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Graduate Student Coordinates Event to Support Organization That Helps People with Disabilities

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Graduate Student Coordinates Event to Support Organization That Helps People with Disabilities

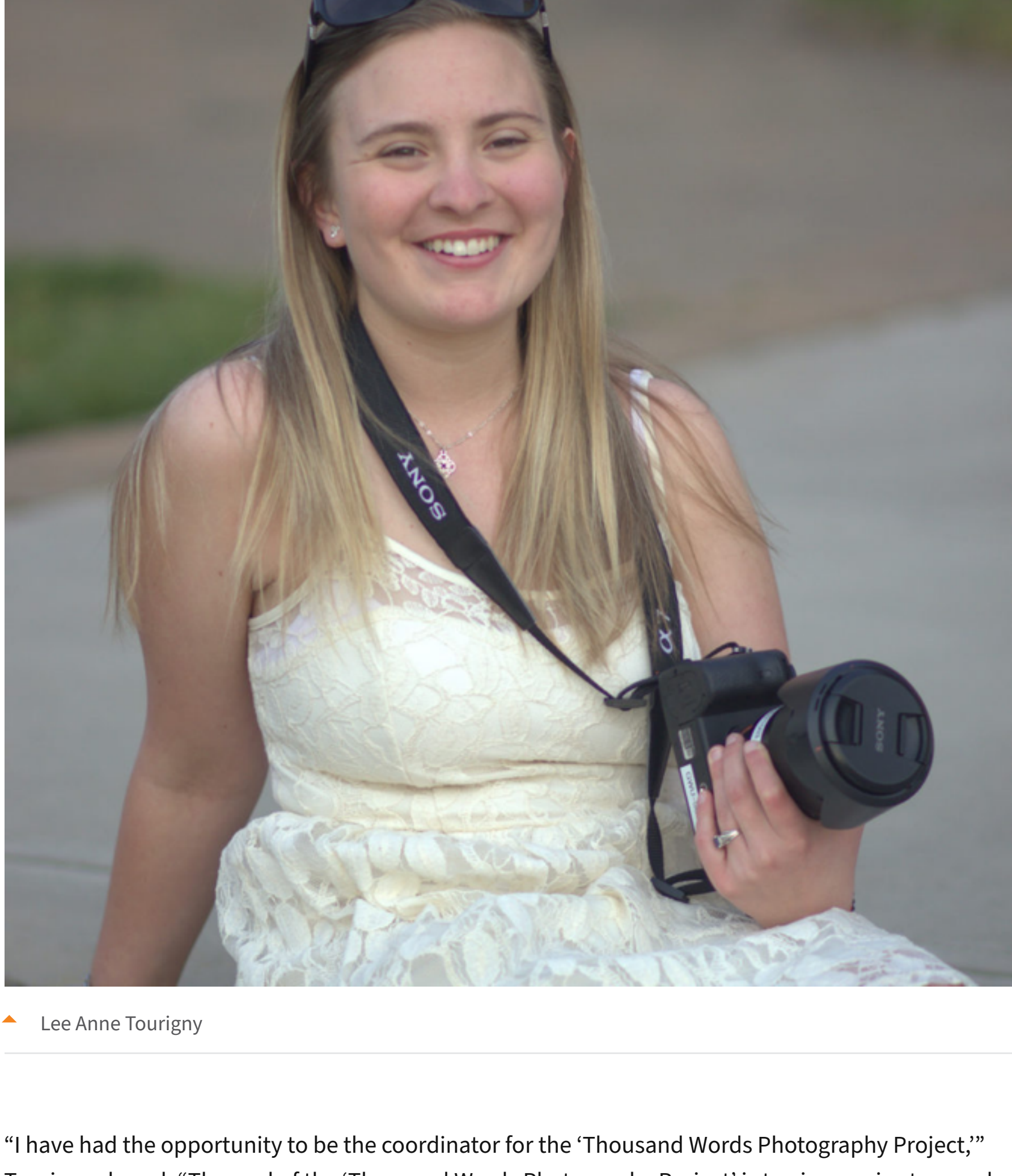
BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JANUARY 21, 2021



Photography Project Relates to Lee Anne Tourigny’s Psychological Research

Before Lee Anne Tourigny graduated from Gardner-Webb University in May 2020, she was a summer intern with [ConnectAbility](#) in her hometown of Dahlonega, Ga. Through its various programs, ConnectAbility, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works to create an inclusive community, where people of all abilities are valued, included and empowered.

