

BECKWITH News

A Newsletter of Beckwith Residential Support Services

Fall 2016



A Community Like No Other

by Susann Sears, M.Ed., Acting Director



In reflecting on the events of this past year, there were a wide range of experiences that we encountered as a community. The expression “Don’t worry, we’ve got this,” was ever-present and foreshadowed the community’s resilience. Even when faced with some particularly challenging circumstances, our contributors reflected on how their experiences were representative of this sentiment, which highlights why the Beckwith Residential Support Services (BRSS) community is one of the most outstanding on campus. Enjoy!

- We welcomed nine ambitious first year residents from California, Alabama, Tennessee, Maryland, and Illinois!
- DRES introduced the Department of Education’s 6th Annual Back-to-School Bus Tour to our students. Meridith Bradford, Kushal Parikh and Alexis Wernsing were selected to share their experiences and vision on the student panel. Assistant Secretary Michael Yudin joined members of our community at Ikenberry Commons for lunch and a tour of BRSS.
- The BRSS community was integral in the planning of the 5th Annual Disability Awareness Program in November. Our Keynote Speaker, Corey Hyslop (’10 ACES; ’12 LER) shared his experiences at Illinois, Beckwith and professionally with Northrop Grumman.
- The Career Center sponsored the inaugural DRES Employer Networking Event in April. Eight residents participated hoping that eventually internship and employment offers will transpire.
- Beckwith was honored by Colonel Bart Welker, (father of first-year resident, Jennifer Welker) from the Illinois Air National Guard as he presented a Block “I” Flag from the Ohio State game’s C-130 flyover of Memorial Stadium.
- Nine residents received awards at the Annual DRES Awards Ceremony.
- Residents and staff were honored by campus or their peers for their commitment and excellence in their positions and roles in making BRSS a great place:
 - Annalea Forrest was awarded Honorable Mention for the “Student Employee of the Year” Award.
 - Associate Director, Katherine Johnson, received the College of Applied Health Sciences Academic Professional Excellence Award.
 - At the Semi-Formal Masquerade Ball, Superfluous Awards celebrated the unique contributions of our community’s members. Approximately 60 current and past residents, friends, PAs, and Nugent Hall paraprofessionals enjoyed the collaborative event.

Aside from the community’s multitude of accomplishments, we also experienced a tremendous amount of loss. Alexis Wernsing unexpectedly passed away October 2nd. “Don’t worry, we’ve got this,” was her mantra, lifelong daily devotion, and her vision for all of us. Former residents Amber Buckley-Shaklee, Muffi Lavigne, and John McHugh also passed away unexpectedly, as did Dr. Timothy Nugent, the founder of DRES. As a WWII veteran, Dr. Nugent fought for disabled veterans gaining access to a college education. It is ironic that he passed away on Veteran’s Day.

In closing, I would like to THANK our Beckwith community members: Katherine, Paige, Rachel, and each resident and PA. Congratulations to Alexis, Kushal, Kyle, Mark, and RaeAnne for graduating. Best wishes to David as he completes his internship, Aaron, Natalie, and Mark as they transition to other residence halls, and to Drew, Mike, and Maddi as they transition into apartments. Please stay in touch!



A Beautiful Community

by Patricia B. Malik, Ph.D., Director of DRES

As I reflect upon the theme of this year's newsletter, "Don't worry, we've got this" I cannot help but smile because often that is the farthest thought from the mind of a first year Beckwith resident and/or their family as they settle into their room in Nugent Hall the week before classes begin. Often they are thinking, "How is this all going to work?" "Am I ready for this?" "What happens if . . . ?" What can be gleaned from the articles shared within this newsletter is that Beckwith residents, first years as well as more seasoned, do figure out how things work and learn so much with the right supports from our world renowned program. Additionally, they also excel, grow, and become more independent believing that "I've Got This!"

