

WINE

Magazine

SUMMER 2024



Presidential Election 2024:

Professors John Baick and Tim Vercellotti outline what to expect for the 2024 presidential campaign season.



Summer '24

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WNE

Magazine

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PRESIDENT

Robert E. Johnson

VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVANCEMENT

Dean Hickey

VICE PRESIDENT FOR MARKETING AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Mercedes Maskalik

EDITOR

Brittney Mihalich

CONTRIBUTORS

John Baick

Judith Curran

Curt Hamakawa L'84

Mercedes Maskalik

Brittney Mihalich

Collin Quinn

Carolyn Robbins

Kelly Scianna

Briana Strobel '17/G'23

Sarah Leete Tsitso

Tim Vercellotti

Molly Watson

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Mercedes Maskalik

Matthew Reilly G'24

Sarah Stephens G'19

DIGITAL DESIGN

Shaun McGrady '02/G'09

Ed O'Connell

Matthew Reilly G'24

Becky Turner '16/G'18

PRINTER

AM Lithography

PHOTOGRAPHY

Luke Haughwout

Roman Lee

Chris Marion

Matthew Reilly G'24

Sarah Smith

Sean O'Neil

Jenil Patel

EDITORIAL OFFICES

Magazine of Western New England University

Office of Alumni Relations

Western New England University

1215 Wilbraham Road

Springfield, MA 01119-2684

(413) 796-2240

alumwne@wne.edu

Address and email changes should be sent to the Office of Alumni Relations at alumwne@wne.edu.

An Historic Commencement

The Class of 2024 celebrated commencement with pomp and circumstance at Springfield's MassMutual Center — the first time the event has been held at this location in more than two decades.

Cheered on by thousands of friends and family members, this special ceremony marked the first time many graduates were able to march after the COVID-19 pandemic prevented prior commencement ceremonies.

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If you're looking for ways to support Western New England University and receive a steady stream of payments, a charitable gift annuity may be your answer. It is a simple contract between you and WNE. In exchange for a gift of \$25,000 or more, WNE will provide guaranteed fixed payments to you for life.

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Based on a \$25,000 gift amount for one person:

AGE	ANNUITY RATE	ANNUAL PAYMENT	CHARITABLE DEDUCTION
65	5.7%	\$1,425	\$8,802
70	6.3%	\$1,575	\$9,378
75	7.0%	\$1,750	\$10,379
80	8.1%	\$2,025	\$11,353
85	9.1%	\$2,275	\$13,246

Based on a \$25,000 gift amount for two people:

AGE	ANNUITY RATE	ANNUAL PAYMENT	CHARITABLE DEDUCTION
65/62	4.9%	\$1,225	\$8,021
65/67	5.1%	\$1,275	\$8,161
70/75	5.8%	\$1,450	\$8,519
75/77	6.3%	\$1,575	\$9,044
80/78	6.8%	\$1,700	\$9,567

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Dean Hickey, Vice President for Advancement at
413-796-2210 or email dean.hickey@wne.edu.

Pushing the Boundaries of Possibility

BY ROBERT E. JOHNSON



By the time you browse through this latest issue of our magazine, we will have graduated Western New England University's Class of 2024. These students chose to attend WNE during one of the most disruptive periods in global history due to the coronavirus pandemic. Unlike the experience of our alumni before them, the path to graduation was filled with unprecedented levels of loneliness, stress, anxiety, and struggle.

I am proud to report the kids are more than alright...and are pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

The work of WNE's engineering students in silicon photonics has the potential to drive innovation across multiple industries, leading to more efficient technologies, new applications, and improved quality of life. This technology can revolutionize industries such as data centers, artificial

intelligence, telecommunications, sensing and imaging, and biomedical applications.

Closer to home, WNE's Center for Advanced Manufacturing Systems (CAMS) and Robotic Welding Technologies Project is poised to deliver new, highly skilled workers to the region's employers. The Healey-Driscoll administration is currently supporting the program with a \$1.1 million investment over three years to establish a research and training cluster in advanced robotic welding technologies at WNE.

"With college comes a lot of changes," says first-year student Roman Lee. In this edition, Lee shares his perspective on coming to WNE, the influence of his family, and how he plans to use the skills developed through the 3+3 Business and Law program to achieve his future goals and contribute to the community.

There are so many exciting and interesting things happening on campus – especially around Commencement time. The 875 Golden Bears that graduated this year have left a profound impact on all of us, and we have prepared them with the skillset and mindset to go out into the world and make a difference.

I hope you enjoy reading about the incredible students, faculty, staff, and amazing alumni whose lives and work continue to inspire all of us at WNE.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert E. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "R" and "J".

CAMPUS NEWS

For the latest news from Western New England University, visit wne.edu/news.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS VISIT WNE: GOVERNOR HEALEY AND SECRETARIES HAO, JONES, AND TUTWILER

Western New England University (WNE) recently hosted a distinguished delegation, including Governor Maura Healey and Secretaries Yvonne Hao (Economic Development), Lauren Jones (Labor & Workforce Development), and Patrick Tutwiler (Education). The visit was part of Healey's Mass Leads Road Show, promoting the Mass Leads Act, which aims to boost Massachusetts' economy by investing in advanced manufacturing and robotics.

Welcomed by WNE President Dr. Robert E. Johnson and other key figures, the delegation engaged in discussions and demonstrations highlighting WNE's contributions to innovation and workforce development. Governor Healey praised the University's role in driving technological advancements and training the future workforce.

The three major WNE projects showcased were the Center for Advanced Manufacturing Systems (CAMS) and Robotic Welding Technologies project:

supported by a \$1.1 million investment from the Healey-Driscoll Administration, this initiative aims to enhance regional manufacturing through advanced robotic welding technologies; the Northeast Microelectronics Coalition Hub (NEMC) participation: backed by \$19.7 million in federal funding, this collaborative effort advances microelectronics research and workforce training; and the Quantum Computing infrastructure grant: a \$999,000 grant from Massachusetts funds in partnership with UMass Boston, positioning WNE at the forefront of quantum research and education.

Dr. Johnson emphasized the importance of these investments in strengthening the state's technology sector and the critical role of education in economic growth and workforce readiness. WNE remains committed to preparing graduates who make significant contributions to their communities and industries.



WNE'S OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAM RECOGNIZED AMONG THE BEST GRADUATE SCHOOLS BY U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

The WNE Occupational Therapy program has been recognized as one of the Best Graduate Schools by U.S. News & World Report. This esteemed ranking underscores the program's excellence and prominence among peer academic leaders in the field of occupational therapy.

The U.S. News & World Report's rankings, based on surveys of peer academic leaders, consider factors such as program quality, faculty expertise, research opportunities, and overall academic reputation. WNE's Occupational Therapy program, ranked 105 out of 263, highlights its high regard within the academic community and strengthens WNE's reputation in higher education.

Dr. John Pezzuto, dean of WNE's College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, noted, "As a relatively new program, we appreciate this peer recognition. Having reached a ranking of fourth among the 11 programs in the Commonwealth offering the entry-level OT doctorate is a testament to the extraordinary faculty, staff, and students."

Established in 2017, the Occupational Therapy program at WNE has quickly risen to prominence, emphasizing experiential education with five semesters of fieldwork and the student-operated BEAR PAW Center. The program's doctoral capstone projects consistently yield outstanding results, with students presenting and publishing peer-reviewed work.



Chair of the WNE OT Department, Dr. Brittany Adams, highlighted the program's collegiality and partnerships with institutions nationwide. Future initiatives include launching a distance learning cohort and expanding telehealth services, further cementing WNE's position as a leader in occupational therapy education.

COLLEGE OF PHARMACY AND HEALTH SCIENCES EXPANDS GLOBAL HEALTHCARE REACH IN GHANA

In January of this year, WNE Pharmacy students, led by Assistant Dean for Experiential Affairs Dr. Melissa Mattison, traveled to Ghana, West Africa, to engage in a transformative international Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) rotation.

In partnership with healthcare professionals and students from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, WNE students provided essential health education and services to local communities. Their activities included conducting health screenings, offering nutrition counseling, and facilitating education sessions on tropical diseases. These efforts fostered intercultural learning and an exchange of medical practices with local healthcare providers.

"This experience allowed our students to immerse themselves in the rich cultural and medical landscape of sub-Saharan Africa while making



a tangible difference in the lives of Ghanaian communities," remarked Dr. Mattison.

The success of this inaugural APPE rotation has paved the way for future initiatives. In January 2025, Dr. Mattison will lead another group of Pharmacy students to Ghana to build upon the foundation laid during this transformative experience.

Western New England University's College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences provides students with opportunities for global engagement and experiential learning, preparing them to become compassionate and competent healthcare professionals on a global scale.

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS HOSTS "HOW TO NETWORK ON THE GOLF COURSE" EVENT WITH DR. JOHNSON

The WNE College of Business has introduced an innovative course titled "Introduction to Golf for Business Professionals," offering students the unique chance to learn golf within an academic setting. This initiative, led by Dr. Sharianne Walker, dean of the College of Business, aims to equip students with networking skills and professional development through the game of golf.

Dr. Walker, inspired by her personal experiences as a young professional missing out on networking opportunities, designed the program to ensure students have maximum career advancement opportunities. The course includes four classroom

sessions, beginning with an introductory lesson by Dr. Walker and followed by a session on networking on the golf course, taught by President Johnson. The program culminates with an on-course outing at Tekoa Country Club.

Dr. Johnson emphasized the value of golf for developing communication, networking, and mentorship skills, noting its unique ability to foster relationships in a professional context. He hopes other universities will adopt similar programs to bring people together and enhance professional development.

The course has already inspired students like Bella Giard, who started a women's golf club at WNE to encourage more women to engage in the sport. Giard's initiative reflects the program's impact, demonstrating how golf can foster leadership and community among students.

This pioneering course at WNE prepares students for real-world success through innovative and practical learning experiences.



CAMPUS NEWS

For the latest news from Western New England University, visit wne.edu/news.



DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY COLLABORATES WITH WEST SPRINGFIELD FIRE DEPARTMENT TO LAUNCH NEW PROJECT AIMED AT PROMOTING CALMNESS

The WNE Department of Occupational Therapy, in collaboration with the West Springfield Fire Department (WSFD), has launched the “BEary Calm Bags” project. This initiative aims to enhance the emergency response experience for individuals requiring extra assistance by providing sensory aids to promote calmness and comfort during ambulance rides.

The “BEary Calm Bags” include items such as sunglasses, noise-canceling headphones, pop-it fidgets, weighted lap pads, communication aides, and a pinwheel for deep breathing. These tools are designed to manage sensory input and promote relaxation, improving the overall experience for both patients and emergency responders.

West Springfield Fire Chief C.J. Bartone emphasized the importance of this project, stating that specialized training from WNE’s disability studies experts will equip EMTs and paramedics with skills to address diverse community needs during emergencies. Assistant Professors Alexis Morin and Erin Wells, lead collaborators on the project, leveraged their extensive experience working with diverse populations to develop this initiative.

Morin’s husband, Zak, a paramedic and lieutenant with WSFD, played a key role in facilitating the collaboration. Along with second-year occupational therapy students, they developed the bags and a training video for first responders. The project aims to expand beyond WSFD, with plans to gather feedback and secure grant funding for sustainability.



DR. MIKE RUST ELECTED TO PRESTIGIOUS KEEN LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

College of Engineering’s Director of Experiential & Entrepreneurial Learning and Professor of Biomedical Engineering Dr. Mike Rust has been elected to the prestigious KEEN Leadership Council (KLC). Dr. Rust’s election to the KLC, a select group within the KEEN/Engineering Unleashed network funded by the Kern Family Foundation, marks a significant achievement.

Since 2011, WNE has partnered with KEEN to reshape engineering education, focusing on empowering graduates to generate personal, economic, and societal value through impactful work. The KLC, established in 2021, collaborates to advance KEEN’s mission and transform engineering education through entrepreneurial principles.

“It is quite an honor to be elected to the KEEN Leadership Council,” said Rust. “KEEN has been a transformative experience for me over the past decade. Serving on the Council allows me to further influence the network’s future and advance entrepreneurial engineering education.”

Rust, a Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers and member of the American Society for Engineering Education, has significantly contributed to engineering education. His research in point-of-care medical technologies has received funding from prestigious organizations, and he holds four U.S. patents. Rust’s involvement in startups such as FloDesign Sonics and New England Breath Technologies showcases his entrepreneurial spirit.

As a KLC member, Rust will engage in strategic planning and discussions to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset in engineering students across the KEEN network. This role, requiring both in-person and virtual meetings, reflects Rust’s dedication to innovation and excellence in engineering education at Western New England University.

This appointment underscores WNE’s commitment to innovative engineering education and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among students.



WNE FinTech + AI 413 Startup Launch Series

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS LAUNCHES FINTECH + AI 413 STARTUP LAUNCH SERIES

Western New England University's FinTech Incubator (FTI) announces the WNE FinTech + AI 413 Startup Launch Series, an innovative program designed to foster entrepreneurship and innovation in financial technology (FinTech) and Artificial intelligence (AI).

The Startup Launch Series offers college students and aspiring entrepreneurs in Massachusetts a unique opportunity to transform their startup ideas into reality. Participants receive expert coaching, access to high-performance computing resources, and funding opportunities. The program's aim is to immerse participants in the region's vibrant FinTech ecosystem, leveraging the high-performance computing cluster at FTI.