Tourigny received her bachelor’s degree in psychology and minored in American Sign Language and Communication Studies. She came back to Gardner-Webb in August 2020 to earn her Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling. A graduate assistant in the GWU Career Center, she was also hired to do contract work for ConnectAbility.

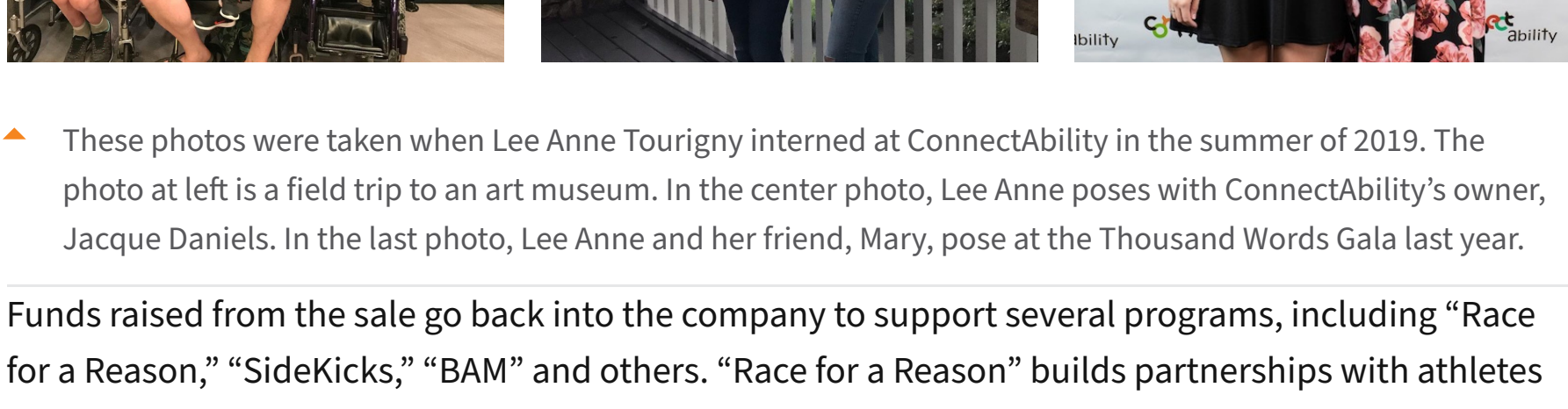


▲ Lee Anne Tourigny

“I have had the opportunity to be the coordinator for the ‘Thousand Words Photography Project,’” Tourigny shared. “The goal of the ‘Thousand Words Photography Project’ is to give a voice to people with disabilities through the visual art of photography. People are placed into teams each year. Teams consist of people with and without disabilities who collaborate and produce photographic works that relate to a specific theme. This year the theme of the project is ‘The Color of Life,’ in which each team highlights a specific color in the photographs.”

Because of COVID-19, “Thousand Words” was moved online, and Tourigny has virtually coordinated the project from North Carolina. “I organized all 10 teams, ran monthly Zoom meetings, recruited guest speakers—one of whom was Dr. Bob Carey in the GWU communications department—and helped organize and advertise for the gala and a book that will be produced this year.”

In the past, the photographs have been available to the public and sold at a fundraising auction. Instead of doing an in-person event this year, ConnectAbility is hosting an online fundraiser on Jan. 30 at 6:30 p.m. Anyone can register online for free to join the event. “Once registered people can see the beautiful photographs taken by our teams and start bidding on them,” Tourigny explained. “On the Facebook and Instagram pages for ConnectAbility, you can learn more about the people that make up our 10 teams. We will be doing a 3-day highlight for each team leading up to the event that you can follow.”



