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Ouachita News Bureau

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Photo 1 Ouachita's 2022 Alumni Milestone Award honorees (from left) Jacob Lively, Chris Wright, Bob Sexton, Jenny Gosser Turner and Vanilla Nelson Hannah. Joined by Hannah's daughter, Roxie Browning and Dr. Sells. Photo by Wesley Kluck.

For immediate release

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By Felley Lawson

October 12, 2022

For more information, contact Ouachita's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Five Ouachita Baptist University graduates received the university's Alumni Milestone Award on Saturday, Oct. 8. Based on their professional achievements, community service and dedication to their alma mater, the honorees were selected by a committee of Ouachita faculty and staff and Dr. Ben Sells, Ouachita president.

"Exemplary graduates are nominated every year for the Alumni Milestone Award," Sells said. "Our goal is to select inductees who, by the way they live their lives, represent our amazing alumni and demonstrate the qualities that make Ouachita, Ouachita."

This year's Milestone honorees received their awards at a breakfast held in their honor on campus and were recognized during halftime festivities at Cliff Harris Stadium, where the Ouachita Tigers took on the Southwestern Oklahoma State Bulldogs.

The following is a list of 2022 Alumni Milestone Award honorees:

Vanilla Nelson Hannah of Arkadelphia, Ark., class of 1972, has served for 18 years as a justice of the peace and is an active member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and the Greater Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Arkadelphia. She retired in 2021 after a 48-year career in education with the Arkadelphia Public School District, having served most recently as counselor at Goza Junior High and Arkadelphia High School.

“Ouachita prepared me for life and my career by teaching me to work with diverse situations and people,” said Hannah. “It increased my desire to learn more and do more.”

Jenny Gosser Turner of Scott, Ark., class of 1982, grew up attending campus events as part of a multi-generational Ouachita family. She earned a degree in early childhood education that gave her a foundation for working with children as an elementary school teacher and in church as a children's ministry leader.

“Some of my favorite experiences are mission trips I still take with Ouachita friends as we work to share the love of Jesus with children in other countries,” Gosser said. “Everywhere I travel I meet someone from Ouachita, and the Ouachita connection makes an immediate bond.”

Bob Sexton of Little Rock, Ark., class of 1992, is an active member of the boards of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the UALR Bowen School of Law Alumni Association and the Arkansas Trial Lawyers Association. Sexton has been recognized locally, regionally and nationally for his work as a partner with the Little Rock-based law firm Rainwater, Holt and Sexton.

“Everyone in Arkansas knows and respects someone who attended Ouachita. As an alumnus you stand on the shoulders of all those graduates who came before you,” he said. “There’s no question that the people I met and the experiences I had at Ouachita changed my life for the better.”

Chris Wright of Burleson, Texas, class of 2002, enrolled at Ouachita to prepare for a career in vocational ministry and has pastored churches in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. He earned a Master of Divinity degree from George W. Truett Theological Seminary and is pursuing a doctorate at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Wright serves as lead pastor of South Hills Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

“Ouachita taught me the value of integrity and faithfulness to the truth of God's Word and the importance of personal spiritual growth through my relationship with Jesus Christ,” he said. “Ouachita's unwavering commitment to God's Word coupled with the close-knit family culture is a rare find in today's world.”

Jacob Lively of Little Rock, Ark., class of 2012, graduated from the University of Arkansas School of Law at Fayetteville. In 2019, he was named to Arkansas Business' “20 in Their 20s” for his accomplishments and leadership potential in business and politics. Lively is chief operating officer of FoxDen Capital in Little Rock.

“What Ouachita offers is real: real connection with real people, all rooted in a real purpose grounded in a Christ-centered community,” he said. “Ouachita's impact on me can be seen every day. The three words on the Ouachita seal – vision, integrity and service – have given me so much direction in my journey.”