

# 151. Leslie Brister Carpenter: Family Reunion

## **Gavin Kelly**

Hey everybody, you're listening to Beyond 1894 This is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly, from the Office of University Communications, and we are joined for this episode by another one of our friends from the Alumni Association. Leslie Brister Carpenter joins us. She is the Director of Alumni Engagement. Leslie, thanks for being here today.

## **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Absolutely.

## **Gavin Kelly**

so you know, I mentioned right up top that you work with alumni, and I know there's been a real push over the last year or so to ramp up those engagement numbers and really connect with our, our alumni around the world. Before we get into that, talk to me about what this summer is shaping up as we, as we record here. The summer's just started, but I know that that for alumni, that just means different ways to connect as we go into these summer months. So, tell us about kind of what are these things coming up for the Alumni Association.

## **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Yeah, so we hit the road tomorrow. So, our first event, we kick off with Little Rock. We did kind of like a soft launch with Shreveport. We did our Tech and Tails event over there and had a great crowd of about 300 alumni, and so throughout the rest of the summer we'll visit nine different cities and just connect people back to tech and to Ruston, and have them just kind of remember why the Bulldog family is so special to them. So we're excited to meet alumni. Last year we really kind of launched that off, and we're just kind of blown away by the response that we had from people in all the different areas, and just were, we would get to like doubling our numbers, and then you know, we'd get a week out, and then we tripled the numbers from previous years, and it was just like it was so exciting, just how much you see people really do care about the tech family and what it meant to them.

## **Gavin Kelly**

Yeah, so we're talking about your tech, your town, right, is what it's called. What is that event like? Like, what could someone going to that event for the first time expect?

## **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Absolutely, it's really just kind of like a big tech family reunion. A lot of them, Dr. Henderson gets to tag along with us, or Ryan Ivy, our AD, and like Joel Steak from Honors. So, just people from all around campus just coming to one location closer to you, yeah, bringing tech to your town, and just hanging out, just talking about what's new, talking about what's old. That's probably some of my favorite experiences. Last year in Lafayette, we had a grad from, oh goodness, I think the late 50s, yeah, wow, Miss Carol Stelly, Miss Carol, please forgive me if it was, if it was earlier than that, but she was a tech grad, and she brought her original alumni association from they got when they graduated, and just

hearing all of her stories about tech were just super cool, and then by the end of the conversation we were related, and she was a resting gal, and so that was super cool,

**Gavin Kelly**

yeah. I mean, it sounds like, too, apart from just a chance to reconnect with the university and with other people that graduated from university, it's a good chance to kind of rub elbows and talk some with university leadership, which is unique, I think, for an event like that. So,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

for sure, I think, too, with just like our young alumni, so many of them are, you know, they graduated a few weeks ago, and they're moving to Houston or Dallas, and they're like, "Where do I go from here? And so this is the perfect kind of launch point for them to get connected into the Bulldog community and their new locations as well.

**Gavin Kelly**

So, if someone's listening and this is the first time they're hearing about this and they want to be a part of it at one of these events, what is that process like?

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Yeah, you can go to [www dot law tech alumni.org/your town two six](http://www.dotlawtechalumni.org/your-town-two-six), or they can just call our office, email [alumni law tech.edu](mailto:alumni@lawtech.edu) You can call us beep us, you can reach us any way you want.

**Gavin Kelly**

There you go. I like that reference too. Sounds good. So, yeah, if you are listening, you're a Louisiana Tech alum, and your town sounds like something that'll be interesting. It is. It's a proper tour, you know. It's pretty.. you think about it being in a place like Shreveport, and you know, you're like, obviously, but it goes pretty far away from here. So, there's opportunities for you everywhere. Let's talk about you, though, Leslie. Let's get into kind of the journey that brought you here. Talk to me about the early days, talked to me about growing up and realizing Louisiana Tech was going to be your place, and deciding what to study, deciding where to go, and that, and that type of thing.

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Yeah, okay. So I am from Ruston, so Ruston Gal born and raised, went to a small high school right outside of town, because that's where my mom taught school. Okay, and so went to a small class B high school. We didn't have football or anything, you know,

**Gavin Kelly**

very relatable. So I went to Dodson.

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Oh, okay, yeah.

**Gavin Kelly**

Graduated with like 25 kids,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

so a little bit bigger, about 60, but yes, I get it. And so went to a smaller high school, definitely very community based, just kind of cut like. Close-knit family, obviously, growing up in Ruston, you know, you're at tech homecomings, you're at football games, you're going to tech the halls, like we have all these like old hand molds from tech the halls from back in the day when it was in the plaza, and just really seeing like the tech family at work for a really long time, and so when it came time to look at universities, I think tech was just kind of always my home.

