

The College Where Alumni Come Home to Work

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CARLINVILLE - For more than a century, being a Blackburn student has meant more than just going to college. Students attending Blackburn not only earn valuable four-year degrees but are also given responsibilities with on-campus jobs to build resumes with real-world work experience. One of ten federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn is the only school in the nation with a program managed exclusively by students. The students who attend are a living part of the College, helping to plan, manage and run the facilities of an institution fully invested in them. But the relationship doesn't fade after graduation. Blackburn alumni constantly search for and create

opportunities to support the College, including traveling back to the picturesque campus and rolling up their sleeves to clock in again. The annual Campus Beautification Day event is a perfect example of how the bonds, connections, and relationships forged at Blackburn only grow stronger.

Now in its fourth year, Blackburn's Beautification Day continued the steady year-over-year growth in numbers, with 110 volunteers making their way to campus to lend a hand. By far the most significant project tackled for 2022 involved rebuilding the landscaping around Stoddard Hall - a nearly 100-year-old residence hall and one of the 10 buildings on campus constructed by students in the Work Program. Other projects throughout the event this year included improvements around architectural sculptures and benches, staining of the wooden bridges, plus, painting, mulching, planting flowers and trees, and refreshing hummingbird feeders across the 80-acre campus.

An event of its kind can only be realized, and become so successful, because of the uniqueness of Blackburn's nationally recognized Work Program, the only student-managed work program in the country. "As part of their rigorous academic program, students at Blackburn hold jobs across campus to make the institution run," said Dr. Lisa Black-Gomez, Blackburn College Alumni Association President and Co-Chair of Beautification Day. "Thus, it's only natural that alumni, whose life experiences and successes are grounded in the values of campus service through work during their undergraduate education, support the program with monetary donations, and they welcome the annual opportunity to come back to campus to work."

The annual event day work plan was originally conceived and annually coordinated by the Blackburn College Alumni Association, working in close cooperation with the college Campus Maintenance department. Nick McKorkle, the Grounds Supervisor at Blackburn, explained "Event day projects are planned in advance and tied directly with the College's 5-year landscaping plan."

While labor is supplied by the volunteers on the event day, materials and supplies are purchased through generous donations made by alumni. Class challenges have also enhanced the fun and funding, such as the 2020 donation of trees, many named in honor of a particular graduating class, classmate, faculty, or staff member. Hummingbird Donation Stations, supporting Blackburn's commitment to sustainability and a vast pollinator population, spawned the first Beautification Day in 2019.

While Coronavirus turned the world upside down in 2020, Campus Beautification continued, albeit in a different form, as several Blackburn Alumni and friends of the college planted flowers and refreshed the hummingbird feeders. Also, that year, with funds made available by a single alumni donor, McKorkle and his Campus Maintenance team of student workers completed a refresh of the landscaping around the Demuzio

Campus Center. As the hub of student activities including the Dining Hall, Bookstore, Work Program offices, and more, everyone on campus continues to appreciate the refreshed appearance.

The 2021 Beautification Day event, coincidentally held on the 20th anniversary of the September 11th tragedy, included a new American flag with memorable dedication provided by Michael Bartsch, Logistics Support Senior Chief U.S. Naval Reserve and Blackburn graduate class of 1984.

Beautification Day benefits extend well beyond immediate enhancements to the campus grounds. Blackburn College received 2021 Tree Campus Higher Education® recognition from the Arbor Day Foundation for its commitment to effective urban forest management. Beautification Day was cited among the initiatives that helped the college reach its goal of planting 115 trees three years ahead of its 5-year schedule. With a long history of leading in sustainability, Blackburn is currently the only Illinois college or university in the St. Louis region to be named a Tree Campus USA. Blackburn first received this honor in 2013 and has been annually recognized since 2018; Beautification Day is proud to play its part in this effort. As an added bonus, student volunteers have an opportunity to work alongside and network with alumni who represent a vast array of academic and professional experiences and careers.

“Blackburn has had such a profound impact on its students throughout the years,” Jeanna Supple, Blackburn College Alumni Association board member and Beautification Day co-chair, said. “Alumni come back home to work, not only to keep this campus vibrant but to renew their unique connection with this one-of-a-kind institution. Blackburn not only espouses its values but practices them. It is a college that provides learning and relationships that last a lifetime.”

About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of only ten federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only program in the nation fully managed by students. Balancing academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains tangible experience and develops critical skills by contributing to their community, all while building a resume and earning their degree. U.S. News & World Report recognized Blackburn College as one of the top Liberal Arts Colleges in the Nation for Social Mobility in their Best Colleges lists for 2020, 2021, and 2022. The Center for Education & the Workforce at Georgetown University ranked Blackburn as a

top performer for Earnings-Price Return - 209% (#1 in IL, #10 in the U.S.) and Net Price (#1 in IL; #11 in the U.S.). The Washington Monthly twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.