"We are excited to invite individuals with a passion for technology and entrepreneurship to join us for the WNE FinTech + AI 413 Startup Launch Series," said Dr. Charles Mutigwe, associate professor

of Business Analytics at Western New England University. "Through personalized training by our esteemed faculty, corporate partners, and local nonprofits, participants will have the support they need to secure funding and turn their innovative ideas into successful ventures."

The program features a series of events and activities to guide participants through every stage of the startup journey, including an Idea Jam, Elevator Pitch Camp, Elevator Pitch Contest, a six-week Summer Residential Fellowship, SOAR Show-and-Tell, and a Fall Demo Day.

Partnerships with WNE Advancement, WNE Division of Marketing & External Affairs, Alchemy Funds, and M. Scott Investments ensure a robust network of support for participants, enhancing their chances of success in the competitive startup landscape.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON NAMED TO MASSACHUSETTS AI STRATEGIC TASK FORCE

WNE proudly announces the appointment of President Robert E. Johnson to the Massachusetts Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategic Task Force. Established by Governor Maura Healey through an executive order, the Task Force is dedicated to exploring the implications of AI and generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technology across various sectors, including business, education, and state functions.

The Task Force aims to harness AI's potential while ensuring its responsible use to benefit the state's economy and communities. "Massachusetts has the opportunity to be a global leader in Applied AI," Governor Healey stated, highlighting the collaborative efforts required to maintain a competitive edge.

Expressing his gratitude, Dr. Johnson said, "Incorporating AI into our educational curriculum is about empowering students to become architects of the future. At WNE, we're committed to leveraging AI to enhance learning outcomes and foster a culture of lifelong learning." He emphasized the importance of critical thinking and ethical frameworks in responsible AI development.

The 25-member Task Force, comprising distinguished individuals from academia, government, and industry, will begin its work in February 2025, with recommendations expected later in the year.

SPOTLIGHT ON INTERNATIONAL LAW: THE SCHOOL OF LAW PROMOTES JUSTICE AROUND THE GLOBE

Through teaching, research, and action, faculty and staff at the Western New England University School of Law model the values integral to upholding the rights and liberties of all people — whether they are located in the Commonwealth, the nation, or throughout the world.

School of Law Dean Zeldia Harris, Professors Bridgette Baldwin, Rene Reich-Graefe and Tim Webster, Assistant Professors Luwam Dirar and Tolulope Odunsi-Nelson, and Clinical Assistant Professor Lauren Cerasik are actively working with international advocacy agencies, human rights organizations, and foreign governments. Their work includes teaching trial advocacy, advocacy in collaboration with international non-governmental organizations, developing foreign policies that promote constitutional change, examining international legal scholarship, transnationalism, global governance, and war reparations litigation.

These experiences translate to the classroom and provide WNE students with insight and access to compelling global problems that can be applied locally, regionally, and nationally.

Just weeks prior to beginning her tenure with the School of Law in August 2023, Dean Harris led a group of 60 inmate participants in Naivasha, Kenya, in trial advocacy training with the National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA), Jones Day, and Justice Defenders.

"Students should be encouraged to have an international experience," Dean Harris said. "I think I can certainly offer that to the students because I do travel to other countries to do this type of advocacy training, and I see how students can benefit from that experience too." This summer, Dean Harris will resume advocacy training in Naivasha.





A Gold(en) Medal Career

By Curt Hamakawa L'84

After a 20-year dream career in sports, first with the NCAA and subsequently the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee, I was fortunate to land an even “dreamier” opportunity at Western New England University, where I found my calling in helping students prepare themselves for their lives ahead. I graduated from the School of Law in 1984 and returned to WNE in 2006 to teach in the College of Business, aiming to replicate a semblance of the educational experience that I once enjoyed as a student.

As a professor of Sport Management, I leveraged my industry contacts as well as those of my colleagues to create two popular speaker series: an evening program titled “For the Love of the Games” and a brown bag lunch program called “People Who Inspire.” Through the Center for International Sport Business, we brought a diverse cross section of prominent personalities from the world of sport and business to campus. I remember a standing-room-only crowd amazed by the measure of 29 feet, 2½ inches that I marked with strips of tape on the floor of Wood Auditorium

after announcing that our guest, Olympic long jump champion Bob Beamon, leapt that distance at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City — distance which, 56 years later, is still an Olympic record. Imagine the reaction when I asked Beamon if he would be so kind as to repeat his feat for our students that evening!

The on-campus presence of this array of high-profile speakers enabled WNE students to meet, hear, and learn from these influential leaders, and in many cases engage in conversation at pre-event receptions and intimate post-event dinners.

Another popular program that I initiated was a unique travel course that took WNE students to the Olympic Games in Beijing (2008), London (2012), and Rio de Janeiro (2016), as well as to the FIFA World Cups in South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), and Russia (2018). Students witnessed the highest level of athleticism at these events and gained behind-the-scenes perspectives into the business framework from the people producing these mega sport events. A memorable highlight from the Beijing trip was waking up our first morning and opening the pages of the *China Daily*, the country’s national English language newspaper, and finding, to my utter surprise, a full-color photo of one of our WNE students laying a smooch on a young – and smiling – Chinese woman! The photo, taken on opening day of the 2008 Olympic Games, was labeled a “cross-cultural kiss.”

A highlight of this role was being interviewed by NBC Sports court-side



China Daily photo.

reporter Craig Sager at a USA women's basketball game during the 2012 London Olympics. He filed an on-air report during the live telecast with a shoutout to "a group of boisterous students from Western New England University, located in the birthplace of basketball in Springfield, Massachusetts." He then signed off with "Now how's that for a field trip!"

My greatest joy at WNE, however, was the opportunity to interact with students in and out of the classroom on a near-daily basis. To emphasize my purpose as an educator, I kept a desk plate in my office

with "IATSS" written in bold letters as a daily reminder that "it's about the students, stupid." As a professor, and during my three-and-a-half years as a member of the University's leadership team, I found deep satisfaction in engaging students and guiding them along their paths. I like to think that I played a small role in impacting their life journey — hopefully for the better.

I am grateful to the hundreds, if not thousands, of WNE students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and trustees whom I have been privileged to know over my nearly 20-year association with the University. As a Western New England student, alumnus, professor, administrator, and now retiree, I am proud to have been a member of this extended family whose enduring hallmark is the genuine culture of care and concern for its fellow members. It is my fervent belief and hope that past, current, and future generations of Golden Bear Nation will uphold this ethic in the finest tradition well into WNE's second century. 🐻

Curt's Legacy

KRISTEN BREEN '19 (Sport Management) There are truly not enough words to describe the impact that Curt had not only on my life, but on the lives of every student who had the pleasure of crossing paths with him at WNE. Curt was kind, caring, generous with his time, involved, dedicated to his students, and passionate about learning — at home and abroad. Most importantly, Curt cared about the little things that made a difference in his students' lives. From (not) getting lost on a run in Richmond Park while studying abroad, to spending Friday mornings in Chautauqua, to participating in mock international relations cases, my story is not unique. It is the story of every student who was lucky enough to interact with Curt during their time at WNE. Curt Hamakawa is the embodiment of WNE. He personifies the culture, values, commitment, and passion that defines this incredible university. WNE will not be the same without Curt, but the impact he has had and the lives he has touched go far beyond the walls of Churchill Hall and will live on not only in Springfield, but across the world.

TIM CONROD '11/G'13 (Sport Management/MBA) Curt's impact on my development, career, and life has been immeasurable. When I met Curt in 2008 during my sophomore year on campus, I lacked direction. As my advisor and professor, he quickly became my mentor. And as a mentor, he took extra time to teach me a few things that nobody else ever thought to. Curt taught me to be genuine, to be a diplomat, and that nice people can win in the business world. He's a first-class educator and a good example for us all. He'll be sorely missed by WNE in his well-deserved retirement.

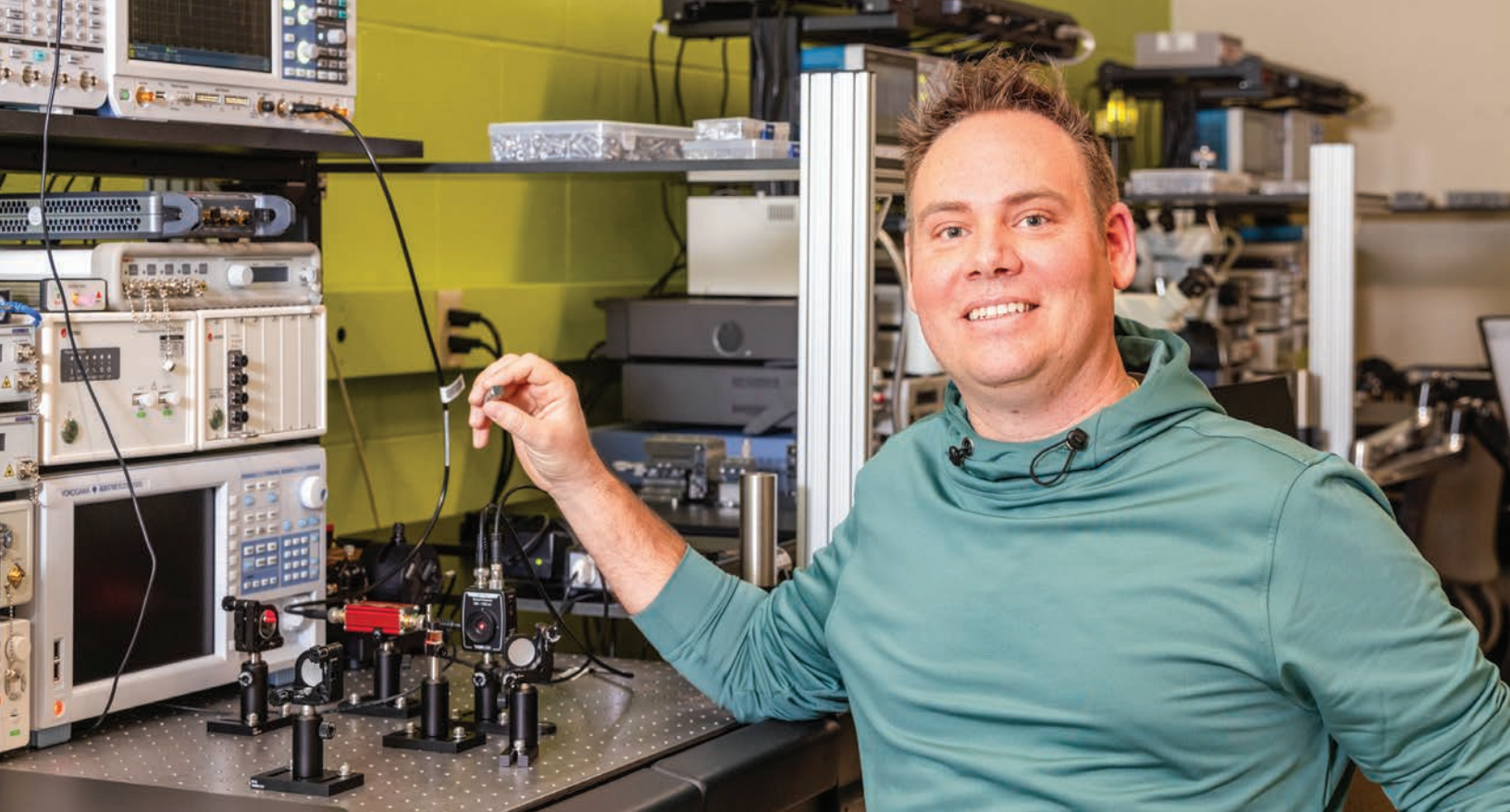
DAN COVELL, (Professor of Sport Management) [Through these trips]... Curt provided what I have come to realize was the most remarkable course-based experience for any student ever enrolled in our institution. I wouldn't have gone on them with anyone else, and I'm sure the students would agree.



In the College of Engineering's LEAP Lab, the Future of Silicon Photonics is Now

By Brittney Mihalich

What do sand, light, computer chips, and fiber have in common? If you've been playing the *New York Times* game Connections, you might be puzzled by this grouping: all four items are components of, or powered by, silicon.



Back in 2010, when Engineering Professor Steve Adamshick was preparing to graduate with his Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering at WNE, he had no idea that the technology he regularly worked with — circuits, interferometers, and semiconductors — would soon be miniaturized into a silicon photonics platform. Now, he's preparing the latest generation of engineers to continue pushing the bounds of innovation with his special topics course on silicon photonics.

For the non-engineers: what, exactly, is silicon photonics?

Let's break this down: silicon photonics is the creation of light circuits on a silicon-based platform.

Silicon, which is essentially sand and dirt melted down into particles, is the base material for what powers our digital existence: computer chips, central processing units (CPUs), and virtually all modern electronics. Silicon is also a base component of photovoltaic cells, or solar cells, which convert sunlight directly into energy. Those solar panels your neighbor installed last year — silicon! As silicon is one of the most abundant materials on Earth, it's interesting to note that the dirt beneath our shoes transforms into computer chips that sell for thousands.

Optics, or how we work with light, can be conceptualized with your hand-held camera. When you focus light on a subject or manipulate a shadow, you're working with optics. Add geometric structures and fiber cables to the mix, and you've got fiber optics — transmission of light through a thread of glass or plastic. Shine a light into one end of a fiber optic cable, and it reaches the other end intact. Similarly, when encoded information such as internet and television data enters one end of a fiber optic cable, it's converted back to its original form when it reaches the other side.

Photonics, or the manipulation of light, powers telecommunications, biosensing, environmental sensing, and — more recently — quantum computing.

When Professor Adamshick first taught the special topics course on silicon photonics in 2016, he focused on fundamentals, simulation, and mathematical problems. "There wasn't a lot of hands-on to it," he said.

