

# WNE

Magazine

SUMMER 2026

## THE ARTS AT WNE: A Year to Remember

**THE STAGELESS PLAYERS OF WESTERN NEW ENGLAND COLLEGE**

present:

Welcome To Our Tenth Anniversary

**You're A Good Man Charlie Brown**

Spring Production  
**APRIL 1976 - 1986**

WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY WNE

THE STAGELESS PLAYERS PRESENT

**LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS**

Book and Lyrics by Howard Ashman  
Music by Alan Menken

March 31 • 7:00 p.m.  
April 1 • 2:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.  
April 2 • 2:00 p.m.  
Sixth Hall, Wood Auditorium

Directed by Eric Gossling  
Assistant Directed by Jeff Tringali  
Choreography by Kristin Aune-McMahon  
Music Direction by David Smith

Students and Parents: \$5.00  
General Admission: \$10.00

Order online at  
[www.western.edu/arts](http://www.western.edu/arts)  
Tickets at the door: \$10.00



Sponsored by Western Services, The Office of Student Engagement and Community and the Department of Communication, Media, and the Arts



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*The Women of LOCKERBIE*  
By Deborah Sarason

A story of grief, love, loss, and hope, from the Western New England Community's first completely virtual play to a whole host of memorable & joyful moments, comes back from stage to screen in this play and beyond.

April 2, 2025 • 7:00 p.m.  
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YouTube Live

Directed by Kayla Cessario and Molly Doyle

WNE



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All are welcome, new and im-pros a

March 18, 6:30  
Improv Room • Campus Cen

We hope to see you there






*Summer '26*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **4** JOE HARTMAN: BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT—TOGETHER

As Western New England's seventh president, Hartman blends connection, engineering insight, and curiosity to build upon the university's foundation for a brighter future.

### **8** COMMENCEMENT 2026

Western New England University honored 887 graduates in the Class of 2026, celebrating their resilience, achievement, and leadership.

### **12** WNE CELEBRATES MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

Improv on the Rocks, Stageless Players, and WNEK "The Voice" Radio mark milestone anniversaries—celebrating the creativity, connection, and unforgettable memories they have sparked across generations.

### **20** BUILT ON BROTHERHOOD: A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP AT WNE

Decades after their time on the field, Chris Clark '94 and his Golden Bear teammates came together to honor James "Hoss" Horbal '93 and the enduring bonds built through the game.



# WNE

Magazine

WNE: *The Magazine* is published for alumni, parents, and friends of Western New England University.

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## IN EVERY ISSUE

### 6 CAMPUS NEWS

Stay up to date on the latest happenings and events on campus.

### 10 GOLDEN BEAR ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Josh Tullis '12 reflects on his enduring bond with the Golden Bear community and why giving back to future generations means so much.

### 16 CUB CLOSE-UP

Meet Josh Farrell '26, a driven mechanical engineering senior who balances athletics, engineering, and the arts, as he reflects on the opportunities, achievements, and lasting legacy he leaves through leadership and community impact.

### 18 ATHLETICS RECAP

### 22 ALUMNI NEWS

### 24 CLASS NOTES

# The Gift that Gives Back for Life

Your experience at Western New England University helped shape the path you are on today.

Now you can help open doors for the students who will follow you through a Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA) with Western New England University. Establishing a CGA allows you to support future Golden Bears while receiving fixed payments for life.

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## HOW MUCH INCOME WILL I RECEIVE?

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

Age	Annuity Rate	Annual Payment	Charitable Deduction
65	5.70%	\$1,425	\$8,524
70	6.30%	\$1,575	\$9,145
75	7.00%	\$1,750	\$10,195
80	8.10%	\$2,025	\$11,213
85	9.10%	\$2,275	\$13,150

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

Ages	Annuity Rate	Annual Payment	Charitable Deduction
62/65	4.90%	\$1,225	\$7,680
65/67	5.10%	\$1,275	\$7,844
70/75	5.80%	\$1,450	\$8,259
75/77	6.30%	\$1,575	\$8,823
78/80	6.80%	\$1,700	\$9,378

*Please note that this information is for illustrative purposes and is not intended as tax or legal advice. Rates are subject to change and are based on rates suggested by the American Council on Gift Annuities.*



Contact Dean Hickey, Vice President for University Advancement at 413-796-2210, or [dean.hickey@wne.edu](mailto:dean.hickey@wne.edu) to discuss your options.

Your generosity today creates opportunities for Golden Bears tomorrow.

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# A Message from President Joe Hartman



Dear Golden Bears,

As my wife Karen and I begin our time at Western New England University (WNE), we do so with a deep sense of gratitude and anticipation. From my earliest visits, what stood out was not just the strength of the institution but the warmth of its people. This is a community that takes pride in what it does—and, just as importantly, in who it serves.

That impression has only deepened in the weeks and months since. It has been a privilege to begin engaging with campus life, including participating in #WNEgives and connecting with members of the community.

What draws me most to WNE is its clarity of mission. This is a university where education truly launches lives—where students across the arts and sciences, business, engineering, health professions, and law are prepared not only for careers but for meaningful contributions to their communities. That breadth matters.

A comprehensive education, grounded in both intellectual curiosity and professional preparation, equips graduates to adapt, lead, and grow over time.

I have long believed that I would not be the engineer or the educator I am today without that kind of broad foundation. At WNE, that philosophy is not aspirational—it is current practice.

As I step into this role, I am committed to building on the University's strengths and elevating the impact of the work this community already does so well. There is a powerful story here: of students prepared for opportunity, of faculty deeply invested in their success, and of alumni whose lives reflect the value of a WNE education. It is a story worth telling more broadly and more boldly.

In the months ahead, Karen and I look forward to becoming part of this community in a meaningful way: attending events, meeting students, connecting with alumni, and listening. Leadership, at its

core, is about presence and partnership, and we are eager to engage fully in the life of the University.

There is real momentum here at Western New England University, and real opportunity ahead. I am grateful to begin this next chapter with you and to help ensure that the University continues to prepare students for lives of purpose, achievement, and impact.

Warm regards,

Joe Hartman  
*President*



# Joe Hartman: Building What Comes Next—Together

Molly Watson

When Joe Hartman first visited Western New England University (WNE), it was not a formal interview that sealed the connection. It was a feeling.

A Sunday afternoon. A walk across campus. A sense of energy that felt both grounded and forward-looking.

“Driving away, we just had a wonderful feeling,” Hartman recalls. That moment—shared with his wife, Karen—sparked something deeper. What began as curiosity quickly became a conviction.

Now, as Western New England’s seventh president, Hartman brings that same instinct for connection to his leadership—pairing it with the mindset of an engineer, the curiosity of a lifelong learner, and a clear belief in what higher education should deliver.

## **A Leader Who Shows Up**

If there is one theme that defines Hartman’s early days, it is presence.

Even before officially stepping into the role, he made a point to be on campus—meeting students, talking with faculty, connecting with alumni, and listening.

“The days of having a year to settle in are over,” he says. “There’s too much happening in higher education. You must show up and get going.”

That approach reflects his broader philosophy: leadership is not about distance—it is about engagement.

Students made that expectation clear during his interview process. In a lively session that stretched for more than an hour, they pressed him with thoughtful

questions—primarily centered on one thing: would he be present in their experience?

He did not hesitate.