Some of our residents challenged their families by moving out of state to attend the University of Illinois and others are planning on moving into their own apartments in the upcoming year. There was a record number of Beckwith residents who received DRES scholarships and awards this past spring. Additionally, four residents did either a study abroad or domestic study program, and two of them are in their first year. It is so exciting for all of us to celebrate their diverse accomplishments! What our Beckwith residents, families and staff sometimes forget is that they are part of something bigger, each building on a quest beginning in 1948 of Dr. Tim Nugent. Although Dr. Nugent passed away last November, as I reflect back on his legacy, I can't help but smile. Because of his spirit embracing "we've got this," especially during the early years, he overcame the obstacles placed before him.

Tim has been sorely missed. He always challenged us to believe that "we've got this" with his famous statement, "The presence of a problem is the absence of an idea." He was always looking for an idea to address a problem. You will find emeritus director Brad Hedrick's important retrospective of Tim's impact on the university and the world. The Beckwith community endured other losses this year as members unfortunately passed away at young ages. Each embodied an attitude of "we've got this," accomplishing so much during their lifetime. The article "Alumni Snapshots" honors these individuals.

In closing, many of our Beckwith residents and alumni are faced with circumstances and people who tell them what they can't or shouldn't do. I am quite fond of the following quote, from an unknown source, that states, "When the world says, 'Give up' Hope whispers, 'try it one more time.'" Each Beckwith community member past, present, (and future), must continue to not listen to the world and pay close attention to what "Hope whispers," in other words — You've got this!

Pat Malik and Tim Nugent. The Big Ten Network recently produced a documentary on Tim called "The Game Changer." You can view it on the University's YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/user/Illinois1867



Sharing Their Beckwith Experience

by Amelia and Catherine O'Hare

My Amazing First Year at Illinois

by Amelia O'Hare

From my first campus tour Fall 2012 and meetings with Susann, Paige, Pat and Katherine, I was convinced that this was where I wanted to be. Being four states away added to the allure and excitement of this adventure with the wanderlust gene raging in my DNA. I didn't know how I was going to get in or even pay for it, but I knew deep down that Illinois would be part of my journey and the gateway to my future. When things are meant to be and you want them badly enough, everything seems to fall into place as doors swing wide open in a divine and miraculous kind of way. It's funny though, how painfully slow time passed until I was finally accepted, completed orientation, and Paige's intense summer homework began. Now looking back at my first year at Illinois, living on my own within the Beckwith community flew by and was amazing!

My year included interviewing and hiring a bunch of strangers — fellow college students (who have since become my BFFs) to help me with very personal things. Some awkward moments at first navigating new relationships, training and gaining mutual confidence. Our unspoken mantra was similar to the theme "we've got this!" Hint: My advice for future students is to NOT procrastinate on summer hiring. Just dig in and get it done. Arriving with your shifts filled makes your transition so much easier!

I craved independence for years growing up in a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. Pursuing a degree in Urban Planning and Design was motivated by my community not being pedestrian friendly or accessible with sidewalks going nowhere, and most homes being inaccessible. The thrill and immense freedom of venturing around campus alone, exploring new places, taking public transportation with another new student for the first time is indescribable!

Free time? I receive a gazillion emails for joining service or social organizations, including leadership opportunities. I joined Beckwith's Director's Student Advisory Committee and ushered at the Krannert Center for Performing Arts. Hint: A great way to see free performances. I also joined some social and networking student organizations in my major. I realized quickly that although Beckwith embodies advocating for accessibility and inclusion, attitudinal barriers still exist on campus. I have learned over time to have my voice heard when social justice is challenged, which leads to great career building experiences. I proposed adding and serving as the Urban Planning Network's diversity officer improving program access, accepted an invitation serving on a committee redesigning Temple Buell Hall's Atrium space, and a professor asked my input toward improving Champaign City Hall's accessibility.

These experiences sharpened my group skills, and educating others on the unique needs of our community and inclusivity were rewarding. I was pulled out of my "solo act" tendency for achieving goals after experiencing greater productivity uniting with others sharing the same perspective.

I am honored and humbled to receive the Matthew A. Odelius Award celebrating the accomplishments of a former Beckwith resident by recognizing a fellow resident demonstrating leadership in student organizations while balancing academics and other commitments. I seek to smooth the path for those after me, just as those before me, like Dr. Nugent, Matthew and many others. The path is unending, always needing leaders to clear a piece of it. We are linked together as we do this work as a strong chain. And with our connections, friendships, brilliant faculty mentors, PAs and the entire Beckwith community, we can courageously say, "We've got this!"