Then, with a grant from the Massachusetts Center for Advanced Manufacturing and the Massachusetts Manufacturing Innovation Initiative, the College of Engineering gained a state-of-the-art optics/photonics training center known as the Laboratory for Education and Application Prototypes, or LEAP lab. Referred to as LEAP@WNE, the

lab includes six instrumentation and prototyping workstations for students to apply the fundamentals of silicon photonics hands-on.

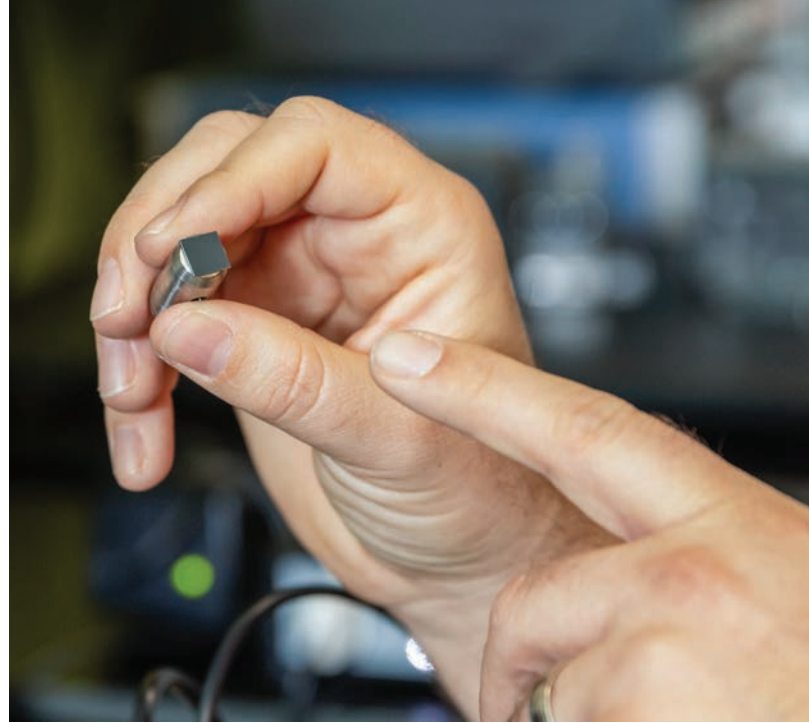
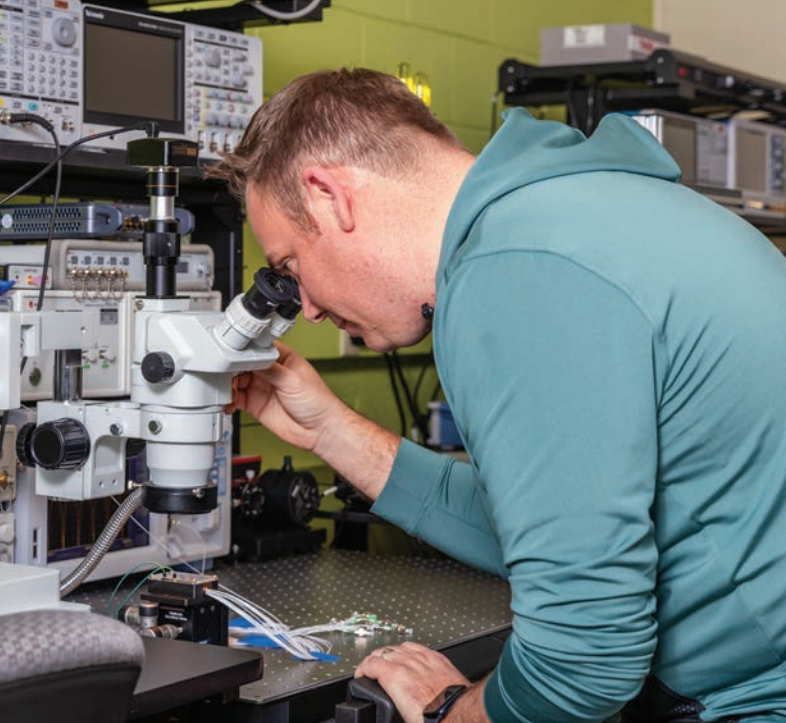
LEAP in Action

Professor Adamshick takes an inquisitive approach when guiding his students in chip design, asking questions like, "How do you build a setup? How do you envision that working? What are the core pieces of equipment that you need to get that done? Can you do that at scale?"

With no more than two students at any one of the six LEAP lab stations, each student has ample opportunity to create their own nanostructures that manipulate light on a computer chip. Once the chip is designed, it's sent out to a manufacturer for fabrication. When students receive the fabricated chip, they are able to test it in the lab.

"Our students get to see that whole process as a closed loop, from the initial concept to how to implement the design of it," Adamshick said.

The chip image on page 10, codesigned by Electrical Engineering alumni Jacob Boisvere '22 and Joseph Gonzalez '22, was the first WNE chip design sent out for manufacturing. Boisvere and Gonzalez created the chip in the LEAP lab to study



the coupling effects of ring resonator circuits, and the pair presented their results in the 2022 WNE Engineering Design Expo.

“The new equipment allowed me to engage deeply with the material outside of classroom lectures, and I frequently spent my time between classes experimenting with various devices and techniques ... this practical approach became essential in helping me complete my senior project,” Gonzalez said.

In layman’s terms, Boisvere and Gonzalez examined how the electromagnetic field of one ring effected other nearby rings when a signal passed through. When designing efficient circuits, electrical engineers need to consider how this coupling effect strengthens or weakens signals passing through circuits. The rings are used in Wavelength Division Multiplexing communication schemes, which we typically associate with telecommunications companies. For example, if you’ve considered upgrading your Wi-Fi network to Fiber, you would essentially be combining multiple optical carrier signals into a single optical fiber.

Boisvere and Gonzalez were members of the first cohort to use the LEAP lab. Now a PhD candidate at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), Boisvere leverages his experience in developing the techniques for using LEAP lab equipment to further his research, which he has expanded to include optoelectronic and power devices in RIT’s Microsystems Engineering doctoral program.

“My experience with Dr. Adamshick has translated well to a research environment,” Boisvere said. “Much like my senior project, my work at RIT has been lab-focused and hands-on ... I’ve co-authored publications on gallium nitride-based ultraviolet μ LEDs and lasers, while working towards heterogeneous integration of these devices with silicon photonics through micro-transfer printing.”

Known for his enthusiasm and passion for silicon photonics, Professor Adamshick introduces students to layout and simulation software in a project-based, hands-on environment. “Exploring the different applications, from Mach-Zehnder interferometers used to detect viral loads of COVID-19, to photonic ring resonators that allow specific wavelengths of light to be separated from many signals through a single fiber optic cable, allowed us to make real-world connections to the potentials of silicon photonics,” Boisvere explained.

K-12 STEM Outreach

WNE’s LEAP lab is one of five facilities in the state that houses application prototyping equipment. “What differentiates our lab from the others is that ours specifically focuses on workforce development,” Adamshick added.

And when it comes to workforce development, Adamshick recognizes the need to generate interest in the field. “The biggest shortage we have in our industry is human capital, and we’ve got to get students thinking STEM,” he said. In response,

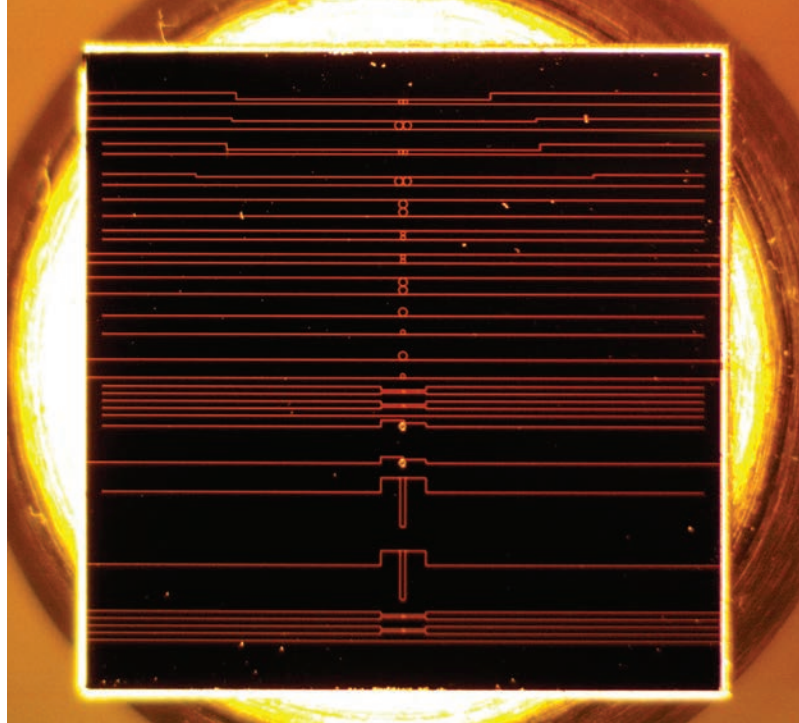
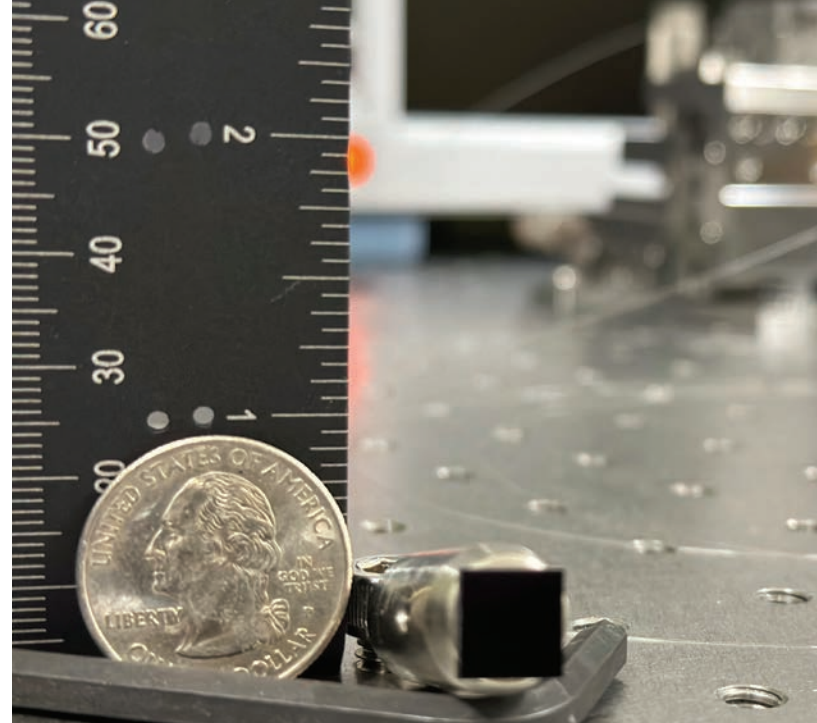
WNE partners with schools in the area to bring elementary- and secondary-age students into the lab.

Just like he does with his WNE students, Adamshick guides these younger groups with questions: “Do you want to use technology, or do you want to help make technology?” When students step into the LEAP lab at WNE, they can expect to see a live vibrometer demonstration on a silicon photonics platform and get their hands on photonic integrated circuit (PIC) chip kits created especially for K-12.

These PIC chip kits, developed by AIM Photonics in Albany, N.Y., and Spark Photonics in Waltham, Mass., were created specifically for educational and workforce development. WNE Engineering was the first customer of these kits designed and manufactured entirely in the U.S.

“In K-12 outreach, WNE has recognized the value of building a long-term pipeline of diverse STEM talent,” said Kevin McComber, CEO of Spark Photonics Design and executive director of Spark Photonics Foundation. “While many in higher education and industry focus intently on high school students nearing graduation, WNE has embraced the opportunity to reach students in middle school, where the data show many children decide whether to pursue STEM or non-STEM education and career pathways.”

At the nearby John J. Duggan Academy in Springfield, teachers and students in grades 6 through 12 engage in STEM



programming through the partnership. “The collaboration between Spark Photonics and Western New England University has provided our students with real-world and hands-on activities to learn about the exciting career opportunities available in the field,” said Mary Kay Brown, Duggan’s director of partnerships.

The Future of Photonics

Of the first LEAP@WNE cohort, Joseph Gonzalez is now an electrical engineer with General Dynamics Mission Systems, where he works with schematic captures, investigates and troubleshoots schematics, and updates designs. Jacob Boisvere plans to “pursue academia after completion of [his] PhD, though there are some very interesting industry opportunities as the semiconductor industry within the United States continues to grow and develop.”

Regarding the K-12 STEM pipeline, Mary Kay Brown of Duggan Academy hopes to continue this collaboration so photonics can be a viable career pathway for students.

WNE will continue to make its mark on the global photonics community as host of the 67th International Midwest Symposium on Circuits and Systems this August. The symposium, sponsored by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), draws international experts in the areas of analog and digital circuits and systems. The theme for this year is “Driving the future of Integrated Microelectronics: Analog, Digital & Photonics to address global societal needs.”

Now that computer chip manufacture is completely automated, engineers have shifted their focus from assembly-line production to making components and machines that use artificial intelligence (AI) optimization. “Not only are we seeing innovation in silicon photonics, but we’re also seeing innovation in artificial learning and quantum computing — those technologies all rely on that core component trio,” Adamshick explained, referring to silicon.

