

WESTERNCONNECT

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



Western Graduate Abdul Cole
Classes of 2021 and 2022
See story on page 3!

Dear Western Alumni,

As we continue to build on the strong foundation that makes Western such a special place, I am reminded every day of the incredible impact our alumni have on our community. Whether you graduated recently or decades ago, your connection to Western remains an essential part of who we are and what we strive to become.

Our students draw inspiration from the paths you've taken, your achievements, resilience, leadership, and commitment to making a difference. Your stories shape their aspirations and remind them that their goals are within reach. Each time you share an update, mentor a student, attend an event, or support a campus initiative, you strengthen the bridge between past and future Western graduates.

This year, we have seen exciting developments across campus: new programs that prepare students for changing industries, expanded resources that support student success, and initiatives driven by the same spirit of innovation and community that defined your time here.

I encourage you to stay connected—reach out, share milestones, join us for alumni events, and continue contributing to the vibrant network that makes Western such a powerful and supportive community.

Thank you for your support and for representing Western with pride wherever life takes you. We are honored to celebrate your accomplishments and grateful for you.

Warm regards,



Stephanie Knutson
Alumni Relations Coordinator



Stephanie Knutson



SCHOLARSHIP

Are you or someone you know planning to attend Western?
Check out the Western Foundation scholarships:
www.westerntc.edu/scholarships

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

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westerntc.edu/alumni

A Long Way From Sierra Leone, and Right Where He Belongs

Before becoming Trooper Cole, **Abdul Bolageh Cole, '21, '22**, grew up in Sierra Leone in a household guided by shared responsibility. Family extended beyond parents and siblings to include relatives, neighbors, and anyone who needed a place to stay. The house was busy, often loud, and rarely quiet—but it worked.

“Where I’m from, you don’t just live with your parents,” Abdul said. “You live with everyone who is part of your life.” There was always someone cooking, fixing something, or talking in the yard. Children played outside until evening. If one home had a television, others gathered there. When someone needed help, people showed up without being asked.

That environment gave Abdul a clear understanding of community and responsibility. It taught him to pay attention to others, to step in when needed, and to carry himself with confidence. Those lessons stayed with him long before he imagined leaving Sierra Leone or building a life in the United States—one that would eventually place him on long, quiet roads far from the heat and bustling noise of home.

A Friendship That Opened the World

As a teen, Abdul trained as a sailor and later volunteered aboard the African Mercy, a floating hospital that provides free medical care along the African coastline. The work was intense and meaningful. It also brought him into contact with all kinds of people from all over the world.

One of them was a young Wisconsinite who arrived on the ship looking for adventure and was assigned to work as a deckhand. The two effortlessly became friends. One night, Abdul mentioned his idea of studying diesel machinery. Abdul’s new friend told him about Western Technical College in La Crosse and later sent him a link to explore. “What stood out to me was how often Western talked about wanting students to succeed,” Cole says. “I thought, if they want that for me, I can do the rest.”

It took nearly three long years of applications, forms, fundraising, patience, and persistence before eventually reaching the United States. The Wisconsin parents stepped in as sponsors. Abdul still speaks about their generosity with a reverent awe. In early 2020, he arrived in La Crosse just weeks before the pandemic began.

Finding a Place

The cultural adjustment was enormous. Euphemistically speaking, the food tasted “unfamiliar,” social cues worked differently, and the winter cold was unlike anything he had ever experienced. “People said winter wasn’t here yet,” Abdul recalls. “But I was freezing.”

Western staff noticed he didn’t have warm clothing and gathered coats and gloves to help him prepare for the season. For Abdul, this reflected something instantly recognizable: genuine care. “Western didn’t just welcome me,” he said. “They cared in a way that made me feel like I belonged.”

He enrolled in the **Diesel and Heavy Equipment Technician** program and worked in the residence hall as a Resident Assistant. He also served as a campus

safety officer, often becoming the person students turned to when tensions ran high or when they needed someone steady to talk to. His direct but enviably calm style stood out. “In Sierra Leone, if there’s a problem, you talk about it. You fix it together,” he said. At Western, he learned how to adapt that approach to a different cultural setting while still staying true to himself.

His leadership style stood out. Western selected him as its 2020–21 Student Ambassador, a year marked by pandemic disruptions and financial stress headaches for many students. Abdul spent that year listening, guiding, and helping students connect to the resources they needed.

“Most people weren’t stopped by big failures,” he said. “It was small things like a broken-down car or not having money for gas.” Scholarships



“Western didn’t just welcome me. They cared in a way that made me feel like I belonged.”

— Abdul Cole

helped him stay enrolled, and he remains deeply grateful for them. “As an international student, scholarships were the only financial support available to me,” he said. “They allowed me to focus on learning and growing.”

A Career Begins and Something New Takes Shape

After graduating in 2022, Abdul began his career at J.F. Brennan in La Crosse, working on tugboats and heavy equipment in addition to the dive team. It was meaningful work and an important step in building a stable, purposeful life in the United States. “Brennan gave me confidence and a sense that I could build something here,” he says.

