

108. LA Tech Homecoming 2024: Family Reunion

Gavin Kelly

Hey everybody. You're listening to Beyond 1894. This is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. I'm Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications. This is our annual homecoming centric episode of beyond 1894 we are joined here today by Dr Heath Tims. Heath Timms has been on the podcast before it was I guess it's been a couple years now, probably close to a couple, probably three or four years ago. Yeah, and at the time, he was a staple of the faculty and administration in the College of Engineering and Science. But I'm gonna let Heath take a second to reintroduce himself, because he has had a role change very recently. So Heath tell us about that.

Heath Tims

Yeah, thanks for having me on today. I've enjoyed the last time I got a chance to do this, last time was a little bit different, obviously, talking about engineering and science and kind of my involvement here at the university. So some of that connects even to what I'm doing now. Obviously, I've been here at the University for quite a while. I think I'm going on my 19th year here at Louisiana Tech as a faculty member, but I did my undergrad here as well, and have long roots and multiple generations that have come through Louisiana Tech. So definitely understand the history that Tech has recently with the change with Dr Henderson coming in, we really wanted to focus more on engagement as a whole, but especially with some of our alumni, and kind of reinvigorating some of the things that we have going on, and growing that in trying to bring some things back that so many people look forward to. So I think going forward, looking forward to the opportunities that can exist there. So there's a long title associated with that, but really the way to think about it is my role is to work directly with the President in really focusing on alumni and engagement to the university. So we are looking for as much as we can to reengage those that have have left, obviously those alums, but also continue to do things with our current students to where they will stay connected as we go forward in the future. So it's a it's an exciting role. It's a fun role. There's still a lot in figuring out and trying to understand it changes day to day, but definitely a lot of opportunities, of things that we can do as a university to re engage our people.

Gavin Kelly

And you know, this is a perfect chance to talk about that mentality, because we're talking about Homecoming Week. And again, it is a week. It's a full week it's a full week full of different events from different areas all over campus. But you were telling me that there's a specific focus of sort of connectivity this year with homecoming week. So kind of talk to me about the concept of homecoming and what's going to be different kind of this time

Heath Tims

around. Well, I mean, I think obviously homecoming is nothing new. I mean, you've experienced it when you went to high school, you experienced it to, you know, obviously the university, this is, this is not a new thing, but I think sometimes it's nice to relook at why we are doing certain things. And if you really think about the word homecoming, it is exactly what the two words are that are put together, and that is coming home. And so in my mind, and I think a lot of our minds, we want to have experiences for our own students while they're here, and they're going through their undergrad or masters or PhDs or whatever, where this becomes their home. This is, this is where they have made their their kind of stand and and we want them to connect with us for the rest of their lives. And so for those that have moved on, the idea is that they are truly coming back home. This is a reunion of sorts. It is a it's an opportunity for them to come back to connect with their peers, connect with other alums, to to be able to see what all is happening at the university, to be proud of what you know has changed, but also be proud of our history and our traditions that still exist. And so I think when it comes to homecoming, we are looking for, you know, trying to create the environment and the events that surround that type of model, just to try to bring those people back. And also, at the same time, have our students be a part of that process.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, there's and just, you know, if you're listening and you aren't, don't know any details about Homecoming, it's at the time of recording. It's just a few weeks out. It's going to start the week of November 3. That's a Sunday that is the start of homecoming week. Obviously, Homecoming is, you know, centered around a home football game that's going to be on Saturday the ninth of that week. So again, a full week of events, we're going to kind of run through a few and mention a few, and kind of talk about the idea behind them. It's worth mentioning that if you're listening, you can go to law, tech.edu/homecoming for a list of those events and some registration links and things like that. And that list is going to be updated as needed in the coming weeks. It's also worth mentioning that colleges, departments, student organizations, they're also all going to be kind of having their own sort of Homecoming events throughout the week. So this is not a comprehensive list, right?

