

KUYPER

College News

Celebrating 85 Years

A Publication for Alumni & Friends

ATHLETICS AT KUYPER *Inviting People In*

Kuyper athletic director Gary Bailey in the newly refurbished athletics suite.

As Gary Bailey walks, and talks, a visitor through the sparkling new athletic suite at Kuyper College, it's not so much pride in his voice as it is quiet satisfaction.

"I'm very grateful for this space," the Kuyper men's basketball coach and athletic director said, lightly running his hand along a Kuyper-gold textured wall. "A year ago, I was painting these walls."

Giving the floor a gentle nudge with his sneakered right foot he added with a hearty chuckle: "And I was laying this carpet."

Now, as the first year of the return of Kuyper athletics has come to a close, Bailey and his team of coaches are continuing to lay foundations for the future, gratefully building on what by all accounts was a terrific season of success in 2023-24.

And though wins were plentiful this past school year—with women's basketball setting a new Kuyper record for wins at 16-10 and the men's basketball team matching the school record for wins at 20-9—W's are not what Bailey first mentions when asked about what made the return of athletics a success.

"As far as successes go, I think anytime that you start a new program, you're always worried about numbers for your team," he said. "Can you get not just enough players, but can you get the right players, the ones who are a fit for what it

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God's Faithful Providence

What if I told you there was a college that wasn't merely giving lip service to its Christian mission but was actually living it, day in and day out?!

That's the opening statement Dr. Anthony Bradley shared as the keynote speaker at our 85th Anniversary Spring Celebration Gala.

If you've been around RBI/RBC/Kuyper College for any time at all, you know that Dr. Bradley is talking about us!

Johanna Timmer, our first president, expressed our mission to the first graduating class in these words: What has the Reformed Bible Institute sought to do to prepare students?

- We have fed you the precious Word of God and have tried to help you assimilate the Reformed truth as held forth in that Word.
- We have taught you a God-centered view of theology of the world and have sought to acquaint you with the spiritual needs of the world at home and abroad.
- We have led you to grasp the centrality of the glory of God in all Christian activity and have impressed upon you the responsibility of faithful witness bearing.

Today we express our mission in these words:

As a community of biblical higher education, Kuyper College forms lifelong learners for purposeful lives of work and service to God and neighbor.

Whether in three sentences or 23 words, what really matters is that we are earnestly living out our mission with lives of service rather than lip service.

In this issue you'll read about students, staff, coaches and faculty who are living out our mission, day in and day out. And at the recent Spring Gala we presented Dr. Nick and Rev. Gloria Kroeze with the Kuyper College Service Award for their lives of service to the mission of the College.

There are countless other stories of those within our College community who are living out our mission, including one alumnus who recently drove his food truck two hours to serve scores of emergency personnel,



volunteers and victims after a massive tornado hit Shelby County, Iowa.

A Life of Service is a fitting theme for our 85th year. It is a theme that honors our 4,500-plus alumni and former faculty, staff and board members who exemplified purposeful lives of work and service to God and neighbor, a theme that encourages us to “never be lacking in zeal, but keep our spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” as we continue our mission.

Grateful to serve,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patti".

Dr. Patricia R. Harris
President



Equipping a New Generation of

Christian Leaders

This spring, we invite you to support Michigan's only work college as together we prepare students to enter their chosen vocation and bring a Christ-centered perspective to the workplace. Your gift will have twice the impact before June 30! **Help us make our \$250,000 matching gift and bring the Kuyper experience to more students.** Visit Kuyper.edu/giving or call the Advancement Office at 877.229.0940.

Learn. Work. Serve.

A Life of Service

The theme for the 2023-24 academic year was “A Life of Service,” and that theme was at the forefront for two special events in April: first the annual Kuyper Gala and then the College’s spring Commencement ceremony.

Speakers at both events gave powerful words of wisdom and advice to those gathered in the two venues—Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park for the Gala and the Boonstra Gymnasium on Kuyper’s campus for graduation.

At the latter, Kuyper graduate Mandi Taylor told the Class of 2024, and the friends and family members who came to fete them, that while the world often tells young people to follow their dreams, sometimes those dreams and God’s plan don’t align. This, she added, she knows from experience.

“I am nowhere near where I envisioned myself being when I was in high school,” she said, smiling. “But God put in my path better opportunities than I ever dreamt possible.”