Over time, however, he realized he missed the human side of his work. He missed the part of himself that connected with people, calmed tense situations, and handled problems that involved more than machinery. “I wanted to help people the way Western helped me,” he stated. That realization led him to explore law

enforcement, and he discovered the Wisconsin State Patrol, a valuable opportunity worth pursuing.

The State Patrol selection process is challenging from the very beginning. It includes exams, interviews, background checks, physical testing, and psychological evaluations. Abdul advanced through each stage and earned a place in the academy, a 19-week training environment at Fort McCoy that demands physical, academic, and emotional endurance. Eighteen recruits began the program; twelve graduated.

“There were days when I questioned everything,” he said. “But then I reminded myself that everything in my life prepared me for the next step.”

In November 2024, Abdul graduated as a Wisconsin State Trooper. A young man who once watched television from outside a neighbor’s window was now serving the people of Wisconsin. It was a moment that naturally invited reflection.

A Community That Carried Him Forward

When Abdul talks about his journey, he often says, “My story could only happen in the United States.” After that, almost as an aside, he gives Western the credit he carries quietly but firmly. He succeeded here because he had been shaped by a strong, communal life in

“My story isn’t just about me. It’s about everyone who helped me, from home, from the ship, from Western, and from Wisconsin. I am who I am because of community.”

— Abdul Cole

Sierra Leone, and because Western became the new community that met him exactly where he landed.

The people he met at Western mattered. Staff noticed he didn’t have a coat and made sure he was warm. Instructors challenged him in ways that pushed him forward. Friends in the residence hall relied on his steadiness and, in turn, helped him find his footing. Western became a second home. He didn’t just attend the college, he lived it.

Today, Trooper Cole serves in Juneau County. He brings the same grounded presence to each interaction that shaped him in childhood and strengthened him at Western. “People don’t call us when they’re having a good day,” he says. “If I can be calm and listen, that changes things.” Much of that work unfolds on long stretches of road, where patience and presence matter more than speed.



He has always planned to someday open a diesel service business in Sierra Leone and train young people in the skills that changed his life. He and his Wisconsin family are also working toward a nonprofit to help students from Sierra Leone access educational opportunities in the United States and are in the midst of setting up a scholarship fund. “My story isn’t just about me,” he said. “It’s about everyone who helped me, from home, from the ship, from Western, and from Wisconsin. I am who I am because of community.”

He was raised in community, and when he needed it most, Western became another one.

Supporting Student Success with Western’s Basic Needs Campaign



At Western, student success is rooted not only in academics but also in stability and well-being. Recognizing the challenges many students face outside the classroom, Western launched the **Basic Needs Campaign**—an initiative focused on ensuring all students have access to essential resources.

This year marked a major milestone: the opening of the new **Basic Needs Center**, celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony led by **Amy Thornton**, vice president of Student Service and Engagement.

The center brings together food support, housing resources, childcare connections, transportation vouchers, financial assistance, and wellness services in one welcoming space. It ensures students never have to choose between meeting basic needs and pursuing their education.

From the **Cavalier Cupboard** food pantry to emergency grants, these supports help students stay enrolled when unexpected hardships strike. Many express immense gratitude for the resources that helped them persist during difficult times.

This progress is possible thanks to the generosity of Western’s community—alumni, friends, faculty, staff, and local partners who contribute through donations, advocacy, and ongoing support.

Learn more or donate at westernnc.edu/basic-needs-campaign

A Head Start That Adds Up

For local students and families, a head start on college is also a head start on affordability



During the last academic year, students participating in **Western's Transcribed Credit** program saved an estimated \$3.7 million in tuition costs, according to a new report from Western Technical College. The program enables high school students to earn college credit at no cost, reducing future expenses while building confidence early.

Another way of looking at it, this year, 5,928 students earned 23,606 college credits, representing \$3,765,631 in savings. Transcribed Credit courses are taught in local high schools by instructors who meet Western's certification and training requirements. When students successfully complete a course, the grade appears directly on a Western transcript, a college credit they can carry forward after graduation.

Transcribed Credit is helping thousands of local students get a head start on college while keeping costs down. It also helps students see themselves as capable of succeeding in college-level work. For families, the impact is immediate and practical: fewer credits to pay for and less debt down the road. For students, it's often their first experience meeting college expectations—and realizing they belong there.

For alumni, the program reflects a long-standing commitment at Western: strong partnerships with local schools and education rooted in community.

To learn more, visit westernnc.edu/earn-college-credit-high-school

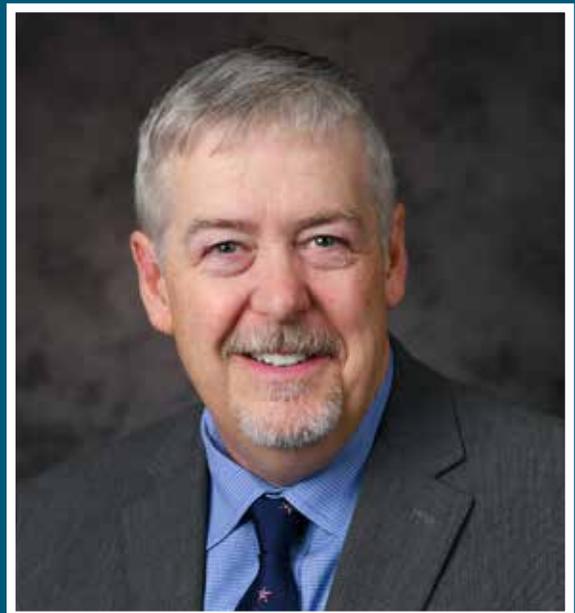
\$3.7 million
saved in tuition

President Roger Stanford Announces Retirement

Western President **Roger Stanford** has announced that he will retire in August 2026, concluding more than a decade of leadership at Western and more than 30 years in education. Stanford shared the news with employees, expressing deep gratitude for the people who make Western strong—including its alumni community.