Heath Tims

No, that's, yeah. I mean, you're dead on with that. I mean, I think the approach. Is what we're trying to do, especially this year, and this has always been the case, but trying to put a little more focus is getting some of this information together as much as we can, in one central place, so that anyone who wants to understand elements that are going on, they can try to go to one one location to understand it. But there's no way that this can be a full, comprehensive list we have, you know, student organizations from all across this campus that we don't if they're not on this list, doesn't mean it's not important. We're just, you know, not able to kind of get all that information together. But there, there are even things in the community that a lot of times, people don't even think about, that aren't even tied to the university formally. But there's a lot that happens there, and that ranges from, you know, some of our, you know, outside Greek organizations, and they, they have a whole series of things that they have available, you know, even some of the different religious organizations there's, there's so many different things that surround this entire week. And so we're just trying to provide as much as we can, a comprehensive look, so that those that do want to come in for any part of it, they can at least understand some of the the key times that they can expect things to be going on. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly

yeah. And also, you know, going back to sort of that connectedness, and the the idea of Homecoming this year kind of ties into the mentality behind shifting the location of some of these events. For example, Tuesday, November 5, 6pm there is a talent show hosted by union board. Again, an annual thing. It's not a new thing to home, but that's going to be in Railroad Park downtown. That's correct. Talk about kind of that idea of moving things into the community. And it's not just encapsulated to the campus, right,

Heath Tims

100 100% I mean, I think any of us who are probably listening to this, they know that tech and Ruston are so connected. I mean, it is truly a you know, what a lot of us like to say is, it's a great college town. I mean, that is and we want to embrace that, that is part of who we are, that is part of our makeup. And we have such a great relationship with the city. The convention visitor Bureau has been phenomenal to work with. And so we want to take some of these events, some of them are obviously very specific to, you know, something on the campus. Obviously, the football game is gonna be played at Joe stadium, right? But, you know, in terms of, there are opportunities to engage outside of maybe the traditional venues, union board, you know, student government have done a great job of thinking through that as well, and we, they've been great to work with. And the talent show is an example of that. As you said, that happens every year, and you want to talk about incredible talent on this campus. You know, these students are absolutely phenomenal. I've had the opportunity to judge that in previous years. I've always said that is one of the hardest things to judge, because they're really good, that one's not a joke, they're phenomenal. And so as you start to have that talent on the campus, and you never know where that talent leads, that's a whole nother thing. Some of the talent that we see here, obviously we have famous individuals who have been highlighted recently, and obviously you can read that on the on some of the things that are coming out from the university. But the talent is phenomenal. And so we want to have the community be able to participate in that as well, and they've been able to in the past, but when it's on the campus, they haven't seen as much, so obviously, weather permitting, but that will be at Railroad Park downtown, and that's just one of those small examples. But really connect the community to the campus, what is referred to a lot of time as the town and gown connection, and we're going to continue to work with that and phenomenal partners with the campus as well as the community. So as much as we can do that, we want to try to the pep rally on Friday night. Is another great example of that. You know, there it is student government that's actually part of the home and coming week activity. Activities with the court is actually presented this the student court that is elected to represent the student body at homecoming. They'll be presented at that pep rally. So, you know, opportunities for our community members to be a part of that. They can, you know, bring their kids, and they can come hear the band, and they can, you know, get hyped up for the next, you know, day's game. So we, we want to do everything we can to connect those things,

Gavin Kelly

yeah, and just, and, you know, even when you talk about tech and Russ and kind of going hand in hand, and the campus really expanding into the community, our campus also is, you know, a little bit a little bit larger than most. It's far reaching. I guess I should say, as an example, what I sort of mentioned about colleges, kind of on their own level, having these kind of events throughout homecoming week, Thursday, November 7, at four o'clock in the afternoon. Just as an example, A and S College of Applied

natural sign they're having a cookout on South Campus. And South Campus is an area that the people who work out. Are very passionate about it, and they deserve all the love they get.

