



**Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson**  
Office of Communications

**2024 STATE OF THE STATE SPECIAL GUESTS**

During the 2024 State of the State Address, Governor Mike Parson recognized a group of special guests for their achievements and commitment to the people of Missouri. Photos of special guests can be found on [Flickr](#).

**Education**

**Jobs for America's Graduates – Missouri (JAG-Missouri)**

*Governor Parson recognized one student, three graduates, and two specialists from the JAG-Missouri program, a state affiliate of the national non-profit organization JAG. As a result of his commitment to the future of these young people, Governor Parson was unanimously elected to join JAG's National Board of Directors in August 2018, having previously been named JAG-Missouri's Co-Chair with First Lady Teresa Parson in April 2017.*

The goal of JAG-Missouri is to help students recognize and unleash their potential by ensuring they graduate from high school and are ready to move into college, military service, or a career.

**JAG-Neelyville Student Dominik Burns**

Dominik Burns has been involved in JAG-Missouri at Neelyville High School since the program began three years ago. His reasons for participating include having a better understanding of what jobs he may wish to pursue and becoming familiar with the job interview process.

**JAG-Van Buren Graduate Dylan Reed**

Dylan Reed is a 2023 graduate of JAG-Missouri at Van Buren High School who was involved in the program for four years. Not sure of what he wanted to do after high school, Dylan set his goals while in JAG of earning an associate degree and becoming an electrician.

**JAG-Stockton Graduate Mitchell Gant**

Mitchell Gant, a 2023 graduate of JAG-Missouri at Stockton High School, has completed the Fire Academy and is a Park Ranger with the United States Army Corps of Engineers. His goal is to earn

certifications in Hazardous Material Awareness and Operations, Firefighting I and II, and Emergency Medical Technician Basic.

### **JAG-Aurora Graduate Yajaris Guzman**

Yajaris Guzman graduated from JAG-Missouri at Aurora High School in 2023. During his two-and-a-half-year involvement in the program, Yajaris realized that he was getting the right tools he needed to explore the world of culinary arts. Currently, Yajaris works at the 19<sup>th</sup> Grille at Millwood Golf and Racquet Club in Springfield.

### **JAG-West Plains Specialist “Mama Joan” Priggel Dietrich**

“Mama Joan” Dietrich has been a JAG Specialist at West Plains High School since 2016. Having watched so many of her classmates and friends in New Madrid County leave high school without a diploma, “Mama Joan” knew that she wanted to be a part of empowering each student to reach their potential and gain the confidence and skills to find a career. She has seen many of her students choose a military career, attend a trade school, or pursue a college degree. The statewide administrators for JAG-Missouri say that when someone wants to start a new JAG-Missouri chapter at their school, they always refer them to “Mama Joan” for best practices.

### **JAG-Neelyville Specialist Shannon Davis**

Shannon Davis has participated in the JAG-Missouri program at Neelyville High School since it began in August 2021. She has never believed in or felt as strongly about an educational program as she does JAG-Missouri and believes that it is something that her district has needed for many years. Shannon’s wish is to spend the remainder of her years in education with JAG-Missouri and continue to develop thriving, productive students through her commitment.

## **Child Care**

*Governor Parson recognized three Missourians involved in the Mineral Area College (MAC) Early Learning Academy program. Realizing that business leaders estimate that lack of these programs is costing the state \$1 billion annually, Governor Parson realizes that it is time for a change, and has proposed new child care tax credit programs to help improve access and affordability for all Missouri families.*

### **Mineral Area College Early Learning Academy Program Director Jennifer Sikes**

Having been a professor of early education for 10 years and a state-certified educator, administrator, and behavior interventionist for over 27 years, Jennifer Sikes realized in 2019 that Mineral Area College in Park Hills needed a lab school that could be utilized by the college’s Allied Health and Social Service, Child Development, and Education programs for practicum hours. The Early Learning Academy, which Jennifer calls her “labor of love,” has used its grant money to open a high-quality preschool centered on

the philosophy of teaching and learning through a play-based curriculum that includes STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), nature, a children's garden to promote food sustainability, and a reduce/reuse/recycle program. Coincidentally, Governor Parson's 2024 State of the State Address was delivered on the one-year anniversary of the Mineral Area College Early Learning Academy.