▲ These photos were taken when Lee Anne Tourigny interned at ConnectAbility in the summer of 2019. The photo at left is a field trip to an art museum. In the center photo, Lee Anne poses with ConnectAbility’s owner, Jacque Daniels. In the last photo, Lee Anne and her friend, Mary, pose at the Thousand Words Gala last year.

Funds raised from the sale go back into the company to support several programs, including “Race for a Reason,” “SideKicks,” “BAM” and others. “Race for a Reason” builds partnerships with athletes of all abilities to train and race together. “Sidekicks” is a respite care program designed for children and adults with special needs and their siblings. “BAM” (Books And/or Movies) connects people who share these interests.

Besides helping the nonprofit, Tourigny is gaining experience for the future. “I hope to use photography in my counseling and to conduct research on the benefits of it,” she affirmed. “My (undergraduate) honors thesis was ‘Using Therapeutic Photography Techniques to Increase the Wellbeing of College Students.’ With the help of my thesis advisor, Dr. (Iva) Naydenova, I was able to get it published in the school journal. This experience gave me the knowledge to be able to lead this project and help form the monthly meetings and direction it has taken this year.”

To learn about the individuals on each team, go to ConnectAbility’s [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) page. Register [here](#) for the online gala.

GOT A STORY?

We welcome your suggestions and feedback, contact:

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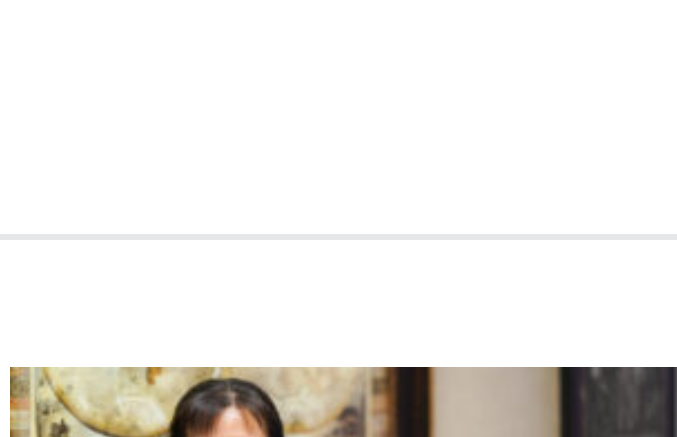
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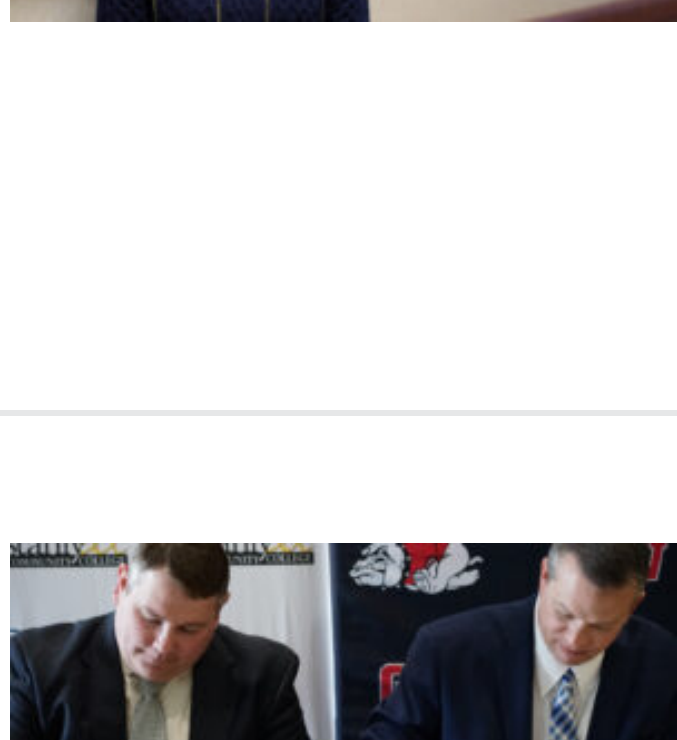


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