“50 years ago, semiconductor manufacturing and innovation mostly happened right here in the US. However, 25 years ago, much of the semiconductor ecosystem left the US, and now recently there’s an emphasis to bring manufacturing and innovation back to the US,”

Adamshick added. “These core systems have such a reliance on [silicon/semiconductor manufacturing], and we need to ensure that essential supply chain stays intact and that we can depend on it.”

Back in the LEAP lab, students from the most recent silicon photonics course created a biosensor on a silicon platform that detects COVID. This presents an opportunity for electrical and biomedical engineering students to collaborate on further developing the project — potentially as a senior design project for the upcoming academic year.

When it comes to projects that carry a seemingly infinite number of variables such as virus detection and vaccine development, silicon photonics offers a way of calculating all possible solutions through quantum computing. “Silicon photonics is also a key player in developing quantum computing architectures that can operate at room temperatures by delivering focused light to individual neutral atoms,” Adamshick explained. He added that “a lot of venture capitalism is going into these photonics solutions because we don’t need the infrastructure of a dilution refrigerator system as required for superconducting qubit-based quantum computing architectures, where materials are cooled to temperatures approaching absolute zero degrees Kelvin.”

Outside the lab, as a former student-athlete himself, Adamshick values the well-rounded student experience at WNE. “Coach Downes was instrumental in my decision-making process to pursue a degree at WNE, as it was really the only school that said yes, you can be a student-athlete and yes, you can complete your engineering degree,” he explained. “That’s important to students who grew up playing a sport and want to continue playing a sport.” Not only was Adamshick captain of the men’s golf team as a student, but he also met his wife, Kelly Coakley ‘10/G’11 on campus.

“This place is like home,” Adamshick said of his alma mater and employer. And — beyond matters of the heart — home is where the innovation is. 🐾



CUB CLOSE-UP

Roman Lee

By Briana Strobel '17/G'23

Meet Roman Lee, a first-year student from Hartford, Connecticut, pursuing a 3+3 degree in Business and Law.

Tell us a little about yourself...

My name is Roman Lee, and I came to Western New England University as a Computer Science major but recently changed to the 3+3 program that will fast-track me to the WNE University School of Law. I come from a family where I'm one of seven siblings, and I'm the first to attend college. I grew up with so many people around me, and I credit them for making me want to be a better person — to help people — which is why I switched my major, so I can help those that might not be able to help themselves.

In addition to my studies and spending time with my family, I have started to make motivational videos that I share on social media to inspire people to continue working hard and achieving results. I

am a strong believer that if you want something, you must go and do it in order to achieve it. I started doing this for myself as a self-motivator, but then I thought, if I could show people that their goals are achievable, and if all they needed was a little motivation, I could be that person.

Outside of the classroom, how do you spend your time and how are you involved on campus?

I really enjoy photography. I picked up this hobby by chance in high school, shooting athletic games and friends. I never imagined I would be a member of the University's media team as a work-study student. In this role, I've been fortunate enough to learn from those within the team and be exposed to different elements of photography that I hadn't previously seen.

I also love basketball. I've been playing since I was 5 years old and played all through high school. This was the first year I didn't play due to an injury my senior year, which pushed me out of love with the sport. However, taking time off and attending games this year as a photographer with the University Marketing team helped me realize that I was on the wrong side of the court. I am currently practicing with the team during their off-season with the goal of trying out next season.

Why did you choose Western New England University?

I gravitated toward WNE after touring multiple institutions that didn't feel right. After having a conversation with a guidance counselor, they recommended checking WNE out at the school's college fair. I

toured and submitted my application, and it was during my visit on Accepted Students' Day that I knew this was the place for me. Everyone was nice, and there was a lot of excitement and enthusiasm that made me want to be a part of it. Not only was the energy a factor, but WNE was also the only college that offered me financial support. I am the proud recipient of the Presidential Scholarship, a scholarship that I can receive every year if I maintain a 3.5 GPA.

Since arriving, that energy I experienced at Accepted Students' Day has continued, between the support from my peer advisor Allison, who always reaches out with a text or greets me with a smile, to how inclusive the campus is — it's very uplifting to be able to walk around campus and feel like no one is a stranger. That's one of my favorite parts about this community, that no matter

how different you are from the next person, you can count on the fact that you will be included and welcomed.

What are your goals after graduation?

I am hoping to help people, whether that's as a personal injury lawyer like my father, or as a real estate agent — I will be taking the real estate license test this summer. I've seen firsthand the impact my dad and stepmom have on the people they help by owning their own law firm in Hartford, and I want to be able to do the same. And, who knows, maybe I can one day use both to accomplish that.

As you round out your first year, what are you excited about for the future, and what do you think you'll change moving forward?

I can confidently say I am excited to no longer have to take 8 a.m. classes. Waking

up for those was brutal. With college comes a lot of change, something I'm not adverse to. So, for me, trying to figure out the balance of fun, schoolwork, and downtime has been a struggle, but I'm starting to navigate that better. I found the best solution has been meeting people and surrounding myself with those that are positive and supportive. Next year, I'm looking forward to the opportunity to try out for the men's basketball team, but as I look to the future, I'm excited for this opportunity to continue my education. I know that once I start that new chapter of life after graduation, my degree from WNE will help me achieve my goals. 🐾





Presidential Election 2024:

The Experts Weigh In

Professors John Baick and Tim Vercellotti outline what to expect for the 2024 presidential campaign season.



Part 1: Back to the Future with WNE History Professor John Baick

Question 1: The title grabbed you, didn't it?

For those of you who had me as a professor, the title should remind you how to pronounce my name (sounds like “back”). It’s also a reference to a cult classic that can be a useful way of thinking about our current political climate. If we consider the film, we have a new way to understand how voters might be thinking about the future — specifically, the 2024 election.

Question 2: Do you remember the plot of *Back to the Future*?

The movie features Marty McFly, a suburban high schooler in 1985 who travels 30 years back in time and then needs to return home to his own era — hence “back” to the future in the title. During his adventures in 1955, Marty encounters his father and mother as teenagers. He helps his father overcome a bully, find his voice, and fall in love with his mom. In the process, Marty inadvertently changes the future of 1985.

Question 3: Did you know the slogan “Make America Great Again” was plagiarized?

Long before Trump donned a “MAGA” hat, Ronald Reagan ran for president in 1980 with the slogan “Let’s Make America Great Again.” Ultimately, Reagan’s slogan and the 1985 movie *Back to the Future* were both successful for the same reason: 1980s America was full of both doubts about the present and nostalgia for the past, specifically the 1950s. Reagan wanted to return to this idealized past — and so, in his way, does Trump.

Why did America miss the 1950s? Let’s consider the film the way Donald Trump would. When Marty traveled 30 years back in time, he found that his dingy 1985 hometown looked nicer. Families lived in new houses, ate together around the dinner table, drove new cars, and enjoyed full service at the gas station. Everyone knew their place in society, saw the same movies, sang the same songs, and watched the same TV shows. There was no visible crime or poverty, and the closest thing to protest was disappointed students at a dance. Things were simpler.

Question 4: Did you know that Joe Biden isn’t very exciting?

Joe Biden never had a slogan that caught on. In 2020, the Biden campaign tried “Restore the Soul of America” and “Build Back Better,” but they never resonated like “Make America Great Again.” That’s because Biden’s message is more complicated. He sees the past as filled with good things, but also things that can be improved.

The Joe Biden version of watching *Back to the Future* means appreciating many of the same charms that Trump, Reagan, and millions of viewers enjoyed about the 1950s while still addressing issues that need to be fixed. Marty’s dad was bullied — who else was being bullied in town, and why? Why was there only one Black person in town? What was it like to be a young woman in the 1950s? In the film, Marty’s mother was a damsel in distress who faced sexual assault, but she lacked an inner life or aspirations of her own beyond what was expected of a 1950s woman. She wasn’t quite a Barbie doll, but she wasn’t a full-fledged individual, either. She was just a trophy for men to fight over. The 1950s were great for some, but what about those who were left out?

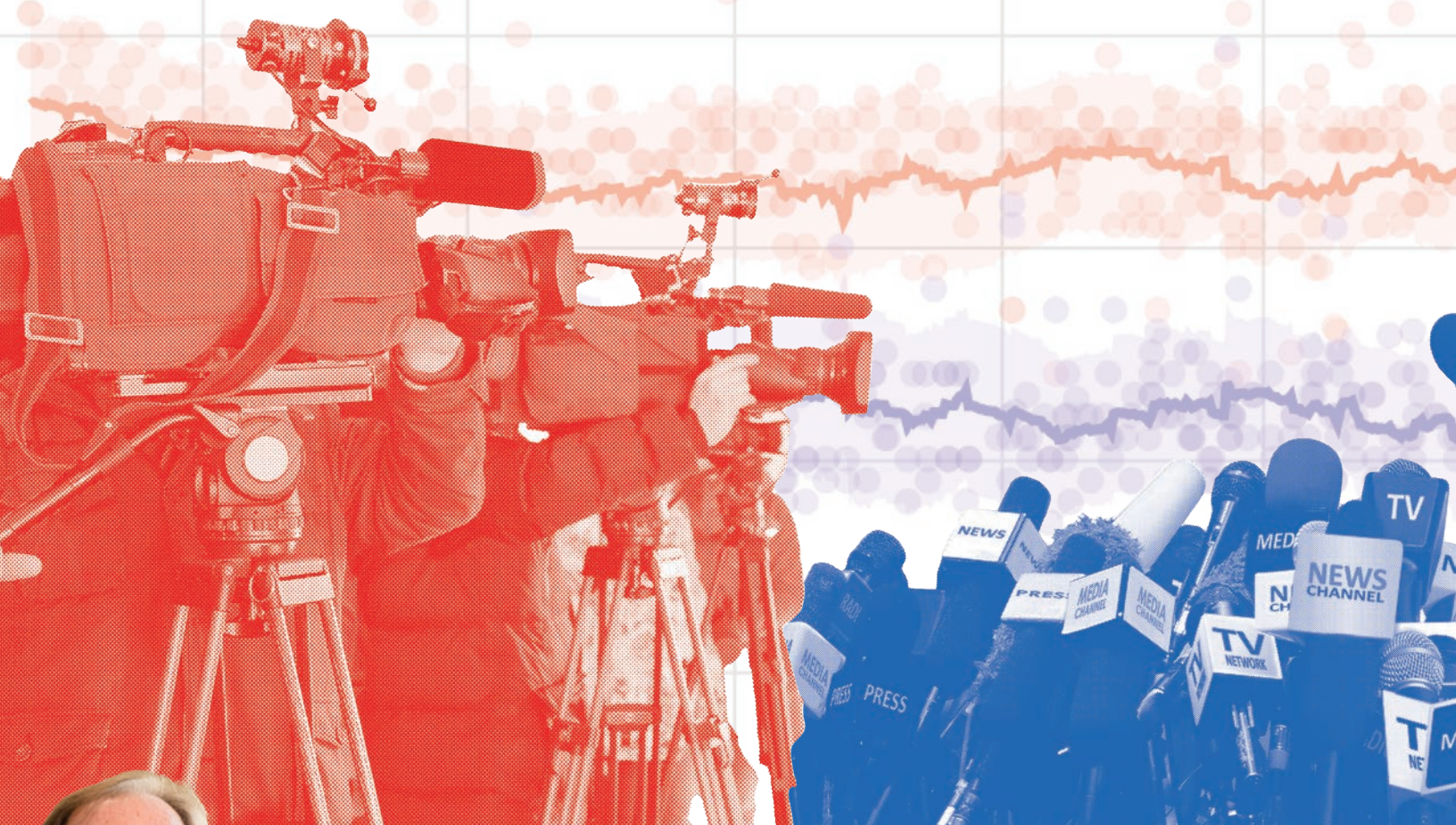
Question 5: How do we remember the past?

The 2024 election will determine America’s future, but it will be based on how we remember the past. History is not just about what happened in the past — it’s about what we think of it. If you watch *Back to the Future* and want to hop in a time machine yourself, you’re probably a Trump voter. If you notice the ways that our past wasn’t perfect, you might resonate with Biden. And if your favorite part of the movie is when, around the dinner table, Marty mentions “John F. Kennedy,” you might understand why so many people are interested in voting for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Nostalgia is a powerful, powerful force.

Stay tuned for the summer nominating conventions. The new slogans will be about, on some level, going “back” to the future.

Comments? Desire a follow-up conversation? Contact me at jbaick@wne.edu





Part 2: Obsessed with election polls? Tips to survive the 2024 presidential contest with WNE Political Science Professor Tim Vercellotti

Thousands of national and state political polls came out during the 2020 presidential election year, and thousands more will make their way into the public consciousness in the upcoming 2024 election cycle.

While political poll results can evoke frustration, panic, or euphoria among political observers, surveys also feed an insatiable audience. No sooner is a poll out than we start looking for the next release of findings, either to confirm or dispute the trends that we see. The shelf life of any one survey is remarkably brief, despite the careful work that goes into designing and executing a valid and reliable poll.

Those of us who observe politics for a living, as an avocation, or simply as informed voters, can easily forget that each poll is a snapshot in time. Surveys do not predict the future, but they can give us a broad sense of where a political contest stands at a given point in the campaign. Having your spirits rise or fall based on any single set of results can make for a long and exhausting slog to Election Day.

If following political polls is second nature to you, here are some pieces of advice to bear in mind as we make our way through the 2024 presidential campaign:

1. Retain healthy skepticism about presidential polls.

A task force convened by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), the leading professional organization for survey researchers in the U.S., found that national presidential polls in 2020 had a higher average error in their estimation of the popular vote than at any time in the previous 40 years. The average error for the presidential, gubernatorial, and U.S. Senate races in state-level polls was the highest it had been in 20 years. The errors tended to overstate Joe Biden's share of the vote and understate Donald Trump's. The outcome of the election reflected the overall trends of the polls, but Biden's actual margin of victory in the popular vote was smaller than the pre-election polls had suggested.