During his tenure, Stanford has championed student success, expanded partnerships with employers across the region, and strengthened Western's role in shaping the local workforce. He has led major initiatives such as the transition to seven-week terms, enhancements to student support services, and significant facility upgrades that will serve future generations of learners and alumni.

Western's District Board has begun the presidential transition process, and more updates will be shared with alumni and the community as planning continues. A more in-depth reflection on Stanford's leadership and legacy will appear in the fall issue of the alumni newsletter.



From Western to the Wild Front Lines

How a Western grad found his calling in the vast, unpredictable world of the National Park Service



Rich Westpfahl, '67, was a well-respected dean at the College, part of a broader family legacy rooted in public service across the La Crosse region. That sense of responsibility—to people, to place, to doing the work well—echoed through Westpfahl's own training and career choices.

Today, Westpfahl is a chief law enforcement ranger with the National Park Service, based at Fire Island National Seashore. One of only a handful of rangers nationwide certified as both a law enforcement officer and a paramedic, his work spans emergency response, leadership, and the protection of some of the country's most treasured landscapes.

The work often unfolds far from public view. Rangers coordinate rescues, respond to medical emergencies, fight fires, manage overdoses, and de-escalate conflicts across thousands of acres of rugged terrain—places most people experience only as visitors. It's a role that demands judgment, adaptability, and a steady presence in moments that rarely come with warning.

The moment that first sharpened Westpfahl's sense of what that work could look like came in 1999. He and his wife, both EMTs at the time, responded to a rollover crash near Carlsbad Caverns National Park. They

were first on scene. Shortly after, a National Park ranger arrived—driving a police-issue Camaro, wearing a law enforcement uniform, and stepping seamlessly into the medical response. The ranger was also the chief.

Westpfahl was struck by the scope of it all. Here was a single officer operating within an entire ecosystem of responsibility—law enforcement authority paired with medical expertise; command presence paired with hands-on care. Until that moment, he hadn't fully understood that park rangers could hold both roles at once. The idea stayed with him, in the background, reshaping how he thought about a future in public service.

Years later, that early impression began to take form. After completing Western's Paramedic program and graduating from the National Park Service law enforcement academy, Westpfahl accepted a seasonal assignment at Yellowstone. More followed—Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Carlsbad Caverns, and eventually Fire Island—each role expanding his scope, sharpening his leadership skills, and reinforcing the value of being able to move fluidly between enforcement, emergency care, and command.

In 2019, two decades after that roadside crash, Westpfahl returned to Carlsbad Caverns—this time with himself as chief

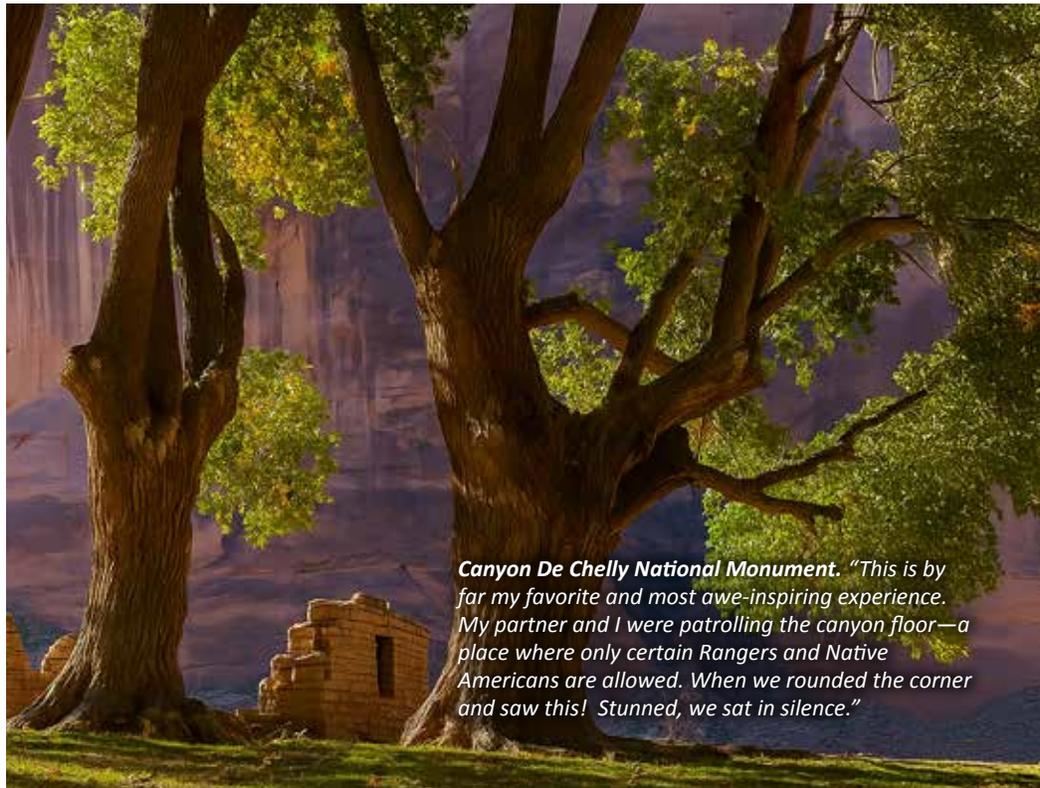
Western graduate **Erik Westpfahl, '96, '02, '04, '06**, is keeping wild places pristine—and the people within them safe.

