

WESTERNCONNECT

THE ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCE | A publication for alumni & friends of Western Technical College



Luke Achterberg, Western graduate
See Luke's story on page 3!

Hello, Western Alumni & Friends!

We had a beautiful fall on campus! This region certainly showcases its beauty with the change of every season (even with the snow)! We are fortunate to live in such a beautiful area. Life on campus has been very busy. Students are gathering in the Union Market, classrooms are full, and the campus is bustling with lots of lively student activities and events. It was refreshing to have a “normal” fall term.

This edition of the *Connect* is full of new things on campus as well as showcasing some of our very talented alumni. We love to share the successes of our alums and encourage all of you to stay connected. Sharing your stories provides our students with the encouragement and confidence needed to keep their sights on their goals.

In addition, the Alumni Association Board is excited to welcome our newest member, **Kevin Knerzer**. Kevin is passionate about Western and giving back to this community. We are all looking forward to working with him and growing our alumni outreach. Look right to learn more about Kevin.

Cheers to a bright and joy-filled 2023!



Stephanie Knutson
Alumni Relations Coordinator



Stephanie Knutson

Connect with us!



westerntc.edu/alumni

Western Connect is published twice a year for alumni and friends of Western Technical College.

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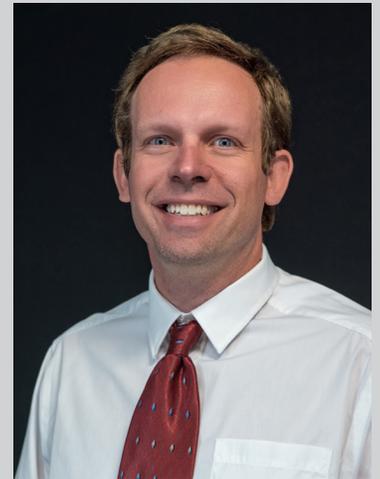
Keep up to date on all of Western's news at westerntc.edu/news

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Welcome to the Alumni Association Board!

Please join us in welcoming **Kevin Knerzer** to the Western Alumni Association Board. Kevin is a 2003 Accounting graduate. After receiving a 4-year degree in marketing, he realized he was still interested in accounting and chose to pursue further education at Western. Kevin found his Western experience rewarding and filled with great opportunities. Kevin now works at WKBT.

Kevin lives in La Crosse with his family. He is passionate about working within the community to help Western students and connecting with Western Alumni while moving the College's mission of the forward.



Jacquelyn Schreiner named Executive Director of the Western Technical College Foundation

Jacquelyn Schreiner is the new Executive Director of the Western Technical College Foundation. She has been serving as the foundation's interim director since July of last year. Following a national search, Jacque has since been selected as the best person to lead the foundation.

Schreiner has extensive experience at Western, having worked as the foundation's development officer since 2013. Schreiner has worked to expand fundraising efforts and donor lists, including the growth of scholarship opportunities for students with disabilities and an impressive increase in Western's endowment to over \$8 million. Schreiner helped cultivate and solicit over 1,100 scholarships in 2021 alone. Prior to Western, Schreiner served as the Associate Alumni Director at Winona State University and the District Field Executive for the Girl Scouts of Riverland Council.

"I firmly believe in Western's mission of providing relevant, high-quality education to our community; I plan to use and further develop the strong district relationships Western has to help our students succeed in the classroom."

To learn more about Western's Foundation, visit www.westerntc.edu/foundation.

Luke loves to Go Big

Wisconsin native **Luke Achterberg '05** is a successful working artist. His chilly, utilitarian Northside La Crosse studio is where the artistic magic happens. Luke is a sculptor; his medium is metal, his method is welding, and he loves to “go big.” We must ask, where would he be without his Western Welding Degree?

Luke took a convoluted and explorative education path. He started UWL as a biology major for the practicality of it, and he had a knack for it, too. A year and a half into the program, and it was the memorization of Latin names that gave him pause, so a natural drift back to the artistic side of things proved inevitable. A sculpture course with an impressive professor reignited an interest that would stay. Fast forward five years: Luke graduated from UWL with a double major in art and psychology, a philosophy minor, and many Spanish classes. Luke realized he wanted to make giant outdoor sculptures, and to help him do that; he enrolled in Western’s Welding program.