This level of error occurred despite survey methodologists embracing key lessons from the 2016 cycle, including watching for late shifts in voter preferences and ensuring that samples were weighted to accurately reflect the makeup of the electorate in terms of education. The AAPOR task force, made up of some of the polling industry's most respected experts, indicated that the 2020 polls had addressed those issues as well as other concerns (such as the high rate of early voting and voting by mail due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Without the ability to interview individuals who had not responded to the surveys, it was difficult to pinpoint precise sources of the 2020 errors.

With that in mind, should we ignore the 2024 polls? That would be a mistake, given that we can still learn a lot about the dynamics of the campaign even if we cannot be certain of the potential outcome. We can still look at the broad brushstrokes that polling can provide, such as the issues that may be driving turnout and the candidate qualities that voters value most. That data can give us a feel for the state of the contest, even if we lack the precision that we would like to have when it comes to the horse race.



2. All polls are not created equal. Look at trends instead of specific surveys and monitor state-level surveys over national polls when doing your Electoral College math.

Even when survey researchers can draw a reliable probability sample and develop a realistic likely voter model, a single poll's results can be an outlier. We are much better off looking at an aggregation of surveys, which can smooth out the impact of any one poll that might have surprising findings. Many websites provide up-to-date survey aggregations, including RealClearPolitics and FiveThirtyEight. Also, keep checking the aggregations over time. Any given week's outlier results might be the leading edge of a shift in public opinion that the following week's polls may capture and confirm.

And, while national surveys tend to get the headlines, remember that a presidential election consists of 50 state elections (and an election in the District of Columbia). With votes in the Electoral College awarded by each state and DC, the state-level surveys give us the most detailed look at the race.

Even at the state level, we can narrow our focus to a handful of swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) where the presidential election is expected to be decided. Each decision was made by fewer than three percentage points in the certified vote in 2020. Together, those states comprise 93 votes in the Electoral College, or more than a third of what a presidential candidate needs to get to the magic number of 270. Significant shifts in voter preferences in other states might expand that map between now and Election Day, but if you are looking for a quick assessment of the race, examining aggregations of surveys in each of these seven states will give you a snapshot of where things stand.

3. Look for transparency when assessing the validity of polls.

Continuing with the theme that not all polls are created equal, look for transparency when deciding whether to give credence to survey results. Does the poll specify the type of sample (probability or non-probability), sample size, respondents (all adults, registered voters, or likely voters), dates of data collection, mode of data collection (telephone, online, or a combination of approaches), and how the data were weighted to reflect the population under study? Does the organization that conducted the poll identify its sponsor and provide a copy of the questionnaire with the full text of the questions, in addition to the order in which they appeared or were asked? The availability of this information can help you to judge whether the results come from a credible source.

If these basic elements are not shared by the polling organization, it may be best to move on to the next survey. Survey researchers who adhere to best practices are usually eager to report this information. You can also look for the survey research "seal of approval" — membership in the Transparency Initiative of the AAPOR. Members of the initiative pledge to make public the basic methodological details of a survey when releasing the results. The Polling Institute at Western New England University has been a charter member of the Transparency Initiative since 2015.

Keeping in mind these caveats may help as we sort through the stream of survey results that will come in the next few months. Awareness of the strengths and limitations of political polls can help keep results in perspective while we learn valuable information about the dynamics of the campaign. 🐾

Commencement 2024

Bringing the Bear's Den to Downtown Springfield

By Mercedes Maskalik

On Sunday, May 19, Western New England University held its commencement ceremonies at Springfield's MassMutual Center, marking the first time the event took place at this location in more than two decades. The decision to move the venue came after careful consultation with students, allowing for a larger gathering of family and friends. The ceremonies witnessed 517 undergraduates and 358 graduates receive their diplomas, surrounded by peers from across the United States and beyond.

President Robert E. Johnson praised the graduates for their resilience and determination. "Today marks a pivotal moment in your lives, filled with the joy of achievement and the anticipation of future contributions," he said.

Emmy Award-winning NBC10 Boston journalist Latoya Edwards and Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Ashley Randle L'14 delivered the commencement addresses for the undergraduate and graduate ceremonies, respectively.

Edwards, in her address to the undergraduates, emphasized the power of perseverance and the importance of giving back to the community. "Your journey does not end here," she said, urging the graduates to use their voices for good and to be catalysts for change in their communities.

Commissioner Randle shared her personal story of growth from a local farm to leading state agricultural policy. "We are rooted in our communities, and from these roots, we grow and impact the world," Randle told the graduates, illustrating the influence of dedication and local engagement on broader societal outcomes.

Undergraduate student speaker Nina Sullivan reflected on the shared experiences and challenges she and her class overcame, "We stood together, studied together, and we thrive together. Let's carry forward this unity wherever we go."

The commencement was not only a celebration of academic achievements, but also a testament to the enduring spirit and commitment of the Western New England University community. 🐾





WNE University School of Law Alumna Dorothy Varon *A Catalyst for Connection* By Sarah Leete Tsitso



After a midlife crisis drew her to law school, Dorothy Varon L'95 uses knowledge and passion to make community connections.

As Dorothy Varon walks through the cavernous hallways of MassMutual in Springfield, Mass., she greets nearly everyone by name. They all know her name, too. Given the sheer number of people who work at MassMutual, this phenomenon is amazing — but not surprising. After all, Varon is all about making connections.

A self-proclaimed extrovert, Varon, who is lead counsel for the Corporate Law division at MassMutual, prides herself on being a facilitator — someone who brings people and organizations together to make the world a better place. She credits her father, who was also a lawyer, for showing her the importance of helping others.

“What I noticed about my dad was how he helped everybody,” Varon said. “He would

get calls in the middle of the night from people who were in trouble. He always helped them, even if they weren’t his clients. These weren’t people coming to him from the law firm; they were friends of the family — they were my friends, they were my brothers’ friends, they were people who found themselves in trouble.

“So, from a very early age I watched him serving other people,” she added. “He always shared what he knew to help people, and I think that influenced me a lot even though I didn’t know it, because at the time, the last thing I wanted to do was be a lawyer like him.”

Education was important to Varon’s parents, and because of that, there was never any question that she would attend college.

She majored in psychology with a minor in pre-med, but it didn’t take long for her to realize medical school was not in the cards for her.

“I was not cut out to be a doctor,” she said. “I can’t think about blood, let alone experience it.”

Instead, after graduating from City College in New York, Varon began working in the corporate sector, specifically in healthcare and life insurance. She found that corporate America suited her desire to give back.

“If you work for a company that has a good soul, then it’s a very different thing from what people typically associate with corporate culture,” she said. “I feel like I can do well and do good at the same time. I try to tell that to all the law students I talk

to who think they must choose between doing good and having a comfortable life. They can't necessarily see that there's an intersection where you can do both."

In her work within the health insurance industry, Varon often interacted with lawyers. The more she worked with them, the more she realized law might just be her calling — like it was for her father. At the time she made the decision to go to law school, she was a consultant helping Metropolitan Life design a payment system for claims.

"I was reading a lot of statutes," she said. "I had to understand and read the laws, as well as work with lawyers. While I was designing systems to comply with legislation, I realized I can do this. I started to really feel like I had missed my calling, so I decided to look at what it would take to go back to school — it was like a midlife crisis. It's very different going back to school in your 40s."

Varon made the move from New York City, where she was born and raised, to Columbia County, just over the border between New York and Massachusetts, to attend law school at Western New England University.

"I loved law school," Varon began. "If I could have stayed in law school my whole life, I would have. I was fascinated by everything in the curriculum ... other than income tax."

Her time at WNE was so transformative that Varon still finds herself regularly on campus — long after graduation. "I've been involved with the law school for a long time," she said. "They are my alma mater — I owe my career to them. I'm very loyal to the school. I'm very fond of it. So, I've stayed connected."

Since she graduated and began working at MassMutual 18 years ago, Varon has used these connections to help facilitate partnerships that make a difference in the lives of countless people. One example is her work within WNE's Center for Social Justice, which includes a program called the Consumer Debt Initiative (CDI). The CDI defends consumers facing wrongful credit card collection actions. They help interview and counsel clients, negotiate with opposing counsel, and fight for justice against the debt collection industry, while

connecting clients to financial literacy and other holistic resources.

For MassMutual and its charitable foundation, the work within the CDI was a perfect fit with their company's mission.

"The Consumer Debt Initiative was really interesting to the MassMutual Foundation," Varon, who also sits on the Foundation's Board of Directors, stated. "Our mission is to help individuals and families achieve a more stable financial resiliency. Many families could not withstand a \$300 upset to their annual income. It's like, 'If my car breaks down, I have to decide whether to feed my kids, fix my car, or pay the rent.' MassMutual is

"I loved law school," if I could have stayed in law school my whole life, I would have. I was fascinated by everything in the curriculum...other than income tax."

a financial services company, so we look to help people achieve financial resiliency."

Through Varon's connections to both MassMutual and WNE, she also led efforts to get MassMutual's Pro Bono Committee involved in the Center for Social Justice.

"When I arrived at MassMutual, we didn't really do any pro bono work in Springfield," she said. "I went to our General Counsel here at MassMutual, and he agreed that we should have a program where people who wanted to do free legal work could. Our pro bono work has grown substantially over the past 15 years. We have a committee that looks at opportunities for our group, and we work with lots of partners, including The Center for Social Justice at the School of Law."

The connections Varon makes between those partners helped launch the Center for Social Justice's "Justice Bus" — a custom, retrofitted sprinter van with a complete mobile office that includes multiple

workstations, computers, a printer, and other technology necessary to serve clients in the community.

"When Ariel Clemmer was executive director at the Center, she heard about other places in the country that had these mobile law offices," said Varon. "She had this vision of finding funding for a justice bus. She was writing grants and trying to get legislators to fund it in the state budget, but she wasn't having much luck. So, I mentioned it to our General Counsel (at MassMutual), and he said, 'We have a sprinter van, but because of COVID it's not being used much.' He investigated whether MassMutual might consider donating it to the Center for Social Justice, and they did."

As Varon lists all the work being done at MassMutual — within its Law Department, its Foundation, and through its large corps of volunteers — she is hesitant to take any credit, admitting that she's always a little self-conscious when being interviewed about her life and accomplishments.

"I don't want to take too much credit," she said. "It's a function of people being open to the connections being made. No one does it alone. There are people who are facilitators — catalysts — who make connections. I think that's a very fair way of thinking about the work I do."

"It's really MassMutual — I've had a career here for the past 18 years, and I feel like I've been able to do a lot of good with the support of the company," Varon added. "I do love to make connections. To see and understand that there really is a lot going on out there in the world where we can make a difference as part of our mission. It's all part of what we are trying to do as a company. This goes back to my dad, right? You see the difference you can make in the world just by doing your little bit."

This reminds Varon of a magnet she once had stuck to her refrigerator. It was a butterfly flying over an enormous forest fire. The butterfly was dropping two little water droplets onto the flames. On the bottom it said, "I'm doing what I can."

"That's it," said Varon. "That's the wisdom I live by. If everybody does what they can, it could be a very different world." 🦋

Thomas Vega '16

By Carolyn Robbins

In the summer of 1989, the mother of a 16-year-old high school dropout put her son on a Greyhound bus to Springfield, Mass. with the hope that the move would save him from the dangerous influences of the poverty-scarred South Bronx.

When he arrived to live with his aunt and uncle, Tom Vega had no idea that the journey would take him far beyond Springfield's John F. Kennedy Middle School.

"I knew this was my chance," he said. So, he seized the opportunity.



Now 51, Vega, a 2016 honors graduate of Western New England University College of Business, holds a top position in a growing field at CVS Health, where he is senior product and delivery manager.

“It has been quite a journey,” Vega admitted, adding that he couldn’t have succeeded without mentors along the way and the flexibility that his studies offered when he enrolled as a part-time student in 2008. But back in the fall of 1989, his future was unsure. He was in middle school again, making up for lost time. “I didn’t want to disappoint my aunt, who was also raising two of my cousins while working at a Westfield-based wire factory, and my uncle, who worked for Digital computers,” he said. “So, I focused on what the teachers told me to do to distract from the anger I felt toward my mom for taking me away from my friends,” adding that he wasn’t the type of kid to act out in destructive ways by turning to drugs, alcohol, and violence — the standard coping mechanism in New York. Vega had already lost his brother to a drug overdose, and he came from a neighborhood riddled with crime, gang violence, and drugs.

Older than most of his peers at Kennedy, Vega focused on studies, not social life. He made honor roll at JFK and at Holyoke’s Dean Vocational High School, where he studied carpentry, later obtaining his associate’s degree from Springfield Technical Community College, again with honors. From there, he enrolled in online classes at what was then Western New England College, juggling a series of full-time jobs including stints at Universal Forest Products, where he was human resources manager and director of safety, and Baystate Health, where he honed his IT skills as a process improvement manager. Later, he held similar positions at MassMutual and The Hartford before landing at CVS Health, where he is currently working on cutting-edge technologies that focus on workplace improvements and enhance the lives of patients.

Through his work experiences, along with his participation in the Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), Vega gained valuable leadership and technical skills that served him well. Participation in MEP’s conflict resolution program taught him, among other things,

“how to listen actively and with intent” to better communicate with employees in the workplace.

Vega’s real-world work experience gave him valuable transferable skills that allowed him to share his experiences with peers and professors in business classes at WNE. The University’s flexible degree program enabled him to focus on his grades while balancing work and family time with his young son Alec, now a 21-year-old college graduate.

