LOOKING FORWARD
How philanthropy is helping to write a new chapter at Penn State
From Penn State’s founding land-grant mission to serve and support individuals across the Commonwealth to the “We Are” chant that defines modern-day school pride, dedication to community has always been at the heart of what it means to be a Penn Stater. Today, at a pivotal moment in our country’s engagement with race and justice, the University is deepening its commitment to providing an inclusive Penn State experience—and is inviting supporters to join them.

The Educational Equity Matching Program, launched earlier this summer with a $10 million institutional investment, offers donors an opportunity to double or triple their support for scholarships reaching students whose gender, race, ethnic, cultural, and/or national background contribute to the diversity of the student body. The match will continue through June 30, 2022, or until matching funds are exhausted, and more information can be found at greaterpennstate.psu.edu/EEMP.
The generosity of Penn Staters has never been clearer—or more needed—than during the challenges we’ve faced together this year. From an outpouring of support for student emergency aid at the onset of the current pandemic to the fundraising milestone we achieved and recognized in July, when we ended fiscal 2020 with record-breaking commitments for the third year in a row, the dedication of our alumni, friends, faculty, and students remains the foundation of our institution.

As we begin this academic year navigating new realities and challenges, your support remains just as essential to our path forward, and this issue of We Are magazine celebrates the promise and hope expressed through philanthropy. You will meet a student who earned her degree with the support of the Complete Penn State program and an Open Doors scholarship, and another whose engagement in student philanthropy signals the commitment of young alumni to their alma mater. You’ll see how gifts from alumni and friends are leading the fight against student food insecurity, and you’ll catch a glimpse of two new building projects that, with transformational donor support, will change the Penn State landscape, literally and figuratively. You’ll read about how the University is partnering with donors to empower a new and diverse generation of leaders in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math, and about the launch of a new matching program that encourages donors to join Penn State in building a more equitable and inclusive experience for students across the Commonwealth.

Ours is an institution built to take on important issues and the complex conditions that surround them. It’s a place that trains and inspires leaders, who in turn build better futures for communities across the Commonwealth and around the world. At the heart of all these ambitious efforts is the generosity of Penn State alumni and friends, and I thank you for your continuing support and vision that fuel what’s possible for Penn Staters and for our world.

Rick Sokolov ’71 Lib
Chair, Executive Committee,
A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence
In 2019, a Government Accountability Office report revealed that more than a third of U.S. college students struggle to afford food. With emergency aid and food pantries available to Penn Staters across the Commonwealth, the University advanced its commitment to fighting student hunger with the launch of the Task Force for Food and Housing Security in early 2020. The group is now assessing the range of existing programming and identifying opportunities for new initiatives, and as the crises brought on by COVID-19 yield even more urgency around the fight, the generosity of alumni, friends, and students is driving the University toward solutions.

“Food insecurity is invisible and doesn’t always get talked about... You can’t look at a person and know they’re not eating enough or not eating nutritiously."

—Tiana Williams, Lion’s Pantry Director
Last fall, Penn State faced Ohio State in the Tackle Hunger Challenge, a weeklong competition to raise the highest number of $5 gifts to fight student food insecurity. More than 10,000 Penn Staters made sure the Nittany Lions took the title—and raised over $213,000 for students facing hunger across the Commonwealth.

For many Penn Staters at risk of or already experiencing hunger, job loss and limited resources forced by COVID-19 precautions have further threatened their well-being. A surge of generosity from the University community is helping to ensure no student must face hardship alone.

As of June 30, 2020, a combined total of more than $650,000 had been raised for the Student Emergency Care & Advocacy Fund and to directly support student food pantries. At University Park’s student-run Lion’s Pantry, more than 11,000 pounds of food and essential personal supplies were distributed between March 18 (the start of COVID-19 service) and June 30, 2020.

“It’s inspiring to witness firsthand how the Penn State community has come together to support those facing scary and uncertain times.”
—Sayre Bradley, Lion’s Pantry President

“Hunger is an issue students shouldn’t fight alone.”
—Abisha Ebenezer, student food pantry volunteer at Penn State Abington
For Taylor Machuga, graduating with a degree from Penn State was a childhood dream. But once enrolled, Taylor had to face more than a rigorous curriculum—in her senior year, unexpected personal hardships and financial need suddenly put a degree out of reach. By participating in the Complete Penn State program, and with the support of the David J. and Jeanne A. Feight Open Doors Scholarship, Taylor graduated in 2019 from the Smeal College of Business with a degree in Sports Marketing. Today, as a new alumna and account executive at Sky Blue FC, Taylor reflects on her time at the University and the parts of Penn State she carries with her today.
What initially sparked your interest in Penn State?
Growing up, I had a cousin who majored in Broadcast Journalism at Penn State. She’d tell me how amazing Penn State was and about the friends she made and the exciting things she was learning. Her passion really stuck with me. Even as a kid, I knew I wanted an experience like that for myself.