That path saw her attend several colleges after high school but ultimately buy a business on Mackinac Island. She eventually felt a calling to social work and graduated from Kuyper in 2018 with a degree in the field before earning a master’s degree from Spring Arbor University in 2022 and then landing a job at Bethany Christian Services as the Parenting Supports Supervisor in the Foster Care Department.

Along the way, she said, she learned that serving others is a big part of following God’s direction.

‘The reality of our mission’

Dr. Patricia Harris, Kuyper’s President, echoed this sentiment in her words of welcome to Commencement attendees. “These graduates are the reality of our mission,” she said. “They are being formed as lifelong learners for purposeful lives of work and service to God and neighbor, and we are so thankful for that,” she said.



The Class of 2024.

Abby Brown, who graduated in 2024 with a degree in social work, is one of those learners and spoke on behalf of her class.

“We are not leaving, we are being sent,” she said. “May we remember the lessons that we learned here, to be quick to serve and open our arms wide to embrace others, even if they do not look or think like us. And may we constantly remind ourselves of the source of this love: Christ.”

An 85-year track record

At the Gala, Dr. Anthony Bradley presented a seemingly simple statement to students, staff, faculty and friends of the College that foreshadowed the themes of Commencement.

Looking around the room, he said: “What if I told you there was a college that wasn’t merely giving lip service to its Christian mission but was actually living it, day in and day out?”

The College, of course, is Kuyper, and Bradley, keynote speaker for the night and Kuyper’s Research Professor of Interdisciplinary and Theological Studies, knows that full well. As he neared the end of his first year at the College, Bradley told those gathered to celebrate that Kuyper has an 85-year track record of living out its mission in deep and tangible ways.



Service Award winners Dr. Nicholas and Rev. Gloria Kroeze.

Another important part of the Gala was the presentation of the Kuyper Service Award, which is given each year to a recipient or recipients who have exhibited the spirit and work of the College’s mission statement through lifelong service.

“By accepting this award, the recipients set an example of dedication and humility in service that encourages all of us within the Kuyper College community,” remarked President Harris, who conferred the honors.

This year, the Kuyper Service Award was presented to Dr. Nicholas and Rev. Gloria Kroeze who, during Dr. Kroeze’s 22 years as President of Kuyper College and beyond, have truly lived lives of faithful service.

“I, along with Nick, thank you for the honor of this award. I have had the great privilege of doing this life journey with him, and it’s been amazing,” Rev. Kroeze said.

Added Dr. Kroeze: “We receive this award, not so much as an affirmation of anything we have done, but as an additional prayer reminder for us to embrace even more strongly the mission and people of Kuyper College, that God may bless her and strengthen her toward the future.”

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means to be a Kuyper student-athlete? We needed our coaches to be recruiters, and they got the job done.”

Beyond that, Bailey added, was the concept of community.

“It’s a Kuyper hallmark,” he said. “We talk about community here being real and deep and happening inside and outside the classroom. Well, we saw it happen through athletics this past school year.”

With a laugh, Bailey noted that the College had to reorder Kuyper Cougars T-shirts and sweatshirts probably a dozen times.

“And I’ve seen people wearing them out in the community that I don’t even know,” he said. “It is really cool. But maybe one of the biggest things was that at all of our events we had so much support. Fellow students, staff, faculty, alumni. For so many games, the gym was packed. Those were real successes.”

Kuyper President Patricia Harris heartily agrees.

“Gary Bailey and his coaching staff did an amazing job of launching and leading our athletic program this past year, and the outcomes far exceed my expectations,” she said. “And they are dedicated to building and maintaining a vibrant, God-honoring culture. I thoroughly enjoyed the enthusiastic engagement and success of athletics on our campus this year and look forward to what next year brings.”

Bailey is looking forward to 2024-25 too, eager for women’s volleyball and men’s and women’s basketball to build on what was begun this past year and excited about adding men’s soccer to the fall lineup of sports.

“Athletics allows us as a college to invite people in,” he said. “This campus is so beautiful, and it’s got such a great location. I don’t know that we’ve tapped into the full potential here in terms of bringing people in, but as we add more sports, we add more opportunities to connect people to all of the good things happening at Kuyper. So that is very exciting to me, to our coaches and to our players.”

