They are good neighbors and friends. They are passionate about many things: family, flying, helping young people, community betterment, and preserving a landmark tavern. They are Craig and Gina Shorten, ardent supporters of ATSU and its campus community in Kirksville, Mo. It has been a mutually beneficial relationship for more than 25 years with many personal ties to the lives of students, faculty, and staff.

They were Kansas natives whose respective parents moved their families to northeast Missouri and set the stage for the two of them to meet and discover a common interest in aviation. Through high school and their time at Truman State University in Kirksville, that interest led both of them to obtain a pilot’s license.

Craig has been a flight instructor and tandem skydive jump master for 20 years. Not only did Craig marry his jump pilot, Gina, they also raised a pilot. Their daughter Chade, who will obtain her pilot’s license soon, is enrolled as a freshman at Truman State University this coming fall.

Employment in sales and service took Craig to Iowa for about 10 years. During this same time, Gina partnered with her father and they traveled throughout the Midwest with their rural water construction business.

“Gina can still readily handle a backhoe,” Craig says. Craig returned to Kirksville in 1986, acting on entrepreneurial instincts and the opportunity to operate the DuKum Inn, adjacent to ATSU’s campus. This famous “watering hole” had been serving the locals and college students since its beginning in 1938. The Shortens embarked on an ambitious plan to renovate and expand the business and have transformed it into Kirksville’s primary nightspot. As time went along, they added other nearby property and business enterprises, including the Golden Spike nightclub (also adjacent to campus on Jefferson Street).

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HEROES IN THE MAKING

ATSU-ASDOH students participate in Smile Forward program

Beating cancer is nothing new to Leota Raisor, 86, who has had several bouts over the years with the disease. Now in remission, Leota is receiving treatment at the Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health (ASDOH) because the chemotherapy has caused her teeth to become unstable and decay. She will undergo a complicated procedure with only local anesthesia to have her remaining lower teeth extracted and then be fitted for dentures.

Despite requiring a complex dental procedure to improve the quality of her life, Leota was upbeat and excited when she was greeted in the waiting room by her student dentist, Michael Pysnak, D4. Her excitement turned to frequent pauses, however, while she tried to prevent from crying when asked about her treatment and the care she has received.

“Only positive,” Leota says about her experience. “The most thorough work ever done and I have had quite a bit of dental work over the years, but never by people I felt so comfortable with.”

Since Leota was on a fixed income, Michael knew she would be an ideal candidate to receive funding support from ASDOH’s Smile Forward program. The Smile Forward program provides dental care and preventative oral health education for disadvantaged adults with little or no dental insurance benefits, who are not eligible to receive funding from Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, or who demonstrate financial need. These individuals struggle with economic hardships ranging from housing to transportation to financial needs.

Patients are identified by students, and a faculty committee reviews applications to determine who is awarded financial assistance and how much.

Leota is extremely grateful for the care she received.

“He’s the real hero,” Leota says, referring to her student dentist, Michael.
PASSIONATE ABOUT MANY THINGS—THEIR COMMUNITY AND ATSU HIGH ON THE LIST

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In recent years the Shortens have expanded their business to include catering refreshments at many ATSU and community activities. They often provide sponsorships for University and student organized events. The DuKum Inn and their other enterprises have always provided many opportunities for ATSU student employment and long-lasting personal friendships. The DuKum Inn is always a favorite stop and stroll down memory lane for class reunion tours held during ATSU’s Founder’s Day celebration each fall.

A desire to see their community grow and thrive led the Shortens to be early supporters of a grassroots Kirksville effort to bring the new Missouri School of Dentistry and Oral Health to the campus. They quickly and generously joined fellow citizens in amassing a $1 million commitment of gifts and pledges for the new school construction. As the need for additional property adjacent to the campus became apparent for this new expansion, the Shortens also provided an “in-kind” gift to meet that need. Incentive for the gift included the University establishing a charitable gift annuity.

Travelers to Kirksville are greeted by welcome signs that proclaim “Kirksville—Where People Make the Difference.” The University owes a great deal to the loyal and generous support of its many friends and neighbors in both Mesa, Ariz., and Kirksville, Mo., who like Craig and Gina, are passionate about stepping up and making a positive difference for ATSU and its mission.

Members of the KCOM class of 1960 found their way back to the DuKum Inn during Founder’s Day.