**NEWS**

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HASAPIS RECEIVES FIRST LEE SCHOLARSHIP AT UT MARTIN SELMER CENTER

MARTIN, Tenn. – Aaron Hasapis, a police officer in Bolivar, was the first recipient of the Robert Kirk Lee Scholarship at the UT Martin Selmer Center. He was announced as the winner at the start of the 2023-24 school year.

Hasapis (pronounced “HASS-sup-iss”) was halfway through his degree when he made the decision to focus more on his family. Now that his daughter is older, he decided it was time to return to school and finish what he started.

Like many of the other students at the center, Hasapis is a nontraditional student who balances a hectic life of work and school.

He was happy to find out that he would receive the first Robert Kirk Lee Scholarship, and he knows that it will help with the cost of tuition and books this year.

"My plans are to further my career in law enforcement." he said, adding that he is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, seeking to graduate in the summer of 2024.

UT Martin Selmer Center Director Alan Youngerman said the Robert Kirk Lee Scholarship will help several people coming to the Selmer Center gain a strong education that can lead to better employment.

“This scholarship is dedicated to criminal justice majors,” he said. “A lot of our students are nontraditional students and don’t have access to all of the scholarships like the Hope Lottery Scholarship and some of the others that are available to traditional students.

“This does give our nontraditional students an opportunity to have a scholarship to help them proceed. A lot of our nontraditionals are men and women with families who are trying to come back to school and work a full-time job while they’re coming.”

Youngermen said Lee’s widow, Susan, wanted to establish a scholarship at the UT Martin Selmer Center in her late husband’s name. Robert Lee was an adjunct professor there since the center opened in 1998. Lee died in November 2022.

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Lee earned his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from the University of Tennessee at Martin in 1978. He was a member of the Tennessee Highway Patrol, serving on Gov. Lamar Alexander’s security staff, and was the youngest person to be elected sheriff of McNairy County, serving from 1982 to 1994, becoming the first person to serve three consecutive terms.

After his service as a sheriff, he joined the Criminal Investigation Division of the Tennessee Highway Patrol, later joining the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation before retiring in 2015.

Youngerman said the Robert Kirk Lee Scholarship could help Hasapis in many ways.

“Most local officers just go through the academy, but these additional classes would teach other criminal justice techniques,” he said. “They teach knowledge of procedures like criminal evidence and criminal investigation and a lot of additional information beyond what they would learn in academy training.

“Plus, getting a degree in criminal justice can help someone move up in their career path, whether it’s locally with the police department or moving up to Highway Patrol. We’ve had several Tennessee Highway Patrol officers come here to finish a degree with us, and that makes them eligible for promotions through the department as well.”

Youngerman praised Susan Lee and the Robert Lee family and others for providing scholarships to the UT Martin Selmer Center.

“We are lucky to have multiple local donors,” Youngerman said. “We give away over $50,000 in locally-derived scholarships plus another $50,000 in additional money for other sources – so, a total of $100,000 in scholarships each year for our center.

“That makes it a very affordable and attractive offering for students who cannot go to the main UT Martin campus for whatever reason, and they can stay local.”

More information about the UT Martin Selmer Center can be found at utm.edu/academics/selmer-center or by calling 731-646-1636.

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Photo 1 – LEE SCHOLARSHIP – Bolivar Police Officer Aaron Hasapis is shown at his pinning ceremony in February 2022 with his daughter Adyson. Hasapis is the first recipient of the Robert Kirk Lee Scholarship at the UT Martin Selmer Center.

Photo 2 – LEE SCHOLARSHIP – Robert Lee was an adjunct professor at the UT Martin Selmer Center since it opened in 1998 and had an extensive professional career in law enforcement. The scholarship offered in his name at the UT Martin Selmer Center will help continue the education of those seeking careers in criminal justice through that facility.