

2025

Founders' Day



THIEL[™]
COLLEGE

Founders' Day Convocation

11 a.m. Thursday, February 6, 2025
Lutheran Heritage Room, Howard Miller Student Center

PRELUDE

Jacob Hoffman, *Pianist*

***PROCESSIONAL**

***PLACING OF COLLEGE MACE** Jared Johnson, Ph.D.
Faculty Marshall, Professor of English

***OPENING PRAYER**..... Pastor Audra Franley '17
Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion

GREETINGS FROM

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES..... Rod E. Wilt '86
Chair of the Board of Trustees

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

CHORAL MUSIC

No Time *arr. Susan Brumfield*
Thiel Choir
Jacob Hoffman, *Pianist*

Beati quorum via *Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)*
Thiel Singers
Brianna Samson, *Director of Choral Activities*

PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL STAFF AWARDS

Sheila Nowinski, Ph.D.

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College

Amy Arbogast

Vice President for Finance and Administration

Michael McKinney, Ed.D. '02

Vice President for Student Life and Athletics

Distinguished Staff Advisor/Mentor Award Robin Sakonyi
Director of the Learning Commons

Distinguished Staff Award Jaclyn Schulz
Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs

Distinguished Staff Award..... Robert Bercis
Assistant Director of Maintenance

Distinguished Staff Award Melanie R. Broadwater '98
Director of the Counseling Center

Distinguished Staff Award Melissa Michael
Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Student Life and Athletics

Distinguished Staff Award Andrew Geisler MBA '24
Defensive Coordinator/Defensive Backs Coach

PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL FACULTY AWARDS

Sheila Nowinski, Ph.D.

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College

Distinguished Advisor/Mentor Anna Reinsel, Ph.D. '06
Professor of Environmental Science, Department Chair

Distinguished Adjunct..... Cynthia Dayton
Adjunct Professor of Chemistry

Distinguished Scholar..... Jay Donis, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of History

Distinguished Service Nicole K. Olshanski, D.N.P.
Assistant Professor and Director of Nursing Program

Distinguished Teacher Kara Schreckenghost
*Assistant Professor of Education, Director of Teacher Education,
Department Chair*

Distinguished Professor of the Year ... George Branch-Trevathan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Religion, Department Chair

**PRESENTATION OF THE
LOUIS AND BARBARA THIEL
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**

Introduction by
President Susan Traverso, Ph.D.

Daniel Spence

An honor bestowed in recognition of his Commitment
to the Community, Support of Higher Education and
Investment in the Arts

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.

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

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

Hail, Alma Mater
Thiel College Alma Mater
from the Hymn Tune "Integer Vitae"

Music by F. F. Flemming (1811)
Lyrics by Grace Hunton, Class of 1900

In 2
♩ = 65

Hail, Al-ma Ma - ter, on thy hill en - thro - ned. Firm as a mou - n - tain, may't thou stand en - dur - ing.
Hail, Al-ma Ma - ter, may thy torch for - ev - er. Shed light re - splen - dent for thy God and coun - try.
Hail, Al-ma Ma - ter, we thy chil - dren pledge thee. Here our de - vo - tion, loy - al, true, and ten - der.

9
Fair as the val - ley of thine own She - nan - no. Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter.
Send the flame on - ward to all gen - er - a - tions. Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter.
Thee will we cher - ish, praise thy name for - ev - er. Hail, Al - ma Ma - ter.

rit. on verse 3

***CLOSING PRAYER.....** Pastor Franley

POSTLUDE

Jacob Hoffman, *Pianist*

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

Daniel Spence



Dan Spence is a distinguished member of both the Thiel College and Greenville-area communities. A graduate of Grove City College, he built a successful career in information systems, serving as a Senior Information Systems Analyst for Westinghouse Electric in Pittsburgh before joining Viacom and Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS).

In retirement, Spence has continued to make a significant impact. He has served three terms as President of the Greenville Kiwanis Club and is a board member and title sponsor of the Greenville Symphony of Mercer County.

Spence's family holds a remarkable legacy at Thiel College. His mother, **Betty Harter Spence '37**, graduated at the age of 16 with a degree in mathematics. His uncles, **William Harter '33** and **Rev. Dr. Nathan F. R. Harter '41**, were also Thiel alumni. William was inducted into Thiel's Athletic Hall of Fame in 1986, while Rev. Dr. Harter taught classics at the College during the 1950s. Dan's grandfather, **Nathan Warren Harter**, joined Thiel in 1911 as a professor of mathematics, astronomy, and geology, while also coaching football, golf, and tennis. The second-floor atrium of the Haer Family Science and Arts Connector is named the Nathan Warren Harter Atrium in his honor—a reflection of the Spence

family's deep ties to Thiel. Dan's grandmother, **Besse Harter**, was also a vital part of the Thiel community, including managing the Ridgeway Hall dining hall.