Erik Westpfahl didn't set out to build a career in national parks or federal law enforcement. His path took shape gradually—through Western Technical College, steady field experience, and a willingness to follow opportunity as it appeared.

Police Basic Training came first, followed by EMT certification, Police Science, and later, Paramedic training. The route wasn't linear, but together it formed a rare and powerful combination: law enforcement paired with advanced emergency medical care.

One lesson stayed with him. During a defensive tactics session, a regular guest Western instructor **Dan Marcou** offered a simple directive: Be nice, until it's time not to be. Then be nice again. It wasn't called de-escalation at the time, but the principle was clear—resolve situations decisively without losing your humanity.

Westpfahl's connection to Western runs deeper than his own coursework. His uncle,



Canyon De Chelly National Monument. "This is by far my favorite and most awe-inspiring experience. My partner and I were patrolling the canyon floor—a place where only certain Rangers and Native Americans are allowed. When we rounded the corner and saw this! Stunned, we sat in silence."

ranger. When he left the post, his team presented him with a framed photograph: the Camaro that first caught his attention, parked beside his own Dodge Charger in the same location. He doesn't dwell on symbolism, but the full-circle moment was not lost. Park law enforcement often surprises people. Rangers don't simply patrol trails or issue citations. They respond to medical emergencies, coordinate complex rescues, fight fires, and manage high-risk situations where patience and judgment matter as much as authority.

In 2018, Westpfahl and a fellow ranger responded to a report of a suicidal man on the Hoover Dam bypass bridge. For more than 90 minutes, they listened and worked to build trust. When the situation nearly unraveled, they caught the man by the legs midair. He survived! Moments like that linger and Westpfahl never learned what happened next, but the weight of the work and the responsibility that comes with it, never leaves him.

As a leader, Westpfahl emphasizes trust, preparation, and restraint. His approach centers on building strong teams, giving them what they need, and stepping back once the groundwork is set—an outlook shaped early at Western, where practical, people-centered training was taught long before it became a national discussion.

After nearly two decades with the National Park Service, Westpfahl has learned to hold complexity with steadiness: the beauty of a landscape, the responsibility of command, and the impact of a single conversation. His advice to Western students reflects that perspective—stay flexible, learn from every experience, and invest in yourself early.

The most meaningful careers rarely begin with a master blueprint. Sometimes they start with a class, an instructor who leaves a mark, a moment that sticks—and the courage to follow where it leads.

If you find this type of career intriguing, email Erik @ Erik_Westpfahl@nps.gov. He'd love to talk about it.



*Willow Beach in Lake Mead National Recreation Area.
"Sunsets in Arizona are miraculous. I patrolled this portion of the Colorado River for almost 6 years."*



Erik and his wife, Jennifer. She is also a graduate of the '97 EMT program and a law enforcement officer (EMT Ranger) for 10 years; half of that time, they were working at the same parks!



Celebrating Our December Graduates: Congratulations, Class of 2025!

This December, we proudly celebrated the achievements of Western's newest graduates. You have reached an important milestone—earned through hard work, persistence, and a commitment to your goals.

Graduation honors your resilience. Many of you balanced classes with jobs, cared for families, overcame challenges, or returned to school to pursue a new path. No matter your journey, you persisted—and you should be proud.

As you enter your next chapter—whether joining the workforce, continuing your education, or exploring new opportunities—we hope you carry with you the confidence and skills you gained at Western. Remember that you remain part of the Western family. Stay connected and share your successes.

Congratulations, graduates!

Don't miss out—check out all your alumni benefits today at westernnc.edu/services-and-benefits



Make an Impact, Join the Western Alumni Board

Western is seeking passionate graduates to serve on the Alumni Board. If you're looking for a meaningful way to give back, support student success, and shape the future of Western, we'd love to have you. Your experience matters.

Apply at westernnc.edu/alumni



Save the Date: Western Scholarship Golf Outing

Spring is just around the corner, and it's time to dust off your clubs. The Western Scholarship Golf Outing is set for May 20, 2026, at Cedar Creek Country Club in Onalaska.

This event is more than a day on the course—it directly supports Western students. Every dollar raised will fund scholarships that remove financial barriers, empower students to stay on track, and open opportunities they may not otherwise have. Your participation helps more learners focus on their goals, persist through challenges, and reach graduation.