“At WNE, I had fantastic professors, and I

“I was fortunate to have teachers, professors, and a few good business leaders to help put me on the path to success.”

was able to pace myself with courses while navigating life’s challenges,” he said. Those challenges included a layoff from Universal Forest Products when the homebuilding business was hit by the housing crisis. Despite the setback, Vega continued to keep his eye on the prize. “I just kept chipping away, course by course, aided with employer-financed grants and scholarships.” He expanded his skillset with a class on interpersonal skills, which helped him develop strategies for leading teams to meet shared goals — skills that he still uses to this day.

Along his journey, Vega enlisted in The National Guard, noting that military service “taught me about leadership, self-confidence, loyalty, teamwork, and perseverance in the face of what had seemed like insurmountable challenges.” He was named to the President’s and Dean’s Lists and achieved many academic accolades, including the Part-time Undergraduate Student Award at the 2016 College of Business Awards. In 2014, while still pursuing his Bachelor of

Business Management, he bought a house in Deerfield, Mass. where he and his wife Heather, a business analyst at Baystate Health, continue to reside.

After leaving The Hartford, a colleague at the insurance company referred Vega to CVS Health, where he was hired on the spot after his job interview. He was promoted to his current role within his first year at the company.

Vega said CVS Health is “redefining the healthcare experience in America through its commitment to making healthcare simpler, more convenient, more affordable, more accessible, and more focused on the patient.” He collaborates with stakeholders from various parts of the company to implement improvements to healthcare delivery systems. “We work to bring those improvements to life by using the latest technologies possible,” he said.

Vega meets with business leaders, technology teams, data scientists, patients, pharmacists, and providers to understand their concerns with any underlying processes, and then makes recommendations for a plan. If the group approves of the recommendation, Vega brings in a technology team to execute the plan.

“We know that the use of AI in healthcare is nothing new,” Vega noted. “But we are now at an inflection point ... AI has the potential to truly transform how healthcare is delivered and how it helps people live better lives.”

CVS Health is committed to utilizing AI and generative AI responsibly and safely, Vega explained. “AI is being used to focus on analyzing historical data and making numeric predictions, while generative AI allows data-driven computer models to create outputs and information that can be indistinguishable from human-generated things such as text, images, video, and audio.”

Vega believes that, with the aid of strong relationships and mentorships, anyone can overcome early obstacles in life and pursue an education and a fulfilling career. “Learn to market the best thing about yourself,” he said. “I was fortunate to have teachers, professors, and a few good business leaders to help put me on the path to success.” 🐾



A Golden Year for Our Women's Programs

WNE Women's Basketball Captures CCC Championship

The WNE women's basketball team won the Commonwealth Coast Conference (CCC) championship for the first time since the 2018–2019 season. Grabbing a nail-biting 50–49 victory over the Nor'easters of the University of New England, Lilly Hedge (Guilford, Conn.) and Shaina Cooney (Montgomery, N.Y.), led the team offensively, helping to set the team up for the national tournament. The Golden Bears received an at-large, automatic qualifying bid into the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Tournament and drew Bowdoin

College, the NCAA's eighth-ranked team in Division III. The Golden Bears hung close with the Polar Bears before bowing out of the tournament. The regular season began with the Golden Bears conceding a 4-2 record before the start of conference play. WNE women's basketball secured two CCC wins by the end of 2023 and rang in the new year with three more. The month of January saw WNE come away with an 8-2 record, while the Golden Bears closed out the regular season with five straight victories to claim the top seed in the

CCC championship tournament. After picking up a bye in the quarterfinal round, the Golden Bears defeated Suffolk University 69-51, advancing to the conference championship game. Following the conclusion of the season, Cooney and Tara Laugeni (Woodbridge, Conn.) picked up All-Conference honors from the CCC, while WNE women's basketball Head Coach Nicole Chaszar was honored as the CCC's Coach of the Year in her 19th season at the helm of the Golden Bears.

Women's Wrestling Earns Three Bids to NCWWC Championships

In just the second year of the program's existence, Linda Holeman (Preston, Conn.), Sabrina Sedor (Stafford, Conn.), and Dakota-Marie Dinielli (Plainville, Conn.) earned spots into the National Collegiate Women's Wrestling Championships (NCWWC), becoming the first three Golden Bears to ever accomplish the feat.

Holeman was a qualifier in the 130-pound weight class, earning fourth place at the qualifying event and an automatic bid into the championships. A dominant force, Holeman recorded WNE's first ever victory in the program's history at the championship event, going 3-2 overall and finishing 24-8 overall for the season.

Sedor locked up an opening-round win at the championship event to grab WNE's first ever victory in the 136-pound weight class. Sedor competed in 16

matches for the Golden Bears, winning 10 of them. The sophomore qualified for the championships after making it to the third-place match.

Dinielli won 17 of 21 matches this season and earned the qualifying bid into the championship event after placing third in the 143-pound weight class. The sophomore went 4-1 in the qualifying event and was the first Golden Bear in this weight class to qualify for the championships.





Women's Ice Hockey Captures First CCC Title in Program History

After starting the season with just one win in their first four games, the Golden Bears closed out the 2023 portion of their schedule with a 4-1-1 record, defeating three conference opponents during that span. The Golden Bears welcomed January with a 7-0 triumph over Anna Maria College – the largest win in program history. WNE won their first three games that month while going 6-2 overall, including two CCC victories. They closed out the regular season with a win on the road against the University of New England (UNE), locking up the two seed in the CCC Tournament. WNE hosted a semifinal game to open the tournament and prepared to play their first playoff game on home ice. After a rocky start to their first CCC championship game, the WNE women's ice hockey team was

crowned CCC champions for the first time in program history after defeating Curry College in the conference title game by a final score of 5-3.

The Golden Bears relied heavily on senior forward Alyssa Murphy (Plymouth, Mass.) during the conference championship game against Curry College, a fourth seed who upset top-seeded Endicott College in the semifinals. Curry netted the first two goals of the game, putting the home team behind, but Murphy started the comeback, scoring the first goal for WNE and giving them the momentum they needed to turn their 2-1 deficit around. Abby Hay (Plattsburgh, N.Y.), Jenna Lynch (Brookline, N.H.), Zoe Galanoudis (Massapequa, N.Y.), and Kelly Yorkey (Pittsford, N.Y.) scored four powerplay goals in the second and third

periods with assists from Maddy Tucker (Clarkston, Mich.), sending the Golden Bears to their first CCC championship in the program's history.

The Golden Bears earned their first at-large bid into the NCAA Tournament and hit the road to face Middlebury College, the sixth-ranked team in NCAA Division III women's ice hockey. With their history-making season ultimately coming to an end in the first round of the NCAA tournament, the CCC honored five All-Conference members, including Murphy, Tucker, Rieley Jessie-Gerelli (Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.), Maddie Pope (Plantation, Fla.), and Alexa Paoli (Steamboat Springs, Colo.).

Softball Collects Third CCC Title in Program History with 9-3 Win

The WNE softball team played in a winner-take-all contest to decide the champion of the 2024 CCC season. The Golden Bears, seeded second in the CCC tournament, defeated the fifth-seeded Hawks of Roger Williams University 9-3 and captured the title for the first time since 2018.

WNE softball was off to a slow start during the beginning of their campaign, falling short in the first five games at THE Spring Games event held yearly in Clermont, Fla. Following the early woes, the blue and gold picked up victories in their final six games of the trip, including a 15-0 win over Buffalo State. The Golden Bears found their stride when returning home, winning the next eight of 10 games, six of those in conference play. They witnessed graduate student Kailey Carrano (West Haven, Conn.) break the WNE softball career RBIs record, one that stood for nearly 20 years, during the final regular season series at Wentworth Institute of Technology.

The Golden Bears finished the regular season with a 24-12 record and took the two seed in the double elimination CCC tournament after finishing CCC play with an 11-5 record overall. WNE knocked Nichols

College out in the tournament's opening game, thanks to two more RBIs from Carrano, defeating the Bison 2-1. WNE moved on to the winner's bracket and defeated Wentworth Institute of Technology 6-4, becoming one win away from the title.

While the Hawks came away with a win in a potential clinching game against the Golden Bears, WNE upped the ante in this winner-take-all match with 9-3 victory

to capture the CCC championship for the third time in program history. Following the triumph, the Golden Bears were sent to Medford, Mass. for the regional NCAA tournament hosted by Tufts University, playing both the Tufts University Jumbos and the St. John Fisher University Cardinals during the two-game event. WNE wrapped up their 2024 campaign with a 27-15 record 🐾



WNE Found an Ace in Jenn Kolins, Director of Athletics & Recreation

By Briana Strobel '17/G'23



Western New England University Athletics prides itself on three pillars of success: integrity, respect, and commitment. These are qualities that Director of Athletics & Recreation Jenn Kolins practiced long before she stepped foot on the WNE campus. Now, as a member of the Golden Bear community for more than 24 years, it is easy to see how Kolins not only embodies those pillars but truly bleeds blue and gold.

Over the past 30 years, the world of sports, especially intercollegiate athletics, has significantly changed to offer enhanced opportunities for universities and athletic conferences to positively impact the experiences of student-athletes, coaches, and administrators. One of the most notable changes has been the number of women participating across all facets of sport, including serving in prestigious athletic department leadership roles. As of January 2024, Kolins is now among the elite group of female leaders who comprise 25% of university directors of athletics and recreation across the United States.

A native of North Philadelphia, Kolins was raised by a single mother who made spending time at the local playground a priority — a routine that ultimately built the foundation for Kolins' love for sports, connection, and a desire to always pay it forward.

LOVE OF SPORTS

Throughout her formative years, Coach Kolins evolved her involvement in playground sports into a true passion for tennis, the catalyst for what would become her lifelong love of athletics. She began training at the legendary Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis Center at the age of 10 and later joined the National Junior Tennis League (NJTL) to further develop her skills. Under the guidance of her coaches, and occasionally Arthur Ashe himself, she had the opportunity to meet Billie Jean King, the top American women's tennis player at the time.

It was then that Kolins became aware that women were often not afforded the same opportunities as men to advance in athletics. This reality drove her to work that much harder to make a name for herself, both on and off the court, with accolades including recognition by female IndyCar Driver Lyn St. James at a national Women in Sports Day event in 1995. These incredibly impactful experiences and professional-athlete influences helped to provide the life-changing awareness and motivation Kolins needed to steer her in the direction of coaching and her career in sports.

After graduating from Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts, where she was a four-year letterwinner in volleyball and tennis, Kolins was well-

recognized as a consistent competitor within the Philadelphia boys high school league (as there wasn't a female team at her high school yet). Kolins then advanced both her academic and athletic careers at the University of Hartford. As a student-athlete, she had the opportunity to play Division I tennis for four years and served as a three year captain. She obtained her degree in Interpersonal and Organizational Communications with a concentration in Sports Marketing.

After coaching for several years, Kolins recognized that in order to continue to meet the needs of her student-athletes and continue growing as a coach, she needed to continue her education. Earning her Masters in Coaching and Athletic Administration degree from Concordia Irvine in 2015, Kolins has been able to utilize her additional education to further her career and positively impact the University's student-athletes.

CONNECTION & LEADERSHIP

Reflecting on her career, Coach Kolins acknowledged that she always knew her career in sports was "her vehicle to get to her next destination," which is why she jumped at the opportunity in 2000 to join Western New England University as the head coach for Golden Bear men's and women's tennis. Fresh out of college and ready to give back to the next generation of student-athletes, Kolins



credits her coaching experience at WNE as the most fulfilling part of her journey. Making the transition from Division I to Division III was the change she was looking for all along, and coaching at WNE provided her the opportunity to apply and develop her skills, meeting the desire to help student-athletes grow on the court, in the classroom, and in the community.

Her fondest memories have been as a WNE coach — especially one of her first seasons when the University competed in the Great Northeast Athletic Conference (GNAC), and she watched the Golden Bears give everything they had on the court and beyond. Kolins has always approached tennis as a team sport rather than how the sport is generally viewed more individually. It was this shift in mindset that she attributes to the men's team winning their first championship in 2002, and the women's team going undefeated and ultimately winning their first championship in 2003. From that point forward, she made it her mission to help her student-athletes realize the importance of teamwork when setting championship-level goals, while appreciating that every year might not result in a championship.

"It's the work, and it's those subsequent goals that are achieved year in and year out that leave the longest impact," said Kolins. "Although winning is a goal, the students are the mission. Their future successes on

and off their field of play is what drives and inspires me."

Over the past 24 years, Coach Kolins has expanded her leadership within WNE Athletics beyond the tennis court, as she has also served as Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) advisor, assistant athletic director, and co-founding administrator of the Black Student-Athlete Alliance (BSAA). Whether on the court, working with SAAC, or joining diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leadership groups on campus, fostering inclusivity is at the heart of her core leadership principles. In doing so, she has always hoped to educate students from a global perspective while showing them how they can utilize the transferable skills learned through sport to enhance their education, future careers, leadership roles, and personal life.

"One of my favorite parts of the job is seeing the discovery of self that takes place. Moreso, I enjoy being a part of SAAC because it truly is the voice of the students and highlights the importance of peer-to-peer leadership and mentorship."

PAYING IT FORWARD

Throughout her tenure, Kolins has witnessed meaningful change across the world of intercollegiate athletics as a student-athlete, a coach, and now as an administrator. At WNE, she has seen firsthand the growth of our Golden Bear

facilities, enhanced opportunities for women in sports (including the most recent addition of men's and women's track and field during her time as director of athletics), and expanded opportunities and resources for coaches.