**Gavin Kelly**

Yeah,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

and I toyed with like one other university and like applied for housing there, but like at the end of the day, like I knew this is where I was supposed to be. It was just always like the perfect size, and really just kind of a beautiful campus throughout admissions recruiting, I've gotten to see so many different universities, and we kind of don't realize what we have sometimes. It really is like a beautiful campus, and so those are just kind of some things that caught my eye. I signed up for orientation the day before it happened, and so from there it just kind of took off, and I was just in love with tech. My mom took my debit card my freshman year, because I was buying too much red and blue clothes, and so tailgates and games, and getting involved, and like union board, and student recruiters, and just different organizations, like all of those experiences made me kind of see like the greater tech community, and when it came to picking a major, I went into biology. My dad is an RN, my mom is a school teacher. I knew I wanted to help people, but I didn't have the patience to be an elementary school teacher, like my mom, and so I was like, okay, perfect, we're going into the medical field, kind of like dad, and I loved that experience. I will never use my degree a day in my life, but I wouldn't change it. My senior year at that time was thinking pediatrics, med school applications, all of that stuff, and Dr. Liberatos, who was the dean of the College of Applied and Natural Sciences, taught this class called parasitology, and I needed an elective, and I was like, "Perfect, let me grab this elective. Everyone was like, "Do not take this class, and, like, you are going to fail it. It is going to take your GPA. You do not want that on a med school application. And I was like, guess what, I'm stubborn, and I'm gonna prove all of you wrong, okay? And I did not make the worst grade I've ever made in my life, but he had a lab with that class, and through that lab he was just like really good at kind of getting into your life and maybe helping you see things that you didn't see, and he was like, hey, like, med school, go do it, you'll rock it, but like, let me also plant the seed in your mind that you really kind of thrive in like this higher ed kind of community, why don't you think about that, and the light bulb just kind of went off, like, I'd never thought, like, oh, adults make all of this happen, you know, like, yeah, I'd never thought about that as a career, I think higher ed is something you kind of fall into more times than not. No one wakes up in the sixth grade and it's like, I'm going to be an admissions recruiter. Yeah, I think that's true. Yeah, and so I was part of student recruiters at the time when I graduated, and they had an open recruiter position, and so I applied for that. There was no plan B, so thank God that his plans are better than ours, because that's what I went for and got it, and so from there I spent started working in admissions, spent pretty much eight years recruiting, so my first four years I did territory recruiting and a lot of Texas, so Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Waco, just kind of all over, did some stints in Mobile and Tennessee, and

basically they sent me everywhere but Louisiana, they were like, "don't touch the Louisiana kids, but you can talk to these out-of-state kids, and so did that, and loved it, and then ended up recruiting Shreveport and being over student recruiters and just all sorts of stuff in that realm.

### **Gavin Kelly**

Was that an easy transition? I mean, coming from being a student recruiter, obviously it's a whole different job, but like having some exposure to it while you were here on campus.

### **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

absolutely. I mean, I think being a student recruiter, you learn so much about every aspect of campus, and being on the recruiting road, like, you never know what you're gonna like. One kid asked me, what kind of trees were in the picture, and the recruiting brochure, like, I don't know. So, you just get really used to random questions, and what about this? Well, tell me about this. Well, you told me about engineering, but tell me about specifically what kind of robot, and, like, you know, like all these different things, and so being a student recruiter definitely helped me, but I think a lot of the leaders over there at the time really helped shape me professionally and just helped me get to kind of that next level.

### **Gavin Kelly**

I feel like I know the answer, because again, it's been like echoed so many times on this podcast, but whenever you were recruiting and you saw. You know, students commit to being a part of Louisiana Tech. What were those selling points that you know that really drew them in? Like, what were the things where they were like, "Oh, I know Louisiana Tech is for me."

### **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Absolutely, I think for me, I think the best thing about it was just selling tech through your personal story. So, like, as I mentioned, like, just the size was perfect. You know, it's not teeny tiny, where you know everybody and their mama, but it's not ginormous, where you like don't see people that you know and can wave at somebody across campus. So I think that was a huge selling point. I think also just how hands on really a lot of our majors are. I think our minds instantly jumped to engineering and science because their building's name is literally the Integrated Engineering and Science building, it literally is talking about hands-on learning in the name, but when you look at, like, my biology experience, or you look at, like, pre-vet, they're cutting pig toes day one, like, praise God, I didn't go into that one, that would not have been my forte, but you know, you think about all these majors that we have on campus, music and stuff like that, with the Kix Brooks Music Room, and the things that they get to do hands on, that's one thing I realized about tech, is just how much they take on the application to your learning, and you're not just spending your first year, your first two years saying, what's this music theory, or what's this, you know, let me take all 12 englishes that I need day one, like, hey, let's get to the nitty gritty very early on to see if I like it or not.