Register a team or become a sponsor: westerntc.edu/golf

*Join us for a day of fun and giving back;
help open doors for deserving students.*

May 20, 2026 | Cedar Creek Country Club, Onalaska, WI

Western Alumni Board Gives Back Through Service and Spirit

Each year, the familiar sound of a ringing bell signals more than the start of the holiday season; it represents hope, support, and community. This winter, Western Alumni Board members stepped forward to embody those values by volunteering with the Salvation Army through its annual Red Kettle Campaign.

Giving back is at the heart of what it means to be a Western alum, and our board members demonstrate that spirit by dedicating their time to help raise funds for area families in need. Stationed at kettle locations, they greeted shoppers with warm smiles and holiday cheer.

“We’re proud to represent Western in a way that makes a real difference for local families,” said Alumni Board member **Anna Kramer, '07**. “Volunteering together not only strengthens our bond as alumni leaders but also reminds us how important it is to show up for our community.”

This project is one of the many ways the Alumni Board extends Western’s mission beyond campus. Their commitment is a reminder of the positive impact Western alumni make every day—through service, mentorship, and a willingness to lend a hand.

We extend our thanks to our Alumni Board members for their generosity, spirit, and dedication.



Alumni Board President, Kevin Knerzer, '03



Tyler Kramer and Alumni Board member Anna Kramer, '07



Alumni Board member Carla Lundeen, '01



Western Now Offers Drop-In Childcare for Student-Parents

Balancing classes, coursework, and family life isn't easy—especially when childcare options are limited or don't align with a student's schedule. To help ease that burden, Western Technical College now offers affordable, flexible drop-in childcare for student-parents through a partnership with the YWCA La Crosse Child Center.

The program is designed for students who need short-term childcare while attending class on campus. For just \$4 per hour, students can access care for children ages 2–7, up to three hours per day and 10 hours per week, Monday through Thursday. Students must be enrolled in at least one credit-bearing course and remain on campus while care is provided.

For **Melina**, a Western student and parent, the option has made a meaningful difference. "Knowing my child was safe—and so close to campus—gave me real peace of mind and helped me focus in class," she shared.

Unlike traditional childcare arrangements that require full- or part-time commitments, the drop-in model offers flexibility for families who only need care for a few hours at a time. That flexibility, paired with affordability, helps remove one of the most common barriers student-parents face when pursuing their education.

"I can't recommend it enough," Melina said. "The process is easy, the staff are wonderful, and being able to drop my child off on the way to class makes a huge difference."

The program is part of Western's broader commitment to supporting student success and meeting learners where they are—recognizing that access to education often depends on access to practical, everyday support.

Students interested in learning more about drop-in childcare and other resources for parents can visit westerntc.edu/students-with-children or contact **Bobby Lith**, Student Parent Resource Navigator, at lithb@westerntc.edu or 608-785-9194.

"The process is easy, the staff are wonderful, and being able to drop my child off on the way to class made a huge difference."

— Melina



Business Division Launches New Speaker Series

Western's Business Division launched a new initiative connecting students with industry professionals. On Nov. 25, students gathered for the inaugural **Business Speaker Series**, a panel designed to offer real-world insight, networking, and a deeper understanding of the modern business landscape.

The event featured local leaders—including Western alumnus and Alumni Board President **Kevin Knerzer, '03**, now with Morgan Murphy Media. He shared expertise in communication, marketing, and media strategy, highlighting how adaptability and continuous learning shape today's workplaces.

Students asked thoughtful questions throughout the Q&A, digging into topics like leadership, innovation, and career development. Many shared that hearing directly from professionals gave them clearer direction and confidence as they explore their next steps.

"I am grateful for the experience of participating as a panelist for Western's inaugural Business Speaker Series. The opportunity allowed me to answer a wide variety of questions; everything from what employers look for in talent attraction to insights on employee career development."
— Kevin Knerzer, '03.

The Business Division plans to expand this series, recognizing how powerful these connections can be.

Zak Pearson, dean of the Business Division, said: "Our speaker series is designed to connect what students are learning in class with the real experiences of business leaders in our community. We want them to have as many touchpoints as possible so they can see the larger world they're stepping into."

Stay tuned for more events!



From left to right: CJ White, Elevate Media Group; Kevin Knerzer, '03, Morgan Murphy Media (WKBT); Will Kratt, ISG, Inc.; Chris Welnetx, Kwik Trip

E-Waste A Smart Way to Recycle Old Technology Powered by Western Students

Got old tech collecting dust? Western has you covered.

On Friday, March 13, Western will host an **E-Waste Recycling Event**, offering the community a convenient, responsible way to recycle outdated technology, from laptops and printers to phones, monitors, and more. The event runs 9 a.m.–3 p.m. in Parking Lot H on Western’s La Crosse campus.

What makes this event special goes beyond convenience. It’s led by Western’s Student-Run Help Desk in partnership with Dynamic Lifecycle Innovations, a Wisconsin-based leader in electronics recycling and data security. Together, they’re turning community service into a learning experience.

For students, the event is a hands-on example of work-based learning in action. They manage real equipment, follow industry protocols, and work directly with professionals—gaining experience that mirrors what employers expect in the field. It’s learning that sticks, because it’s real.

