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The Rally Cats bring the Tiger spirit to College Avenue during Clemson University's Welcome Back Festival on Wednesday night. Thousands of students turned out to get acquainted with school organizations and local businesses.

## Students find community in Welcome Back Festival

BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL  
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — Sophomore Thomas Marshall stood on the sidewalk watching hundreds of students walk down College Avenue during Clemson University's Welcome Back Festival on Wednesday.

Marshall, an English major at Clemson, peered through his glasses with a smile on his face. While other onlookers might have seen excited students laughing and stocking up on free goodies, Marshall saw community.

"No other school in the country has a small-town community feel like this one at Clemson," he said. "To have everyone from students to families from Clemson Elementary School all the way up to Clemson University just encompassed together in this great community event is awesome."

More than 70 restaurants, businesses and university organizations joined school and city leaders



Clemson University president Jim Clements takes a selfie with a student at the Welcome Back Festival on Wednesday in downtown Clemson. Clements said the festival is a way to welcome back the "entire community."

in downtown Clemson Wednesday evening to welcome upperclassmen back and welcome freshmen for the first time.

Freshman Shaina Wynne attended her first Welcome Back Festival



# FESTIVAL: 'A great way to kick off the year'

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by bringing school spirit to downtown with her fellow Clemson Tiger cheerleaders. With a huge smile on her face, Wynne said she was "excited" to be in Clemson.

"Being a freshman from out of state, it's welcoming to me not only being able to meet people, but also just seeing all the positivity in the air," said Wynne, who hails from Asheville, N.C. "It's being in the environment with all the Clemson Tigers and sharing our love for Clemson."

Thousands of students walked up and down College Avenue surrounded on all sides by restaurants, vendors and clubs. Students scored free stuff and became acquainted with local businesses.

The only sound heard over the chatter and laughter of students was

the music coming from the Tiger Band. Tubas, horns and drum beats echoed between the restaurants and shops, and Tiger Rag was the perfect soundtrack for the evening.

While the Tiger mascot hopped down the street taking photos and pumping students up, Clemson University president Jim Clements set up shop in the middle of the street for what turned into an impromptu meet-and-greet.

Clements shook hands with students, asked their names and majors and posed for photos. The president told *The Journal* he "loved" the Welcome Back Festival.

"This is awesome, because it's a way to welcome back the entire community — all of our students, faculty and staff," Clements said in an orange-and-white-striped polo shirt, shorts

and sneakers. "The local business community is out here to support our students and raise money for scholarships. It's a great way to kick off the year."

Students gathered in groups and greeted each other with high-fives and hugs. Some students took their time walking down the street, while others power-walked to their next goody bag.

A long line of students stretching several restaurants and shops formed for getting tickets to spend on food and raffles.

Wednesday was also the first day of classes for students. The start of the 2017-2018 academic year was sunny and warm. After her first official day as a Clemson student, Wynne, the cheerleader, was also ready for the future.

"I'm definitely excited for football games but

also just being a part of the Clemson community," said Wynne, an early childhood education major. "It's so nice to give back in different ways and be able to be part of the Clemson family forever."

Marshall, a member of undergraduate student government, echoed Wynne's sentiment about community. Marshall told *The Journal* he plans to build relationships this year because he loves Clemson and wants to go all in for the school.

"I want to serve my school to the best of my ability because I think it's an amazing school to be a part of," he said. "It's having that community here backing you every step of the way and knowing that you're always going to have someone be there for you."

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