Those Magic Words

by Catherine O'Hare

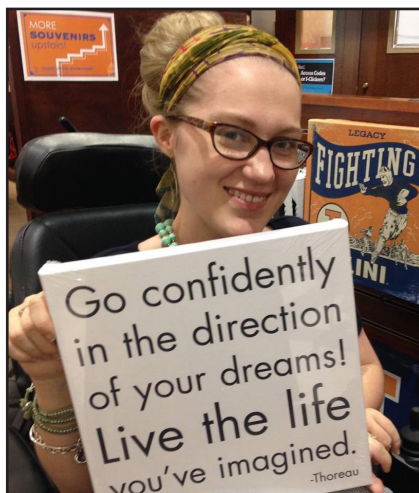
“Okay Mom, you can go now. I've got this,” captioned the last photo I took of Amelia as I drove away, leaving my first child in a strange place, with no friends and the nearest family members four states and almost 600 miles away. As I pondered the *Beckwith News* theme, “Don't worry, we've got this,” I found it serendipitous and suiting that Amelia and I adopted this expression to assure each other that we will succeed and overcome whatever challenges we face. This comforting expression is almost always all that it takes to overcome any self-doubt.

Last June Susann asked me, “What about you, what will you do?” I was focused on Amelia's transition and had tucked this unanswered question away. Though it reemerged smacking me in the face after Amelia's sudden physical absence from my daily routine. I had to take time to grieve, and process this void as any mom would sending their first child to college. However, my loss felt deeper. The caregiver connection immersed me in aspects of her life foreign to most parents. I knew everything about her, her social life, and her health and well-being guiding her emotions.

I became the obnoxious mom! Calling too much, prying or asking silly questions seeking normalcy. I still miss our morning coffee chats bouncing ideas and dreams off of each other. Amelia generously indulged me with FaceTime coffee chats until eventually weaning me, like a mother bird until I could fly on my own. At one point in sensing my profound loss, she comforted me once again with, “Hey mom, you've got this.” Those are magic words.

We presented Paige with many questions, fears and potential hurdles for the last few years potentially inhibiting Amelia from attending Illinois. Throughout, Paige and Susann patiently listened, advised and encouraged us with sentiments of, ‘Hey, don't worry, we've got this!’ I embraced this early and have never doubted it as being factual. Amelia's transition to Illinois and Beckwith has been incredibly smooth. Having critical supports in place, and a strong internal compass, she could finally spread her wings and take flight.

A perfect sentiment to hang in my room.



Catherine and Amelia enjoying another adventure.



The Legacy of Tim Nugent

by Brad Hedrick, Ph.D.
Director Emeritus



As Director Emeritus of the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES), I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of the new and returning students to Beckwith Residential Support Services (BRSS) and Nugent Hall. In combination, DRES and BRSS are uniquely empowering programs and facilities that owe their existence to the vision, leadership and distinguished career of Timothy J. Nugent, a pioneer in both the fields of rehabilitation and education who helped to change forever the paradigm of disability.

In the late 1940's the worldview of disability focused on the biological loss of function attributable to injury and illness and saw "a glass half empty." However, in complete opposition to this dominant view of his day, when Tim Nugent looked upon an individual with a severe physical disability he saw, quite remarkably, "a glass half-full." Where others saw hopeless paralytics, incapable of independence, self-reliance and career success, Tim saw bright, capable young people with yet untapped potential. Rather than dwell upon what they had lost and deem them hopeless, he focused on the abilities that remained, and developed innovative programs and services, like Beckwith Hall, the forerunner to BRSS, to help them maximize the use of their intellect and their residual physical abilities.