For alumni and community members, it’s a huge win: responsibly recycle old technology while supporting student learning and a strong local industry partnership. Accepted items include: computers, laptops, LCD monitors, printers, mobile devices, networking equipment, and more.

Items must be transported in a trunk, pickup bed, or trailer.

Have tech to recycle? Take advantage of this convenient recycling option for the community while giving students meaningful, real-world experience.



ACCEPTED ITEMS

- Modems
- Cable Boxes
- Speakers
- Mice
- PCs
- Networking Equipment
- Mobile Devices/Phones
- Keyboards
- Gaming Systems
- LCD Monitors ONLY
- Laptops
- Printers

E-WASTE DROP-OFF:

Friday, March 13
9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.
Parking Lot H | 8th and Badger Street

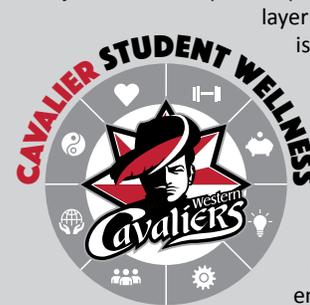


Western Joins the Green Bandana Project

Western Technical College has joined the **Green Bandana Project**, a national initiative dedicated to promoting mental health awareness, suicide prevention, and peer support on college campuses.

The Green Bandana Project trains students in suicide prevention and connects them with mental health resources. Participants carry resource cards and wear a green bandana on their backpack or in a visible spot to sign that they are someone informed, approachable, and ready to help connect peers with support. Over time, the bandana has become a symbol of care, awareness, and solidarity.

At Western Technical College, the program strengthens an existing network of student wellness resources. Through the **Cavalier Student Wellness** program, campus counseling services, and partnerships with local providers such as the UWL Student Health Center and Neighborhood Family Clinics, students have access to affordable, comprehensive care. The Green Bandana Project adds an important peer-to-peer



layer—support that is visible, casual, and rooted in everyday campus life.

“We’re proud to be part of a movement that encourages open conversations about mental health,” said **Ryan**

Monroe, manager of Health, Wellness, and Recreation at Western. The Green Bandana Project helps students look out for one another and builds more compassionate and connected area campuses.

Students interested in participating can learn more and find involvement at thegreenbandanaproject.org/chapter/western-technical-college



Where Are They Now?

We track down retirees to get an update on life after Western.



Loren Caulum

Retired Information Technology-Computer Instructor

I also served as a trustee and past president of the La Crosse County library for over 35 years. I continue to be the “muscle” for my neighborhood library.

What has surprised you most about retirement? I enjoy it far more than I expected! I’m busier now than when I was working.

Describe a perfect day. Every day is perfect. I wake before 8:30, usually by 7:15, take vitamins, make an espresso, and play Wordle. I recently had a 120-day streak. I enjoy whatever the day holds.

Western Reflections

What do you miss most? Talking with students and being in the classroom. Their enthusiasm for learning was apparent. I also miss my colleagues.

What part of Western’s culture meant the most? I loved “Inservice”—now College Day—at the start of each year. It was the one time everyone came together.

A moment or colleague that sticks with you? Betty Baldwin, an office assistant to Robert Franks, was like a second mother when I started. She knew everything and could do everything. I think of her whenever I drive by campus. I also think of my department on the day of my retirement.

Career Highlights & Impact

What accomplishment are you most proud of? Creating the Micro Computer Specialist associate degree program.

Your biggest challenge? Finding ways to connect with each student and adapting strategies to fit their needs.

Any student stories that resonate? One of my former students married my nephew; they now live on my wife’s family farm. Also, one of my high school teachers worked in my department when I started.

Most meaningful impact? Watching students walk across the stage at graduation. In 34 years, I only missed one ceremony.

Advice & Wisdom

Work-life balance advice?

- If you’re not early, you’re late.
- Do it slowly and correctly the first time.
- Build a schedule and stick to it.
- Prioritize family.

Something you wish you knew earlier?

Life should be lived backward—studying matters.

One piece of wisdom for your younger self? Spend more than an hour studying. Your education is the foundation for your future.

Don’t take it lightly.

What standout moments have defined your retirement?

Life is an adventure. Since retiring, I’ve celebrated my son’s destination wedding in Riviera Maya, welcomed two granddaughters, watched my daughter move back from Tucson, and marked my 52nd wedding anniversary.

My worst day in retirement was simply not returning to school the next semester.

Have you rediscovered any hobbies?

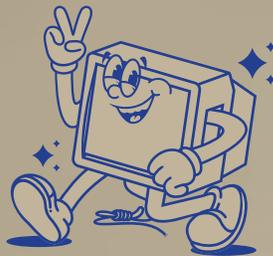
I’ve invested in woodworking and enjoy it deeply. I’ve made furniture for family and friends and sold some pieces. Every year, my wife and her sisters take a long weekend together, and I make a keepsake for them. I’m still brainstorming next year’s.

How do you stay fulfilled? I golf once or twice a week and bowl on Thursday mornings. I serve on the Winding Rivers Library Board and am a past vice president. After years of reading textbooks and industry material, I now enjoy exploring new genres.