### **Gavin Kelly**

Yeah, I think, too, you know, we talked about why tech was was good for you, and I think for some people, you know, you grew up here, so on one side of the coin, it's easy to think, well, tech was always a part of your life and you loved it early on, so it made sense for you to be here and stay here, but I think some people get trapped by that sensation, and they think, well, tech is has been home for

forever, and now that it's time for me to come to college, I want to get away from it, but I think it speaks to tech's strengths that more often than not, you know, you see people who have been rust and lifers who end up here, not because, well, it's close and I'm here, but because, you know it's the place for them to be, and the phrase we get all the time, it feels like home, but I guess if Russ and is your home, then tech is gonna feel like home pretty naturally,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

naturally I think too, like just the way that the community integrates with the campus is something that when I went out, because when you're recruiting, you're spending six months of the year not here, you know, you're I thought the other universities would be like my foe in recruiting, but like most recruiting schools, like based about territory, and so I spent more time with the people who recruited the same territory for the other state schools and things like that, so you get to be pals with them, and you realize very quickly that like Rustin is a college town, and those two shake hands and lock arms and say we're going to be a partner in a lot of things, and that really changes the student experience too.

**Gavin Kelly**

Yeah, let's talk more about where you went after recruiting. I know at one point you were involved with football, was that directly after that, or

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Around the world in 80 days. So I did territory recruiting, I moved to be an admissions specialist, recruiting specifically for engineering and science.

**Gavin Kelly**

So that was that, like coming from a different background,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

very different background. My brother has a civil engineering degree from tech, so like I saw all of these things from like an arms link for a while, and when I got into recruiting for engineering, like, I had to program the robot day one, and, like, not very well, like, we did not have AI either, to just, like, write the code for me, so that was interesting. So I knew enough to be dangerous, and so you start to realize, like, these just kind of, like, I guess, microcultures of campus as well. So that was neat. We actually started in Bogart when I started working for them, and then that was, I think, in the winter, early winter, and then we were moving into the new building that spring, and then we moved into the new building on a Thursday, and that Friday is when Covid happened, so I'm like taking my recruiting camera, like all over the building, like taking pictures of everything, like I don't know what I'm gonna need, but it was a really cool experience, just kind of really getting to see also more of the faculty side of campus, where in admissions it's really student affairs, and so getting to see the faculty side of campus and how that kind of intersects with the students' experience was neat. Then from engineering I went to be the special events and facilities coordinator for the President's office, and got to really just manage some facilities around campus, and help people basically host parties and celebrations, and get-togethers, and weddings, and all sorts of stuff.

**Gavin Kelly**

Why was that a jump that you were encouraged to take? Like, why was that a position shift that you felt like you'd enjoy.

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

I think you're always constantly saying, like, what else could I do? Well, I think a lot of my time as an admissions specialist, like, you're hosting people, right? You're hosting people for campus, you're hosting parents, you're hosting people with high AC T's, trying to kind of, I guess, woo them. Yeah, true. For better terms, I. Um, to get them to come here, and so events is really kind of not that far for me from that, because it's essentially the same thing, whether you're celebrating them graduating from high school and choosing university, or just celebrating union board for their end of the year banquet. Yeah, those were kind of very similar, very people-facing jobs, I think, too. That's something that I love, is just getting to hear people's tech stories, and so think that was kind of just an easy jump for me over to the event side of things. Also, I was just kind of raised like that. My grandmother was a church hostess for many years, made wedding cakes, like, was, you know, like that was her job, and then, like I said, my dad's an RN, but he had a catering business on the side that really started from like tailgating on game days at the Joe, and so I've just kind of grown up around people that love to host and love to have a good time and just celebrate the small things.

**Gavin Kelly**

Yeah, how long were you doing that event coordinating?

