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**MTSU, area officials praise ‘vibrant town-and-gown’ partnership  
at Blue Raider Bridge dedication**

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** — For years known locally as “Bridge Over Broad,” Murfreesboro’s multimillion-dollar urban interchange took on a distinctly MTSU flavor when it officially became Blue Raider Bridge on Thursday, Sept. 5, during a dedication ceremony attended by university, city, county and state officials, and community supporters.

“Today, we reunite to celebrate a relatively new structure, this amazing bridge over Broad Street, and to confer upon it a name that further cements the strong and vibrant ‘town-and-gown’ relationship that MTSU enjoys with the County of Rutherford and the City of Murfreesboro,” MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee told the crowd gathered on the northeast corner of the interchange in the city-owned lot next to Wilson Bank & Trust, which provided parking and refreshments to attendees.

Watch a recap video at [https://youtu.be/vembGzG\\_CWI](https://youtu.be/vembGzG_CWI).

The \$22.8 million Tennessee Department of Transportation project was needed to relieve extreme congestion at the intersection of Broad and Memorial Boulevard/Old Fort Parkway, one of the busiest in the state with an expected average daily traffic count of over 72,700 cars by 2034. Construction began in January 2014, with the full bridge opening with full signalization for all traffic lanes in mid-March 2018.

Rutherford County Mayor Bill Ketron, an MTSU alumnus, pushed to name the bridge to honor MTSU because of the university’s community impact and because the bridge was one of the gateways to reach the Blue Raider campus. The Rutherford County Commission voted in December 2018 to ask the Tennessee General Assembly to approve the new name, which was OK’d earlier this year.

Ketron said naming the bridge in honor of the university only made sense — “Where would Rutherford County be if MTSU did not exist?” — and announced a private fundraising drive to have blue LED accent lighting installed on the bridge to further emphasize the special nature of this new gateway toward the campus.

“It will be an iconic image for Murfreesboro,” he said.

Rutherford County Commissioner Pettus Read, another MTSU alumnus, introduced the name change as chairman of the commission's steering committee. He shared with the audience the deep MTSU roots within his family stretching back to the university's founding days when it was known as Middle Tennessee State Normal School, a training ground for teachers, to its present day status as a comprehensive university now attended by his grandchildren.

"That name that you see here on this bridge is not just the name of an athletic team, it's those of us who have graduated from there. It's who we are and what we are. We're a family, a Blue Raider family," he said, sporting an MTSU tie and Blue Raider cap.

Murfreesboro Mayor Shane McFarland, also an MTSU alumnus, drew laughs recalling the brief tongue-in-cheek naming of the bridge "Bridgey McBridgeface" as part of an April Fool's proclamation as the city solicited ideas for a name last year.

But he turned more serious in praising TDOT, Bell & Associates Construction and the Murfreesboro Transportation Department for their work overseeing the long-awaited project, which not only greatly improved traffic flow, he said, but also includes upgrades such as underground utilities, curb and gutter, stamped concrete and pedestrian islands and signaling.

"I think everyone agrees that the finished product is a successful addition to traffic enhancement in our city and fitting of the Blue Raider name," he said, also praising City Council support for the project and the groundwork of past officials like former Mayor Tommy Bragg.

Representing the state were state Sen. Dawn White, an MTSU alumna, and state Rep. Charlie Baum, an MTSU economics professor. White was effusive in her praise of "the wonderful MTSU faculty and staff" in helping her and "thousands of students" earn degrees at the university, while Baum pointed to the university's wider economic and quality of life impact on the community.

"MTSU is one of the largest employers in Rutherford County. It is the top college destination of choice for our students in Rutherford County," Baum said. "Members of Rutherford County actively cheer Blue Raider sports all year round, and MTSU generates \$1.1 billion in economic activity. I am pleased to report the Tennessee General Assembly happily endorses the naming of this bridge."

Also attending were state Sen. Shane Reeves and state Rep. Mike Sparks.

The dedication comes a month after a similar dedication of long-awaited upgrades to Middle Tennessee Boulevard next to the Blue Raider campus.

"Also like Middle Tennessee Boulevard, this was a project that was transformational in nature. Not only does it provide an elegant solution to what was a perplexing traffic problem, it creates a more inviting portal for residents and visitors to our downtown area and our campus," McPhee said.

## **CAPTIONS:**

**Blue Raider Bridge 1 - MTSU and area officials unveil a commemorative sign at the Thursday, Sept. 5, dedication ceremony of the newly named Blue Raider Bridge in the background. Pictured, from left, are Murfreesboro Mayor Shane McFarland, Rutherford County Commission Pettus Read, state Sen. Dawn White, MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee, Rutherford County Mayor Bill Ketron, and state Rep. Charlie Baum, also an MTSU economics professor. (MTSU photo by J. Intintoli)**

**Blue Raider Bridge 2 - MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee praises the 'town-and-gown' partnership between the university and local community at the Thursday, Sept. 5, dedication ceremony of the newly named Blue Raider Bridge in the background. (MTSU photo by J. Intintoli)**

**Blue Raider Bridge 3 - The new Blue Raider Bridge sign is shown following the Thursday, Sept. 5, dedication ceremony of the newly named bridge that crosses Broad Street at Memorial Boulevard/Old Fort Parkway. (MTSU photo by J. Intintoli)**

**Blue Raider Bridge 4 - A host of MTSU, Murfreesboro, Rutherford County and state officials stand with a commemorative sign at the Thursday, Sept. 5, dedication ceremony of the newly named Blue Raider Bridge in the background. (MTSU photo by J. Intintoli)**

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