Count men’s soccer coach Mike Colago among those who can’t wait for 2024-25 and the chance to invite people in.



Mike Colago

“We have been hitting the recruiting trail hard, and we have been hosting open gyms and watching guys play,” Colago said. “You can tell a lot from a player when they walk in the gym and start competing and interacting with others.”

Colago’s sales pitch to prospective student-athletes is simple.



President Harris with student-athletes and the Kuyper mascot.

“If they are a player who wants to actually play all four years, then Kuyper is the place for them,” he said. “We are building a foundation here, and this class will set the tone for years to come. I am a player’s



Shonett Davis

coach, meaning I believe the Lord put them in my life not as an accident but as a chance to minister to them and them minister to me.”

Newly named women's basketball head coach Shonett Davis sounds similar themes about her approach to recruiting and coaching.

“One of my hopes for the women’s basketball program is to continue growing and achieving success both on and off the court,” she said. “And we want to continue to increase visibility by serving our community. The ladies on the team enjoy opportunities they have to get involved around campus, and as

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Kuyper News and Events

Marriages

Casey (Cohon) Kosten (2019) married Mike Kosten on October 7, 2023.

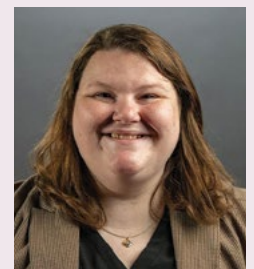
Births

Noah Matthyse (2018) and **Julie Matthyse** (2020) welcomed their daughter, Winnifred Hazel Matthyse, on February 3, 2024.

Professional Development

Casey (Cohon) Kosten (2019) recently joined Gracespring Church as their Kidz Coordinator.

Noah Matthyse (2018) became a Vocational Trainer at Gateway Missions.



Casey (Cohon) Kosten

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coaches we see it as an important part of our faith journey together.”

The approach is also the same for women’s volleyball coach **Tori Johnston**.



Tori Johnston

“As a newcomer into the Kuyper community, there was always such a welcoming and warm atmosphere here,” she said. “The addition of athletics only furthered that supportive

community and allowed us all to rally around our students in a really exciting way. My hope for the future of Kuyper volleyball is that we will continue to support and uplift our athletes to their fullest potential, both on and off the court.”

As Bailey considers the future, including the College possibly adding more sports, like his coaches, he remains eager to see continuous improvement in Kuyper athletics.

“We made some needed physical improvements to the facilities,” he said. “Redoing the gym floor, new bleachers, new shot clocks, upgrading a lot of little things like the training room. You know, maybe things that people don’t always think about.”

He laughed as he recalled some of the scrambling he and his team had to do ahead of the first games for volleyball last fall.

“When we were getting ready (for volleyball season), we realized we didn’t have water jugs



The return of Kuyper athletics in 2023-24 brought success on and off the court for Cougar teams, coaches and student-athletes.

Women’s Volleyball

Freshman **Jada Munro** was named Midwest All-Region honorable mention after leading the Cougars in kills and digs for the season.

Women’s Basketball

Players **Jakya Rimpson** (All-Region honorable mention), **Couper Agema** (All-Region second team) and **Aniya Fisher** (All-Region first team) also won accolades at the conclusion of their seasons.

Off the court, two players earned academic accolades. **Maria Sobany** and **Couper Agema** both were named National Christian College Athletic Association Scholar-Athletes, an award based on grade point average and academic credits.

Men’s Basketball

Three players and **Coach Gary Bailey** collected individual hardware. **Elisha Searcy** was All-Region second team, while **Herman Brown** and **Danyel Bibbs** were both All-Region first team with Bibbs also being named the Regional Player of the Year and a member of the All-American second team. Meanwhile, Bailey was named Regional Coach of the Year, his 10th time winning the award with the prior nine coming during his tenure as the head coach at Grace Christian University. And the men’s basketball team finished in 10th place in the final NCCAA coaches’ poll of the 2023-24 season.

for the teams,” he said. “We didn’t have the carts the jugs sit on. We had to get athletic tape. There were a lot of things that demanded a lot of time. Now, those things are in place, so we can focus our

attention on the details. We want things to look sharp. We want to be excellent in all phases of our athletic department. And we will be. The future here is bright, and I’m so grateful to be a part of it.”



