

One of the galleries at the May 4 Visitors Center highlights headlines from newspapers and magazines that show the impact of the May 4 shootings locally, nationally and internationally.



# Connecting the Story of May 4 to Today's Headlines

The May 4 Visitors Center (M4VC) is observing its 10th anniversary this spring. Following a “soft” opening in fall 2012, the center was officially dedicated as part of the May 4 Commemoration in 2013.

The center was created through the efforts and passion of Laura Davis, BA '73, MA '76, PhD '87, Professor Emerita of English, and Carole Barbato, BS '71, MA '75, PhD '94, professor of communication studies, who both were Kent State students in spring 1970. Davis was an eyewitness to the May 4 shootings. Barbato, who died in 2014, wrote several books about the events of May 4.

Lori Boes, MLIS '11, who has been affiliated with the center since its beginning, now serves as interim director. She says Davis and Barbato were inspired to create the center after attending a presentation by anti-war activist Tom Hayden. "He said, 'It's now time for you to tell your story.'" Laura and Carole took that as a call to action. They thought, "If we don't tell the story, who will be here to tell the story?"

## DEVELOPING THE CENTER AND ITS MISSION

Davis and Barbato taught a course on May 4 at Kent State for nearly 20 years, after inheriting it from Jerry Lewis and Thomas Hensley, professors Emeriti of Sociology and Political Science. Through teaching that class, the way to present the story at the visitors center unfolded. Gallery by gallery it came together, as Davis and Barbato remembered the questions their students had about that day and that time period.

“When we first started building the center, it was really to tell the story of Sandy, Allison, Bill and Jeff,” says Boes, referring to the four students [Sandy Scheuer, Allison Krause, Bill Schroeder and Jeff Miller] who were killed when Ohio National Guard troops fired into a crowd during an anti-war demonstration on the Kent Campus.

However, the center's mission has evolved to providing a central place where people can explore and better understand the events that took place on that day, the context and impact of those events, and their meaning for today.

“We believe that the 26th Amendment passed in 1971 because of the shootings here,” Boes says. “And it’s important for Kent State students to know that voting at 18 happened because of what happened here on May 4. Nixon felt that if they lowered the voting age, the students would stop protesting.”

"I think our job now is to relate what happened more than 50 years ago to current events," Boes says.

For example, in November 2022, the center hosted “Women. Life. Freedom,” a discussion about the protests in Iran, presented by the Kent State Women’s Center in collaboration with the Wick Poetry Center, the School of Peace and Conflict Studies and student-led organizations, including the Society of Global Cultures and the May 4th Task Force.

“Relating to those movements inspires young people,” Boes says. “We’re saying, ‘Look, this happened in the past. We have to be diligent. We have to pay attention to stop these things or at least shed light on what is happening.’”

—Phil Soencksen, BS '89

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