Just as she always hoped to become a coach to impact student-athletes, she now hopes as the director of University Athletics and Recreation that she can continue to make significant changes in sports that will expand resources for student-athletes and positively enhance and impact their overall college experience.

Rising through the world of intercollegiate athletics during a time when women in sports was not as prominent, the dream of becoming a coach — who was able to lead, teach, and help kids and young adults achieve their dreams — might have seemed out of reach for most. But for Coach Kolins, she never stopped pursuing that dream until it became a reality. While coaching was at the forefront of those dreams, she never imagined that one day she would be leading a team of her peers — those she recognizes as "the foundation of the athletics department."

"It's because of our coaches and staff being committed to continued learning and growth that we are able to build upon our department's strengths while carrying on our traditions," Kolins said.

Although she strives to positively impact the student-athletes, she credits them for the incredible experiences she has been a part of at WNE. "I could not be prouder of the way our student-athletes represent themselves and this University, both at the local level and on the national stage."

Coming full circle from playground sports to student-athlete, to coach, and now to administrator, Coach Kolins reflected that while she loves athletics, she loves WNE and its student-athletes, coaches, and staff that much more. 🐾



ALUMNI NEWS

For the latest alumni news from Western New England University, visit alumni.wne.edu/news.

ALUMNI & FRIENDS SWING INTO ACTION FOR THE 55TH ANNUAL ALUMNI GOLF TOURNAMENT

Hosted at the Country Club of Wilbraham, WNE alumni kicked off summer festivities on Friday, May 24, at the 55th Annual Alumni Golf Tournament. The event provided a day of friendly Golden Bear competition on the course while contributing to the Alumni Association Golf Tournament Endowed Scholarship.

With sunshine, enthusiasm, and camaraderie in abundance, participants helped raise over \$18,000 to support this scholarship, which has been benefiting deserving students for the past 18 years. Recipients of the scholarship are chosen based

on their dedication to academic excellence and community engagement. By attending the Alumni Golf Tournament, supporters contribute to the growth of the scholarship fund, ensuring that WNE can continue its prideful tradition of offering crucial financial assistance to students in need.

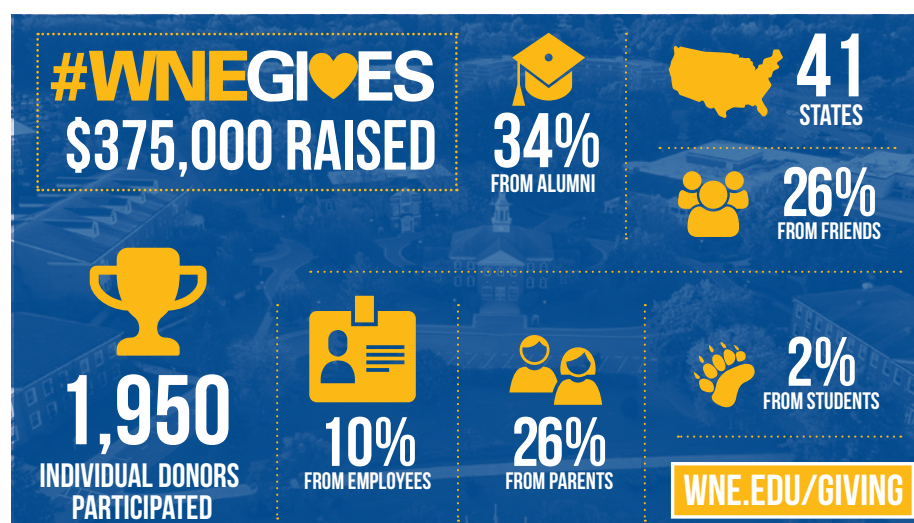
To learn more about this impactful event and relive the experience, visit alumni.wne.edu/news.

Save the date for the 56th Annual Alumni Golf Tournament: Friday, May 23, 2025.

TRANSFORMING TOMORROW: WNEGIVES SOARS BEYOND \$375K FOR STUDENT SUCCESS!

On Wednesday, February 14, Western New England University hosted its annual community day of giving event, WNEgives. It was an astounding success, with more than 1,950 supporters from 41 states showing their love to make it the most impactful annual day of giving yet! Alumni, parents, students, employees, and friends stepped up to raise more than \$375,000, impacting 40 different funds. Various departments of campus hosted over 25 challenges to incentivize giving and reach each program's goals. University Athletics came out on the top of the leaderboard, raising \$175,000 from 1,650 donors.

While supporters from near and far participated virtually through wnegives.com, students, faculty, and staff gathered on campus in the University



Commons for some fun and festive activities. From the thank you card station where students handwrote notes of appreciation to donors, to the WNE-themed backdrop where Golden Bears could

take pictures, community members truly showed their spirit throughout the day and were even able to enjoy the beloved WNE chocolate chip cookies!

DID SOMONE SAY “HAPPY HOUR” WITH WNE ALUMNI?

Over the past several months, the WNE Alumni Association has organized various opportunities for alumni to reconnect with one another over drinks and hors d'oeuvres. The newly launched First Wednesdays with WNE(C) series became a fan favorite this spring, where every first Wednesday of the month Golden Bears have had the opportunity to gather at bars and local breweries in Downtown Springfield to reminisce, network, win prizes, and indulge in a mid-week pick-me-up. Be on the lookout for more First Wednesdays this fall!

WNE's College of Engineering also hosted an alumni event at Problem Solved Brewing, owned by Alan Bukowski '09/G'12. WNE Engineering Golden Bears gathered and connected with former classmates, relived memories with their favorite professors, and learned about the College's happenings over apps and refreshments.



WNE VISITS GOLDEN BEARS IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

While Golden Bears can be found across the country, a vibrant pocket of WNE alumni keeps the University spirit alive throughout Florida.

To shorten the distance from Springfield to the southern coast, the WNE Advancement Division hosted five events across the Sunshine State in The Villages, New Smyrna Beach, Delray Beach, St. Petersburg, and Naples. President Johnson had the opportunity to meet alumni, swap stories and experiences, and discuss University initiatives. He shared with those in attendance that our current and future students are given an

“agile-mind education, with personal exploration and growth,” thus preparing students for the jobs of today and tomorrow. President Johnson continued by acknowledging that current students can experience these benefits because of alumni legacy and philanthropy.

In addition to what current students experience on campus, President Johnson noted the growth of the University over the last few years, specifically highlighting this past fall's first-year class that was 22% larger than previous years. Alongside the impressive post-graduation data, he emphasized

the significance of social mobility, the impact of making personal connections with students, and the importance of fostering these aspects of the student experience so that students are equipped with the tools to navigate life after graduation.

This was the first time that WNE has traveled to Florida since before the pandemic. Vice President for Advancement Dean Hickey believes it is important to host events outside of New England for alumni not only to gather but also to understand the impact of their giving and the future direction of the University.



GOLDEN BEAR WEEKEND: SAVE THE DATE!

Get ready to reunite and relive the memories! Save the date for this year's spectacular Golden Bear Weekend on **Saturday, October 19, 2024**. This year, the weekend will combine the traditions of Homecoming, Family and Friends Weekend, and Open House.

Whether you're catching up with old friends, cheering on the home team, or dancing the night away, Golden Bear Weekend promises unforgettable moments. Stay tuned for more details and mark your calendars for a celebration like no other!



ALUMNI NEWS

For the latest alumni news from Western New England University, visit alumni.wne.edu/news.



CELEBRATING WNE SCHOOL OF LAW ALUMNI & STUDENTS OF COLOR

Western New England University hosted its 24th Annual Celebration of Law Alumni and Students of Color and Award Ceremony on Friday, April 12, at the Marriott Springfield Downtown. Hosted in conjunction with the Office of Alumni Relations, this event serves as an annual opportunity to strengthen the WNE University School of Law alumni network, as well as celebrate the accomplishments of law alumni in the Springfield community and beyond.

The event included impactful alumni speeches from keynote speaker Attorney Rayshea Turner L'17 and the Honorable Charles Groce, III L'97, Annual Law Alumni Luminary Award recipient. The evening also featured Stephen Donkor 2L as the master of the ceremony and included remarks of gratitude from School of Law Dean Zelda Harris.

This year's event featured the inaugural Law Alumni Luminary Award, highlighting a WNE University School of Law alumnus who has made a significant impact on the BIPOC community, has completed at least 10 years of contributions to the field of law, and shines a light for present WNE Law students to follow.

Award recipient, the Honorable Charles Groce, III L'97, was recognized for his work as an associate justice for the District Court in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Groce was appointed to the bench in 2012 by Governor Deval Patrick and currently serves as the first justice of the Westfield District Court in Westfield, Mass. He is the presiding justice for the Springfield District Courts' court assisted supervised program and sits on the Board of Directors for the New England Association of Recovery for Professionals. Additionally, Groce is an active professor in the legal studies department at UMass Amherst, committing his time to educating the next generation of attorneys.

With an enthusiastic and heartfelt speech, Groce shared his personal story and imparted advice, acknowledging that while he cannot predict what tomorrow may bring, he strongly believes that everyone can leave the world better by what we can control in our lives and how we treat others.

This year's young alumna speaker, Rayshea Turner L'17, shared her experience in private practice as a founding partner of Wallace Turner Law in Albany, N.Y. She reflected on her journey of becoming a lawyer, as well as the events that inspired her to open her own practice. She addressed the importance of giving back, recognizing that doing so through legal services, pro bono work, or even volunteering one's time, are all significant when helping those in need.



Embracing Excellence:

Golden Bears Honored at the Alumni Awards

Western New England University's mantra of "Once a Golden Bear, always a Golden Bear" encapsulates the loyalty woven among students and alumni of the University. It is this devotion to the University that inspires Vice President for Advancement Dean Hickey, who expressed how much this loyalty is felt within the first steps on campus. "There's a sense of community. Faculty and staff are committed to providing students with the best possible experience, and our students feel it throughout their time here. I believe this culture leads to alumni feeling grateful for their time spent at WNE, which inspires them to give back to the University and to their community."

This deep-seated devotion radiated brilliantly at the Alumni Awards held on Monday, June 10, at the University Commons. Three alumni were recognized for their unwavering commitment, integrity, generosity, and impact to the WNE community and beyond.



The Delbridge Family Spirit of Philanthropy Award

This award recognizes the sustained and significant philanthropic service of a WNE graduate over their lifetime. The award is named in honor of Kevin S. Delbridge '77/H'19, whose extraordinary support over 35+ years has significantly impacted the WNE student experience, including transforming the delivery of career services and providing scholarships to hundreds of students from Springfield and surrounding communities.

Recipient **John Brennan '71** is a dedicated WNE alumnus, and since graduating, has developed a successful career advancing into positions of leadership with multiple engineering firms. Brennan has served as a trustee for the University since 2012 and was vice chair of the Board. In addition, he was inducted into WNE's Engineering Hall of Fame in 2004, founded the Brennan Family Endowed Scholarship for College of Engineering students alongside his wife in 2007, and was honored as the 2016 Alumnus of the Year for his dedication and generosity to his alma mater. In his 30 years of giving, Brennan has graciously donated over \$1 million dollars to WNE. His philanthropic endeavors exemplify his dedication to giving back and affecting positive change in others' lives, epitomizing the core of the Delbridge Family Spirit of Philanthropy Award.



The Michael A. Serafino '77 Alumnus of the Year Award

For more than 50 years, the Michael A. Serafino '77 Alumnus of the Year Award has recognized an alumnus who displays an extraordinary commitment to professional achievement, civic responsibility, and high personal standards. In 2022, the award was renamed in tribute to, and in fond remembrance of, Michael (Mike) A. Serafino '77, who passed away in November of 2021. The award celebrates Serafino's legacy and the impact that dedicated Golden Bears like him continue to make on campus and the community.

This year's recipient, **Leonard "Len" McCue III '82** is a prominent personal injury attorney and esteemed graduate of the WNE University School of Law. Co-owner of multiple law firms in Florida, McCue's legal advocacy and expertise has positively impacted countless lives. Beyond his legal pursuits, he has supported his alma mater's visions through various generous gifts, including the Leonard and Barbara McCue Scholarship. McCue's altruistic spirit extends further as a member of numerous bar associations, demonstrating his unwavering dedication to giving back and making a difference. His remarkable contributions reflect the essence of the Michael A. Serafino '77 Alumnus of the Year Award.



Outstanding Young Alumni Achievement Award

This award honors a young alumnus that has graduated within the last ten years and has demonstrated a commitment to WNE and its mission in conjunction with contribution and service to society, or through accomplishment and leadership in their profession.

Payton North '17/G'20 is a distinguished alumna of WNE, where she graduated with high honors for both her undergraduate and master's degrees. Rising from a reporter to executive editor at Reminder Publishing in East Longmeadow, Mass., with nearly a half-million readers, she exemplifies excellence and leadership in her field. She has garnered many accolades such as the 2023 Editor & Publisher's 25 under 35 recognition, a 2021 Association of Community Publishers Award, and was most recently recognized in BusinessWest's 40 Under Forty Class of 2024. Beyond her professional achievements, North's commitment to volunteer service, student mentorship, and advocacy for our community embodies the spirit of the Outstanding Young Alumna of the Year Award.

Learn more about our honorees, the event, and view photos at alumni.wne.edu/alumniawards2024.

Class Notes

STAY CONNECTED

Your classmates want to know about the milestones in your life. Send your news, including weddings, career changes, accomplishments, and publications to the Office of Alumni Relations at alumwne@wne.edu, or visit alumni.wne.edu/classnotes to submit your note online.