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Advancing Kuyper

Kuyper College's recent 85th Anniversary Gala was clear proof of a college that is alive and thriving and supported by a community of people who care about its future.

All those who spoke provided a compelling vision for Kuyper's future, and I was particularly moved



Jim Steenberg
Chief Advancement Officer

by the message of Dr. Anthony Bradley, a first-year professor, who compared the life of Kuyper students—or anyone living into a life of Christ, where one is called to serve not knowing where it may take them—to the life of a modern-day rebel.

This approach to life, he added, is in

profound juxtaposition to a predominant American culture that prizes comfort and security above all. As Kuyper's new Chief Advancement Officer, I am proud to serve a place that is doing what is right and perhaps not so concerned about what is popular.

I think about the life of Jesus, who too was a rebel in many ways. Throughout the Gospels, his message was, "You have heard it is said... but I tell you..." Jesus often questioned the social order and norms of His day and challenged people to see the world through the lens of those suffering and needing love.

For over eight decades, Kuyper College has been a beacon of hope, calling people to live rebellious and courageous lives as followers of Christ. Our students, inspired by this mission, have found their calling to serve in international ministry, social work, local nonprofits and business, in all settings making a tangible difference in the world.

By supporting Kuyper, you are investing in the transformation of lives. Our students are equipped not only with knowledge but with the values and skills to make a positive impact in their communities and beyond.

As you think about what matters most to you, I ask that you commit to making Kuyper College a top choice for giving. We need your help. Please give generously!

In My Words

A PASSION FOR KUYPER

My first encounter with Kuyper came as a local homeschooled student. I visited campus with my mom as a high school senior. By the time we left, I was 100 percent committed to attending and never looked elsewhere. I was completely drawn in by both the size of the College and by its appeal as a safe space to transition to my first experience of classroom learning.



Ann Essenburg
Interim Director
of Admissions

I had an amazing experience as a Kuyper student. I made incredible friends and loved the classes, professors and the active and engaged community, including my involvement on the Student Activities Committee as a student leader. I also met Curt my sophomore year, and we dated for three-and-a-half years before getting married in 2005.

I remember that when my mom and I left our campus visit, she said to me, in reference to the director of admissions, who we had met, "You need to do that job someday." Then, during my first year of study at Kuyper, I was approached by the then director of admissions to work in the office as a student worker!

In the beginning, I did mostly mailings and a lot of phone call campaigns, but I loved working in the Admissions Office. I continued to work there my entire time as a student and even was full time in the summer months. That work was a life-changing experience for me. I had begun my studies at Kuyper thinking I wanted to become a teacher and quickly realized that was not where God was calling me. I briefly thought about youth ministry but also didn't feel called there. Eventually, I realized that my passion was working in admissions and helping other prospective students find their place at Kuyper.

During my junior year of studies at Kuyper, a full-time admissions counselor position opened, and I engaged in conversations about what it would look like for me to take the position. I was offered the position in 2005 with the agreement that I would switch to part-time classes while doing full-time work. As a result, it took me an extra year to complete my education, and I graduated in 2006. I then continued to work in admissions until 2010 when I left to have my first son.

I loved being a stay-at-home mom, raising our three boys, and I never really intended to return to work, but God had other plans! In December 2021, He opened the door for me to return to the Admissions office in what I thought was to be a short-term position. My passion for sharing Kuyper with prospective students and being a part of the community was ignited, and I stayed and grew in leadership.

God has been faithful to Kuyper College for the past 85 years, and I am grateful to have been a part of the story here for over 20 of those years as a student, staff member, staff spouse and now a staff member again. It is a joy to be on the front lines of continuing the work God is doing here!

"In My Words" is a feature of the Kuyper College News highlighting first-person stories by Kuyper College faculty and staff.

Kuyper Partners with GRIL

It was while coaching basketball at Potter's House High School that Kuyper business leadership professor Marc Andreas first got a chance to see the impact of a faith-based organization called Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders or GRIL.

Created by alumni of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative in 2004, GRIL offers a variety of leadership development programs, and Andreas saw the difference GRIL was making in the lives of some of his players in the areas of not just leadership but also community development and their own personal maturation process.

"I looked more into their curriculum and saw that it aligned with Kuyper's values," he recalled. "I wanted to find a way to bring this wonderful opportunity to even more young people."