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

So I did that for about nine months. Ryan Richard likes to joke and say I'm like his shortest term right before football season, because that was honestly my biggest fear about that job was not getting to watch football games, because I was going to have to be hosting everyone in the deck and I wanted to be watching the game, and so then through that role I got to know Coach Sunny Cumby well because I was over the DAC facilities and the suite facilities, and he called me one day, and he had mentioned a few times about Dad coming to cater for recruits, and so I was like, oh, he's like calling me for Dad's phone number, and had said he offered me a job, and I was like, really at a loss for words, and in that moment I just knew that tech football is like a big part of my story, and why I love tech so much, and so a lot of times with athletics, you know, you really have to be in athletics, and then move from school to school to school, and that's one reason I knew I didn't want to go into athletics from day one, is because Ruston was such a special place to me. I know it'd be really hard to work for, you know, other schools, and that opportunity came up, and I just took it, and that was just a super cool experience. I started as the assistant to the head coach, and then ended as, like, the assistant ad for football administration, but really just working with a team, working with character development, working with their community-facing experiences, like community service, that was just super cool, getting to help those guys understand and realize the Rustin community, the tech community, teaching them the alma mater, teaching them the fight song, like all of those things, that was just a super fun experience,

**Gavin Kelly**

and still getting to tap into, to like, the again, the hosting job, you know, because that's a part of your job, making sure that the facilities are what they need to be, and that the players and the recruits are, see what they need to see, it

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

is, and I think, too, like, so many student athletes come from much farther than right here,

**Gavin Kelly**

yeah,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

you know, they're probably, if you look at the average student versus the student athlete closeness to home, or how far they've traveled, it's definitely a little farther, and so making this place home for them, like it was just for me, was really neat,

**Gavin Kelly**

yeah. You mentioned that, so we, you know, we just had a big graduation, our biggest of the year is always spring, and we published a list of graduates, and you get to the international section, of course. There's, we have a good international student population here, but so many of them that come from, you know, where there's one student from one place, and it's kind of out there in terms of, you know, because we get a lot of students from Nepal, but if you see one person from one country, there's a good chance it's a student athlete, yeah, and they've crossed many waters to be here, so your point is a good one, that making them feel, because you know you understand what tech is and you want it to feel like home to other people, and you spent most of your career doing that, and I think in a way you still do that now in your current job, and is your current job the one that came after football?

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Yes, it is.

**Gavin Kelly**

How'd that come about?

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

So, religious connections. When I was recruiting for engineering and science, I worked under Dr. Heath Thames, and definitely a love-hate relationship. Like, he loves working with me, but I feel like I make his job difficult because I always try to, like, make things bigger, and I'm also his most expensive employee. He likes to save money, and I like to spend it. And when we were back in our recruiting days, it'd be like, oh, like, what if we did this? Oh, what if we did this? And we just, like, always were trying to, like, one up everything that we had previously done. And so that working relationship was just, he was a great mentor to me, and so when he moved into his role as the CEO of the Alumni Association, he knew he was going to need somebody to kind of push the boundaries of what had been done before, and I guess that's why he went for me, and so I knew that. Had at the time when I wrapped up football, I was getting married, and a lot of life changes, and knew I wouldn't be able to work necessarily like 5am to like 10pm every day of my life, and this work was something that I really saw as rewarding, but also getting to kind of like vision cast what this newer office was was very exciting for me. Yes, the Alumni Association has been around for a long time. The Office of University Engagement is newer, which is the other side of our role, but also it was just kind of time for like a

refresh, and you know, like let's get the family back together, and kind of vision casting how we could do that was, I think, kind of where my strengths came in for that role. Yeah,

**Gavin Kelly**

even down to, you know, establishing a base in the Ropp, and you know, being more integrated in the campus than before. And you can tell from day one that there was a new vision and sort of purpose behind the Alumni Association. So that's very obvious. What is your job like now? Like, what's kind of the day to day, and what parts of it, do you enjoy the most?

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Yeah, so it definitely changes a lot, just because we are in a brand new building to us, not new to campus, in fact, that is the oldest building on campus, but new to us, and so just refreshing the space that we're in, but also just coming up with new ideas for events, and also just talking with alumni and seeing where their heart is in the tech community, and what can come of that. One of my first jobs was to meet Mr. Kurt Joyner in Shreveport, and just kind of talk about, he helps with our senior rings and different things, but he's also been kind of a Shreveport staple dog for a long time, and so just grabbing lunch with him and seeing, you know, what are the things that excite people in this area about tech, and one small thing that came out of that conversation was tech entails. You know, he was like, we used to have this awesome event and crawfish and tech family and band and all this stuff, and we're like, well, we've got to get this off the ground.