Luke’s childhood home and family life provided and nourished early clues to his current standing. Luke comes from a family of covert creatives who love working with their hands at automotive customization, mechanics, and welding. He remembers a powerful image of his grandpa welding—the managed fire and orange glowing metal piqued his interest. As a child, Luke would get in trouble for drawing imaginative made-up cars during math class, a foreshadowing of future Luke.

His inspiration deeply draws from exciting places: the familial model of working on cars, the art and philosophy of Dr. Suess, comic books, street graffiti, and calligraphy. Automotive customization, skateboarding, and snowboarding cultures are used to achieve a popping aesthetic, balanced

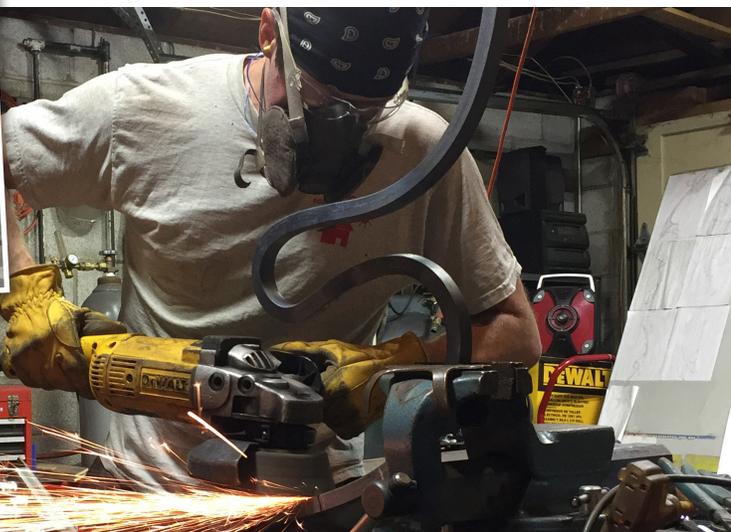
with pleasing curves. Not to be discounted are the traditional skills like blacksmithing and fundamental art concepts in academic training, like composition, balance, and movement.

After completing his degrees, Luke worked locally as a project welder to save money before finishing his MFA with a focus on sculpture and ceramics at the University of Kentucky. After a decade of Kentucky living, Luke and his family moved back to La Crosse to enjoy grandparents, the bluffs and winter sports—they deeply missed winter! The adage about absence and the heart growing fonder may be true.

In addition to his formal education, Luke is a lifelong learner with a passion for creating. He is continually exploring his craft. With so many interests, the artistic route enables Luke to combine many affinities and skills into something beautiful and unexpected. The hardest thing for him is the business side of how to finance his life as an artist. He is always on the hunt for free or cheap metal.

He has found success through commissioned pieces, and he leases sculptures to temporary homes across the country, from large public spaces to galleries to sculpture gardens. One of his pieces resides at the 1802 Gallery on State Street in La Crosse; go check it out! Luke’s diverse interests and well-rounded education continue to serve him well, and he is grateful for the opportunity to share his art with the world. “If I hadn’t gone to Western for the welding degree and gained this process knowledge,” he said, “I couldn’t do what I’m doing.”

Luke’s sculpture was jury selected for the 2022 Wisconsin Artists Biennial at the Museum of Wisconsin Art. He has received several prestigious awards for his art, including recognition from the International Sculpture Center in New Jersey and Art-St-Urban in Switzerland.



**Congratulations to all
December graduates!
Welcome to the
Alumni Association!**

**We look forward to celebrating
with you at our
April Commencement Ceremony!**

**As Western alumni, these
benefits and services are
available to you!**

**Career Resources, Insurance,
Shopping Discounts, Athletic Event
Admission, Library Services, Wellness
Center Discount, Email Address,
Alumni Scholarships**

**Visit:
www.westerntc.edu/alumni**

Phonathon Announcement

Western alumni!

We will be reaching out to you in the coming months to ensure we have updated contact information, share College news, and talk about our scholarship program!



Our scholarships are life-altering for our students, so we are grateful for donations and support.

We look forward to speaking with you!

Thank you

Giving Day: We did it

Thank you to all who donated during our first Giving Day event!