Tim understood that disability did not result solely from the presence of an impairment, but rather, that it was a dynamic and, most importantly, alterable result of the interaction of one's abilities and the presence or absence of environmental and interrelated facilitators or barriers. In Tim's view, the problem of riding a bus wasn't that persons who used wheelchairs couldn't climb stairs, but that the bus did not have a lift, so he built the first wheelchair accessible bus. The problem of students enrolling at Illinois and attending classes wasn't that persons in wheelchairs were too fragile or intellectually incapable of pursuing a rigorous education, but that the buildings needed ramps for the students to enter, so he built ramps and went on to develop the first federal architectural accessibility standards. In Tim's view, persons with disabilities requiring personal assistant support services were fully capable of managing the intellectual rigor of a college degree, but no one had thought to afford them the supports required to effectively address their activities of daily living (ADL) needs. As a result, in 1959 Illinois became the first university to enroll students with disabilities requiring ADL assistance.

Indeed, today, wherever we see the blue and white international symbol of accessibility, we see the fingerprint of Illinois and the legacy of Tim Nugent. We are all indebted to Tim and his remarkable vision. Those of us who have disabilities have been able to more vigorously pursue our potential as a result of his leadership and accomplishments. And those who have not yet experienced disability will, as a result of Tim's vision and achievements, have more positive perceptions of what disability means and doesn't mean, and how it may or may not impact their lives in the future.

Tim Nugent passed away in November 2015. As the Americans with Disabilities Act progresses into the next 25 years and as Beckwith opens for the first time without him, we should all take a moment to celebrate Tim's distinguished career of service and achievement that made BRSS and so much more possible. Then, we must affirm our commitment individually and collectively to keeping his legacy alive by working to expand access and societal participation for those who remain on the periphery as a result of constraining societal attitudes, policies and practices related to disability.



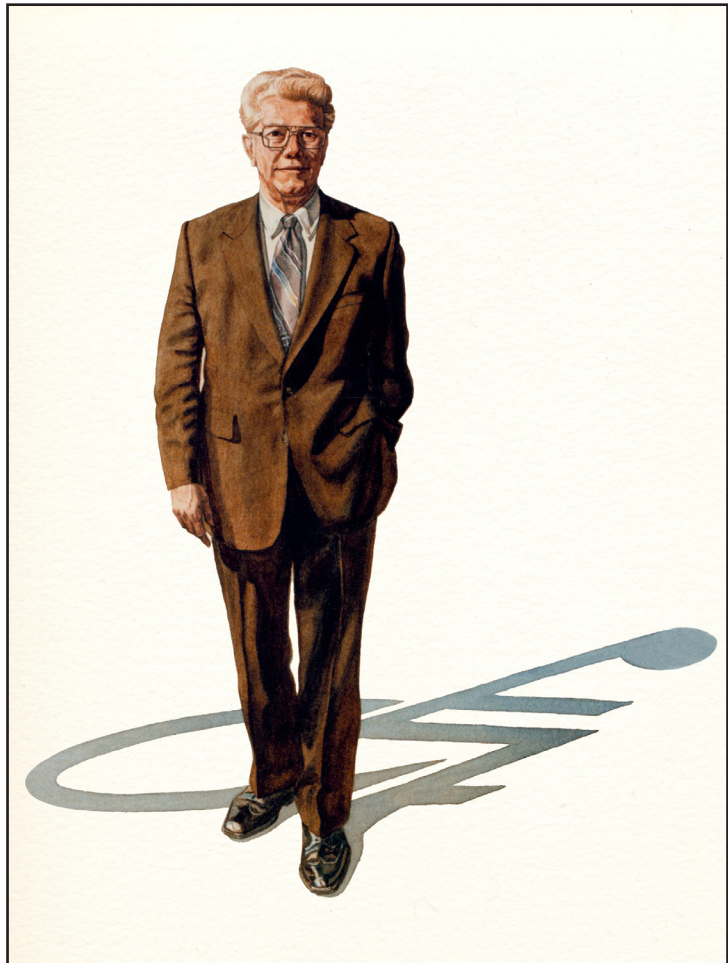
Riding a scooter around his neighborhood at age 77!



With Champaign mayor Jerry Schweighart at the ceremony for Honorary Tim Nugent Way.



Dedication of Beckwith Hall in 1982 featuring the first class of residents.



