

Greenfield's Blake Meyer Named Co-Outstanding Graduate: Blackburn College Celebrates Class Of 2022

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CARLINVILLE - On Saturday, May 14, 2022, Blackburn College in Carlinville, IL held commencement ceremonies on the campus' Hudson Quad honoring 86 graduates from the class of 2022. These events marked the 153rd Commencement exercise for the College.

The Blackburn Alumni Association presented its Outstanding Graduate Award at commencement. This year, two deserving seniors - political science major Blake Meyer of Greenfield, and elementary education major Brianna Milich of Washington, IL. - shared that distinction.

During commencement, academic and leadership awards were presented to the graduating class, and one recognized Emily Fleck, a psychology major from Athens, IL, as class valedictorian.

Dr. Mark L. Biermann, president of Blackburn, shared remarks and welcomed families and friends to celebrate a return to regular graduation activities on campus. "Gathering as we are today gives us a singular opportunity to pause, take stock, and think about what we have experienced, and what we are looking forward to in the future," President Biermann said. "While you are graduating and reaching out to new challenges and

opportunities, a part of you will never leave Blackburn College. For, just as surely as Blackburn has formed you and changed you and helped you to develop, you have had an impact on the College in a very real way.”

“As you have helped to form Blackburn, we have helped to form you. We have helped you to see farther and to envision more,” he continued. “Be confident that Blackburn has helped to prepare you for whatever lies ahead.”

The ceremony featured guest speaker Thomas “Tom” Gayner, Co-Chief Executive Officer of Markel Corporation, a diverse financial holding company listed on the Fortune 500 and is headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, with 61 offices in 16 countries. Gayner’s father, John “Jack” Gayner, graduated from Blackburn in 1938. While a student, Jack Gayner was a sports editor for The ‘Burnian and helped build Dawes Gymnasium - one of 10 buildings on campus constructed by students in Blackburn’s Work Program.

Gayner was not certain how his father discovered Blackburn, but remembered his father telling him that tuition, room and board at the time was \$25 and that “even in the depression, that’s a good deal.” His father would share stories of his time at a school where students did carpentry, plumbing, farming and cooking to keep the college running. “He had no family in Illinois, no connections, and no reason to come here except to reach for an opportunity.”

“Blackburn is a link in the chain of how I got where I am. I’m grateful for what this institution did at one point in time that changed the course of my life forever,” he continued. “I’m grateful for the people that keep it going and the opportunity they created for the class of 2022. And I’m hopeful you will join the long line of generations that has kept Blackburn going.”

Gayner concluded his remarks by saying, “Everything about this place speaks volumes about the idea of just trying to help others and make the world a better place than the way you found it. As you celebrate this day and take appropriate pride in your accomplishment of graduating from Blackburn, I hope you will commit yourself to help those that come behind you. None of us got where we are solely from our own efforts. All of us have had someone look out for us. And someone who helped us in ways that we could not do for ourselves. Blackburn stands as a testament to that idea.”

President Biermann concluded the ceremony with a charge to the class of 2022. “I ask that you go forward into our world in the spirit of that thankfulness. Help those you encounter. Build up those in need. Seek to make this world a better place to live for all people. Live and give fully and generously. We are so proud of you, and we are honored that Blackburn College is your alma mater.”

The ceremony was live-streamed for those unable to make it to campus. The event and copies of the commencement program are available at blackburn.edu/graduation/.

The prior evening, graduating students and families enjoyed a senior banquet hosted by the Blackburn Alumni Association followed by Baccalaureate. The Baccalaureate event featured reflections from several members of the Class of 2022.

Growing up in a larger town where graduations featured more than 500 students, Class Student Marshal Zach Wieland, a mathematics education major, talked about the importance of the relationships and personalized attention possible at a smaller college like Blackburn. “I’ve been in a large school environment, and I’ve been in a small school environment, and I’ll choose small every single time. That’s why I chose Blackburn - not only did I have a chance to build great relationships with my fellow seniors, but I got to know the professors and coaches on campus as well.”

In addition to winning conference championships on the basketball court, Javon Stovall, a communications major and student manager of Dining & Hospitality department at Blackburn, made personal history as a first-generation college student. “Before I left for school going into my first year of college, I visited my grandma and she told me “Never give up, no matter what or how long it takes you. Just keep going until you can walk that stage and get that degree.” That moment gave me a lot of my motivation. Because no one in my family had graduated from college.”

He continued, “What better place to walk that stage than the place of working, learning and earning. All the keys to success in the real world were taught and given here being a Blackburn student.”

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.