Today, that commitment is already taking shape—from campus events to informal conversations—grounded in the belief that leadership happens in the everyday moments as much as the formal ones.

## **An Engineer’s Perspective on Education**

Hartman often returns to his roots as an engineer—not just as a discipline, but as a way of thinking.

Engineers solve problems. They build systems. They look at complexity and find clarity.

That mindset carries directly into how he views higher education.

At WNE, he sees something distinctive: a university that blends professional preparation with a broad, liberal arts foundation—what he describes as a powerful combination.

In his welcome message, he reflects a core idea that has shaped his career: a comprehensive education—one that balances intellectual curiosity with practical experience—prepares students to adapt, lead, and grow over time.

It is a model that resonates deeply with him—not only because of his own path, but because of where higher education is headed.

Across the country, institutions are trying to better connect learning with careers. At Western New England, Hartman sees a university already doing that work.

From first-year projects to hands-on learning experiences, students are building, creating, and engaging with real-world challenges from day one.

“I truly believe Western New England can serve as a model [for other schools],” he says.

### **Making the Value of Education Clear**

If there is one issue Hartman returns to often, it is the value of a college degree.

Not in abstract terms—but in real, measurable outcomes.

“We have to communicate the value,” he says.

For Hartman, that means being honest about return on investment while also expanding how we define it.

Yes, careers matter. So do salaries and opportunities. Along with the experiences that shape a person’s life—friendships, confidence, adaptability, and a sense of purpose.

He speaks about this balance with clarity:

“A Western New England education should prepare students for meaningful careers while also offering the kind of experiences that stay with them long after graduation.”

That combination—professional readiness and personal growth—is what he sees as the University’s strength.

### **Momentum Across Campus**

One of Hartman’s early impressions of Western New England was just how much is already in motion.

Across every college, he found new programs, new investments, and new ideas—often supported by external partnerships and funding.

From emerging work in quantum technologies and advanced manufacturing to growth in biopharmaceutical education, cybersecurity, and fintech, the University is leaning into the future.

What stands out to Hartman is not just the innovation—it is the initiative behind it.

“Faculty and staff said, ‘This is where our students need to be,’ and they went out and found the resources to make it happen,” he notes.

His role, as he sees it, is to build on that momentum—connecting those efforts to partners, industries, and opportunities that extend their impact.

### **A Whole-Person Education**

For all his focus on careers and outcomes, Hartman is quick to point out that education is never just about a job.

He knows this from experience.

Long before engineering, there was music—choir, piano, trumpet, marching band, writing—his first job was a journalist, and study abroad—in Germany, both as an undergrad and grad student. Experiences that shaped how he thinks, communicates, and connects.

That perspective informs how he defines success for students.

“It’s not just about professional preparation,” he says. “It’s about everything that happens alongside it.”

Study abroad. Student organizations. Athletics. The arts.

These are not extras—they are essential pieces of a complete education.

And they are part of what makes a place feel like home.

### **Looking Ahead**

Hartman steps into the presidency at a time when higher education faces real challenges—from shifting demographics to rapid technological change.

He does not shy away from that reality.

But he also does not see it as a limitation.

Instead, he frames it as an opportunity.

“Someone has to step up and lead,” he says.

At Western New England, he sees a university well-positioned to do just that—grounded in its mission, confident in its identity, and ready to adapt.

For alumni and donors, his message is both simple and forward-looking:

“There is momentum here. There is a story worth telling. And there is a future worth building—together.”

Or, as he puts it:

“There is real opportunity ahead.” 🐾



# CAMPUS NEWS

For the latest news from Western New England University, visit [wne.edu/news](http://wne.edu/news).



## NUWAN DE SILVA NAMED 2026 TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNER

Western New England University (WNE) has named Nuwan De Silva, Ph.D., associate professor of chemistry, as the recipient of the 2026 Teaching Excellence Award—recognizing his commitment to student learning, innovative instruction, and mentorship.

Since joining WNE in 2017, De Silva has built a reputation for making complex scientific concepts accessible and engaging. His teaching blends research and real-world application, helping students connect theory to practice in meaningful ways. His scholarly work in quantum mechanical modeling and lanthanide chemistry further informs a classroom approach grounded in discovery and curiosity.

“I’m deeply honored by this recognition, but what matters most to me is the opportunity to work with our students,” De Silva said. “Teaching is about more than delivering content—it’s about guiding students as they grow in confidence, think critically, and prepare for what comes next.”

The award also recognizes an accomplished group of finalists whose work reflects the strength and diversity of WNE’s faculty. The 2026 nominees and finalists included Jingru Benner, Ph.D. (Mechanical Engineering); Dan Bevacqua (English); Abby Caselli, Ph.D. (Psychology); Andrew Moore (Business Analytics and Information Management); and Chidike I. Okeem, Ph.D. (Criminal Justice and Criminology). Together, they exemplify WNE’s teacher-scholar model—pairing academic rigor with hands-on learning and meaningful mentorship.

The Teaching Excellence Award is presented annually to a full-time faculty member in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, or Engineering who demonstrates outstanding instructional practice and student engagement.

De Silva was formally recognized during the University’s 2026 Commencement ceremonies.

## ENGINEERING PRECISION: SURVEYING TEAM HEADS TO NATIONALS

Western New England University’s Civil Engineering Surveying Team has once again earned top honors, capturing First Place at the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Regional Competition for the second consecutive year. With the win, the team advanced to the 2026 ASCE UESI Surveying Society-wide Finals Competition this June in West Virginia.

The six-member team—John Dafonseca, Sean Ebanks ‘26, Jacob Lyons ‘26 (captain), Michael Mason, Henry Ryczek, and Julien St. Jean—represents the strength of WNE’s hands-on approach to engineering education. Guided by faculty advisor Frank Blachly, the students demonstrated exceptional technical skill, teamwork, and professionalism throughout the competition.

Designed to mirror real-world engineering challenges, the competition includes both office-based and field components. Prior to the event, students analyzed more than 12,000 survey points to develop a detailed site plan, which

they later presented to a panel of professional surveyors. In the field, they competed in timed events requiring precision, adaptability, and collaboration.

Their performance stood out for both accuracy and efficiency. Across all tasks, the team consistently matched or nearly matched judges’ values while completing the work ahead of schedule.

During the competition, one professional judge summed up the team’s performance: “I am going to hire this team.”

Surveying plays a critical role in civil engineering, ensuring that infrastructure projects—from roadways to utilities—are built accurately and safely. The team’s success highlights the importance of precision in translating design into reality.



## FINANCE TEAM WINS CFA BOSTON CHALLENGE

Western New England University business students are gaining national attention—and demonstrating the power of applied learning—after capturing first place at the CFA Society Boston Investment Research Challenge.

The student team—Nolan Chamberland, Aleksandra Dziejczyk '25, Zachary Killoran '26 and Madeline Jarvinen '26—outperformed top regional competitors, delivering a rigorous equity research report and presenting their analysis before a panel of industry professionals. Their victory advanced them to the next stage of global competition, placing WNE among an elite group of institutions recognized for excellence in finance education.

Often considered one of the most prestigious undergraduate competitions in the field, the CFA Challenge immerses students in the role of professional analysts. Participants evaluate a publicly traded company, develop investment recommendations, and defend their conclusions in a high-stakes presentation—mirroring real-world expectations in investment banking, asset management, and corporate finance.

For WNE students, the experience is more than academic—it is a defining experience.