Brad Hedrick and Tim Nugent at the DRES 50th anniversary celebration.

With John Burton and Dean Tanya Gallagher at the Nugent Hall Dedication ceremony in 2010.



Receiving an Honorary Doctorate from UI President Robert Easter in 2015.

A Year at Beckwith...



Enjoying the Beckwith bonfire at the Champaign Park District's Kaufman Lake.



Friendsgiving...A time to gather and be thankful for our community.



A motley crew: Kyle, Anuar, Luis, Y.J., and Henry.



Panelists with former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.



Natalie and Chelsey creating tie-dyed masterpieces.



Mer and Jordan enjoying the perks as members of the newly accessible Orange Krush student section.



Colonel Welker and Jennifer presenting the Block I flag from flyover to the community.



Mer on a zipline as part of RST 199's Hall of Fame Tour with Dr. Michael Raycraft.



First-year students Selina and Jennifer enjoying Quad Day.



Student panelists responding to the audience's questions at this year's Disability Awareness Program.



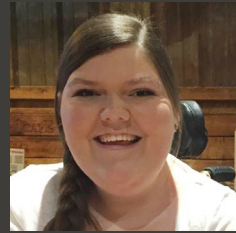
First year residents, mentors, live-in PAs, resident advisor, intern, and disability advocates.



Enjoying a beautiful day.

My “Great Perhaps”

by Chelsey Baker



I can't even begin to put into words how thankful I am to have been chosen to receive the David S. Mundy Award. This award is given to a student in pursuit of achieving independence. Because of Beckwith, independence is now something attainable to me. It wasn't always easy, but I've learned to live by the words "Don't worry, we've got this." I use "we" because it's a team effort. I wouldn't be who I am without my fellow Beckwith residents, PAs, and administration.

I've always had really big dreams, and unfortunately I let most of these go because of my disability. University of Illinois was my back-up plan. I applied just before the deadline because I had absolutely no intention of leaving Tennessee. To this day, I can't explain my decision to come here. I'm not sure why I



Happiness is...celebrating an unforgettable year!

decided to turn my life upside down (in the best way, of course). People in my town doubted me, and over winter break asked if I was going back. My own family, with the exception of my mom, thought I would chicken out. To anyone with doubts, we say, "Don't worry, we've got this." In the final days before moving in, I was stressed. I had to finalize everything with my PAs, worry about how my first shift would go, worry about my classes,

and more importantly, worry about how all of my clothes and makeup were going to fit in my room. I had to stop and tell myself, "Don't worry, we've got this." I've had so much support through this journey, and I appreciate everyone helping me be worry-free.

My high school senior quote came from my favorite author, John Green. In one of his novels, he says, "That's why I'm going. So I don't have to wait until I die to start seeking a Great Perhaps." I chose this because I needed people to understand that I was leaving to find better things. I've been able to reach such important milestones with my independence through this adventure.

Thank you, Beckwith, for being my "Great Perhaps."



A No Brainer

by Maddi Stark

With my last semester of college approaching this fall, I can't help but look back at all of the memories being a Beckwith resident has brought me. From being a nervous freshman, to becoming a mentor, and finally transitioning out of Beckwith, I can see how much I've grown.

When deciding which college to attend I had two choices; the U of I, which was three hours away from my parents and required me to take on a lot of responsibility, or a local college close to my home. It was really a no brainer in my opinion because the U of I could offer me so much more independence and help me figure out how I might be able to someday live and work on my own.

Living in Beckwith has been a great opportunity for me to “get my feet wet” with my newfound independence. It has allowed me to get to know many amazing people, learn how to manage the many different aspects of my life, and help others do the same. This experience also motivated me to tackle my next obstacle, transitioning out of Beckwith.

When I first pitched the idea to my parents they were hesitant. I don't think they were ready for me to leave the safety of what Beckwith has to offer; their main concern being access to PA support 24/7. However, I assured them that “I had this” and I knew what it would take for me to live in an apartment. After lots of explaining about what my plan was and how I was going to accomplish everything, they relaxed a little; but I think they are still a little wary.