### **Mineral Area College Nursing Student Katherine Godier**

Since August 2023, Katherine Godier has been utilizing the state's child care assistance as part of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's subsidy program to provide her son Theodore with the best possible education and care at Mineral Area College Early Learning Academy while she pursues a degree in nursing at the college. Upon touring the Mineral Area College child care facilities for the first time, Katherine fell in love with the phenomenal program it offered as well as the staff who her son regards as family. Katherine's goal is for Theodore to be ready for kindergarten by the time she gets her nursing degree.

### **Mineral Area College Early Learning Academy Student Theodore (Theo) Godier**

Three-year-old Theo Godier has been attending Mineral Area College Early Learning Academy while his mother, Katherine, attends the college as a nursing student.

## **Apprenticeships**

*Governor Parson recognized five individuals involved in various apprenticeship programs throughout the State of Missouri. During his administration, more than 57,000 new apprenticeships have been added, and yearly apprenticeship activity has grown by 100 percent. As a result, Missouri is now ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the United States for apprenticeships. Targeted investments to support even more youth apprenticeship opportunities are truly making a difference in the lives of Missourians.*

### **Four Rivers Career Center Director Philip King**

Originally an engineering teacher for the School District of Washington in Washington, Missouri, Philip King became the Director of the Four Rivers Career Center two years ago. He knows firsthand that the program gives the students a taste of the real world by giving them the opportunity to work with professionals. Philip also realizes that the apprenticeship program benefits local businesses by allowing them to train students that may become fulltime employees. His goal is to keep growing the program to include businesses from the entire Four Rivers Career Center footprint.

### **Four Rivers Career Center Student Isaac Lough**

Having participated in the Engineering Program at Four Rivers Career Center for one-and-a-half years, Isaac Lough developed in his first year an atmospheric water generator that uses a desiccant to capture the water. In his second year, Isaac joined Bugeye Technologies as an engineering apprentice. He has

designed and built displays for engineering-related conventions and has applied his skills in the company's engineering department under their leadership in real-world projects.

Isaac will be attending Missouri University of Science and Technology this fall, with plans to acquire a degree in aerospace engineering.

### **Wilson Logistics Director of Safety and Apprenticeship Director Jeff Fields**

Jeff Fields, who has worked in the transportation industry for more than two decades, has overseen the Wilson Logistics Apprenticeship Program in Springfield for one year. He says that the reason Wilson Logistics got involved in the program was to help make a difference in the lives of those who join the company to better themselves. The goal at Wilson Logistics is to be able to look back at an apprentice's year of employment and see improvement and success.

### **Wilson Logistics Trucking Apprentice Kayla Putnam**

Having been an apprentice at Wilson Logistics for only two-and-a-half weeks, Kayla Putnam, who is also a United States Army Reservist, wants to follow in the footsteps of her "Nana" and be a truck driver. Kayla's lifelong fascination with trucks has led her to pursue a career as an over-the-road driver, where she hopes to experience new things in her life.

### **Wilson Logistics Trucking Apprentice James (Ricky) Schmoll**

After working in welding for 25 years since the age of 13, Ricky Schmoll realized he needed a career change. After searching the internet, Ricky found that Wilson Logistics would be the right fit for him. He started training as an over-the-road truck driver in September 2023, and has already met a lot of fellow drivers and found that the training staff for the accelerated program is very friendly and family oriented.

## **Clemency**

*Governor Parson recognized Reverend Kenny Batson, Pastor of Grace Fellowship Interdenominational in El Dorado Springs, who was one of the 3,700 applicants whose clemency was in limbo. During the Parson Administration, the clemency backlog has been cleared for the first time in decades. As a former sheriff, Governor Parson realized that there were people like Kenny who had truly turned their lives around and earned a second chance.*

### **Reverend Kenny Batson, Pastor of Grace Fellowship Interdenominational in El Dorado Springs**

In his youth, Reverend Kenny Batson was drinking, getting into fights, and found himself on the wrong side of the law. But today, Kenny has turned his life completely around.

