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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 13, 2014

American Southwest Conference Announces McMurry, Belhaven as Future Membership Additions

RICHARDSON, Texas --- American Southwest Conference officials announced today (March 13) the forthcoming addition of McMurry University and Belhaven University to its membership. The announcement was made by Dr. Rod Mabry, president of the University of Texas at Tyler and chair of the ASC Council of Presidents.

McMurry University will rejoin the American Southwest Conference after a two-year absence. Belhaven University, a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), is beginning the process of changing its affiliation to NCAA Division III. The exact ASC admittance date for each institution is contingent upon their date of successful admittance by the NCAA into the required Division III membership program. The two additions will raise the American Southwest Conference membership to 13 institutions.

"The American Southwest Conference presidents are pleased to welcome both McMurry University and Belhaven University to our conference membership," said Mabry. "The pending membership expansion will strengthen our conference in a number of ways and will benefit their student-athletes as well as current ASC student-athletes with improved conference scheduling opportunities. We look forward to renewing and initiating spirited athletic competition and rivalries with both institutions."

McMurry and Belhaven each support athletics programs that fit with those sponsored by the American Southwest Conference, including sports that will bolster overall ASC sponsorship numbers in men's and women's golf, football, and men's and women's track and field. Postseason championship opportunities will be enhanced along with regular-season opportunities.

"Inclusion of McMurry and Belhaven continues the American Southwest Conference mission of providing an environment for learning, competition and cooperative efforts within our membership," said Amy Carlton, ASC commissioner. "The membership additions create an occasion for our administrators to revisit season scheduling and postseason tournament models for potential adjustments where we maximize conference scheduling, maintain in-region Division III non-conference opportunities, and reduce stress on missed class time and travel costs."

McMurry University

One of the eight founding members of the American Southwest Conference in May 1996, McMurry University left the conference in June 2012 seeking to reclassify to NCAA Division II. In late January 2014, President Dr. Sandra S. Harper and the University's Board of Trustees announced that McMurry would withdraw from the Division II membership process and seek return to Division III affiliation.

"McMurry University is delighted to rejoin the American Southwest Conference. Commissioner Carlton and the American Southwest Conference presidents have been very supportive in our effort to compete in NCAA Division III," stated McMurry President Sandra S. Harper. "The ASC invitation is one of the major steps in crafting our scholar-athlete program to fit with our institutional mission and centennial vision. We look forward to the competition and the camaraderie of the ASC."

During its previous 16 years as a member of the American Southwest Conference, McMurry won two NCAA Division III national titles (men's track and field 2008, '12), and collected 41 ASC conference championships. Since leaving the ASC, McMurry athletic programs have competed in the Division II Heartland Conference and Lone Star Conference. The War Hawks compete nationally in the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA), winning the 2012 national tournament title in volleyball.

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McMurry offers 19 intercollegiate athletics programs, 10 men and nine women, including baseball, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's cross country, football, men's and women's golf, men's and women's soccer, men's and women's swimming and diving, men's and women's tennis, men's and women's track and field (indoor and outdoor), and women's volleyball.

Founded in 1923 as a United Methodist institution and located in Abilene, Texas, McMurry University is centered in undergraduate education and enrolls more than 1,200 students in six schools – Arts and Letters, Business, Natural and Computational Sciences, Education, Nursing, Social Sciences and Religion – with over 45 majors and pre-professional programs. McMurry University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, and holds membership in the National Association of Schools and Colleges of the United Methodist Church, Association of Texas Colleges and Universities of Texas and the Council of Independent Colleges.

Belhaven University

Belhaven University has been accepted into the 2014-15 NCAA Division III Exploratory program and the University's Board of Trustees unanimously approved application for NCAA Division III membership during its Feb. 28 meeting.

"I'm thrilled that after extensive study and evaluation, our Board has determined that Belhaven's goals for providing a quality experience for our student-athletes will best be matched in the future by the priorities of NCAA Division III," said Belhaven President Dr. Roger Parrott. "We could not have a better new home than the American Southwest Conference. The character of the schools and the commitment to student-athletes blends seamlessly with Belhaven's priorities, and I've been especially thankful for how welcoming the Presidents of the ASC have been to Belhaven. We look forward to our move into the NCAA Division III, which blends a commitment to quality academics into our student's experience, while providing us tough competition against some of the best known small colleges and universities in America."

The 2014-15 academic year will be Belhaven's final year of NAIA membership and competition in the Southern States Athletic Conference and the Mid-South Conference (football). The Blazers have posted three NAIA national titles, two in men's soccer (1992, 2012) and one in men's tennis (1983). The Blazers have earned conference championships and made NAIA national tournament appearances in seven different sports. Belhaven offers 15 intercollegiate athletics programs, eight men's and seven women's, including baseball, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's cross country, football, men's golf, men's and women's soccer, softball, men's and women's tennis, men's and women's track and field, and women's volleyball.

Belhaven University stands among select Christian colleges and universities and has been repeatedly named one of "America's 100 Best College Buys." The University offers 30 academic majors across a full spectrum of disciplines as well as a variety of graduate programs. In addition, Belhaven has achieved the distinction of being among only 30 universities nationally accredited in each of the major arts – music, theatre, visual art and dance. All programs are taught from a Christian worldview perspective and are guided by the mission to prepare students academically and spiritually to serve Christ Jesus in their careers, in human relationships, and in the world of ideas. Belhaven serves over 3,700 students offering undergraduate and graduate degrees on its residential campus, an online degree program, and graduate and adult degree programs in Jackson, Memphis, Orlando, Houston, Chattanooga and Atlanta.

American Southwest Conference

The American Southwest Conference is an NCAA Division III member conference with a mission to put student-athletes first and provide them opportunities to learn important values, compete at a high level in a friendly environment and develop as future citizens and leaders. ASC member institutions believe athletics should be integrated with other learning. ASC institution presidents often note that their largest classrooms and venues are their intercollegiate athletics arenas and fields where students learn that careful planning, hard practice, attention to detail, commitment to fitness and endurance, sacrifice, high-level teamwork and fair play are the means to success and in reaching high goals. The membership is committed to furthering the philosophy and policies of NCAA Division III and the ASC.

The American Southwest Conference sponsors championships in 16 sports, eight men's and eight women's. Member institutions have collectively won seven Division III team titles and numerous individual national championships. Conference and NCAA resources also provide student-athletes, coaches and administrators access to academic, leadership, sportsmanship and career enhancement opportunities.

The roster of American Southwest Conference members in 2013-14 includes Concordia University Texas, East Texas Baptist University, Hardin-Simmons University, Howard Payne University, LeTourneau University, Louisiana College, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Mississippi College, University of the Ozarks, Sul Ross State University, University of Texas at Dallas and University of Texas at Tyler. The University of California, Santa Cruz is an affiliate ASC member in women's golf. Mississippi College will withdraw from the conference in June 2013 to reclassify to NCAA Division II.