

Remembering Teri Heckert



Submitted photo

Former psychology professor Teri Heckert poses on a vacation. Heckert passed away Feb. 19 after a battle with breast cancer.

BY ANNA GRACE

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One week before she passed away, psychology professor Teri Heckert was doing what she loved — teaching in a classroom at Truman State.

Heckert passed away Feb. 19 after a battle with breast cancer. Although Heckert was diagnosed a second time with the disease during May 2013, she continued to teach until a week before her death.

Junior Rachel Rigsby's experience with Heckert began her sophomore year, when she questioned whether or not she wanted to pursue her psychology degree. Heckert, who was the department chair at the time, laid out the pros and cons of the major, and Rigsby said this helped her make her decision continue with the psychology major. She took one of Heckert's classes geared toward future educators, Motivation and Emotion, and said she learned more during Heckert's class than all her others at Truman.

"Her dedication towards the subject was incredible," Rigsby said. "Every day she came in, and you could tell she was tired, but she still cared so much and was so enthusiastic."

Rigsby is in the pre-Master of Arts in Education program, and when she

was doing her clinical hours — going into a classroom and teaching — she said she frequently would go to Heckert with questions.

She said Heckert answered all of her questions, and Rigsby solved her problems using Heckert's advice.

Rigsby said during almost every class last semester, Heckert would tell her students, "I will teach until the day I die."

Rigsby said Heckert was a challenging professor, but she inspired her students to work hard and want to succeed. Rigsby said once, while she was taking Heckert's class, she went home the weekend before the test and studied all weekend.

"That never happens," Rigsby said. "But the stuff was so interesting, and she just made it so interesting."

Rigsby said she spoke with Heckert about a week before her death and asked how Heckert's semester was going.

"She said, 'My biggest concern is that my students are not getting my full potential this semester because I'm more tired,'" Rigsby said. "That was all she was worried about — her students."

University President Troy Paino said not only was Heckert a wonderful faculty member, but a wonderful person, mother and friend to many. He said she jumped into everything and was committed to her students, teaching and scholarship, as well as incredible service

to the University.

Paino said Heckert always was the first one to take on the challenge when called upon to step up and take on a new responsibility or task.

Paino said he already has heard many students and alumni talk about the impact Heckert had on their lives. He said he was at an alumni event when a former student, now clerking for a federal judge in St. Louis, shared a story about how important Heckert was to him. The alumnus said Heckert was his academic advisor and advised him with his research, and said he believed he wouldn't have been as successful without Heckert's mentorship and guidance. Paino said he heard stories from other students at the memorial service who said they wouldn't be where they are today without Heckert's willingness to go the extra mile to help her students.

Paino said Heckert had high standards, but even when she gave constructive criticism and encouraged students to do better, she did it with such compassion and with the students' best interests at heart that the students responded well.

"My sense of Teri is that she really was called to this work," Paino said. "From my experience, it's those faculty members who have that really strong sense of purpose and that can't see themselves doing anything else but this are the ones

who are most successful at their work, and I think that really describes Teri."

Paino said Heckert was courageous throughout her battle and wanted to keep other peoples' spirits up, with a determination not to let the cancer get the best of her. She loved teaching and working with Truman students so much she wanted to do it right until the end, Paino said.

Paino said he has no doubt that a way to honor Heckert will be discussed during the days and weeks to come. Heckert was involved actively with finding ways to honor other faculty members, and Paino said he thinks it would be fitting that the University did something in her honor.

Paino said he knows Heckert will be missed dearly and thoughts are with her family.

"She will be missed," Paino said. "You just don't replace someone like Teri Heckert."

▮ You just don't replace someone like Teri Heckert. ▮

— Troy Paino

Students go bald for St. Baldrick's

BY KRISTEN WOMBLE
Features Reporter

Most people can choose what haircut they want — long, short, buzzed, cropped or layered. But there are some children who have no choice.

This semester as part of an event hosted by Alpha Phi Omega, some Truman State students will shave their heads to raise money for the St. Baldrick's Foundation March 30 in the Student Union Building. The St. Baldrick's Foundation was founded during 1999 by John Bender, Tim Kenny and Edna McDonnell, and is a organization that raises money for childhood cancer research. Since 2005, the foundation has raised more than \$100 million for childhood cancer research grants.

Students can participate in the event as a team, meaning their donations will go to St. Baldrick's collectively, or individually, meaning one's contributions will be listed only under his or her name.

Junior Carter Datz and senior Calli Lowry will participate in the event and have been raising money as a team. As a team, Datz and Lowry have chosen to sponsor a young girl from O'Fallon, Mo. Collectively, they are trying to raise \$1000, and have currently raised \$90.

"It's a practice in humility — I get to stand alongside those children who obviously have to go through a far more painful process than I do," Datz said.

Datz said the event is a good way to get rid of one's vanity, participate in fundraising and support the children and their families so they don't have to go through it by themselves.

Junior Madeline Niehaus, sophomore Laura Rethemeyer and junior Carli Jackson are raising money for St. Baldrick's, though they will shave their heads through the A.T. Still University event. Their team, called "The Ripple Effect," started raising money during December 2013 by sending out flyers, contacting friends and family, creating a Facebook group and advertising in their hometowns.

Niehaus, Rethemeyer and Jack-

son said awareness is a big part of this event.

Jackson said few of the people who donated money to her had heard about this event before, but after learning about it now they are probably more likely to donate again in the future.

Niehaus, Rethemeyer and Jackson, who are members of TSUnami Ultimate Frisbee, were inspired to shave their heads by teammates who had participated in the event during previous years.

"I felt like I got to walk the journey with them — of raising the money, preparing for not having hair and just watching their transformation over the past two years," Niehaus said.

Niehaus, who is a nursing major, believes that going through this process and shaving her head will help with her career because she will understand her future patients with cancer.

Jackson said she had talked about shaving her head as a little kid and giving her hair to Locks of Love. When she came to college and found out people actually did shave their heads for cancer here, she decided to do what she had talked about for more than 18 years.

"Having the opportunity to both help children, and other people in general, and then grow in myself at the same time — you just don't get that opportunity very often," Jackson said. "You usually have to pick between the two."

Rethemeyer said she always wanted to make a difference, but watching her older teammates shave their heads just sealed the deal.

Rethemeyer said she thinks she will gain a whole new perspective on life ahow she views herself after the event. She said friends have told her after shaving her head, she will realize how much more there is to her than just her hair.

"Of all the times in life to do it, now makes the most sense," Niehaus said.

The team said even though they are ready to shave their heads, they still at times find it hard to believe that this is actually happening — that they will be bald soon.



Submitted photos

Above, junior Carli Jackson, left, sophomore Laura Rethemeyer, center, and junior Madeline Niehaus, right, pose on campus. Right, junior Carter Datz, left, and senior Calli Lowry, right, pose at a sporting event. These Truman State students are teaming up to raise money for childhood cancer research with a head-shaving event through the St. Baldrick's Foundation.

"I've started learning that you have a lot of last moments when you're about to shave your head," Jackson said. "A few weeks ago we had a last time we could do our hair up and go out, and there's a last time I can wear my hair up."

Rethemeyer said it's exciting to see how much the event brings people together and makes them feel closer to one another.

For more information, check out St. Baldrick's website: stbaldricks.org