Besides preparing for my last semester of undergrad, I am also preparing to move into my first apartment with two of my friends. The process was long and hard, and not without a few bumps as we learned how the Fair Housing Act applied to new construction and advocated for compliance to meet our needs. In the end, I feel that it was completely worth it. I'm extremely excited to be living with my friends and starting this adventure with them because, “We've got this!”

Living in Beckwith has allowed me to get to know many amazing people, learn how to manage the many different aspects of my life, and help others do the same.



Maddi, front and center, at the annual skate party at the Ice Arena.

A New Perspective

by Hannah Skrabacz
Disability Advocate (DA)



Three years ago, I was lucky enough to be offered a random job working as a personal assistant in the Beckwith community for Alexis Wernsing. I was oblivious at that time how much that job would alter my life, even today. Instantaneously, Alexis became one of my closest friends and someone I could look up to for advice.

After two years, I looked forward coming to work every day. I spent about fifteen hours a week at Nugent with Alexis, chatting about life or attempting to get homework done together. Events such as the Disability Awareness Program, which Alexis was quite invested in, gave me the opportunity to learn so much about the students. Prior to Alexis, I had never worked with a student with a disability. I valued getting to know her friends. I gained a whole new level of respect and understanding toward the dynamic students brought together by BRSS. Unfortunately, in October 2015, our community lost Alexis unexpectedly.

Alexis was easy going and a great employer. She was revered by her community, many considering her inspirational like I did. So, losing Alexis was one of the most difficult challenges that I, as well as so many others, have ever faced. Being unemployed did not even cross my mind. Alexis never let her disability define nor limit her. She adopted the saying, “we got this” from a former professor. She even had a very pretty paperweight on her desk having “WGT” written in big white letters. Any time she or anyone else close to her, faced any challenges in school or life in general, Alexis was always able to put things into perspective and approach it with the “we got this” mentality.

I am so thankful for the time I had with Alexis. I believe her unyielding optimism regarding life was contagious. Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act gives cause to celebrate Dr. Nugent, Alexis and others within the community or elsewhere living their lives, achieving their vision and using their voice until others also realize “we’ve got this” and join in.



Alexis celebrating her 40th birthday with her PAs.



Alexis was a true St. Louis Blues fan, and always wanted to touch the Stanley Cup. When the Chicago Blackhawks won the Cup in 2015, Mer had an opportunity to touch it in her honor.



Alumni Snapshots

by Paige Lewis

A constant concern of individuals with disabilities, especially if they rely on personal assistant (PA) care, is finding viable staff, accessible housing, and employment. A group, primarily Beckwith alumni, including Esther Lee ('05 English); Carmen Sutherland ('07 Community Health/Rehabilitation Studies, '10 Rehabilitation Counseling); Costa Nikolaides ('08 Psychology and Philosophy); Jonathan Ko ('07 JD); and Michele Lynch ('08 Library and Information Science) are in the midst of incorporating as a 501(c)(3) organization called Able Community. Their mission statement is “redefining independence through self-directed personal care, employment, and community by building affordable co-housing for people with and without disabilities to create an alternative to living in nursing homes and having to depend on family for care.” Their vision encompasses a model for PA care similar to the Beckwith Live-in PA Program. Visit www.ablecommunitychicago.org for more information, to get involved or lend support.

Northrop Grumman is the fifth-largest defense contractor in the world embracing diversity and inclusion as one of their CEO's top five goals. Corey Hyslop ('10 ACES, '12 LER) appreciated that he was hired for his abilities, not appearance. In speaking so highly of Beckwith, DRES and Illinois regarding these shared values, Northrop Grumman funded the Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education's computer lab. Corey and Sandra Evers-Manly, Vice President, Global Corporate Responsibility, visited campus in October so she could begin to understand this culture herself. She was impressed and supports expanding this relationship in the future. Because of Corey's desire to “pay it forward” he has laid the foundation for many others to benefit.



Corey Hyslop with Sandra Evers-Manly from Northrup Grumman.