Guided by faculty mentors who bring both academic and industry expertise, the team developed not only technical skills, but also the confidence and communication abilities essential for career success.



As the team prepared for the next round, they carried forward more than a win—they represented what is possible when talent, opportunity, and support come together.

Their success is a powerful example of how Western New England University continues to prepare students not just for their first job, but for lasting impact in their fields.

## PHARMACY RESEARCH AT WNE EARNS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Research and innovation at Western New England University's College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences are gaining national attention, with recent honors highlighting both faculty scholarship and student impact.



At the 2026 Online Learning Consortium Innovate Conference, faculty member Janet Kennedy was recognized with a Best-in-Track Award for her research on advancing online learning in pharmacy education. Her work explores new strategies to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes—an increasingly critical focus as healthcare education continues to evolve.

In a complementary example of research impact, a research team from WNE's College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences earned second place in the Academic Research Awards at the 28th Annual American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists Northeast Regional Discussion Group (NERDG) meeting, held in Groton, Conn. on March 30. The highly regarded regional conference brings together scientists, faculty, and industry professionals to showcase advances in drug delivery and pharmaceutical research.

Together, these recognitions underscore a defining aspect of the WNE experience: the integration of teaching, research, and real-world application. Faculty-led scholarship informs the classroom, while students gain hands-on experience working alongside mentors on meaningful projects that address current challenges in healthcare.

For students, these opportunities are transformative. Engaging in research builds critical thinking, strengthens technical skills, and prepares graduates to enter a complex and rapidly changing healthcare environment with confidence.

As the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences continues to build momentum, its faculty and students are not only earning recognition—they are helping shape the future of healthcare through discovery, innovation, and education.

## THE WORK OF WNE'S CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

At Western New England University School of Law, the Center for Social Justice is redefining what legal education can be—pairing hands-on experience with meaningful community impact.

Through its Consumer Debt Initiative (CDI), the Center provides free legal services to individuals facing debt collection and related financial challenges—an area where access to representation is often limited, particularly for low-income and underserved populations. At the same time, the work serves as a powerful learning model, giving law students the opportunity to represent clients, conduct research, and advocate for real outcomes.

The impact is both immediate and measurable. Over the past year, the initiative served more

than 700 clients and helped reduce nearly \$900,000 in consumer debt—offering tangible relief to individuals and families across western Massachusetts.

But the story goes beyond numbers.

For students, the experience is immersive and deeply impactful. Through externships, internships, and pro bono opportunities, they engage directly with clients—developing practical legal skills while seeing firsthand the human side of their work. It is an approach that prepares graduates not only to practice law but to lead with purpose.

“Economic justice is at the core of the Center's work,” said Director Zachary Bleckner, noting that many cases reflect broader affordability challenges.

By providing high-quality legal support at critical moments, the Center helps build long-term financial stability while training the next generation of client-centered attorneys.

This impact is made possible through strong partnerships, including continued support from the MassMutual Foundation, whose recently renewed \$1.08 million, three-year commitment ensures that the work of the CDI can continue to grow and support both expanded services and enhanced student learning opportunities.

At WNE, legal education extends beyond the classroom, empowering students to make a difference today while preparing them to shape a more just and equitable future.



# COMMENCEMENT 2026

Molly Watson

## ***“Stay Curious. Be Adaptable. Lead with Your Humanity.”***

That advice from graduate commencement speaker and Western New England University (WNE) alumna Sheryl McQuade G’94 set the tone for Western New England University’s 2026 Commencement ceremonies on Thursday, May 14, at the MassMutual Center. Speaking to graduates entering a rapidly changing world shaped by technological disruption, uncertainty, and new opportunities, McQuade urged the Class of 2026 to remain grounded in curiosity, human connection, and authenticity as they begin their next chapter.

Celebrating resilience, achievement, and leadership, the University awarded 887 degrees across undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral programs during two ceremonies honoring the Class of 2026. The day included the conferral of 483 bachelor’s degrees during the morning’s undergraduate ceremony and 404 graduate



degrees in the afternoon, including 236 master’s degrees and 168 doctoral degrees.

The ceremonies also highlighted the strength of the Golden Bear alumni network, with alumni leaders returning to the podium to welcome the graduating class into the University’s more than 50,000-member alumni community. Heather Coulter Kemp ’10, president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors, addressed undergraduate students while



Nicole Mule L’17, president of the Law Alumni Association, welcomed graduate students and fellow law alumni during the afternoon ceremony.

The ceremonies also marked an important moment in the University’s history, as President Joseph C. Hartman participated in the undergraduate commencement ahead of officially assuming the presidency on June 1.





Interim President Michael B. Alexander reflected on the accomplishments of the graduates and the values that will guide them moving forward.

“College is not an end to learning, nor is it a beginning,” Alexander told graduates. “It is an acceleration. Work hard, persevere, seek the truth in all things, and be kind.”

Board of Trustees Chair Elena Gervino L’88 encouraged graduates to advocate for themselves and pursue opportunities with confidence.

“Sometimes the most important door in your life opens because you had the courage to knock,” said Gervino, who shared the story of being waitlisted before ultimately being admitted to WNE University School of Law.

Undergraduate student speaker Camden Kaufmann ’26, a Springfield native graduating with dual degrees in Political Science and Criminal Justice, reflected on the unique experience of a class that entered college just as COVID-era restrictions were ending and had to navigate an uncertain and rapidly changing world together.

“We’re stepping into a world that’s unpredictable and fast moving, but we’ve already shown who we are,” Kaufmann said. “We are the class that is adaptable when the world changes, and shows up when it gets hard.”

The University also recognized nationally respected leaders during the ceremonies through honorary degree presentations.

At the undergraduate ceremony, Martin J. Walsh—former Boston mayor, former U.S. secretary of labor, and current NHL Players’ Association executive director—received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree in recognition of his leadership in labor rights, public service, and social justice.

During the graduate ceremony, McQuade, regional president of TD Bank’s New England Metro and a proud WNE alumna, also received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

McQuade urged graduates to remain adaptable in a rapidly changing world.

“The most successful among you won’t be the ones who believe they know everything,” McQuade said. “They’ll be

the ones who stay curious enough to keep learning... humble enough to unlearn... and courageous enough to relearn.”

The undergraduate class represented 15 states, with the top five fields of study being Mechanical Engineering, Psychology, Criminal Justice, Finance, and Computer Science. Graduate and professional students came from 26 states. In addition, the graduating class included international students from Canada, India, Mexico, Spain, and Saint Lucia.

As graduates crossed the stage and joined the ranks of more than 50,000 Golden Bear alumni worldwide, the ceremonies celebrated not only academic achievement, but the resilience, leadership, and sense of purpose that will shape the next chapter of their lives.

Visit [wne.edu/commencement](http://wne.edu/commencement) to view both recorded ceremonies. 🐻



# Josh Tullis:

## Stringing Together Lifelong Connections On and Off the Field

Sarah Tsitso

Driven by perseverance and loyalty, alumnus Josh Tullis '12 turned his Western New England experience into a lifelong connection by giving back to the community that helped shape his path on and off the field.



For Josh Tullis '12, nothing was going to keep him from completing his Marketing and Communications degree at Western New England University (WNE). Not financial challenges that sent him home for one semester during his junior year. Not a paperwork mix-up with his internship that delayed his official graduation by more than a decade.