1980s

Grady Donaldson Jr. L'80 (JD) has retired after 36 years with Schenkel & Donaldson, P.C. He was an attorney as well as partner for the firm.

Keith Shaw L'82 (JD) has been reappointed as chairman of the CATIC Board of Directors. Shaw has been a board member since 2001.



Thomas Cella L'83 (JD) was recognized for inclusion in the 2024 *Best Lawyers in America* in three categories: Personal Injury Litigation, Products Liability Litigation, and Medical Malpractice Law. Cella is a partner at Howard, Kohn, Sprague & FitzGerald in Hartford, Conn.

1990s

Michael Mikaelian '90 (Industrial Engineering) has been appointed as an inside sales engineer for global manufacturer Conval.



Todd Shelansky '93 (Accounting) has been promoted to managing principal at HarperWhitfield CPA firm. With offices in Farmington, Conn. and Weatogue, Conn., he will lead the team in achieving the firm's mission while ensuring its successful growth. Shelansky has been with the firm since 1994, was promoted to manager in 2003, and was promoted again in 2015 to principal.

Cynthia Elomaa '94 (English) has written a children's picture book, *Nicky's Very Messy Room*. This first book in its series teaches children about personal responsibility, following directions, cooperation, and social and emotional development. Elomaa is an active member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and the Association of Rhode Island Authors, is available for author visits, and teaches writing workshops for students. To learn more about her books, author events, and classes, please visit her website at www.cynthiadilippoelomaa.com.



Charles Milhans G'94 (MBA) has been honored as the 2023 veteran of the year in Leonminster, Mass. He was awarded for not only his actions in the military but also for what he has done for the community.

Richard LaRose, Jr. L'97 (JD) has joined Goldberg Segalla and will be practicing in the firm's Workers' Compensation group in Albany, N.Y.

2000s

Alison Robb '00 (Marketing Communications/Advertising) has started a new position as marketing consultant for MassMutual's Protection Products Marketing Team.

Christine Byrne '02/G'21 (Accounting/MSA) has been promoted to director of finance for the Eastern States Exposition.

Kevin Sears G'02 (MBA) has been named as 2024 president of the National Association of Realtors (NAR). He is a broker and partner of Sears Real Estate in Springfield, where he works alongside his siblings, specializing in single-family brokerage and property management. Sears aims to secure more housing in Massachusetts, especially multifamily options near the MBTA stations, during his time as president.

William Butman, Jr. '03 (Technical Management) was appointed to serve on the City of Chicopee's Cultural Council. Additionally, he has recently earned his MS in Human Resources Management (AI) from Northeastern University.

Melissa Grenier '04 (Social Work) celebrates 13 years of employment with the Alzheimer's Association, MA/NH Chapter. Grenier has been promoted within the organization from serving as their program coordinator to regional manager for the state of New Hampshire.



Bryan Cassidy '05 (Computer Information Systems) was awarded *Hartford Business Journal's* C-Suite Award for Chief Information Officer, which honors the top performing C-suite level executives in the Greater Hartford area who work in the for-profit, non-profit, and governmental sectors, have contributed to their company's or organization's overall growth, and have shown commitment to good ethics, reporting, and involvement in the community.

Stephanie Vincelette '05 (Marketing) has been promoted to assistant vice president of human resources operations at bankESB.

Phillip Giguere '06/G'15 (Accounting/MSA) has been promoted to partner at MP CPAs in Springfield, Mass. Giguere joined the firm in 2006 and has more than 18 years of experience in business and individual taxation.

Scott Szczebak L'07 (JD) has been selected as town administrator for Southamptn, Mass.



Byron Jones '09 (Integrated Liberal Studies) has joined the Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Services' Board of Directors. Jones currently works for the International Trade Association through Platinum Technologies and has 19 years of business and digital strategy experience.

Michael Ormsby '09 (Communications) has been named the director of One Stop Student Services at UConn Storrs. Ormsby has over 11 years of experience as a leader in student services, including directing orientation programs, teaching and advising first-year students, and working in residential life.

2010s

Jonathan Longobardi L'10 (JD) recently joined Halloran Sage as a partner in the firm's New Haven, Conn. office. He is an experienced civil litigator with over a decade of practice in insurance defense, personal injury, transportation, medical malpractice, and commercial litigation.

Michael Monti '10/G'12 (Integrated Liberal Studies/MBA) has joined the American Hockey League as a video coach for the Cleveland Monsters after previously holding the titles of assistant coach, assistant GM, and director of player development for the Omaha Lancers Hockey Club in the United States Hockey League.

David Oliva '10/G'11 (Sport Management/MBA) was awarded an exclusive seat in the B2B Innovator Class of 2023 last August. Oliva was honored at the 2023 B2B Sales & Marketing Exchange in Boston, an event produced by the renowned Demand Generation Report.

Joshua Risen L'10 (JD) has started a new position as the office administrator for the town manager and selectboard office in Great Barrington, Mass.

Kaylyn Smith '10 (Psychology) has started a new position at Connecticut College as the associate athletic director.



Rachel (Bradshaw) Griffin '11 (History) has been promoted as the new senior director of donor relations & stewardship at The UConn Foundation. She has been with the organization since 2019 and served as both the assistant director of stewardship and associate director of stewardship.

Stephen Holstrom L'11 (JD) has been promoted to partner at Bulkley Richardson, the second largest law firm in western Massachusetts.

Justin Martins '11 (Communications - Public Relations) has re-joined Whalley Computer Associates, Inc. as their new strategic account manager.



Rosa Fredes L'13 (JD) has joined Goldberg Segalla's Workers' Compensation group as a partner in Newark, N.J., bringing with her 10 years of experience in this field.

Emily Newman-Savino '13 (Sport Management) started a new position working as the operations coordinator at InCord Custom Safety Netting Solutions in Colchester, Conn.

Allison Poirier L'13 (JD) has been promoted to partner at Kahan Kerensky Capossela, LLP (KKC). She is a valued member of the Estate Planning Department and has been with KKC since 2013. Additionally, Poirier was selected as a Super Lawyers Rising Star, a distinction that only the top 2.5% of attorneys in Connecticut receive, for both 2023 and 2024.



Shelby Van Huysen '13 (General Biology) has started a new position as clinical nurse manager at Yale School of Medicine, Department of Neurology.

Robert Garlick '14/G'15 (Accounting-Finance/MSA) was promoted to audit specialist at Voya Financial. In addition to his promotion, Garlick is now a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) charterholder.

Michael Camille '15/MBA'19 (Marketing/MBA) has started a new position as project engineer - supplier management at ALTEN Technology USA.

Dr. Stephen Ako-Nai BCNSP PharmD'16

(PharmD) has published the book, *Don't Lose Your Joy*. This book is about how the power of maintaining joy is essential for anyone looking to overcome anger, create positive perception, and achieve their purpose in life. *Don't Lose Your Joy* can be found on Amazon.

Lindsee Keefe '16 (Industrial Engineering) has started a new job at Cartamundi in East Longmeadow, Mass. as the continuous improvement leader of the former Hasbro facility.

Teryn Maihiot '16 (Pharmaceutical Business) started working at Bristol Myers Squibb as their senior manager of clinical documents.

Sarah Marois '16 (Accounting, Finance) has begun working as a senior financial analyst at Owens Corning.

Eric Stinson '16 (Communication - Public Relations) has joined Hilton Hotels of San Diego as the complex senior marketing manager.



Rebecca Turner '16/G'18 (Communication - Public Relations/MAC) was promoted to web content manager in the Marketing and External Affairs office at Western New England University. She has been with the University for five years.

Sarah Morgan L'17 (JD) has been named vice president of human resources at Health New England (HNE). In this new role, Sarah will lead and oversee HNE's human capital and organizational development operations, ensuring business strategies, plans, and initiatives are developed and implemented in compliance with governing regulations, internal policies, and procedures.

Paige Auger '18 (Management and Leadership) has joined Market Mentors as a financial administrator.

Devin Kindred '18 (Management and Leadership) has been promoted to director of residence life & student conduct at American International College (AIC) in Springfield, Mass. Kindred previously served as AIC's assistant director for residential and commuter student living, while also facilitating the Safe Zone – LGBTQ+ education series on campus.

Francesco Siniscalchi '18 (Business Analytics and Information Management) has been promoted to strategic pricing manager at Covetrus.

Dr. Kaitlin Armstrong '19/PharmD'21 (Pharmacy Studies/PharmD) transitioned into a new role at The Hospital of Central Connecticut as an ICU clinical pharmacist.

Kristen Breen '19 (Sport Management) is the community outreach assistant for the Chicago Blackhawks. Breen joins the Chicago Blackhawks after four years with UConn Recreation, most recently as an assistant program director for operations and facilities.

Alex Parker '19/G'20 (Accounting/MS) has started a new position as senior associate with the Center for Audit Solutions at KPMG.

Alexandra Summa '19 (Psychology) has been promoted to human resources generalist at Tighe & Bond.

Carling Willis '19 (English) has started a new role as a communications manager at Connecticut Children's.

2020s

Dr. Kaeli Serafino '20/OTD'23 (Psychology/OTD) has started as an occupational therapist at CareOne.

Taryn Kubik '21 (Sport Management) has started a new position with Brown University Athletics as their coordinator of recruiting and retention.

Jack LaBranche '21 (Accounting) has been promoted to senior associate at MP CPAs Firm.

Emma Laughlin '21/G'23 (Communications - Public Relations/MS) has started a new position as a communications and content marketing specialist with Health Plans, Inc.

Conner Murphy '21/G'22 (Sport Management/MBA) has been promoted to assistant director of residence life at Sacred Heart University.

Nicholas Romei G'21 (Sport Leadership and Coaching) started a new position as assistant director of athletic communications at Boston College.

Yassine Sahbani L'21 (JD) has joined Barclay Damon LLC's Commercial Litigation, Torts & Products Liability Defense, and Labor & Employment Practice Areas as their new associate attorney. Here he represents clients in a wide range of civil litigation matters with a focus on complex contract disputes and the defense of a variety of general liability claims.

Joseph Webber '21 (Sport Management) is an assistant coach for Dean College's baseball team.



Amara Barbiero L'22 (JD) has been appointed as an associate attorney at Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley, P.C. in downtown Springfield, Mass. She will focus her practice on workers' compensation and personal injury claims.

Samantha Vitka '22 (Psychology) has started as the sports administration assistant for Wesleyan University.



Caleb Wu '23 (Sport Management) has broken the men's Guinness World Record of juggling a soccer ball 75 times in 30 seconds while going 5 mph on a treadmill.

Baby Golden Bears



Finley John, January 15, 2024 to **Christine Rathbun '13** and **John McCabe '13**



Easton James, March 1, 2024 to **Jennifer (Mears) Kravic '13** and **James Kravic '13**



Amelia Pauline, April 26, 2024 to **Danyelle (Bigda) Mindek '15** and **John Mindek '15**



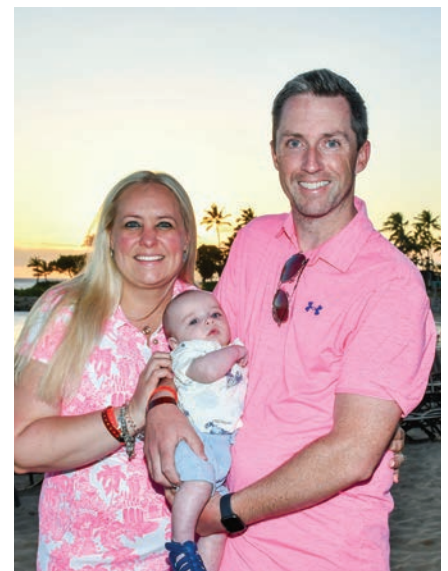
Logan Marshall, July 7, 2023 to **Megan (McNatt) Bielsky '10** and **Robert Bielsky, Jr. '09**



Cora Ann, June 5, 2023 to **Lindsay (Furlong) O'Hara '07** and **Dan O'Hara**



Griffin Lloyd, August 2, 2023 to **Allie (Lombardi) Gravois '13** and **Collin Gravois '12**



Maverick Duda, December 20, 2023 to **Candace (Klementowicz) Kelly L'14** and **Ryan Kelly**

Marriages



Lauren Hurley '18 and Patrick Dillon '16, September 30, 2023, in Aquebogue, N.Y.



(above) **Michele Magliulo '15 and Brian Ballo '15**, October 14, 2023, in Long Island, N.Y.



(left) **Gabriel Updegraff '22 and Sophia Updegraff**, November 25, 2023, in Woodbridge, Conn.



(right) **Miranda Wyse '18 and Bobby MacKay '16**, August 18, 2023, in Scituate, Mass.

(below) **Anthony DiNoia '22 and Kelsey DiNoia**, September 2, 2023, in Kinston, N.C.



Thomas Vega '16 and Heather Vega, August 28, 2023, in New York, N.Y.





(above) **Kaytlin Nelson '20** and **Daniel Morabito '20**, September 22, 2023, in Wilbraham, Mass.

(left) **Mikenzie Crowther '21** and **Michael Skidmore '21**, October 15, 2023, in Broad Brook, Conn.

(right) **Karissa Andro '22** and **Matthew Touma '22**, October 12, 2023, in South Windsor, Conn.



Dr. Megan Pantos '19/PharmD '21 and **Nathan Lachapelle '20**, November 11, 2023, in Holden, Mass.



Caroline Best '19 and **Matthew Tarini '19**, September 16, 2023, in Williamstown, Mass.

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CURTAIN CALL

WNE's Stageless Players rocked the stage with their spring performance of the 1975 cult classic, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.





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