

Georgia College's 125th Anniversary-Celebrating the Past While

Moving Forward

Beautiful columned buildings, students studying on front campus, countless contributions to the community and businesses-the landscape of Milledgeville would not be the same without Georgia College's (GC) presence. This academic year (2014-2015), GC will be celebrating 125 years of excellence in education and a history that is tightly interwoven with our charming city.

"The quasiquicentennial celebration has served as a way to commemorate the university's history while also honoring our present and planning for our future," said Dr. Steve Dorman, president of Georgia College. "As we reflect on our past, we remember those who shaped the university and guided its growth and expansion over our 125 years."

A History of Distinction

A journalist from Augusta, Julia Flisch, is credited with building support to establish a publicly funded college for women that would prepare them for the demands of the industrial age. According to University Historian Dr. Robert J. Wilson, Flisch wanted to simply "Give the girls a chance!"

"Georgia Tech had just been founded so that southern men would be competitive in the new industrializing society," says Wilson. "In 1889, because of Flisch's organizing efforts, Georgia Normal & Industrial College (GNIC)-the first name given to the institution-would do the same for women."

The school was chartered in 1889 as a two-year college emphasizing teacher training and business skills including typewriting and stenography. “Over the years, GC was known for the high quality of their students who became teachers. It also nourished a liberal arts sensibility from the beginning, unleashing the creativity in people such as Flannery O’Connor, our most renowned alum,” adds Wilson.

During the 1920s, the college started making progressive changes including going from a two-year to a four-year institution, forming student organizations and the establishment of The Colonnade student newspaper. The name also changed for the first time from GNIC to Georgia State College for Women (GSCW). A teacher’s college, the courses included Psychology, Home Economics, English, Math, Art, Science, Recreation, and Music.

During the years encompassing World War II, the entire country was asked to support the cause and GSCW was proud to participate in the great effort. In 1943, the school was selected as one of four colleges for training the United States Navy WAVES. For two years, 15,000 women received training on campus in storekeeping and clerical duties which they used during their service in the Navy.

During the 1960s, academic policies would shift as the rising tide of change flowed across the nation. The decade saw yet another name change-from GSCW to The Women’s College of Georgia (TWCG)-and welcomed the first African-American student, Celestine Hill.

During the post-war years, enrollment dropped to record lows due to women preferring to attend coeducational colleges. In 1967, the school made its biggest change to date as

it allowed men to attend for the first time in its history. That fall, 185 men joined the 1,216 women as students. With male students attending, the name once again changed to Georgia College at Milledgeville-four years later it would simply be known as Georgia College (GC).

With coed status, the 1970s and 80s saw many improvements on campus including a growing enrollment and the addition of several athletic sports. Baseball, basketball, softball, gymnastics, water skiing, and tennis teams drew in crowds of supporting fans. In 1989, the 100th anniversary of the college was marked with the opening of the Centennial Center (CC), which serves as a wellness center and gymnasium.

The 1990s and 2000s would hold vast changes for this once small, regional college. In 1996, the Georgia Board of Regents charged the institution with a new mission as “Georgia’s public liberal arts university” and gave it the sixth name-Georgia College & State University (GC&SU).

In 1997, the university was headed by its first female president-Dr. Rosemary DePaolo. Under her influence, the school thrived and grew into one of the most respected public liberal arts colleges in the nation.

The 2000s have witnessed unprecedented growth for the college in the areas of enrollment, monetary contributions, degrees granted, restoring of historic buildings, and the creation of new builds, as well. The decade also saw the return of the shortened version of the modern name-Georgia College (GC).

Today, GC serves more than 6000 undergraduate and graduate students at the main campus in Milledgeville, the Center for Graduate and Professional Learning in downtown Macon, and the graduate programs at Robins Air Force Base and online course.

Celebrating History While Building a Bright Future

From the early planning stage, the events included in the anniversary celebration were meant to engage not only students but the wider community as well. Freshmen kicked off the academic year with a class photograph-taken on front campus-outlining the “125” symbol. This shot mirrored many that had been taken by previous classes throughout the college’s history.

“We have involved current students, faculty, staff and the Milledgeville community in our celebration,” said Dorman. “The quasiquicentennial has allowed us to prepare for our future with the scholarship campaign, where we plan to create 125 new scholarships for future generations of students.”

Dr. Bruce Harshbarger, vice-president of student affairs, has been involved in many anniversary events including creating a time capsule which will be on permanent display in the Ina Dillard Russell Library. “The time capsule drew contributions from over two dozen student organizations, with most of the groups sending representatives to the dedication ceremony to show the items they had contributed and their significance,” said Harshbarger.

In November, the community was invited to join the GC History Club in the long-standing tradition of decorating the graves of past presidents of the college at the historic Memory Hill Cemetery.

Students have shown a great deal of interest in the celebration of GC's history. "I have found that students are fascinated by the rich heritage of this university," stated Wilson. "Having an appreciation of our history enhances the sense that they are having an ivy-league experience at a public university."

The Community Charter Day celebration held on November 8, included a performance of Flisch's inspiring speech about the importance of educating women, dedication of the time capsule, entertainment from the Music Therapy and Theatre departments, and the opportunity to create oral histories from personal experiences.

The day concluded with a glamorous gala that celebrated the school's history while raising money for scholarships. During the evening, 125 individuals and groups were honored for their remarkable influence on the institution. Among those honored were The Colonnade, Dr. John Lounsbury, Flannery O'Connor, Governor Zell Miller, The Give Center, and the Watson-Brown Foundation, just to name a few.

One honoree, Chief Ken Vance, was surprised and honored to learn of his appointment to the 125 list of most influential. "When I learned of my inclusion, I thought it very cool and most humbling," stated Vance.

Vance credits GC with helping to shape his life in varied ways. "As a writer, Dr. Sarah Gordon awakened the writer's voice in me," said Vance. "I also met my wife of 32 years, Carol, at GC. I raised my family while working there-I would say GC has had an enormous impact on my life."

For more information on the 125th anniversary and schedule of events, go to <http://gcsu.edu/125>. For information on donating to student scholarships visit <http://foundation.gcsu.edu/howmakegift>.