Working with Denise Fase, the longtime director at GRIL, saw the development of a new course called "Leadership, Empowerment and Community Development" that was offered this semester to Kuyper students for the first time ever.

Andreas said the course, which was taught by Fase, has been a good fit for the Kuyper curriculum.

"As a three-credit course, it nicely fits with students who want to get Kuyper's new 15-credit minor in Christian Community Development," he said. "It's also an excellent course for students from all majors as an elective to help them explore their own personal leadership skills while



Back: Daniel Molenaar, Bradley Eldridge, Drew DeVries, Denise Fase, President Harris. Front: Jia Debrey, Catrina McConnell and Grace Birmingham.

seeing how they can make a positive impact integrating into their own community as well."

And early reviews of this first offering were terrific, he added.

"I've heard students say they love this course because it helps open up their eyes to a larger view of opportunities they can do to get more involved in their very own communities," he said. "It helps empower young people to move from being observers to active participants in their communities to work for justice and positive change that aligns with biblical values."



Dr. Richelle White

Dr. Richelle White Earns Grant

For Dr. Richelle White, Kuyper Professor of Youth Ministry and Director of Field Practicum and Internships, storytelling plays a big role in both her

teaching and her academic work. Telling our stories, she said, is a crucial part of building community and working toward spiritual, physical and collective healing.

Storytelling, community and healing are also the central themes of a new research project for which she recently received a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

Over the next year, White, who earned her Ph.D. at Union Presbyterian Seminary, will work with 12 women from various walks of life—Kuyper students and alumni as well as members of Grace for the Nations Church—to create a storytelling lab.

"It's an intergenerational group. Our oldest member is 82, and our youngest is 20. Everybody brings something to the table," she said.

The group will gather twice a month, once a virtual writing circle and once an in-person workshop, to build community and experience healing by exploring and sharing personal narratives.

Through this deep dive into storytelling, White hopes to enhance her professional

knowledge and benefit her students.

"I'm always trying to include more storytelling activities in my teaching. Sometimes it's me or my students telling the stories, and sometimes we're engaging with stories from movies or other media," she said. "I want them to be aware of what stories do and of the power that stories have."

Enhancing her teaching skills, she says, is at the heart of why she applied for the Calvin grant in the first place.

"I always like to feed my interests and passions so I can keep things fresh here," she said.

She plans to complete the project by December 2024.

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STUDENTS TO WATCH

Jakob Rodriguez

I grew up in Middleville, a small town south of Grand Rapids. Growing up in a small community helped make me into the person I am today, and I also am super thankful for my mom and dad because they showed my older brother and me the importance of getting an education and how important a work ethic is both inside and outside of the classroom. My mom works on computers and other technologies for a small company, and my dad is a teacher for Kentwood Public Schools.

I graduated from Thornapple Kellogg High School, and what caught my attention about Kuyper was the ability to play basketball after high school. But what pushed me to commit to Kuyper was the aspect of building a good and healthy relationship with God. I grew up with little to no faith, but I found myself being drawn to God. I made the decision to go to Kuyper to learn and grow more in my faith, while getting a solid education and still playing basketball.

"Because my faith is new, I am still doing my best to trust in God and His will, but I can confidently say Jesus has changed my life for the better."

Kuyper has lived up to all of my expectations and beyond. I really didn't know what to expect when I came here for the first time, but I already can see the growth in myself in my academics and definitely in my faith. My professors are amazing. At Kuyper, not only can I see the passion each of my

professors has to teach and to help me learn, but I can also see their faith and their desire to bring students closer to God. Professor Andreas and Professor Zwart are a couple of favorites. They have opened my mind up to many different things in my studies and in life, and I talk to them outside of class too and find them to be genuine in who they are and what they believe.

Outside of class there is basketball, of course, and I also have worked in facilities through the amazing KuyperWorks program. I work during winter and spring breaks and during the summer too. Juggling work and school and sports is definitely difficult. One thing I've learned to do is create a schedule in the beginning of each semester and stick to it. Knowing what I am going to do every day throughout the week has taken most of that stress off because I know when I am going to work, go to class, do homework and play basketball, etc. That's all helped me balance my time well and get through a busy school year.

Going to Kuyper will result in a degree and a close relationship with God if you open your heart and mind to that possibility. I believe that great professors, a close-knit community and a focus on the Lord means anyone can have success at Kuyper.



CLASS **2027**
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