Dan and his late wife, **Dorothy**, further cemented their legacy at Thiel with a transformational \$4 million gift to renovate the Academic Center, with each contributing \$2 million. In recognition of their generosity, the building was renamed the Daniel and Dorothy Spence Academic Center. Dorothy's story is equally inspiring. While working full-time as a telephone operator, she earned her undergraduate degree in mathematics and later an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh, studying at bus stops in between shifts. Rising through the ranks, she became Verizon's Manager of Outside Plant Engineers for Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. After marrying Dan in 2013, she relocated to Greenville and became an active member of the community, contributing alongside Dan to the Kiwanis Club and other local initiatives.

The Daniel and Dorothy Spence Academic Center stands as a testament to their shared commitment to empowering student success. Their enduring love, dedication, and generosity continue to inspire the Thiel College community. Through hard work, intellectual curiosity, and a passion for service, Dan and Dorothy Spence have created a legacy that will enrich the lives of students for generations to come.

Staff Awards

Distinguished Staff Advisor/Mentor

Robin Sakonyi



Robin Sakonyi joined the Tomcat family in November 2020 in her current role as Director of the Learning Commons. It is fitting that she is the first nominee in the new Special Mentor category, as her nomination forms collectively mention “student” or “students” 23 times.

Sakonyi has two children, **Emma**, 18, and **Jack**, 16, and lives in Sharon, Pa. She is a busy mom of two (three, if five-year-old lab Bentley is included).

Sakonyi has a bachelor’s degree from the University of Pittsburgh and a Master of Arts in student personnel from Slippery Rock University.

While completing her graduate degree at Slippery Rock University, (2001-2002) she worked as a Career Counselor in the Office of Career Services. Upon completion of graduate school, Sakonyi landed an academic advising position in the Education Department at Point Park University (2003-2005). Family brought Sakonyi back to the Hermitage area. She then began her 15-year (2005-2020) career at Youngstown State University’s Center for Student Progress, advancing from a coordinator position to assistant and finally associate director.

Staff Awards

Distinguished Staff

Jaclyn Schulz



Jaclyn Schulz is the Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. She has been at Thiel College since 2022. She is married to **Kenneth Schulz**. They live in Hermitage, Pa. They have two children **Aaren**, 17, and **Branson**, 17. She has had roles at Harvard University, the University of

Pittsburgh, Cigna Healthcare and Athena Study Abroad before arriving at Thiel.

She is very involved with the church where her husband is the assistant pastor. She is grateful for the opportunity of “working with such wonderful people day in and day out.” She was an extra in the movie “Love and Other Drugs,” which was filmed in Pittsburgh. She graduated from Deer Lakes High School in 2001. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Emerson College in 2005 and a master’s degree in education from Abilene Christian University in 2017.

Her nominations cited her integral role in the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education accreditation application, PA State Board of Nursing application, and workflow improvements for budget managers. Her work in Faculty Services further demonstrates her dedication and ability to exceed expectations, making her a key contributor to the College’s success.

Staff Awards
Distinguished Staff
Robert Bercis



Robert Bercis is the Assistant Director of Maintenance. He has been with Thiel College since 2021.

He graduated from Linesville High School in 1996. He is married to **Dr. Rebecca Bercis**, and they have two children, **Cole** and **Lexi**. They live in Jamestown, Pa.

He has more than 20 years of experience with his self-started business, Bercis Construction. He enjoys snowmobiling, hunting and cutting wood and entering hot pepper eating contests.

He said one of the highlights of working at Thiel has been preparing for Jamestown's prom and graduation. His son attended both events, capped off by his participation in graduation in 2024.

Bercis was recognized for his exceptional problem-solving skills and dedication, consistently exceeding job expectations. His nomination highlighted his ability to "shift from one dirty job to another all day long in a calm, persistent manner." His commitment and resourcefulness left a strong impression on his nominator.

Staff Awards
Distinguished Staff
Melanie R. Broadwater '98



Melanie Broadwater '98 is the Director of the Counseling Center.

