification. In 2021, she became a member of the Association of Higher Education and Disability. Bain also obtained her professional certification as an ADA Coordinator in 2022 through the ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program.

"I would like to credit my kids and mom, Lynne, for being my biggest cheerleaders and Robin Sakonyi for this job opportunity," she said.

Bain lives in Sharpsville, Pa. with her two sons, **Alec** (17) and **Maxx** (14).

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Adjunct

Julie Harris, M.Ed.



Julie Harris has been a part of the Thiel College Community since 2014. Harris is an adjunct professor of education and has been teaching the science methods course in the Department of Education since she first arrived at Thiel. Her job is to prepare students to teach science content to elementary students through engaging, cross-curricular activities.

Harris makes it a priority to ensure all her students have authentic and real-world experiences that will allow them to become successful educators. She works with the Jamestown Area School District and educators at Pymatuning State Park to give her students the opportunity to teach directly to students and become certified in both Project WILD and Project Learning Tree.

She earned her bachelor's degree in education from Otterbein College and her master's in education with an emphasis in language arts from Wright State University. She obtained her special education certificate from Slippery Rock University.

Harris taught sixth-grade environmental science and language arts for 25 years at Jamestown Elementary. She also taught third and fourth grade for 10 years. Harris is a member of the Master Gardeners of Crawford County and the Westford Flower Club.

Away from Thiel, Harris enjoys being with family, vacationing with friends, kayaking, skiing, trout fly fishing and playing pickleball.

Faculty Awards
Distinguished Scholar



Jared Johnson, Ph.D.

Jared Johnson, Ph.D. is known for his impressive publications and commitment to the scholarship community. Johnson is Chair of Thiel's Department of English. At Thiel, he teaches a variety of courses, which include: Shakespeare, Science Fiction and Fantasy, Introduction to Literature, World Literature, Dramatic Literature, Writing for Stage and Screen, English Capstone, College Writing, and First Year Seminar. Johnson is as an active mentor for his students and peers.

Johnson has achieved impressive back-to-back publications with two scholarly articles from research he conducted during his spring 2020 sabbatical. Additionally, he presented a version of one of his publications at the most recent Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference at Owens Community College in Toledo, Ohio.

Johnson holds a B.A. in English and philosophy from Flagler College and an M.A. in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He received his Ph.D. in English from the State University of NY at Stony Brook. Prior to Thiel, he served as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Outside of Thiel, he is a member of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Organization.

Johnson lives in Greenville, with his spouse, **Ashley Johnson**, and their children, **Violet** (4) and **Evelyn** (2). Away from Thiel, Johnson enjoys doing CrossFit and playing basketball with his colleagues.

Faculty Awards
Distinguished Service



Christopher M. Stanisky, Ph.D.

Christopher Stanisky, Ph.D. is chair of the Chemistry and Physics Department. Stanisky is a highly respected member of the campus community, who has served on key committees such as the Curriculum Study Committee, VPAA Academic Dean Search Committee. He was an advisor for the American Chemical Society Student Affiliates and the Pre-Chiropractor, Pre-Podiatry and Pre-Pharmacy Programs in the Health Professions Institute.

In 2022, he was Chair of the Chemistry Search Committee for a new tenure-track chemistry faculty in organic chemistry and biochemistry. He represented the Chemistry and Physics Department in establishing the college curriculum for the new physician's assistant and nursing programs.

Stanisky played a key role in facilitating renovations to the first floor of the science building. He moved instrumentation and apparatus out of laboratories into temporary storage and met with architects and other science faculty to discuss and modify plans for renovations.

Stanisky has a Bachelor of Arts with majors in chemistry and Latin and a minor in ancient Greek from Franklin and Marshall College and his doctorate in physical chemistry from Yale University. He added post-doctoral research at the University of Notre Dame. He is a member of the American Chemical Society.

Stanisky lives in Sharon, Pa. with his wife, **Heidi M. Soxman**, and their children, **Jasper Levi Stanisky** (12), **Sawyer Everett Stanisky** (9) and **Oliver Quinn Stanisky** (5).

Faculty Awards
Distinguished Teacher



Mary O'Donnell, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of biology, **Mary O'Donnell, Ph.D.** is always incorporating new opportunities for students in her research-based independent study classes. Many would describe O'Donnell as an engaging professor who is always finding new ways to make difficult concepts relatable to her students without compromising the integrity of the material. She is constantly bringing real-world examples, case studies, and relevant research experiences into her classes.

