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Weir accepts position at Fort Caswell



Photos by Chelsea Sydnor

By Chelsea Sydnor

After nearly 17 years at Gardner-Webb, student activities director Karissa Weir has accepted a position with Fort Caswell Coastal Retreat and Conference Center in Oak Island, N.C., beginning this summer.

Weir will serve as the Guest Services Team Leader, overseeing positions such as coordinators for summer staff, recreation and marketing. She will assist with programming as Caswell hosts youth groups for a week at a time.

"I'll be doing food services, guest services, recreation and programming," said Weir. "I will oversee the hospitality part of it, hoping that the students will see the message behind the ministry."

Weir took interest in the position when she found out the director of Fort Caswell, Rick Holbrook, was planning to retire this year.

"A friend of mine from Caswell, Brian Hemphill, will be moving up to director, and told me that his position would be open," Weir said.



Weir majored in Recreation Management at Appalachian State University because of her interest in camps and retreat centers.

“I liked going to camps growing up and the week of fun that you have,” said Weir. “I was also in Girl Scouts and went to camp at Mundo Vista.”

Weir has previous experience with Caswell, including during the summers while she was in college. Later, she spent four years as the recreation director for the facility.

According to Weir, it was God’s timing that led her to Gardner-Webb.

“I was visiting Laurie Varley, another Caswell friend of mine that worked here in the alumni office in August of 2000,” Weir said. “[Varley] told me about a position she thought I would be good at, and it was the student activities

director.”

Weir inquired about the job via email, and was able to start in October of that year. She started out as the Student Leadership and Activities Director, overseeing SGA, clubs and organizations and orientation.

According to Weir, the need for another role became apparent as the student population continued to grow. With that change, Weir’s job title became Director of Student Activities, Campus Recreation and New Student Orientation. The department has since continued to expand, adding members such as Brian Arnold as the Assistant Director of Student Activities.

“It allows us to help each other,” she said.

Arnold has also enjoyed working with Weir.

“Over the last 13 years, I have had the opportunity to work with Karissa and she has become a part of my family,” he said. “During our time of working together she has been very supportive and helpful as I have learned about Campus Recreation and Student Activities. She has challenged me to grow personally and professionally. My wife (Dr. Tracy Arnold, GWU Nursing) and I are very grateful for Karissa and the love that she has shown to our family.”

Another big change Weir has seen throughout her time at Gardner-Webb is in the way she promotes events.

“Facebook and social media have changed for the students,” she said. “Getting the word out to students is very different. At that time, you had to have an ‘edu’ account for Facebook, and Twitter was not even well-known. We also have to compete with Netflix, and getting students out of their rooms to participate.”

Meanwhile, Weir also experienced the transition to Tucker Student Center.

“It’s a beautiful facility over here,” Weir said.

While Weir will miss Gardner-Webb and the people there, she has always hoped to make her way back to a career in camps.

“When the position opened up, I felt it would be a good time to move on,” she said. “I always wanted to get back to doing conference center resources.”

According to Weir, she will miss the students the most.

“Being able to interact with students the whole time they’re here has been my favorite part of the job,” she said. “I’m here the first day they move in, and then get to see them walk across the stage and see how much they have changed.”

Weir has also made a lasting impact on the university. According to Brad Vaughn, Office Manager for Student Activities, he has learned a lot through working with Weir, even during his time as a student.

“Our personalities are a little different,” said Vaughn. “While she is more easygoing, I’m more upbeat and stress-inducing. She’s taught me to relax and let things go. She’s made it easy to learn the ropes for when she leaves. I will definitely miss her.”

Meanwhile, Dean of Students Sarah Currie is appreciative of Weir’s dedication to her job.

“[Weir] is approachable and is always willing to work with students to make their ideas a reality when it comes to events at GWU,” said Currie. “Most importantly she cares about students and wants the best for them. We will all miss her constant support and fun personality.”

Weir is excited to experience the change, including the chance to do more event planning.

“I’m more of a behind-the-scenes person,” Weir said. “I don’t really think my talents are in public speaking, but instead handling the details to make something happen. I think my gifts are in hospitality.”

Weir’s last day in the office will be April 28.