WESTERN STUDENT RUN

HELP DESK

MARCH 27 – APRIL 17



Get help with software questions, hardware support, and troubleshooting. Wanek Center of Innovation in Room 219, 744 Badger Street, La Crosse

Community members may park in Western lot H or visitor parking spots for free during Help Desk hours.

Walk-In Service & Appointments Fridays: 9am - 3pm

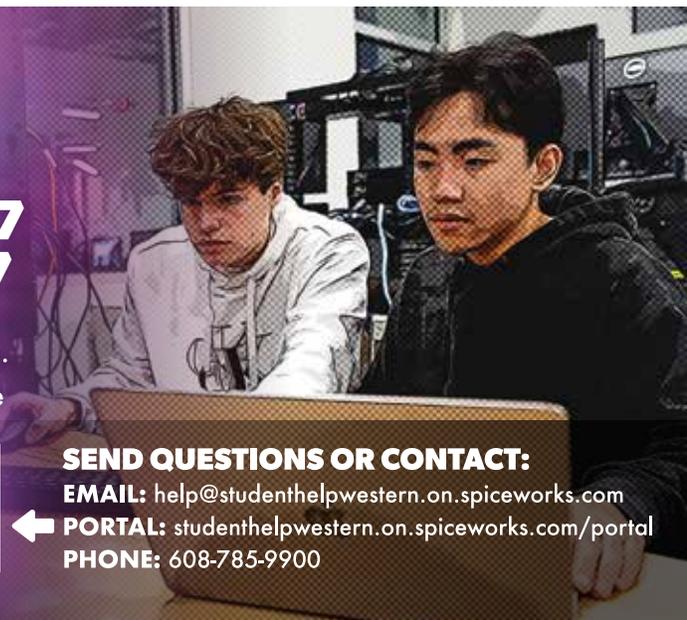


SEND QUESTIONS OR CONTACT:

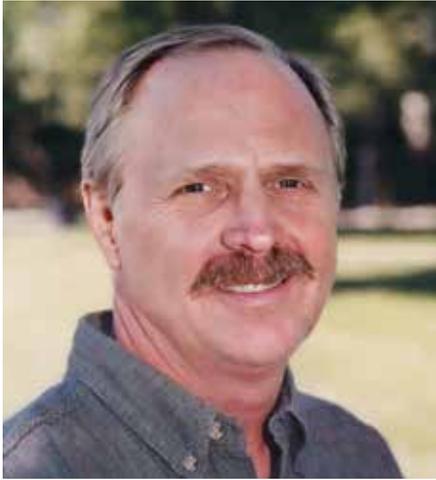
EMAIL: help@studenthelpwestern.on.spiceworks.com

PORTAL: studenthelpwestern.on.spiceworks.com/portal

PHONE: 608-785-9900



Remembering the Legacy of John R. Bolstad



John R. Bolstad lived a life enhanced by curiosity, creativity, and a lasting commitment to education and service. As an educator, artist, and lifelong learner, he influenced students and colleagues through his intellect, his generosity, and the care he brought to his work.

John dedicated 21 years to Western Technical College, teaching Computer Information Systems and Mathematics. He helped students

develop practical skills, confidence, and a belief in their own ability to solve problems. He took pride in teaching ideas that mattered and in watching students grow into them. His love of learning extended well beyond Western. He taught internationally in Sydney, Australia, authored a textbook, created a computer game, and earned copyrights for his work—projects that reflected his inventive thinking and enjoyment of complex challenges.

Music and the arts were essential parts of John's life. From his early years marching with the Austin Lancers and the La Crosse Blue Stars to his later roles as an instructor, show designer, and judge, drum and bugle corps remained a constant presence. He was also a dedicated supporter of local and collegiate performances and believed deeply in the value of the arts as a force for discipline, expression, and connection.

John was also deeply committed to giving back. He established the John Bolstad Endowed

Scholarship at Western to support new students with financial need. He contributed to humanitarian organizations and sponsored children through Child Fund International. His generosity reflected his belief in the importance of access, opportunity, and responsibility to others.

Outside of his professional life, John enjoyed the outdoors, sports, and travel. He approached life with intention and curiosity,

making room for learning, creativity, and service wherever he went. His legacy endures through the students he taught,

the arts he supported, and the many lives he touched. He will be deeply missed and remembered with gratitude by the Western community and beyond.

"John lifted the people around him with his upbeat demeanor and he left a trail of cheerfulness wherever he went."

— Jason Rouvel, friend and Colleague

Celebrating the Life and Impact of Mark Davini

Mark Davini was a dedicated educator, creative professional, and longtime member of the Western Technical College community. His work will continue to shape the programs he helped build and the many students who found their direction through his teaching.

Mark joined Western Wisconsin Technical College in 1996 as a Media Producer and later became an instructor in Visual Media and Digital Media Production. Over more than 26 years, he helped grow and strengthen Western's media programs, bringing current industry practice into the classroom and helping students understand what professional work truly demands. He retired in 2022.