Nothing.

“Making that commitment, coming back—finishing what I started—meant so much to me,” said Tullis. “It was important to me to come back to Western New England, to this school, this community, this coach.”

The “coach” in question is long-time WNE men’s lacrosse coach John Klepacki, a man Tullis still considers a member of his family, a man who recently attended Tullis’ wedding.

When Tullis came to WNE from Long Island, N.Y., he did so not just for the academics. He also came to play lacrosse for Klepacki, who first saw Tullis play in a high school tournament. Tullis knew he wanted to play in college, and he was impressed by the program at WNE.

“I looked them up when I got home from the tournament,” he said. “Western New England seemed like they were at the highest level of Division III. It felt right, like it was the right fit. So, I sent the coach an email.”

Tullis got the call he had been accepted to WNE just before he took the stage to accept an award at the New York State Sales Demonstration Championship, which he won for a company he had started called

Quik Stik Lacrosse, that combined his two loves: business and lacrosse.

“People from all over the country would send me their lacrosse heads, and I would customize them,” he said. “I was doing that pretty much all throughout high school.”

Coming to WNE and being part of this community was life-changing for Tullis. His father passed away when he was a senior in high school, leaving him, his mother, and his sisters on their own on Long Island. He said they all felt a little lost that year, without much structure.

Being part of the WNE men’s lacrosse team gave him a little of that structure back.

“We were a very regimented lacrosse team,” he said. “I didn’t have a regimented life at home. Then I’m up here, on my own, and I have to figure this out. I have to practice at six. I have to get into the weight room. I have to impress the coach. I have to figure all this stuff out, kind of on my own. And I think it worked.”

He credits his team and coaches for getting him through tough times.

“When you’re on a team, it’s an immediate group of people on your side,” said Tullis. “It’s a group of people with the same interests as you, the same schedule as you. But even beyond that team, I have a lot of friends who didn’t play lacrosse. I had the football friend, I had the golf friend, a tennis friend. I had a collection of different sports groups and different people who were my friend group. Not just solely the lacrosse team.”

Even after graduating, Tullis stayed within the sports world. Now, as an account executive with Metro Team Sports, he continues his relationship with WNE on multiple levels, not the least of which is making sure all WNE athletes are properly outfitted with uniforms and apparel.

“Western New England is my number one customer, probably my biggest customer that I personally deal with,” said Tullis. “Western New England gave me my first big, all-in contract. They hadn’t had one before. But I know this school. I know the teams and the coaches. I know what they like. I know what they don’t like. Walking in the Healthful Living Center (HLC)—it feels like home.”

“It’s amazing to go from being a student there to someone who is helping on the other side. Other people sell what I sell. Other people do what I do. But there is a sort of family feeling going back and talking to those people and working with those coaches and working with those colors. I care what that Golden Bear looks like. It’s still a big part of my life.”

He also makes sure he gives back to WNE athletes personally, understanding just how important it is to be able to wear the school colors with pride.

“Being philanthropically connected to the school is meaningful to me,” he said. “Every athlete, after their first year, goes home

***“Being philanthropically connected to the school is meaningful to me....I want to make sure that the financial investment from the student athletes here is as low as it can possibly be for them to get all the things they need. That’s the key role for me in this school.”***

with gear, and everybody compares what they got. But not everyone is getting the same amount or the same kind of gear from their programs. I want to make sure that the financial investment from the student athletes here is as low as it can possibly be for them to get all the things they need. That’s the key role for me in this school.”

Tullis emphasizes that philanthropy is more than having your name on the side of a building. It’s about contributing in ways that positively impact the students walking through those halls—and running up and down the fields—every day. He is thankful to all those who made his years at WNE possible, and he is proud that he can give back to the next generation of students.

Uniforms and merchandise are not the only ways Tullis stays connected to WNE. He also remains in close contact with former teammates, coaches, and others within the University’s lacrosse program through the alumni network.

He notes there is a group chat filled with former WNE men’s lacrosse players and others that continues to grow each year. Acknowledging that those are the people and the connections that he still counts on both personally and professionally. And they all set aside time to come together to honor and revere their former coach, who holds a special place in all their hearts and who is still coaching the team today.

Once a year, many of these former lacrosse players return to the field for WNE’s alumni game, including Tullis.

“Because of that connection, we still show up,” he shared. “Our alumni game gets a lot of people coming back every year. It’s unique. We still get everybody coming back, everybody donating, everybody caring. It’s a tight community.”

During that game, Tullis and others seek out current students looking for advice and guidance on internships, career opportunities, or life in general.

“We’ll find out who’s studying business, who’s studying this, who’s studying that,” he said. “We have an impressive alumni base that can help students.”

Tullis enjoys helping, especially since he knows too well what it feels like to be a student who doesn’t know what is coming next, worried about the future and how to make it through to graduation. After the first semester of his junior year, he realized he would not be able to return for the remainder of the school year, as they had missed a critical financial aid deadline. Ultimately disqualifying him for loans and making it challenging to afford the semester’s tuition.

“So, I stayed home that spring and started working in a lacrosse shop. But I kept texting [Coach Klepacki]. I kept working out. And I made a promise to come back. But I jumped into the workforce halfway through my college career, not knowing if I was ever really going back. Maybe this was it. But I said I was going to come back, and I did.”

Today, Tullis remains a familiar face on campus, whether he is playing in the alumni game, meeting with coaches about uniforms, or chatting with student athletes about their futures.

“When I come back for the alumni game, I’m starting to see that the whole sideline is filled with guys that are five, six, seven years younger than me,” he said. “That just shows how Coach Klepacki is still creating an environment where guys want to come back to campus and be involved.”

“It means a lot and shows the young kids who just got to campus how special this place is. They don’t know yet what it’s like to be a part of this community, so having that many guys committed to coming back every year, it’s important.” 🐾



## WNE Celebrates Milestone Anniversaries: Stageless Players and WNEK “The Voice” Radio at 50 and Improv on the Rocks at 20

Brittney Mihalich

From the stage to airwaves, Western New England University’s student-led arts and media groups foster creativity, connection, and lifelong memories that span generations.

In keeping their traditions of immersing audiences with electric energy and live entertainment, three campus organizations are marking milestone anniversaries this year. Improv on the Rocks rings in its 20th season, and the Stageless Players and WNEK “The Voice” Radio each mark 50 years.

For some Golden Bears, membership among these organizations means a deeper connection to social life on campus. For others, they are an opportunity to learn a new skill or refine a craft. Yet for all, it is the lifelong memories of laughter, connection, and a little notoriety that endure the decades.

### Stageless Players

In the moments before stepping on stage, Joshua Farrel ’26 recalls that, “It’s the most nerve-wracking and exciting experience that you can have in theater.” Farrel, who performed the lead role in Stageless Players’ 2025 production of *Sweeney Todd*, added, “the second you step on stage and you get into your character and scene, everything just starts rolling—all those nerves flood away in an instant.”

The Stageless Players have captivated theatergoers in Sleith 100 for half a century. Known for attracting seasoned community



theatre members, students who had never set foot on a stage, and virtually everyone in between, the organization offers a warm, inclusive, and encouraging setting for performance enthusiasts to deepen their appreciation for the stage.