When did you decide that Penn State was the right fit for you?
I attended my first football game at Beaver Stadium when I was 15, and I was blown away. The students and fans energized the stadium like nothing I’d ever seen before. Seeing the crowd united as one community, I realized that this was the feeling my cousin had described. Penn State became the only option for me.

Tell us about a standout memory from your time as a student.
I had awesome experiences during my internships in marketing and promotions with Intercollegiate Athletics. From developing marketing plans and game day promotions to interacting with the fans directly, I got real-world experience in an area I love. I always said that I’d rather work on game day than hang out with my friends!

How did Complete Penn State change your college experience?
There came a point when I wasn’t sure if I could afford to continue taking classes. The donors who established my scholarship made a huge difference in my life during a really difficult time. Without their support, I would have fallen one semester short of graduation. Today I have a career in an industry that I love. I take every opportunity to thank University donors and share just how important this program was to me. I can’t put into words how grateful I am, but I’m going to keep trying for a very long time.

If you could create your own endowment, what would you fund?
I would choose to support something like Complete Penn State so I could be there for students at a point where they feel lost and don’t know what the future is going to hold. And now, through all of the challenges of COVID-19, this program is going to matter more than ever.

You earned your degree last December and participated in the University’s virtual commencement ceremony in May. How did you feel on graduation day?
It felt surreal. I wish I could have been there in person, but my Penn State experience taught me how to be flexible and adapt to unexpected circumstances. Being able to say that I have a degree from the University is my dream come true. I wouldn’t trade it for the world.
Fostering diversity in STEM education is crucial for our nation’s future. The fields of science, technology, engineering, and math promise solutions to the world’s most pressing problems. Several STEM disciplines are being enlisted in the current response to COVID-19, for example, while others address such issues as climate change and food and energy security. Across topics, progress in STEM is driven by innovation, and innovation comes from talented people—of all races, genders, and financial backgrounds—sharing ideas and inspiration with each other.

With some STEM sectors in the U.S. facing a shortage of well-prepared college graduates, encouraging students from all backgrounds to study STEM is essential for both industry and education. At the same time, the STEM fields offer opportunity, providing avenues to well-paying, rewarding careers with positive societal impact. Ensuring that all active and aspiring students have access to these opportunities is a fulfillment of Penn State’s land-grant mission and an ongoing University priority.

For all of these reasons, Penn State is working hard to foster diversity in STEM through scholarships, special programming, and other initiatives, and private philanthropy is fueling those efforts. The A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation has set a powerful example through its commitment of $15.5 million to create the A. James Clark Scholars Program in the College of Engineering to support high-achieving engineering students with significant financial need. This remarkable investment was matched with $10 million from Penn State, the largest match to a private philanthropic contribution in the University’s history.

The Clark Scholars will be selected on academic merit, extracurricular leadership, and demonstrated commitment to civic improvement. The financial support they receive will allow them to focus on their education without taking on loans or outside work commitments. In addition to the standard academic and experiential offerings available to every engineering student, the scholars will also participate in summer bridge programs, a global experience, a shared residential experience, and community service projects.

“The Clark Scholars will receive an outstanding engineering education,” says Tonya Peeples, associate dean for equity and inclusion and chair of the Clark Scholars Program steering committee. “But more than that, we want to prepare them
to really make an impact after graduation, to take on roles as socially responsible innovators and leaders in the industries in which they pursue their careers.”

Similar Clark Scholars Programs at ten U.S. universities represent the values of the late A. James Clark, who built Maryland-based Clark Construction Group into one of the nation’s largest privately held construction companies and established the Clark Foundation to enact his philanthropic vision of investing in people. The program aligns with Penn State’s vision for diversity and inclusion, as well as the College of Engineering’s ambitious Engineering Equity Initiative, which aims to increase the number of women earning bachelor’s degrees in engineering to 50 percent by 2026, while also growing the number of students from all underrepresented groups.

Having just launched its first cohort in summer 2020, the Clark Scholars Program joins an established initiative at Penn State that has seen remarkable success: the Millennium Scholars Program. Now in its seventh year, this program trains the next generation of U.S. leaders in STEM who are committed to increasing the diversity of professionals in STEM-related disciplines. Modeled after the Meyerhoff Scholars Program, a groundbreaking academic model at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, it gives students from five Penn State colleges—the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Earth and Mineral Sciences, Engineering, Information Sciences and Technology, and the Eberly College of Science—who plan to pursue doctoral study the preparation and support necessary to enter competitive graduate programs.

“In addition to financial support, Millennium Scholars receive a range of exciting educational opportunities that strategically position them for success and leadership in STEM, from hands-on research to valuable internships,” says program director Amy Freeman. “Last fall, for example, approximately forty students presented their scholarly research around the country, and our students are in high demand from top graduate schools such as Yale, Harvard, Caltech, and Texas A&M. Over half of our graduates go on to STEM doctoral programs.”