Heath Tims

Yeah, definitely. And I'll say the food is usually pretty good. So the campus is one that Ruston and the campus tie so much together. In more recent years, if you haven't been back to the campus in years, you'll see that there's been a lot of growth on the east side. So for those that they're not directionally as easy, that's toward the downtown, you know, and the very intentional, very intentional, and Mississippi has been completely redone, so now there is a brand new paved road that has giant sidewalks that are very nicely set up, that runs from downtown all the way, basically, to the baseball stadium. You've got the new walkway that has been, you know, a part of that, even the, even the Rock Island Greenway running north, south, you know, from all the way at Cook Park north of town, literally comes right through the campus. So that connection point we, we carry a decent bit of space, but it's close, and that's one of the great things that we talk about with being as college town, is that we have a unique setup, and that our downtown, especially is so close to our campus that's not typical, and when it is, it's usually in a very urban environment. So it's a great setup that we have. And yeah, there's there's things spread all over this campus, every day, every night, that are happening that whole week.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah. And you know, part of the reason that it's so easy to integrate with the city of Russ and come from a sort of dedicated partnership between the university and the city. And I think partnerships are a big reason, a big driver behind the growth the university. And also, think it's worth mentioning, you know, you think about someone who may come back for homecoming week who hasn't been here in years and years and years, decades, whatever. I think it's it's interesting. It would be interesting to, from that perspective, see how much campus has changed. But also it's not unrecognizable. I mean, talk about, you know, kind of how campus has changed for you since you first been here to now. I mean, there's still some staples that are still around, sure.

Heath Tims

I mean, I, you know, I was shortly after Centennial Plaza was put in. And I think a lot of times people forget that was a road. And I do remember that road, you know. So there are certain things on campus that now have become just ingrained, you know, obviously some of the some of the old dorms, and there's mixed feelings to that. You know, the dorm I lived in is, is not here same actually. When, when students refer to different names of dorms, I'm like, Wait, that's in a different location. So, you know, obviously change happens, and we want to embrace that when it's done in the right way. And you know, there's a lot of new buildings, especially on that east side of campus, there's a lot of construction. That's been the common joke is we'll tear up a road and a area of campus quite often. But that's progress, and that's part of what is happening, is us moving forward. So you may find that you try to come down railroad drive, and it's a different direction now. So that's that happens. So obviously, be patient with that. It's not that your old route wasn't a good one, but we we are moving forward as a university, and at the same time, we're not losing our traditions and our history and you know, so when you come back, you can still see those key things. And I think one of the cool things working with student government this year is they actually chose the kind of title of this week was celebration of tech traditions. And so when you think about it that way, it's like the stuff that we've had still exist, and we

want to grow that, but we also want to introduce new things, and so we've even done that. You know, we've talked with so many on the campus about this, and now there's been some information go out, but there's even a kind of a new event that will be available on Friday night that obviously we would welcome our alums to come to, and definitely would encourage them to something called evening Under the Oaks. It is, if you really get down to it, it is an opportunity to come back to that center part of campus, the very, you know, well known area with the lady of the mist and the beautiful oak trees. And we have, you know, band playing with lights and trees. And to be able to just get people back together, that connection point, that nostalgia, I remember talking with some friends just in the last couple weeks regarding that this was going to occur. And I'm always amazed at how many times people talk about they proposed there, or, yeah, sat there and I did not propose in the quad. But many nights I sat on those benches with my now wife, and there's a lot of memories that kind of bubble back up for people. And so those things still exist, those those memories we want to tap into. We want it to have that affinity for. You know. What they enjoy when they're here, and how they've continued to improve on that, yeah,

Gavin Kelly

and that again, that evening Under the Oaks, that'll be Friday, November 8, starts at 630 in the evening. That is a registration required for

Heath Tims

that is, that will be, you know, kind of a great social event, really, with with good entertainment. And really, we want people to come, you know, heavy hors d'oeuvres, and we'll have some, you know, some drinks available as well. And so we just, we would invite people, that's, you know, just one example, but to come back and and just participate in those things. Get Connected, not only with us as a university and the faculty and staff and administrators and students that are here, but with your peers, you know, those that you went to school with, those that you know you have memories and history with. You know, we want to have those people back and connect back to each other. That's a big part of what we talked about the Tech family over the years. You know, sometimes it's good to get the family back together and relive and think through some of those great memories and some of those great opportunities that that you had together,