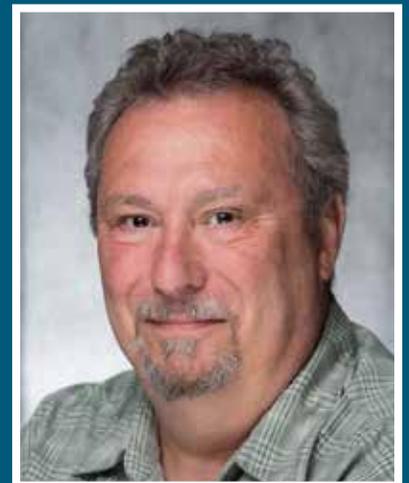
With deep expertise in video, audio, lighting, and production, Mark emphasized both craft and accountability. He expected students to take their work seriously and encouraged them to see creativity as something that improves through effort, feedback, and collaboration. Many students credit him with helping them recognize their own abilities and with preparing them for careers that require adaptability and confidence.

Mark formed lasting relationships with students that often extended beyond graduation. Former students became colleagues, collaborators, and friends, reflecting the respect and trust he built through teaching and mentorship. He was also a strong supporter of the Western Foundation, advocating for resources that expanded access, strengthened programs, and supported student learning.

Mark's legacy lives on in the confidence, skills, and careers of the students he taught and in the programs he helped advance. Western Technical College, the Western Foundation, and the alumni community remember him with gratitude and respect for a life devoted to education, creativity, and possibility.

"Mark was a master at bridging the gap between technical skill and real-world soul. As a true 'edutainer,' he led with his heart and his history, morphing years of industry experience into relatable stories."

— James Bushman, fellow instructor



In Memoriam

Patsy L. Challet 8/4/25
1968 General Clerical

Richard A. Coombs 12/3/25
1996 Accounting

Mark N. Elliott 12/2/25
1988 Air Conditioning, Heating, & Refrigeration Tech

Ruth Hafner 11/11/25
1966 CETA Clerk Typist

Kim A. Hesselberg 8/20/25
1979 Practical Nursing

Ralph JaDoul 10/27/25
1978 Wood Tech

Susan L. Jensen 10/28/25
1992 Administrative Assistant/Information Processing

Donald D. Jobe 1/2/26
1969 Accounting

David E. Johnson 11/20/25
1973 Wood Tech
1975 Accounting Finance

Lynn M. Kohlmeier 8/28/25
1978 Operating Room Assistant

Jeff J. Muellenberg 7/18/25
Agri-Business Science Technology

Eric M. Nies 9/26/25
1980 Farm Operations
1995 Agri-Business Science Technology

John M. Oestreicher 11/26/25
1996 Accounting

Isaac C. Pettibone 11/28/25
2022 Automotive Service Technician - Level 2

Scott D. Smith 10/2/25
1988 Electronic Servicing

Julia A. Zebro 8/15/25
1978 Practical Nursing

Western Retirees & Staff

John R. Bolstad 12/23/25

Mark Davini 1/13/26

Joan M. Kohlhaas 9/17/25

William H. Temte 12/2/25

Honoring the Life and Legacy of Donald D. Jobe

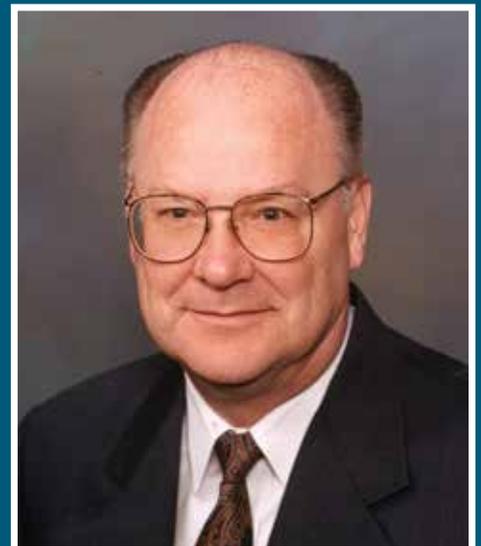
Western Technical College remembers and honors the life of **Donald D. Jobe**, a distinguished alumnus whose leadership, service, and commitment to education left a lasting impact on our institution and the communities he served.

Don earned degrees in Electronics and Accounting from Western Technical College, followed by a bachelor's degree in Accounting from Winona State University. His education laid the foundation for an accomplished career that began at the Trane Company and spanned nearly three decades at Norplex—later ISOLA Laminate Systems—where he rose to the position of President and CEO.

Don maintained a strong connection to Western throughout his life. He was recognized as a Distinguished Alumnus in 2000 and generously gave back as an advisory committee member and part-time accounting instructor, helping shape future generations of students. His legacy at Western continues through his son, **Dean Jobe**, who currently serves as Associate Dean of Allied Health in the Division of Health & Public Safety.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Don and his wife Donna shared a deep commitment to service, supporting orphanages and adoption efforts for homeless children. Their compassion and generosity exemplified the values Western strives to instill in its students.

Don's legacy lives on through the lives he touched—as a leader, mentor, alumnus, and advocate for education and opportunity.



Remember When...

Do you recognize anyone from this photo? We would love to hear from you!



Do you have a photo to share? Contact the Alumni Office at **608-789-6083** or alumni@westerntc.edu