We met our goal because of you! Students face more financial challenges than ever. We do all we can to remove financial barriers. Support from our alumni, faculty, staff, community, and businesses makes this possible..

Thank you!

Western Technical College Foundation

GIVING DAY



12.06.22

SCHOLARSHIP

Are you or someone you know planning to attend Western?

Check out the Western Foundation scholarships:

westernnc.edu/scholarships

Many are available!

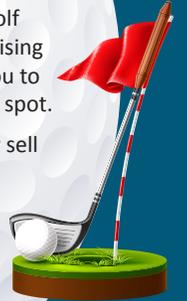


Scholarship Golf Outing

Join us on **May 24, 2023**, for our annual scholarship golf outing! Last year's sold-out event was a huge success, raising over \$20,000 for student scholarships. We encourage you to get your registration in as soon as possible to secure your spot.

We have several sponsorship opportunities that quickly sell out. We hope to see you there!

For more information visit www.westernnc.edu/golf



Western's AJ Clauss to co-chair statewide committee on diversity

Western Technical College's **AJ Clauss** has been appointed co-chair of the Wisconsin Technical College System's (WTCS) Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. Clauss currently serves as the Equity and Inclusion Coordinator at Western. Clauss established a grassroots faculty and staff initiative called Equity Leaders. They also serve on Western's Diversity Advocacy Team to create actionable solutions to inequity in higher education. This

is a two-year committee appointment and the work focuses on policy reform, student access equity, closing equity gaps, and increasing transparency.

"I am excited for this opportunity to represent Western, the La Crosse community, and the WTCS DEI Committee in moving forward with the incredible equity initiatives already in the works," said Clauss. "We will continue to center the needs and experience of historically marginalized groups to collectively create change."

To learn more information on Western's DEI initiatives, visit www.westernnc.edu/equity-inclusion-community-engagement.

Western District Board Member Opportunities

Monica Kruse, Chairperson of the District Board Appointment Committee for the Western Technical College District, is accepting applications from district residents for appointment consideration to the Board of Western Technical College. Application materials are available during the month of February 2023.

The Western District Board currently holds regular meetings the third Tuesday of each month in La Crosse and other campus locations. Special board meetings are scheduled as needed. District Board members serve without compensation, but receive reimbursement for necessary expenses incurred while performing official duties.

Those interested must submit an application, at least two letters of reference supporting their nomination to the board, and must attend a public hearing and meeting of the District Board Appointment Committee to be interviewed. The open positions effective July 2023 are for (2) additional members and (1) elected official member.

Watch for upcoming news releases if you are interested in serving.



Eyes Wide Open

La Crosse native **Michael Roskos** is like any other student in Western's Welding program. He has assignments, asks questions in class, and visits the Union Market on his lunch break. By all accounts, Roskos is a student eager to learn all he can. But what is apparent right away—his age. He just happens to be a 54-year-old former surgeon.

"I'm nine years older than my oldest instructor," he quips.

During his time as a surgeon, Roskos conducted routine appendectomies, gall bladder removals, and trauma-related emergency surgeries. He's saved countless lives and improved the region's overall health during his 23-year medical career.

His life drastically changed last spring. Roskos enjoys spending time outside; one day he was chopping wood in a nearby forest. While working, a small tree swiftly rebounded toward him and poked his right eye, leaving him blind. After two surgeries and the introduction of glasses, much of his eyesight returned. Nonetheless, the damage meant his surgical career was over.

"Nobody could decide but me whether I could go back to surgery," said Roskos. "Everyone has to take my word for it. I had to decide my own fate and in good conscience—I could never be what I used to be."

Newly retired, but not by choice, Roskos looked for other opportunities outside of medicine. His interest turned to welding, something that dates back to his childhood. His best friend's father was a welding

instructor at Western, and he was always interested in the process, trying to better understand how metal is put together. It's what led him to enroll at Western this fall—at age 54.

"My kids love it," he laughs. "They think it's funny when we compare school notes."

After more than a decade of medical school, Roskos was back in the classroom. It hasn't always been easy, he says. Getting back into the college routine is difficult. With no prior experience welding, it's been a challenge keeping up. He puts pressure on himself, but he believes his prior career is helping.