Gavin Kelly

yeah. And I think speaking of people sort of reliving connections, it also a good handful or so of alumni are going to kind of get a spotlight on them over the course of the week. On Friday, there is a luncheon that day for the Alumni Awards. Again, an annual thing, yep. But that's, you know, the alum of the year, young alum of the year. And then each college has their own sort of alum to highlight. That's correct.

Heath Tims

There will actually be eight award recipients this year that will be recognizing, you know, as a university, for just how they've contributed in their fields, and what they've done in their careers, how they've contributed back to the university. We even have an opportunity this time, we will be doing a non alum Award, which is kind of a unique thing that's been done over the few years for just those that have been a part of our university, even though they never formally graduated. And I think that's an element that we need to think about as well as anybody who has connected our university is a part of this, so a whole nother audience that a lot of times, people don't think about. But our parents, you know, if they

made the decision to go somewhere else, you know, we can't fault them for that. We may make fun of them informally, behind the scenes, but, you know, we may joke with them, but we're thankful that they sent their own you know kids here, and you know these students now, there are a lot of parents who have connected back. So, you know, come be a part we. We welcome you to join in with us as a part of university,

Gavin Kelly

kind of like being a reverse legacy. That's right. We love

Heath Tims

that, you know. And there are quite a few, and there's all kinds of things that are happening there. We have parents that had no connection to the university, but their students are here now who've been able to see some of the opportunities across the campus. You know, bringing companies here. There's been all kinds of things that have, that have happened because of what's happening at the university and in the Ruston community as a whole. So we, we would welcome any of those groups. So whether you're an alum or not, yeah, if you, if you want to connect with us, we want to connect with you. Yeah, let's

Gavin Kelly

get into Saturday, which I guess if there is a homecoming day, it would be that Saturday, it would be probably, maybe arguably, the most non stop day. Starts with, again, another, another staple of homecoming week, but has been moved location wise, starting at eight o'clock that morning on Saturday. Breakfast with champ. Yeah, breakfast

Heath Tims

with champ. This was something that, you know, personally, I care a lot about, because, you know, I have those memories myself. I was able to bring my kids, and they grew up here on the campus, obviously, and so, you know, able to participate that. And we've got however many years worth of memories than pictures that we've been able to do for those that haven't been a part of that breakfast of Champ is intended, and it's really focused more on a younger audience, and those, those young kids that you know we want to make future Bulldogs. We want them to be a part of our campus early on, we want them to understand this campus. So that will be coming back to main campus. We are actually going to be hosting that in the student center tech table quad. And so that's a cool opportunity to bring our, you know, young, young bull pups, back to the campus. And obviously our, you know, our own alums, especially with families, anybody's welcome to attend that. But that kind of has a different target audience, for the most part. But they'll, they'll be able to eat in tech table, which, if you haven't been back in a while, is drastically different than when I was a student. It is actually a great little area for eating. And they'll be able to meet there. And obviously, there'll be pictures with champ that are professionally taken, pictures that will be provided to the families. There will be some other activities with the the cheer groups and Regals. And obviously, you know, tech 22 and champ will all be there. You know, chance to come back. And kind of relive a little bit of memories, even for the parents, and for the parents to be able to show their kids some things. Well, we're looking at some scavenger hunts for the kids that that way they can be able to see, maybe where their parents brick was, or whatever. So opportunities to kind of engage that younger group for the future, and also, at the same time getting