She is currently teaching a new course that is essential to Thiel's first cohort of nursing students. Within this course she is connecting science to the clinical, giving students the foundation they need to be successful. O'Donnell also supports her students outside the classroom, as she worked with Sharon Regional to plan a site visit for her students during her microbiology lecture.

She received her Bachelor of Science in microbiology (2013) and her Ph.D. in biology sciences (2018) from The Ohio State University. She also acquired her postdoctoral training from the University of Pittsburgh in 2020.

O'Donnell was an adjunct researcher for the Magee Women's Research Institute from 2020-2022. She was also a visiting assistant professor for Oberlin College from 2020-2021.

O'Donnell and her spouse, **Kyle O'Donnell**, are residents of Youngstown, Ohio. In her free time, she mentors Thiel undergraduate students through research partnerships with the University of Pittsburgh and Magee-Women's Research Institute.

Faculty Awards
Distinguished Professor of the Year



Jared Hanneman, Ph.D.

Jared Hanneman, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Sociology and the chair of the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice. At Thiel, many are impressed by his well-thought-out and articulate opinions and would describe him as highly organized.

For years, Hanneman has taught courses in criminal justice studies, sociology, and in the World Cultures and Global Issues seminar series. Many of the students who have taken his course point out how Hanneman always found ways to support and encourage them throughout the semester.

Hanneman has a history of leadership at Thiel. He was the first organizer of the Scholarship and Arts Symposium. He was also a member of the Instructional Design Team during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Outside of Thiel, he is a member of the Midwest Sociology Society.

He earned a B.A. in sociology, microbiology, and philosophy from Miami University and an M.A. in sociology from the University of Pittsburgh. In 2014, he acquired his Ph. D in sociology from the Graduate and University Center of the City University of New York.

Before coming to Thiel, he taught as an adjunct lecturer at several NYC institutions, such as NYU, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Hunter College, and Pace University.

Hanneman lives in Sharpville, Pa. with his spouse, **Alison**, and their children, **Graham** (13), **Callum** (11) and **Cordelia** (9). His hobbies include reading, swimming, completing crossword puzzles and white-water rafting.

*Previous Louis and Barbara Thiel
Distinguished Service Award Recipients*

Paul J. Miller '69 ~ 1990
The Hon. Roy W. Wilt '59, H'85 ~ 1991
Richard L. Werner, H'87 ~ 1992
Donna C. Winner, James E. Winner ~ 1993
Joseph M. Walton, D. Michael Walton, Joseph P. Walton ~ 1994
Dorothea E. Anderson ~ 1995
F. W. Knecht III ~ 1996
James E. Feeney ~ 1997
Joseph A. George ~ 1998
James Weller Jr. Family ~ 1999
Peter Mortensen H'05 ~ 2000
Dr. Robert Baker, Dr. John Scullin ~ 2002
Archie O. Wallace, Esq., Jeff A. Wallace, Daniel P. Wallace, Esq. ~ 2003
The Rev. Martin M. '66 and Sarah "Sally" (Fox) Roth '65 ~ 2005
Paul E. O'Brien ~ 2006
Robert D. Robbins and Cynthia A. Robbins ~ 2007
James D. Bittel Jr. '60 ~ 2008

Luther John Kuder '59 ~ 2009
Fred '66 and Jill (Shackett) Haer '66 ~ 2010
The Frangakis Family Foundation ~ 2011
John M. Hudson ~ 2012
Harvey H'15 and Uta Childs ~ 2013
Mark A. Nordenberg, Esq. '70, H'97 ~ 2014
Robert Olson, Ph.D. '60, H'09 ~ 2015
The Dietrich Foundation ~ 2016
John '71 and Nancy (Gibson) Hauser '75 ~ 2017
Tom Roberts and Michael P. Walton ~ 2018
Sen. Michele Brooks & Rep. Mark Longietti, J.D. ~ 2019
The Pittsburgh Promise ~ 2020
Brenda Wallace ~ 2021
Mary Reames ~ 2022

For lists of previous Distinguished Staff Award and Faculty
Award recipients, go to www.thiel.edu/foundersday.



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