"You need to have good depth perception in welding, as in surgery," he says. "But you need to learn how to learn again. I had to learn to ask for help."

Through it all, however, is a determination to see his latest challenge through. He spends extra time with instructors, asking questions and getting hands-on practice right away, something much different at a technical college than in medical school.

"It's so fun to do things in the lab," he said. "You know exactly why you are learning each skill."

He doesn't want attention, but wants to show people that anyone can go back and learn a new skill. Life is never too short, even when something unexpected happens."

To learn more about Western's Welding program, visit www.westernnc.edu/welding.

Local transfer agreements open doors

Officials from **Western Technical College** and **UW-La Crosse** have formally signed several transfer agreements.

The agreements stem from Western's Associate of Arts program which just launched earlier this year after approval by the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents. Signed agreements include admission to UWL's Psychology and Exercise and Sport Science tracks and several programs in UWL's College of Business Administration. These transfer agreement programs also address future state workforce needs.

"UWL has an outstanding relationship with Western Technical College, and we are always collaborating on ways to offer students in our state and region flexible options for completing college degrees," said UWL Chancellor Joe Gow.

"This is a tremendous day for education in the La Crosse region," said Western President Roger Stanford. "Providing more transfer opportunities for our students is critical, and UWL is a terrific partner. These agreements open the doors for more people by making bachelor's degrees more attainable. This is a big win for the community."

To learn more about Western's Associate of Arts program or its transfer agreements, visit www.westernnc.edu/associate-of-arts.



Connect Opt-in

In a world where costs seem to only keep rising, we are asking our audience if you prefer to receive an online version of the **Western Connect**, or if you would prefer to continue to receiving the printed version.

Your feedback is very important to us! Please visit: www.westernnc.edu/connect to let us know your preference.

In Memoriam

Donald R. Bay 10/1/2022
1974

Keith R. Bower 10/4/2022
1993 Automotive Technician

Liam M. Burns 9/7/2022
1993 Diesel & Heavy Equipment Technician

John K. Hartfiel 6/11/2022
1986 Refrigeration Servicing

Steven M. Haugen 11/24/2022
1968 Welding

Jean E. (Grimsled) Lange 9/28/2022
1997 Agri-Business Science Technology

Robin R. Lee 8/16/2022
1994 Air Conditioning, Heating, &
Refrigeration Tech

Nathan L. Oium 8/6/2022
1999 Mechanical Design Technology

Robert J. Olson 10/16/2022
1983 Machine Tooling Technics

Ronald D. Phillips 10/27/2022
1989 Electromechanical Technology

Kristi A. (Mickelson) Smith 9/5/2022
1984 Operating Room Assistant

Donald J. Staff 10/13/2022
1975 Auto Body

Kristine E. (Potter) Terpstra 10/14/2022
1979 Accounting

Richard A. Walz 11/6/2022
1973 Wood Tech

Western Staff

Katherine L. (Jefson) Bakken 9/17/2022

Gordon Halverson 11/2022

Alice M. (Reagles) Ingham 1/2/2022

James M. McCann 8/29/2022

Carl H. Mueller 10/19/2022

Gary L. Thorsen 12/11/2022



Stay Connected

Stay in touch—we love to hear about your successes and life events!

Visit

www.westerntc.edu/stay-connected

Email

Alumni@westerntc.edu

Make sure to follow us on our social media channels: [@westerntcalumni](#)

Refer a Student to Western

Do you know someone looking to pursue an education? We'd love your help identifying the next generation of Cavaliers.

Refer a student by clicking "Request Info" at www.westerntc.edu.

Indicate you're filling out the form for someone else by checking the box at the top of the form. After submitting the form, one of our admissions coaches will reach out to the student.



Spring Open House

Wednesday, March 15 | 4–7 p.m.

Design your future on your terms—check out all things Western at the annual open house. Explore the campus, learn about academic programs and financial aid assistance, scholarships, refreshments, and get a jump on the application process.

Apply during the open house and the application fee is waived!



Stop by any time; join us at any of our locations:
La Crosse, Black River Falls, Independence, Mauston, Tomah, and Viroqua.

For more info, go to: WesternTC.edu/OpenHouse.

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Do you have a photo to share?

Contact the Alumni Office at 608-789-6083 or alumni@westernnc.edu