Twice each year, members of the Stageless Players select, rehearse, and perform classic and up-and-coming shows. Encouraged by Theatre Professor Hillary Haft Bucs, students wrap up productions not only with the lines of great performances committed to heart, but with the confidence and sense of accomplishment

that only a standing ovation can provide. “Stageless has brought out a different side of me,” explained Skyler Quadros, a once-reserved Creative Writing major who found her voice on the stage.

For Dale Facey ’83, it was his involvement in Stageless Players that brought him out of his shell and embedded him in campus life. Facey went from a shy commuter student to appearing before the Western New England University administration to keep the organization afloat in its early years. He recalls stacking the Student Senate



**THE  
STAGELESS PLAYERS  
OF**

**WESTERN  
NEW ENGLAND  
COLLEGE**

**Present:**

Welcome To Our Tenth Anniversary

**You're A Good Man  
Charlie Brown**

**Spring Production  
APRIL 1976 - 1986**



with Stageless Players members and then appearing before administration when his attempts to “improve” Sleith Hall for productions were not appreciated by all. Yet for all its trouble, Facey looks back fondly on when Sleith 100 was just a carpeted lecture hall; costumes were kept in closets, a course in theatre was new to campus, and a dance studio was installed at the campus center.

“It’s the reason I have great memories of college,” Facey said. “It was where I met all of my college friends; it was my social circle, and 43 years later I still keep in touch.”

Gregory Madrid ’96 reflects how the organization brings together “such a

different group of students.” As a business major and peer advisor, Madrid still connects with his fellow cast and crew members: “Those friendships last for a lifetime.” Echoing his sentiment, Danna (Mazzola) Castanho ’13 said of her involvement with the Players, “It was magical to see a show come together with people from all different majors.”

Ian Martin ’97 recalls how his experience with Stageless Players and WNEK led him to pursue a career in college student development. “If I hadn’t joined the Stageless Players and met the lifelong friends that I did,” Martin said, “I’m not

sure I would have followed the path I have taken.”

The Stageless Players celebrated their 50th season with a spring production of Lawrence D. Cohen’s *Carrie: The Musical*. The Players’ production is a nod to the 1976 Stephen Spielberg film, for which Cohen also wrote the screenplay. Alumni from across the nation gathered for the anniversary event to support the student production, as well as to reminisce and make new Golden Bear connections. This production featured the largest cast and stage crew since pre-pandemic seasons.



## WNEK “The Voice” Radio

Ian Martin '97 joined WNEK to combine his interests in performing and music. Following graduation, he returned to WNE as assistant director of student activities and continued his involvement with the radio station as faculty advisor for WNEK. He witnessed firsthand the renovation of the St. Germain Campus Center and the subsequent move of The Westerner, The Cupola, The Review of Arts and Literature, and WNEK to a recently renovated Rivers Hall.

“This was exciting, as it significantly increased WNEK’s physical space,” Martin said. Now with room for an on-air studio, reception and production areas, and an office, WNEK elevated their presence on campus and throughout the Springfield community.

First airing on February 17, 1976, WNEK was initially known as WTRZ after the initials of Dean Theodore Regis Zern, when

the call letters WNEK were taken by a Coast Guard cutter of the same name. In 1981, the station chartered with the Federal Communications Commission to allow commercial broadcast, and in 1988 became WNEK-FM. Keeping up with the evolution of radio, the station broadened its listener base with internet streaming in 2010, and WNEK “The Voice” Radio now plays 24/7 in the Campus Center as well as during events throughout campus with the mobile DJ service.

When Kathryn Henry '23 arrived at WNE, she fully immersed herself in WNEK. “It was probably the highlight of my college career,” Henry said. “It was such a welcoming community to be a part of. It transformed everything about my life.” Henry went on to earn the WNEK General Member of the Year award as a first-year student and held roles of marketing director,

technical director, and assistant station manager. Yet Henry’s pivotal achievement with the station was her role in the launch of the Kodiak Music Festival in April 2022.

The Kodiak Music Festival now celebrates its fifth year on Commonwealth lawn where students and local bands can be found performing. Under the guidance of Faculty Advisor Alex Russo, the club’s members have mastered the skills to run their own audio for the festival.

The station held a 50th anniversary broadcast on Tuesday, February 17, 2026 to mark the completion of its fifth decade, followed by a dance party hosted by WNEK students and alumni DJs. The celebration will continue in the fall during Golden Bear Weekend, with alumni reuniting over stories of their WNEK experiences.





## Improv on the Rocks

Student comedians audition for membership in this tight-knit community that performs on and off campus, hosts workshops, and brings graduated Golden Bears home for reunited laughs at its annual alumni show. Improv on the Rocks provides comic relief for members and entertainment-seekers alike, and now at 20 years old, the organization has become a mainstay on campus.

For Allie Provost '24, the club was a much-needed refresher in her busy schedule. "Practices with improv were scheduled points in my week where I knew I could relax, laugh with my friends, and recharge for the day, which was such a blessing," Provost said.

Looking back on her time at WNE, Provost recalls laughter in the rehearsal room, as

well as the confidence and leadership of her roles that both Improv on the Rocks and Stageless Players offered. As a member of the executive board for both clubs, she added that "these roles prepared [her] for career opportunities," and that the skills honed with improv can extend to a variety of workplace settings.

To celebrate their 20th anniversary, Improv on the Rocks expanded their annual alumni show to incorporate even more hilarity, marrying the minds of alumni with present members on one stage. Golden Bear comedians of the past, including founding members Jeffrey Stanwood '06 and Rebecca Giudici '06, returned to perform alongside the newest generation, ensuring that the traditions of laughter and camaraderie would continue in the decades to come. 🐻





## ***CUB CLOSE-UP***

# Josh Farrell '26

Juliet Ribeiro

**A driven mechanical engineering senior at Western New England University, Josh Farrell '26 blends a passion for athletics, engineering, and the arts while leaving a legacy on campus through leadership, innovation, and community impact.**

### **Tell us about yourself and why you chose Western New England University (WNE).**

Born and raised in Pawtucket, R.I., I'm proud to say that I officially graduated in May with a degree in mechanical engineering with a concentration in mechatronics and a minor in athletic coaching.

As a WNE tour guide, I always told prospective students two things that brought me here: academics and athletics. WNE was the first school that I visited with the class sizes I wanted, a great job placement rate, hands-on programs, internship opportunities, and NCAA sports. In high school I was a state champion and national qualifier for track and field, and I knew that it was something I wanted to continue in college. However, I didn't want to sacrifice my academic

experience for a sport. That's why WNE was the perfect fit for me. Academically I knew I was setting myself up for success, and I could also continue competing in sports at a high level.

### **You have a unique degree combination. How did you choose this?**

I've always been around athletics. However, coaching popped up out of nowhere during my senior year of high school when I had to be one of the girls track coaches due to a staffing shortage. I loved that experience and I have such a passion for my sport, so I wanted to pass that on to other athletes. I continued coaching after I graduated high school, and I now have around 20 former athletes that I helped coach competing at the collegiate level. My experience coaching

other athletes is what pushed me to pursue a minor in athletic coaching. If I ever want to coach a team of my own, I will have the accreditation to help me accomplish this.

### **Reflecting on your past four years as a Mechanical Engineering student, what were some of your favorite memories?**

I really enjoyed being part of the Product Innovation Development Showcase this past December. I was on team Orbit, which consisted of myself, three engineering students, and three business students. Together we created a modular attachment that tracks disc golf discs after they are thrown. We ended up getting second place, and it was a great experience because we worked together to create a strong product for a niche market.