She lives in Transfer, Pa. with her husband **Bill Broadwater**. They have two children, **Ryan**, 19, and **Abby**, 16.

Broadwater worked at Sharon Regional Health System in the outpatient behavioral health department for 13 years before coming to Thiel College. She graduated with a double major in psychology and sociology. She earned a Master of Arts in clinical mental health counseling from Geneva College in 2000. She enjoys reading, cooking and spending time with loved ones.

Broadwater is the owner of Suds and Cedar, which makes handmade bath products.

She is a member of the Mercer County Suicide Prevention Committee and the American College Counseling Association. She volunteers at Grace Chapel Community Church in the youth ministry program.

Staff Awards
Distinguished Staff

Melissa Michael



Melissa Michael is the Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Student Life and Athletics and Housing Coordinator. She lives in Conneaut Lake, Pa. and has a son, **Bryan**, 10.

She spent eight years in the United States Air Force Reserves as a medic. She was also the finance officer, color guard member and club manager of American Legion Post 494 for eight years.

Michael was an administrative assistant at Conneaut School District for four years. She also has 10-plus years of bartending at social veteran and firehall clubs. She graduated from Reynolds High School in 2005 and the Community College of Air Force, with an Associate Degree in nursing in 2012.

She enjoys practicing baseball and football with her son, being silly and laughing with family, and exploring new adventures with those nearest and dearest to her heart.

In 1995, she and Assistant Professor of Education and Chair of the Department of Education **Kara Schreckenghost** became grand world champions in baton twirling.

Staff Awards
Distinguished Staff

Andrew Geisler MBA '24



Andrew Geisler MBA'24 is in his sixth year with Thiel College. Geisler has served as the team's defensive backs coach since 2019. He also served as the team's co-defensive coordinator in 2021. He served as the team's interim head coach for three months beginning on December 1, 2021.

Geisler arrived at Thiel after spending the 2018 season working as an intern with NCAA Division I Cornell University's defense and special teams. Prior to his time with the Big Red, Geisler was the defensive quality control coach at California University (Pa.) for two seasons.

Geisler also worked as a strength and conditioning intern at Saint Vincent College from Jan. 2015 through May 2016. He was also an assistant line coach at Shady Side Academy for four years.

Geisler played football at Saint Vincent College. He was a captain in 2015 and the team's defensive player of the year in 2014. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Saint Vincent in 2016.

Geisler has been a committed member of the Thiel community, providing dedicated service that strengthens the College.

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Advisor/Mentor
Anna Reinsel, Ph.D. '06



Anna Reinsel, Ph.D. '06 is a Professor of Environmental Science, Chair of the Department of Environmental Science and Associate Director of the Dietrich Honors Institute.

She is married to **Tim Reinsel '06**. The couple lives in Brookfield, Ohio and have three children, **Penelope**, 11, **Rosalie**, 8, and **Tobias**, 4.

She graduated from Ravenna High School in 2002 and Thiel College in 2006. She earned her Ph.D. in chemistry from The University of Akron in 2011.

She enjoys leading study abroad/away courses and being able to adventure with students.

Reinsel is planning a trip to Scandinavia in May 2026. She is proud of her role in creating the environmental safety management degree and is thankful that it has brought in so many amazing students.

And she wants to share a message about her students: "Love my Envirocats!"

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Adjunct
Cynthia Dayton



Cynthia Dayton is an Adjunct Professor of Chemistry.

In 2013, she received her bachelor's degrees in chemistry and math from Western Carolina University and went on to earn a master's in chemistry in 2014. It was while working as a graduate student assistant instructor, she found a passion for teaching.

Dayton has taught chemistry and math at several colleges including South College of Asheville, Haywood Community College, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and Southwestern Community College. In 2020, like many people, she began working online, teaching remote courses for Rasmussen University. In January of 2021, Dayton moved back north to Pennsylvania and began teaching for Thiel College.

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Scholar

Jay Donis, Ph.D.



Jay Donis, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of History. He and his wife, **Claire Donis**, have two children, **Malcolm**, 4, and **Brooke**, 2, and they live in Sharon, Pa. Donis has always loved history. He remembers playing with medieval Lego sets. His parents took him to a lot of Civil War battlefields as a child, because he wanted

to see them. He never lost that interest and went to college to study history with no plan after graduating. He discovered that you can just keep studying history, so he pursued a master's degree and then a Ph.D. Along the way, he did a number of odd jobs, including teaching as an adjunct professor and coaching high school lacrosse and soccer.