**Gavin Kelly**

Yeah,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

and so getting that tradition kind of back going, and so seeing where people's hearts are, seeing the small things that we can do in those areas is a large part of like my day to day. So it's never really the same. Also, just programming for current students and helping them realize what alumni life is, because we don't want the first time that they experience us to be when they walk across the graduation stage. Also, I think a huge shock to me was if you Google the word alumni, it doesn't mean just graduates, which I think is a common misconception, but everyone that was a student, a former student of any university, so if you attended tech for a quarter, you qualify as an alumni, and so reaching those different pockets of people, alumni, graduates, our current students, which we refer to as alumni in residence, like that. Yeah, yes, and so just all sorts of different areas of the tech family that touch people, and just helping people know that we care about them, and that we want them to care about us in return,

**Gavin Kelly**

yeah, and kind of full circle too, because I'm sure there's a little bit of crossover between students that you recruited to campus many years ago and students that you now get to reach out to that are alumni, I'm sure there's even some same exact people that you connect with.

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

It was crazy to think, like, when I was recruiting engineering, since I spent four years there, like, at one time, everyone in that building had, like, come through my, my desk, my email, my recruiting text messages, and things like that. One time, when I was recruiting, when you text the kids, they think it's just like an automated message, because you kind of try to make it an automated message, so that you're not like a conversation all day long with them, but I was like texting the student about their, their tour time, and like, hey, confirming you're still coming, and he was like, yeah, I'll be there, booth thing, and I was like, oh my gosh, this is an 18 year old, yeah, and so from there, when he came for his tour, I like, I didn't say a word, and then at the end of the tour, I was like, thanks for coming, Boo Thing, and he was with all of his friends, he was mortified, his parents were cracking up because they had, like, heard about this whole conversation. So fast forward to a few weeks ago, we were, we do the alumni brick orders, and I had this dad call and we were like working on some stuff with his brick and he was like, are you Leslie Brister? and I was like, yes sir. He was like, I didn't realize with your new last name, he said my son was your boot thing and he's graduating. So yes, there are a lot of wild stories, just students that I recruited that now I get to kind of interface with, but it's just really cool because I already know part of their story, so like the conversation has already started with them, and that's really fun.

### **Gavin Kelly**

Yeah, very good. That's yeah, very nice full circle moment. If, if it didn't sound strange out of context, the name of this episode could be Booth, but I. Think, I think that might sound a little strange out of context.

### **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Absolutely,

### **Gavin Kelly**

it's easy talking to you to see that over the course of your time at Tech as a student and the jobs you've had since, in the job you're in now, that you have maintained kind of your core personality and identity, and like wanting to play to your strengths in your job and being a people person, like you said, but I'm sure Leslie now is different from Leslie 10 years ago, so let's do the reflecting part of the podcast and tell me about kind of how you think you've changed or grown since your time as a student to now,

### **Leslie Brister Carpenter**

like you said, I think there's a lot of things that are still the same, I look back, and, like, new union board was one of my favorite organizations, because it was events, and it was coordinating with students, and so, obviously, things like that are very much the same. I think, looking back, my biggest strides have really been more in, like, the professional sense of just having really awesome bosses that have helped cultivate me into a great leader, starting in admissions to being under, you know, Heath and engineering to Ron Richard to Sunny, just having people to pour into you and just really mentor you and be like, hey, like maybe let's step back and look at this full picture, because being in events you can definitely get caught in the details sometimes, so that's probably a big change. Also, just kind of like the giving back, realizing I think as a young student you're like, I've given so much to tech, I've spent so many hours here, paid so much money, or things like that, and so finding ways now that I can give back and be more outward focused with my tech experience.

**Gavin Kelly**

Yeah, I think, too, like you said, the core of what you do and who you are and how you see yourself has not changed. And I bet if you would have had to predict then the type of work you'd be doing now, you probably could have done it, because, but of course, you might have suspected you'd be working in biology somehow. Yeah, definitely.

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Yeah, I definitely thought I was gonna be in med school and a doctor right now. So

**Gavin Kelly**

things work out the way they're supposed to, right?

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Absolutely.

**Gavin Kelly**

Well, thank you for that insight. Thanks for sharing a little bit about your journey, about your job, jobs plural. Again, you're not planning on scooting out of the alumni association, not anytime soon. Well, thanks again for sharing, and have fun on the road this summer. Thanks. How many of the your tech, your town limits, are you gonna get to go to? Are you planning on all of them? Most of them, some of them,

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

all nine. Okay, there's one that I may have to miss for just like random things, but should be at all nine.

**Gavin Kelly**

Okay, well, have fun with that. And thanks for joining us today. And go dogs.

**Leslie Brister Carpenter**

Absolutely, go dogs.

**Gavin Kelly**

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