### **How have hands-on labs and design projects influenced your learning experience?**

I have loved how hands-on the Engineering program has been here at WNE, and I found that I learn best this way. During my freshman year I actually got the opportunity to work as a research assistant in the Civil Engineering Department. I worked with drones that were specifically used alongside first responders and in rescue situations. This experience gave me an introduction to everything engineering, and it's how I found that I like working on the coding and electrical side of things.

### **You are very involved on campus; can you talk about the programs you are a part of and why?**

The programs that I'm involved in are cross country and track and field, where I'm the captain of both, along with Stageless Players. Running has been part of my life for a long time, with 12 years in cross country and eight years in track and field. Competing at the collegiate level was something I always aimed for, whereas theatre is not something I tried until my senior year of high school, yet loved it and knew I wanted to continue performing at WNE. Four years later, I'm glad I stuck with it, as Stageless Players has given me my closest friends. Each semester we get to do something we love together, and it's been such an important part of my undergraduate career. This spring I participated in my seventh and final show as Billy Nolan in *Carrie: The Musical*.

### **You helped create the WNE track and field team. What was that process like, and what did it mean to you to be part of it?**

When I first came to WNE, we were a cross country only University. As a track and field athlete as well, I had a goal of building a track and field team here. After pestering Coach Jon Harris '04 for two years, he and I made the push to administration to form a team. At the end of my sophomore year, it was announced that a track and field program would launch for the next spring season. Our first season drew more than 70 athletes, and in our second, we had a team of 81 making us one of the largest programs in our conference. Looking back, creating this team was such an amazing experience because it will outlive me at WNE while

helping future generations of students—and whether they know my name or not, it's part of my legacy.

### **You are also a member of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), what are you responsible for?**

I'm on the executive board of SAAC, where I help to plan the Golden Bear Trot, which is an annual 5k on campus in the fall where the athletic department collects canned good donations for a local food shelter here in Springfield. For 20 years, the Golden Bear Trot has united the University in helping to make a difference in the Springfield community.

### **How did it feel to win the Grand Skookum Award at the start of your senior year?**

It was surreal. When I originally got nominated, I thought I had a good chance to be named a Skookum; however, Grand Skookum was never a thought in my mind. I remember sitting there as they read off names, and the longer they went without calling mine is when reality began to set in that I won. It was a special moment for me, because during my time here I have had a lot of people tell me that I'm an overachiever and that I should just settle into a couple of things. After winning Grand Skookum, it felt like everything I did here at WNE was validated. I have always given 100% to this University and it was amazing to be recognized.

### **Outside of your various campus roles, what else are you involved in?**

Off campus I'm a volunteer coach for the Wilbraham and Monson track and field team. I have not been able to go to as many practices since we got our own track and field team, but I still try my best to go to meets and events. The opportunity to coach high school students in the community has been amazing as I get to branch out into the greater Springfield area and make an impact.

Wherever I live, my goal is not to simply work and go home. I want to be part of my community, and volunteering at Wilbraham and Monson is how I do just that.

### **What are your plans after graduation?**

Starting off the summer, I will be competing on the New England pro track circuit while also taking the stage in a community theater production in Swansea, Mass. In August, I will begin my role as a mechanical engineer with Consulting Engineering Services in Norwood, Mass., focusing on the design of heating, ventilation, air conditioning, plumbing, and fire protection systems. That same month, I will also start my Master of Business Administration at Regis College, where I will continue competing in my final year of collegiate track and field.

### **How has WNE shaped you personally and professionally?**

Western New England truly set me up for success through my courses, clubs, and athletic teams. The engineering program prepared me to be well-rounded not just in design, but in coding, testing, and analysis. It also emphasized teamwork, which reflects real-world engineering, and helped me build strong collaboration skills. Personally, I've grown into a more intentional and self-aware individual. My experiences here taught me to prioritize what truly makes me happy and to surround myself with supportive people. WNE has given me both the skills and the community to confidently move forward in my life.

### **What does WNE mean to you?**

Western New England University will always be home to me. No matter where I go in life, I will always be a Golden Bear at heart. Even when all the people I know here leave, the campus will still be filled with the echoes and memories of the people that I love and the dreams that I pursued here. 🐻





# Golden Bear Athletics Recap: Reaching New Heights in Every Arena

## WNE Women's Wrestling Continues to Climb to New National Heights

The Western New England University (WNE) women's wrestling team, in just its fourth full season of existence, continued to make waves on the national stage this season. The 2025-2026 season saw the Golden Bears place second at the NCAA Regional Championships, the best finish in program history, where eight Golden Bears qualified to compete on the national stage. The eight qualifiers included four first-time national competitors; Victoria Orender '26, Maddie Ripley, Sanyah Queen, and Sky De Leon. Four Golden Bears returned to the national stage for the second time: Jazmene Molina, Tanya Teneva, and Atiyana Williams, while Linda Holeman reached nationals for the third time.

Freshman, Maddie Ripley, led the Golden Bears this season with 28 victories over 32 matches in the 117-pound weight class. Ripley became just the second in

program history to be crowned a regional champion after a dominant performance at the NCAA Region I event. She went on to compete in four matches at the NCAA National Championships, picking up a pair of victories for WNE. Ripley was joined by sophomore Atiyana Williams, who was also a regional champion for the Golden Bears in the 180-pound weight class this season, the third regional champion in the program's history. Williams won her second career match at the NCAA National Championships this past season.

Meanwhile, Tanya Teneva and Linda Holeman, collected 26 wins each for the season. Both Teneva (138-pounds) and Holeman (124-pounds) were second-place finishers at the NCAA Region I event this past winter and competed on the national stage.



## Men's Lacrosse Wins 15th Conference Championship in Program History

The Western New England men's lacrosse team finished the 2026 season back on top of their conference after winning the Conference of New England (CNE) Championship for the 15th time in program history. Playing one of the toughest schedules in Division III proved to be important for the Golden Bears success, as they started out the season just 1-3, but competed against some of the top teams in the sport. WNE opened its season in mid-February, with snow still on the field, against No. 13 St. Lawrence University. The first WNE win of the season came against Keene State College, with a 10-7 victory. As the season went on, the Golden Bears continued to be tested by top-tier programs, finishing 5-6 in non-conference action.

