

Heart of a Tiger: Looking back at top 10 FHSU news stories of 2023

1/5/24

By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - I have the honor of working with so many great people at Fort Hays State University, and I hope you will indulge me in celebrating several of our shared accomplishments in this, my first column of 2024. I hope you will enjoy this look back on a momentous year via a top-ten list of the impactful FHSU news stories of 2023.

#10 Gerard Wellbrock celebrates his 20th year as the “Voice of the Tigers”

A 1990 graduate of FHSU, Gerard took over as the “Voice of the Tigers” in 2002 after years of working as the understudy of his predecessor, Steve Webster. Gerard followed eight previous Voices of the Tigers, including four Kansas Hall of Fame broadcasters. He is now the longest-running voice of the Tigers. Gerard is the Sports Director for Eagle Radio, and you can hear his play-by-play commentary of Tiger Athletics events live on KJLS, 103.3 on the FM dial.

#9 FHSU Earns Military Friendly School honors for the 16th consecutive year

The Military Friendly® program was established to create civilian opportunities for transitioning veterans and is the standard that measures an organization’s commitment, effort, and success in creating sustainable and meaningful opportunities for the military community. More than 1,800 schools participated in the 2023-24 survey, with 530 schools earning award-level designations in Gold, Silver, and Bronze. FHSU attained the rank of Silver for the second consecutive year!

#8 Tiger Athletics welcomes new leadership and a brand-new sport

In April, we saw the end of an era as Tony Hobson, the winningest coach in FHSU Women’s basketball history, retired. Tony passed the baton of leadership to long-time assistant coach Talia Kahrs. Coach Hobson’s head coaching career spanned 31 years, including three national championships at Hastings College in Nebraska, six MIAA Championships, and four MIAA Basketball Coach of the Year selections. Coach Kahrs’ squad is already crushing it in her first season as head coach. As I write this column, her Tigers are 11-1 on the season and 5-1 in MIAA play and have just cracked the top 10 in the NCAA Division II coaches poll.

This past fall, the inaugural class of 17 women wrestlers arrived on campus and began training for their first full season of matches in the fall of 2024. Fort Hays State was the first NCAA school in Kansas to offer the sport and the first school in the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association (MIAA) to offer women’s wrestling as a varsity intercollegiate sport.

#7 Shotgun Sports team brings home back-to-back national titles

An impressive 2022-2023 season saw our shooting sports dynasty win the Highest Overall Team honors across all divisions at the first-ever Federal Cup at the National Collegiate Shooting Sports Athletic Association (NCSSAA) event in March. During 16 days of shooting and travel, the team competed at Nationals in Las Vegas, earning five All-American shooters and four honorable mentions. The team then traveled to San Antonio for the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) Collegiate Championship, where nine team members took home All-American honors and secured first-place finishes in trap, skeet, skeet doubles, and super sport. To cap it all off, our shooters finished the season undefeated!

#6 2023 Giving Day demonstrates the power of community

The university's third annual Giving Day was enthusiastically supported by more than 1,200 members of the global Tiger Nation. Our generous donors gave to 62 causes, including academic department needs and Tiger Athletics programs. They also backed the Kansas Comprehensive Grant. This State of Kansas program provided a dollar-for-dollar match to all donations.

#5 New partnership with Kansas College of Osteopathic Medicine provides an accelerated pathway for future FHSU physicians

This is an exciting example of an FHSU educational partnership that will positively impact our state's quality and availability of healthcare services. FHSU students who qualify can begin their first year of medical school in their senior year of undergraduate studies at Fort Hays State University. After completing their first year, they will receive their bachelor's degree from Fort Hays State University. This will allow them to earn their undergraduate and medical degrees in seven years.

#4 10 Tiger Athletes earn All-America honors

Last spring, 10 Tiger athletes earned CoSIDA Academic All-American honors, the most single-year awardees in university history, and the most in the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletic Conference in 2023. Tiger Athletics sports represented in our list of All-Americans include baseball, football, men's and women's track and field, and women's golf and soccer.

#3 FHSU hosts second Western Agriculture Summit

This event was created in 2022 by Kansas District 110 Representative Ken Rahjes, chair of the House of Representatives Ag Committee, and Dr. Grady Dixon, Fort Hays State University dean of the Peter Werth College of Science, Technology and Mathematics. The summit's goal is to bring awareness to the critical issues facing Kansas farmers, ranchers, financial institutions, and ag businesses. The focus of this year's summit agenda was jobs in Kansas agriculture.

#2 New federal funding will allow us to expand the number of nursing professionals in rural Kansas

Senator Jerry Moran joined us for an October press conference to announce the award of two Health and Human Services Administration federal grants totaling more than \$4 million. These grants will help us expand the number of highly-trained nursing professionals serving in rural Kansas by providing students with monetary stipends and specialized training if they commit to practicing in a rural Kansas setting.

#1 FHSU, Northwest Tech, and NCK Tech Announce New Affiliation Initiative

Presidents Eric Burks, Ben Schears, and I turned several informal discussions over several months into a comprehensive strategic affiliation initiative. This effort is a powerful way for our three institutions, each operating from positions of strength, to address demographic and economic challenges in Western Kansas.

I am so excited to see what 2024 brings! In the coming year, we will see our strategic affiliation begin to take shape. In the months ahead, we will roll out several new initiatives specifically designed to meet the needs of learners, businesses, and communities in Western Kansas. Top on our list is to help address challenges in the fields of mental health services, nursing, professional and continuing education, telehealth, and information technology.

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