



Photos by Rory Doyle

# OUTDOOR RECREATION LAB

## KEEPS FOUNDER'S DREAM MOVING FORWARD

By Elisabetta Zengaro

### THE LAB

"You haven't been in here before?" Todd Davis, program director for outdoor education at Delta State, asks. I regrettably admit that this is my first time inside the new outdoor recreation lab at Delta State. It's about 3:00 in the afternoon. Most students are out of class. While the lab is open, we are the only two people, save the few students passing by that poke their heads around the corner as they head to their afternoon workout in the fitness center down the hall.

Dozens of photos line the walls—all from DSU outdoor recreation trips over the past eight years. On the right is a towering rock climbing wall. I have the immediate temptation to grab ahold and start climbing, but something in the corner of the room catches my eye. In the center of the room sits a long wooden table where students gather for class. Mounted on the wall to the left of the table is a map of Mississippi and surrounding states.

"These are all the areas we will go, can go, or have gone in our immediate area,"







Davis says. "The pushpins represent what you can do."

The orange pushpin represents mountain biking, blue is canoeing and kayaking, green is hiking, the purple is rock climbing, and the yellow pins represent camping and activities that can be done in a day trip—all within a five-hour radius of Cleveland, Mississippi.

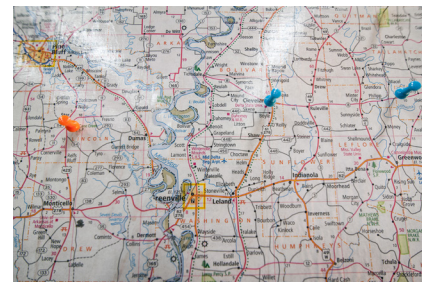
"We are opening a digital website, and on the website there will be this map," Davis explains. "If you click on the button on where you want to go, it will come up with what it is, what you can do there, how far it is from Cleveland, and what road you can take. It will be a digital sort of reference board for our students."

Of course, prepping is a major component of an outdoor recreation trip, and thanks to the lab, Delta State students no longer struggle for space to prep before trips and store equipment. In fact, the need for storage was a primary factor in advocating for the lab.

"In 2010, two years after I was here, we started getting a lot of gear," Davis says. "We used the old pool as a space. When the old pool closed, we couldn't put things out there because there was no HVAC, so we moved things. Prepping was really awkward because we didn't have a space, so we utilized the fitness center. We utilized classroom 130 and had to move desks out of the way. We utilized the outdoor space sometimes if it was nice weather, but it was never consistent."

Davis found his diamond in the rough in the form of an old abandoned gym locker. No one had been using it for years, so Davis asked the Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences, Dr. Leslie Griffin, if part of the funds from the Dave Heflin Professorship could be devoted to developing the space into a lab, which she approved. The renovation process began in 2014 and took about two years to complete.

During the renovation process, they removed the showers and restrooms and transformed the space into a fully functional recreation lab complete with washing machines, kitchen space, rock climbing wall, guidebooks, maps, and storage space for equipment and camping gear. The lab also doubles as a smart classroom with a ceiling-mounted projector and space for students to display ongoing research.



## HEFLIN & THE PROFESSORSHIP

The lab is named for Dave Heflin, an assistant professor emeritus of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at Delta State, and the founder of the Outback and Kayak Club. On Feb. 11, 2017, the space was officially dedicated with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

As I continue to look around the room, it's hard to imagine this all began on a canoe trip at the Buffalo River. About 40 years ago, a few Delta State faculty members decided to go on a canoeing trip there. Dave Heflin began taking students on trips in the early 1970s and dedicated his career at Delta State to furthering outdoor recreation and education. Originally a speech professor, Heflin began teaching outdoor recreation program courses in 1976. Still, the outdoor recreation program wasn't an actual degree program. It was a student club, known as the Outback and Kayak Club, which Heflin served as the leader. For years he took students, faculty and alumni on





his legendary trips. It wasn't until he retired that the outdoor recreation program came into being at Delta State.

When Heflin retired, his family approached the Delta State Alumni Foundation about the possibility of establishing a professorship that would ensure students can continue to have opportunities for recreation and outdoor experiences.

The intent of the professorship was to ensure there would be someone at Delta State to organize outdoor recreation courses such as rafting, canoeing, rock climbing, and kayaking. Todd Davis has fulfilled that role for the past nine years.

**WHAT'S NEXT**

Through the professorship, Davis has kept Heflin's legacy alive, and the outdoor recreation program continues to grow. While the lab was the second phase of the professorship, the third phase is getting a new van to make traveling to different locations easier.

"The van will provide us stable transportation to go to new places and other conferences and workshops without having to compete with so many organizations and departments for vans," Davis said. It's called, "keeping the program moving forward," and there are various gift levels people can donate. If they choose to make a donation to the van, their name will be featured on the back of the van.

Those wishing to donate to the van or the outdoor recreation program can make gift levels at five different levels—Argonaut, Risk-Taker, Speculator, Adventurer, Explorer and Navigator—with the Argonaut level being the highest level to donate.

For more information on how to donate to the outdoor recreation program and Dave Heflin Professorship, contact the Delta State Alumni Association at [alumni@deltastate.edu](mailto:alumni@deltastate.edu) or 662-846-4704. The Dave Heflin Outdoor Education Recreation Laboratory is open Tuesdays and Wednesdays 10 a.m.-12 p.m. and 2-4 p.m., and Thursdays 10a.m.-12 p.m.

**GIVING LEVELS FOR THE OUTDOOR RECREATION PROGRAM**

- ARGONAUT
- RISK-TAKER
- SPECULATOR
- ADVENTURER
- EXPLORER
- NAVIGATOR