Conference of New England play began for Western New England, and the Golden Bears caught fire, opening

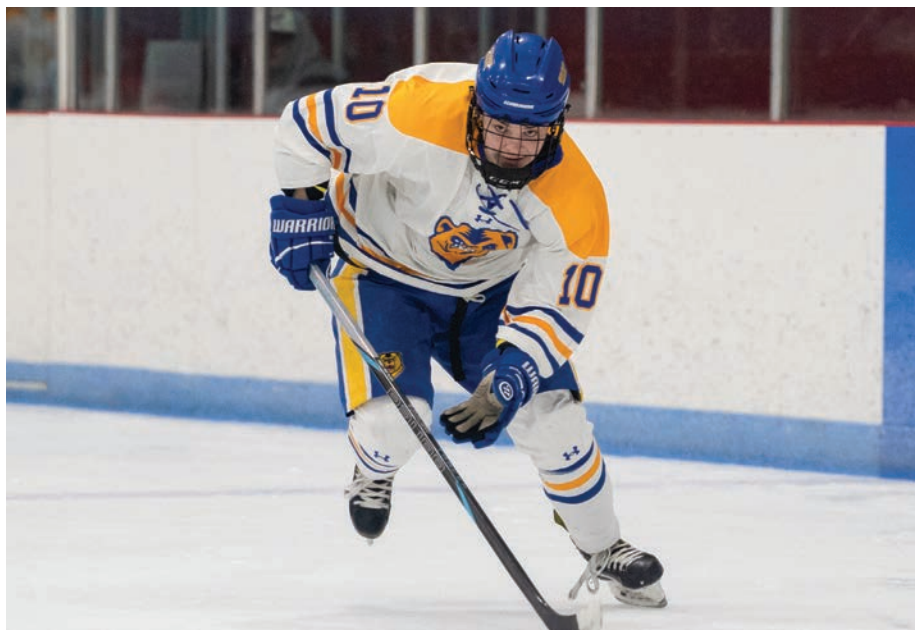
play with wins over Wentworth Institute of Technology, University of New England, and Gordon College. The blue and gold held their own in back-to-back home contests and prevailed, taking down Roger Williams University and University of Hartford to remain undefeated within the conference. Western New England ripped off the next three wins, defeating Nichols College, Johnson & Wales University, and Curry College. These results left the final game of the season to decide the top-seed in the conference as the two undefeated squads—WNE and Endicott College—would meet to round out the regular season. Despite scoring six goals in the second quarter, it would not be enough, as Endicott claimed the top seed in the CNE Tournament with the win over the Golden Bears.

Western New England hosted the University of Hartford in the CNE Semifinals, looking to get back

to the championship game after missing out in 2025. The Golden Bears trailed Hartford at the half but stormed back in the second to outscore their opponent 9-4 punching their ticket to the championship game. There, WNE would look for revenge on Endicott, while also looking to snap a five-game losing streak against the Gulls. The championship game featured back-and-forth action, with the teams trading the first eight goals of the game before the Golden Bears pulled away late in the third quarter, scoring four straight goals and coming away with a 10-7 victory and advancing to the NCAA Tournament for the 13th time. Western New England's season came to an end in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament after falling to SUNY Cortland, rounding out the year with a 13-7 record.

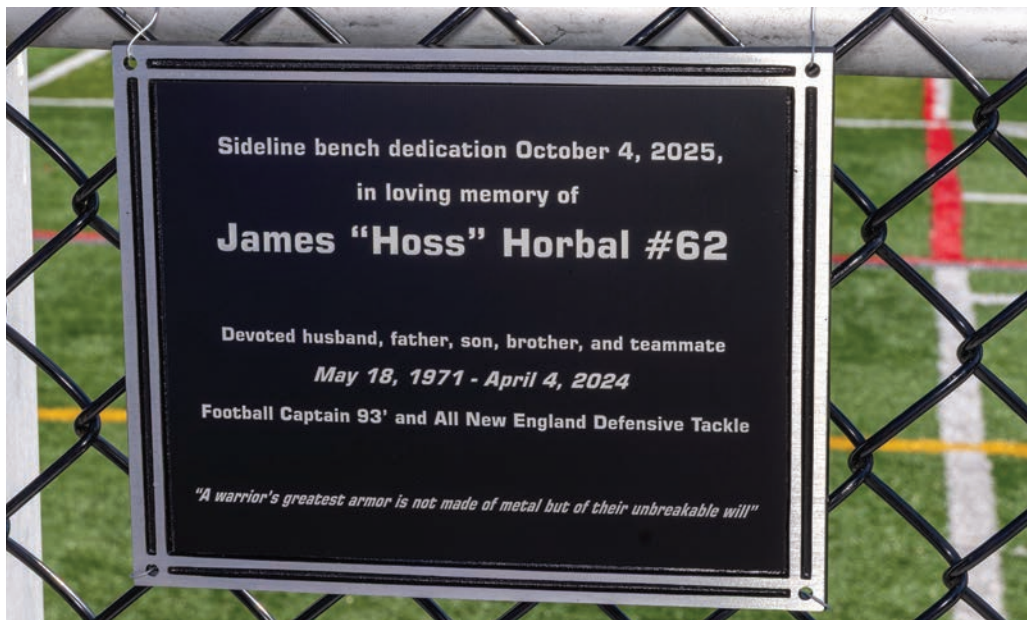
## Women's Ice Hockey Sees First All-American in Program History

Western New England women's ice hockey had major accomplishments both on and off the ice this past season, most notably having the first All-American in program history. Sophomore Michaela Birmingham put together a sensational season, one that saw the Enfield, Conn. native come away with career-highs in nearly every statistical category. Birmingham played in all 27 of Western New England's games this season, scoring seven goals and adding 18 assists, securing 25 points on the season. Birmingham led WNE with 143 shots on goal. Two of Birmingham's seven goals came in overtime, while the sophomore had three total game-winning goals, second-most on the team. Defensively, she blocked 33 shots, third-most for the Golden Bears. With an outstanding season, Birmingham became the first All-American in program history, one of just ten student-athletes across NCAA Division III to earn the honor as a defender.



## Around the Den: Notable Golden Bear Accomplishments

- The Western New England women's basketball team competed in the conference title game for the third straight season in 2025-26, compiling a record of 20-8 overall, going 12-4, finishing second overall for the season.
- Western New England women's ice hockey got back to the Conference of New England championship game this season for the second time in program history in the fifth full season of existence. WNE's 18-8-1 record this season was the most wins in program history, while the Golden Bears received votes in the top 15 poll from the U.S. College Hockey Online (USCHO) organization.
- The Western New England men's basketball team made the conference championship game for the second straight season, accomplishing a 21-6 overall record, going 14-2 in conference play.
- For the third time over the last five years, the Western New England baseball team appeared in the Conference of New England championship series, finishing second. Led by CNE Player of the Year as well as Rookie of the Year, Tyler Waterbury, the blue and gold started a nine-game win streak to close out the season before falling to eventual champion Endicott. WNE wrapped up the season with a 24-20 record. 🐻



## Built on Brotherhood: A Legacy of Leadership at WNE

Decades after their time on the field, Chris Clark '94 and his Golden Bear teammates came together to honor James "Hoss" Horbal '93 and the enduring bonds built through the game.

Dean Hickey

In the fall of 1989, Chris Clark '94 stepped onto campus with two clear goals: play football and earn a degree. Over four years of early mornings, hard-fought games, and long nights of study, those goals were met—but they were only part of the story. Along the way, Clark built bonds with his teammates that transformed his college experience into something lasting: a family.

At the center of that family was its leader, James "Hoss" Horbal '93. Clark and Horbal first met during a recruiting trip to campus and quickly formed an unlikely connection despite their differences. Horbal, who grew up in Adams, Mass., in a close-knit family, was a natural leader who consistently put others first. Clark, raised in Providence, R.I. with less structure, arrived on campus still searching for discipline and direction.

His first year proved challenging. Unprepared for the academic demands of college, Clark struggled to find his footing. But the camaraderie of his teammates—and the example set by leaders like Horbal—pushed him to persevere. What began as a team soon

became a brotherhood of more than 60 young men who held one another accountable and supported each other on and off the field.

By his junior year, Clark had grown into a leader himself and was named captain. In that role, he developed leadership skills and confidence that would shape both his personal and professional life.