Kenny is a proud husband and father of three kids. He earned both a bachelor's and master's degree and has been a pastor for more than 20 years, including serving as a hospice chaplain.

Even though he knew that God had forgiven him years ago for his actions, he now feels that he has totally been forgiven as a result of Governor Parson's pardon.

## **Appointments**

*Governor Parson recognized City of St. Louis Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore, who was appointed to that position in May 2023. The Governor noted that Mr. Gore was chosen because of his commitment to building strong communities, fighting crime, returning law and order, and putting people first. Governor Parson added that the level of professionalism between the Circuit Attorney's Office, Metro police, the courts, the Attorney General's Office, and his own office is greater than he has ever experienced.*

### **Gabriel (Gabe) Gore**

City of St. Louis Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore has served as a partner at Dowd Bennett LLP since 2010 and has more than 23 years of experience in private law practice. Before moving to the private sector, Mr. Gore served as a member of the Office of Special Counsel John C. Danforth's Waco Investigation, tried federal prosecutions as an Assistant U.S. Attorney - serving as a member of the Organized Crime Drug Task Force and Violent Crime Unit -, and clerked for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

Mr. Gore is a member of the St. Louis Community Foundation, Forest Park Forever Board of Directors, Missouri Supreme Court Advisory Committee, and Missouri State University Board of Governors. He was also appointed by former Governor Jay Nixon to serve on the Ferguson Commission. Mr. Gore has earned Ingram's Top 50 Missourians You Should Know recognition, the St. Louis Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Award, and the Distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Department of Justice. He was also named in the National Black Lawyers Top 100.

Mr. Gore earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Missouri State University, where he was a track and cross-country athlete. He then attended the University of Chicago Law School where he received his Juris Doctor.

## **Infrastructure**

*Governor Parson recognized eight MoDOT team members who represent the more than 4,600 MoDOT employees across Missouri. Under the Parson Administration, these employees have been responsible for repairing or replacing over 1,000 of Missouri's poorest bridges and utilizing additional resources for projects such as the Buck O'Neil Bridge, I-270 North, and the new Rocheport Bridge. In five short years, 17,000 miles of Missouri's roadways have been repaired, which is approximately 50 percent of the state's entire highway system—the seventh largest system in the nation. Under Governor Parson's leadership, nearly 2,000 miles of lettered roads in rural Missouri have been completed due to \$200 million of unprecedented funding.*

### **MoDOT State Team Members**

- Central Office - Doug Hood, Assistant Financial Services Director
  - Manages process for Governor Cost Share Program
  - 28 years for MoDOT
- Northwest – Nicolette Comstock, Senior Maintenance Worker

- Works at the Clearmont Maintenance Facility
  - 7 years for MoDOT
- Northeast – Rhonda Marsden, Maintenance Crew Leader
  - Works at the Memphis Maintenance Facility
  - 29 years for MoDOT
- Kansas City – Ron Clark, Buck O’Neil Project Senior Construction Inspector
  - Works on the Route 169 Buck O’Neil Bridge including procurement of contractor, reviewing designs, and inspecting construction work
  - 6 years for MoDOT
- Central – Mike Schupp, District Construction and Materials Engineer
  - Served as Project Director for the I-70 Rocheport Bridge
  - Working with the I-70 team developing the first project from Columbia to Kingdom City
  - 29 years for MoDOT
- St. Louis – Sheron Thomas, I-270 North Senior Highway Designer
  - Worked on the I-270 Design Build project including procurement of contractor, reviewing designs, and inspecting construction work
  - Served as a mentor to the high school students in the STEM program Project Pave
  - 6 years for MoDOT
- Southwest – Wyatt Schubert, Motorist Assistance Operator
  - Handles emergency response/crashes along I-44 in the Springfield-to-Joplin area
  - 3 years for MoDOT
- Southeast – Nikki Knight, Construction Inspector
  - Inspected Focus on Bridges projects in southeast Missouri
  - 23 years for MoDOT