Thiel hired him for a predoctoral fellowship in 2021. He finished his dissertation, received his Ph.D. from Lehigh University, and earned a tenure track position in 2022.

He is involved with the Pennsylvania Historical Association and *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*.

A member of the Noon Hoops Crew, he once saw **Devin Weisbarth '22** miss 10 consecutive 3-pointers in a game only to follow it up with long streak of makes in the next game.

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Service

Nicole K. Olshanski, D.N.P.



Nicole K. Olshanski, D.N.P. is Assistant Professor of Nursing and Program Director for Nursing. She is married to **Steve Olshanski**. They have four children, **Alyssa**, 21; **Grace**, 19; **Nicholas**, 18; and **Caroline**, 13. They share their home with their "fur children," Chloe, Pudgie, Mikey and Frankie. They live in Slippery Rock,

Pa. Olshanski taught at the University of Pittsburgh and was a tenured faculty member at Youngstown State University prior to coming to Thiel College as the Director of the Nursing Program.

She was a member of the team that led the nursing program to initial accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Her proposal for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program was approved by the Pennsylvania State Board, and she traveled to Imbert, Dominican Republic with nursing students. Olshanski was inducted as a fellow into the American College of Nurse Midwives in May 2023.

She has earned a post master's degree Certificate Nurse Midwifery from Shenandoah University (2016), a Doctor of Nursing Practice from Waynesburg University (2010), Master of Science in nursing from the University of Pittsburgh (2002), a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Slippery Rock University (1999), Associate Degree in Nursing from Butler County Community College (1997) and Seneca Valley High School (1995).

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Teacher

Kara Schreckenghost



Kara Schreckenghost is Assistant Professor of Education, Chair of the Department of Education and Director of Teacher Education. Schreckenghost lives in Sharpsville with her children, **Tyson**, 12, and **Kolten**, 10. She spent 11 years as a special education teacher at Greenville Area School District. At Thiel, she

has been Chair of the department for the last three years. She has also taught in the Excel Opportunities Program and in a freshman seminar course for five years.

She is working on her Doctor of Special Education at Slippery Rock University with an anticipated completion of August 2025. She earned her K-12 Principal Certification from California University of PA in 2017. She earned a master's degree in special education supervision in 2013 and a Bachelor of Science in education in 2008, both from Slippery Rock University. She graduated from Sharpsville Area High School in 2004.

An important Thiel moment to her is being a first-year instructor and being one of the first connections students make with a faculty member on campus. "I cherish the moments we have in classes each day...and the fact that I get to see students through their college career from their first day on campus to their last. All of the students at Thiel make me so proud," she said.

Faculty Awards

Distinguished Professor of the Year

George Branch-Trevathan, Ph.D.



Rev. George Branch-Trevathan, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Religion and Chair of the Department of Religion. He is married to **Rev. Rebecca Branch-Trevathan**. They have a son, **Benjamin**.

Branch-Trevathan came to Thiel in 2010. He has served as a lecturer in Religion, Assistant and now Associate Professor of Religion, Chair of the Religion department, member of the Faculty Executive Committee, Director of the Learning Commons, Associate Director of the Dietrich Honors Institute and Interim Director of the DHI. In 2021, the Northeast Regional Honors Conference named him the Honors Faculty Member of the Year. He is the author of "The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises."

Branch-Trevathan earned his bachelor's degree in religious studies and Spanish language and literature from Vanderbilt University. He earned a master's degree in divinity from Harvard Divinity School and his Ph.D. from Emory University in New Testament and early Christianity.

His favorite saying is "talking about it usually helps," which also leads to some of his favorite Thiel moments, which are listening to students' stories.

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 &
Sarah "Sally" (Fox) Roth '65 ~ 2005

Paul E. O'Brien ~ 2006

Robert D. Robbins &
Cynthia A. Robbins ~ 2007

James D. Bittel Jr. '60 ~ 2008

PREVIOUS LOUIS AND BARBARA THIEL DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Luther John Kuder '59 ~ 2009

Fred '65 and Jill (Shackett) Haer '66 ~ 2010

The Frangakis Family Foundation ~ 2011

John M. Hudson H'23 ~ 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

Rod E. Wilt '86 ~ 2023

Barry Oman '74 &
Linda (Dean) Oman '75 ~ 2024



75 College Avenue • Greenville, PA 16125

www.thiel.edu • 800-24-THIEL