



'Developing scholars and leaders'

SSCC honor society finds success amid challenges

When the first Covid-19 cases began to appear in Ohio in March 2020, Susan Morris had a choice to make: Let the pandemic choke the life out of Southern State Community College's small Phi Theta Kappa chapter for which she was the advisor, or let it be an opportunity to make something bigger and better.

Morris and a handful of dedicated SSCC students made the latter choice, and as a result, SSCC's PTK chapter boasts a bevy of awards and honors and is poised to accept a record number of students.

Morris said she came aboard as the PTK advisor in 2018 and refocused the chapter's goal: In Morris's words, "Developing scholars and leaders."

But when the pandemic reared its head in winter 2020, the chapter had to completely rethink its strategy. Two of the chapter's three officers left, leaving only one student — Morris's son, Brock, the chapter's leadership VP.

"It was tough," said Brock Morris. "In the beginning, it was just the two of us. A lot of people had left because of COVID and a lot of classes and events were going online, so to retain in-person contact with people was really tough."

Still, Brock and Susan Morris wanted to help SSCC weather what may have been its darkest hour.

"When we had to approach the administration on what they needed, it was pretty obvious," he said. "We knew the problem we had to solve."

With Brock Morris as the sole member and president of the chapter, the Health Ambassador program was born. Over the following months, Alyssa Mays, Elizabeth Neal and Savannah Frost — all new PTK members — donned branded T-shirts and masks and helped SSCC's campuses maintain COVID-19 guidelines such as mask wearing, temperature screening and sanitization.

"That very idea was probably the catalyst for how we progressed and began projects and research," Susan Morris said. "That's when we realized we were one step away from becoming a five-star chapter."

In order to achieve five-star status, the chapter had to complete a research project. Alyssa Mays, the new Vice President of service, conducted research on why many people were resistant to the idea of wearing masks in public. As part of the project, Mays made cloth masks and gave them to a local orphanage with COVID-19 education. The project ended up winning runner-up for the Honors in Action Project Awards.

"Everyone would have been OK with us doing nothing during a pandemic," Susan Morris said. "It could have died. But we continued to work."

The chapter went on to gather new members and win a laundry list of awards, including the Ohio Region Shining Star Award, Ohio Region's Best College Project, PTK International Top 50 Best College Project, Ohio Region and Western District Most Distinguished Chapter and PTK International Top 20 of 100 Most Distinguished Chapters. SSCC President Dr. Kevin Boys was awarded the Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction for his support of the chapter.

"People look at successful people and they see a magic bullet," Susan Morris said. "But this was actually a three-year process. It's never overnight. There has to be hard work."

The chapter is now poised to accept a record number of members under the leadership of Savannah Frost and Elizabeth Neal.

Susan Morris said Brock Morris' story is a good example of how PTK can help with scholastic and professional development. Due to the pandemic, Brock Morris deferred his direct admission to Miami University's Farmer School of Business and instead completed the Ohio Transfer Module for Business at Southern State Community College. During his PTK experience, he was named to the All-Ohio Academic Team as the Ohio Region Buckeye Scholar and a 2020 Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholar. He also received scholarships totaling \$1,750. After completing his associates degree at SSCC, he received a PTK transfer scholarship, entered Miami University in the Fall of 2022 as a junior, and is enjoying success in the Farmer School of Business.

Likewise, Alyssa Mays, a CCP student and a senior at North Adams High School, was selected as a 2021 Coca-Cola All-USA Academic Team Silver Scholar, named first team All-Ohio Academic and received scholarships totaling \$2,250. Mays completed her associates of science degree as a CCP student and transferred to Marietta College on a full-ride scholarship as a Charles Sumner Harrison Scholar.

Morris said she was "thankful and blessed" to be involved in the chapter and help it achieve its goals. "The decisions you make, even as small as they may seem, move the needle one more little bit toward the vision you have."

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