some of our, you know, alums that have been out, the chance to come back, that it will be immediately followed by something that also has been going on for many years, and that's the parade, but I'll say kind of a renewed focus on that this year, with President Henderson coming in, that was one of the big pushes, is that that needs to be a celebration that we can have, and that is a little broader reaching than just a few floats running along the side of a campus. So that parade will be coming back to the campus. It'll be running right through the middle of campus following breakfast with champ. It then will run kind of into the community parts. So there'll be a parade route and such that people be able to see where that is. But that will, that will have a definite renewed focus and a lot of work with student government there, on increasing our involvement, of our, you know, campus organizations and band et cetera, to where that can be, something that we want you to come be a part of the timing of that is at 10am and that works well for getting people here. We want you to honestly spend the day in our community. Yeah, and there's a lot of ways you can do that. So there'll be a lot of tailgates going on, and obviously you could be a part of that. We want to encourage that. But there's also time, if you wanted to just come and participate, see the downtown area. One of the things that, if you haven't been back to campus a lot, you worrying, I want to go the game, but I don't have a pass. Or look, the city of Ruston and downtown runs the shuttle that runs from downtown and also kind of right here on the campus. So that is a free shuttle, which is great and gets gets rave reviews from people who do that. So, you know, go, go eat at one of the downtown vendors, go to the shop downtown, and, you know, get a chance to reconnect with the community as a whole. And then obviously come and be a part of, you know, tailgating in the atmosphere. You know, the walk of pride, where the students that are, you know, we think of them as athletes, but they're still students. They're, they are our students that are, that are performing on a field. And, you know, we want to, we want to welcome them and be a part of that family too. So, you know, come, come be there when they show up to the stadium in the walk of pride, you know, and be right there tight, right up against them and giving them the high fives and everything as they come in. And, you know, that's a way that you may not think about it, but even your little kid can have an impact on the game, because it affects somebody's mood as they go into it. So, you know, we want that type of environment. We we have that family environment, where we want you to connect personally with this family, but also the family in terms of the personal connection we have with our with our community and our student athletes and our current students. So it's all part of what we do.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, and you know, like you, like you said in so many words, reconnect with tech, but also you reconnecting with rust and and the focus of this homecoming week being integrating those two together a little bit better is going to show through, I think again, that that football game Saturday, November 9, Bulldog football is going to take on Jacksonville State kickoffs right around 330 but make a full day out of it. The game is just kind of the the punctuation mark at the end of a big homecoming week. Also, I mean, the next day, on Sunday, one o'clock in the afternoon, volleyball is going to have a home game in the tent. Game in the tech. It's senior day for them. So again, kind of Sunday to Sunday, there's always something going on for all ages, for any type of alum, no matter what your major was, or program you were in, how involved you were on campus, there's going to be something for everyone throughout homecoming week.

Heath Tims

And so I would say, however you are able to connect. And I think this is one of the roles that kind of starting with what my new role is, also kind of thinking about that, what does it mean to engage our tech community and our Tech family? And there are a lot of ways to engage. I mean, obviously I would be, you know, I'd be wrong by not mentioning that financial is one in a lot of people think about Yes, and obviously we need support, so let's start there. But I think one of the big things is there are other ways to engage. There are ways to engage by just showing up. There are ways to engage by wearing blue, wearing wearing tech apparel whenever you go and you travel and you know, and you're out there in your in your normal day to day life, there are ways to to reengage with us as a university, by, you know, sending your students and sending those legacies to us, to actually come and be a part, or, you know, recruiting other students. So there's a lot more involved with how you. And get plugged back in to the campus, and we're looking for anything that continues to grow our family as much as we can. Yeah. So

Gavin Kelly

again, Homecoming, a very traditional annual opportunity to do so a little bit of a focus shift this year, but it's all it's all for a good cause. It's all on the up and up. So again, Latech EDU slash homecoming. That's place you're going to want to go to see kind of a full, fuller list of the events that we've covered here today. But homecoming week starts Sunday, November 3, and goes through that whole week. So like he said, Come be a part of it. It's there's just show up. Yeah, be here. Be here. Hey. Thank you for making time for us today. Thanks for breaking down homecoming week a little bit for us. Thanks for having me. It's very evident that you're excited to be in this new role. Love it. So yeah, go dogs,

Heath Tims

that's right. Go Dogs

Gavin Kelly

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