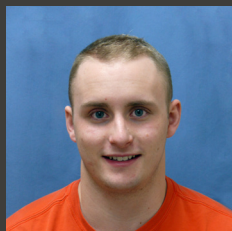
In Memorium

We celebrate Amber Buckley-Shaklee's ('06 Sociology), and a doctoral student in sociology pursuit of social justice, being a sports fanatic and her dreams. We cherish Margaret (Muffi) Lavigne Plum's positive attitude, empathy, and artistic talent. We admire John McHugh's ('05 agricultural communications) humor and his effort promoting Muscular Dystrophy awareness. These individuals embodied the essence of “Don't worry, we've got this!”



A Unique Experience

by Patrick Tomic



“Don’t worry, we’ve got this!” This saying and overall view, is a great way to celebrate and express how the 2015-16 year went. So many memories, laughs, and times of reflection occurred. From celebrating the start of the school year with the new first-year residents, to celebrating and reflecting on the lives of Tim Nugent and Alexis Wernsing, and to my own professional development. I was blessed to be among each of these precious moments, remembered for their impact personally and upon the community.

I’m grateful for my role and overall experience within BRSS throughout my community health internship in the fall, and independent study in the spring. My fondest memories were being able to observe and offer helpful feedback to students as well as the BRSS administration. I was able to use my experience to support first-year residents in acclimating to the University, or just listen when they were worried or stressed. I also had the unique experience helping their parents adjust to their children moving on and becoming more independent. Similarly, I benefited from BRSS administration/students supporting me as I navigated the many facets of my internship. We all grew together through this community to make these transitions as easy as possible.

Moving forward from the framework placed last fall semester, this spring I saw continued growth in the Beckwith community and myself. The first-year students continued to become acclimated and challenged themselves as did the rest of the community as they prepared for the next wave of their life. I learned extensively about the many facets of occupational therapy from Rachel Graddy, OTD, OTR/L and have a stronger conviction more than ever that I can do it. I couldn’t honestly have said that a year ago.

We will take what we have learned from the lives of Timothy Nugent and Alexis Wernsing and use it to make positive outcomes. And by growing and using what we have learned from our experiences, the theme, “Don’t worry, we’ve got this!” will further help many individuals for years to come. Thank you Beckwith for welcoming me into your community. I look forward to seeing how everyone grows in their abilities in the future.



Patrick sinks a shot from the top of the key! He had a great cheering section.



The Smallest Things Count

by Prince Robertson, Nugent Hall Resident Director

Serving as Nugent Hall's Resident Director for nearly two years (2014-2016) was life changing. Not only did I support Beckwith's program influencing student development and mentoring, but I was also immersed in this community by being humbled in unimaginable ways. I took pride in the role Beckwith afforded me and I will forever be grateful.

Creativity and innovation was key to my success and connection within Beckwith's community, and Nugent Hall as a whole. I learned that simply walking down the hall and saying "Hello", "Hi", or "How's your day?" was more influential than one thinks. It's the smallest thing that counts.

I made an effort at least once a week to join the BRSS students in the dining hall for lunch. It gave me an opportunity to know students on a personal level, fostering more comfortable dialogue. Again, it's the smallest thing that counts. These small gestures were milestones to me. I now have friends for years to come who reside in BRSS as opposed to considering them as "just students who I served."

I embrace several memories as part of the BRSS community; some epic, some sad. Mingling with residents at my signature pancake programs and video game nights were awesome. But, here are the most intimate encounters that impacted me most. I was always touched when a BRSS resident would bring cookies for my family and me, or stop by my office to chat and check on my wellbeing. As I was transitioning to another position on campus, a BRSS resident came to my office to thank me for a job well done. I recognized that all my effort wasn't in vain; this served as verification that my work had been fulfilled.

BRSS, thank you for accepting me not only as your Resident Director, but as a friend. You have helped me gain perspective and belief throughout this transition of my life, personally and professionally. Thank you for welcoming my family (Mallory, Jeremiah, and Isaiah) into your circle. We wish you nothing but the best in the future.



Prince with his family.



Meeting of the minds; chess match in the lounge.

Beckwith Residential Support Services
Timothy J. Nugent Hall
207 East Gregory Drive, MC-540
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
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Champaign, IL 61820

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