The Millennium Scholars Program has benefitted from many private gifts since its inception, including major commitments from former Board of Trustees Chair Ira Lubert and longtime donors Steve and Kathi Austin Mahle. Currently, the program’s leadership is turning to private supporters to help build a substantial program endowment as a financial foundation for the program’s long-term sustainability.

Donors who support these programs are helping Penn State achieve its goals for the Greater Penn State campaign—in particular the Open Doors imperative to ensure access for talented students of every background. Through the campaign, Penn State has established several matching programs to encourage productive partnerships with our donors. For example, the STEM Ph.D.-Graduate Enhancement Scholarship Matching Gift Program provides a 1:2 match for gifts of $500,000 (creating a $750,000 endowment) to support STEM doctoral candidates from historically underrepresented communities. Similar to the Clark and Millennium Scholars Programs, this initiative offers both scholarship and programmatic support, including mentorship, career counseling, and professional development opportunities. Additionally, the newly launched Educational Equity Matching Program encourages donors to double or triple their scholarship support for students who contribute to the diversity of the Penn State community (more information on the program can be found on the inside front cover of this issue).

To learn more about these and other opportunities to support diversity in STEM education, please contact Eric Reinhard, Director of Strategic Initiatives, at ereinhard@psu.edu.

“Being selected for Millennium Scholars made choosing Penn State a no-brainer. The program has provided a sense of community and security from the start, and that gave me the confidence to join other groups like the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers—of which I’m now president—and to secure research opportunities at the Applied Research Lab. Right now Millennium Scholars is helping me prepare for graduate school so I can realize my goal of pursuing research into new types of energy storage.”—Cecilia Flores is a senior majoring in Chemical Engineering
THE PALMER MUSEUM OF ART

When Penn State’s art museum moves into its new state-of-the-art facility, slated for a 2021 groundbreaking with approval from the Board of Trustees, its name will continue to honor the donors whose unparalleled support laid the foundation for the University’s leadership in the arts. In March, the Board of Trustees voted to carry forward the Palmer Museum of Art as the institution’s name. The late Barbara and James Palmer, whose cumulative gifts to the museum are valued at more than $50 million, are the most generous supporters in the museum’s history. The Palmers also served as leaders for two major fundraising campaigns for the museum, which was renamed to honor their 1986 gift to expand and renovate the current Palmer. The new facility, designed by Allied Works Architecture to capitalize on the natural beauty of the adjacent Arboretum at Penn State, will offer a fitting home for the Palmer’s collections, including one of the finest American art collections in the country. More than 200 works came to the University after Barbara’s death in 2019, adding to the 450 already given by the Palmers. Chuck Palmer, son of James and Barbara, says, “Our family is delighted that the museum that meant so much to our parents will continue to bear their name. Our mother and father believed that art was vital to the life of their community and to the impact of Penn State as an institution. We hope that their example will motivate others to contribute and continue to guide the University, its supporters, and lovers of the arts into perpetuity.”
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Groundbreaking is nearing for the first stage of a proposed decade-long, multi-phase plan that will transform the College of Engineering and its footprint on the University Park campus. Currently spread across nearly fifty buildings, the college is Penn State’s largest, with more than 12,000 students across all campuses and 300 faculty. The facilities plan will create a new hub for the college west of North Atherton street, with two proposed buildings totaling 377,000 square feet. This first phase also proposes renovations to Sackett Building, while the second phase plans for a third building on West Campus and additional construction on the Hammond Building site. The result will be a flexible, modern home for engineering education and the more than $150 million in research conducted by the college’s faculty and students each year. The Boston architectural firm Payette has been engaged to design the first two buildings, and donors are already stepping forward to support the project. Civil engineering alumnus Andrew Kartalis and his wife, Katherine, have made a $2.5 million estate commitment, motivated by the plan’s promise to bring together the wide range of engineering fields represented within the college. Kartalis says, “The new space is going to provide numerous excellent opportunities for students from several disciplines to work together and collaborate. When students from various engineering majors work together to solve a challenge, they begin to think differently. That’s invaluable.”
When Katie Solomon ’21 Lib was unable to cover the full cost of her education, the Penn State community was there to support her. Katie is the recipient of the Suzanne Pohland Paterno Renaissance Scholarship, the Weiss Breakthrough Scholarship, and the Peter and Ann Tombros Trustee Scholarship. The awards have helped Katie focus on her education, and they inspire her to give back. Katie has interned in the Office of Annual Giving and through the Division of Development and Alumni Relations summer internship program, volunteered with the senior class gift committee, served as the two-time development director for THON, and is now the THON 2021 executive director. She plans to pursue a law degree after graduation, but she hopes to ultimately work in fundraising, where she can create opportunities for future generations.

"I remember finding out I was a scholarship recipient. Earlier that day, I had gotten a bill I couldn’t cover, and I was terrified. Donor support made all the difference. My goal is to eventually work in fundraising—I’ve seen the impact of philanthropy, and I want to be a part of that."