"Being the football captain taught me to lead while building the confidence to work with others," Clark said. "Those abilities have stayed with me throughout my career in business, marketing, and sales."

While his experience on the field helped shape who he would become, it was support off the field that helped launch his career. With guidance from the University's career center, Clark secured an internship which led to his first role at Pitney Bowes, launching his career in sales.

Driven by a strong work ethic and competitive spirit, Clark quickly advanced, eventually rising to vice president of U.S. sales. Then in 2010, after sixteen years at Pitney Bowes, he



took a leap of faith and joined the video game industry as a senior quality assurance director at Blizzard Entertainment in California.

That decision marked a new chapter in Clark's life, but the foundation remained the same. The leadership, resilience, and sense of accountability he developed at WNE, and within his football family, continued to guide him as he built and led teams in a fast-paced, evolving industry.

That impact was shaped, in no small part, by one individual whose presence left a lasting mark on everyone around him.

James "Hoss" Horbal embodied the very definition of leadership. Grounded by his upbringing and driven by a deep sense of responsibility to others, he was the kind of person who made everyone around him better.

In 2024, a tragedy struck when Horbal passed away unexpectedly. He is survived by his wife, Debra; his children, James and Luke; his parents, Paul and Elaine; and sister Lisa. Throughout his life, Horbal dedicated himself to service, working in law enforcement and

special operations across the world in support of the United States Department of Defense and the United Nations.

Horbal's passing was a profound loss, felt deeply by the many teammates, friends, and family who had the privilege of knowing him.

Paul Frisone '93, a former teammate of Horbal who now works with the Brown University football program reflected on the man he knew.

"Jimmy was always the kindest person in the room," Frisone said. "My life was better for having him in it, and if others could have just one person like him in their life, then theirs would be better too."

Jeff Neeld, who worked closely with Horbal, added, "Jim was a devoted family man. He led by example, always serving, teaching, and encouraging. You could always count on him."

To honor Horbal's legacy and the profound impact he had on those around him, Clark reached out to Jason Lebeau '10/G'16, head football coach at WNE. Coach Lebeau proposed dedicating new sideline benches in Horbal's name.

Clark and his teammates committed to funding the benches and chose to unveil them ahead of the Golden Bear Weekend game on Saturday, October 4, 2025. A plaque behind them reads: "In loving memory of James 'Hoss' Horbal #62, devoted husband, father, son, brother, and teammate."

During the ceremony, Horbal's family, friends, and former teammates gathered to celebrate his life and share memories that spanned decades. His wife and children traveled from Virginia to be present for the dedication.



"I am grateful that our kids can see their father's legacy from the different parts of his life and that they had an opportunity to learn more about their father through his friends and teammates," Debra Horbal said. "For them to see his name honored in a place that he loved so much is special. We will miss him forever but seeing him loved and honored by so many is healing for us."

His parents and sister came up from Florida to attend the dedication. They never missed a game during Horbal's college career and are strong supporters of the program to this day.

"As Jim's family, we are very proud of the friendships he made at WNE and continued throughout his life," they said. "The outpouring of WNE alumni that attended the dedication showed how much he was loved and respected."

Through this tribute, Clark and his teammates have done more than memorialize Horbal; they have carried his legacy forward. The benches now stand as a lasting reminder of the leadership, loyalty, and sense of family he instilled in those around him, and that will continue to inspire generations of Golden Bears.

"When future players see his name behind those benches, I want them to remember the importance of giving back and being a good person," Clark said. "When in doubt, do the right thing. That's what he stood for."

"This dedication is also for his family, friends, and teammates," Clark said. "It's for when they come back to campus to remember Jim and the great times they shared with him."

In speaking with current players and reconnecting with the program, Clark was reminded that the impact of WNE extends far beyond the field. What started as an effort to honor a teammate has grown into something bigger—a renewed connection to the University, its people, and the values that first shaped his experience. For Clark, it became clear that giving back was not just about remembering the past but about strengthening the bonds that continue to define the present.

"Having established a relationship with Coach Lebeau, I can see that he is helping players grow into responsible adults. They remind me of myself, Jimmy, and Paul," Clark said. "We can support him while also coming together as past players and reconnecting with each other, which makes our lives richer and fuller. It is rewarding to be able to give back to an organization that helped me in life, and I know that I am not alone in that feeling." 🐾





# ALUMNI NEWS

For the latest alumni news from Western New England University, visit [alumni.wne.edu/news](http://alumni.wne.edu/news).

## THE 26TH CELEBRATION OF WNE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW ALUMNI AND STUDENTS OF COLOR

On Friday, April 10, the Western New England University (WNE) School of Law community gathered for the 26th Annual Celebration of Alumni and Students of Color. Hosted by the WNE University School of Law Alumni Association in partnership with the Office of Alumni Relations, this year's event centered on the theme "Rooted and Rising: Honoring the Past and Inspiring the Future."

More than a celebration, the evening served as a powerful opportunity to highlight the School of Law's community and legacy. The event recognized the ways in which law alumni and students of color continue to shape both the legal profession and the University while honoring the paths that made their achievements possible and those still being forged.

The event featured inspiring speeches from young alumni speaker, Attorney Tasha Marshall L'16, and from the Honorable Tracy E. Duncan L'88, recipient of the third annual Law Alumni Luminary Award and keynote speaker. The evening also included Taylor Harding L'26 as master of ceremonies, Alexis Serral L'26 as the student speaker and remarks of gratitude from School of Law Dean Zelda Harris.

For the third consecutive year, the Law Alumni Luminary Award has been presented to a WNE University School of Law alumnus who inspires

others through their distinguished legal career that spans over 30 years. Judge Duncan was recognized for her work that began in juvenile court during the 1980s and expanded to the United States District Court in 2023. After unanimous confirmation by the Governor's Council, she now serves as an associate justice of the Superior Court for Western Massachusetts, becoming only the second person of color in state history to do so. In 2023, she also received the Distinguished Bar Advocate Award for her work in criminal defense.

During an inspiring keynote address, Judge Duncan reflected on her journey from growing up in Springfield to becoming a respected legal professional and judge. She spoke passionately about the lessons she learned throughout her career and the mindset that sustained her success, emphasizing the need for resilience, adaptability, and courage. Judge Duncan also underscored the importance of representation in the legal system.

Concluding her remarks, Judge Duncan encouraged the room of current and aspiring legal professionals to stay grounded, stating, "Never forget where you came from. I am so proud to represent the city of Springfield and this University every time I walk onto that bench."



## RECORD-BREAKING GENEROSITY: #WNEGIVES 2026 REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

In a remarkable show of Golden Bear pride and generosity, the Western New England University community came together on Wednesday, February 18, to make history during the 10th annual #WNEgives. Thanks to the incredible support of more than 2,200 donors, over \$500,000 was raised, making it the most successful giving day in WNE history.

Alumni, parents, students, faculty, staff, and friends from across the country united to support a wide range of initiatives that directly enhance the WNE student experience. From academic programs to the arts and athletics, every gift makes a meaningful impact on current and future Golden Bears.

The excitement of the day was felt on campus at the University Commons, where students wrote heartfelt thank-you notes to donors, listened to music provided by WNEK, and enjoyed activities that brought the community together.

#WNEgives 2026 demonstrated the strength, spirit, and shared commitment of the WNE community to empowering the next generation of Golden Bears. **Save the date and get ready to make an impact—together, we'll help Golden Bears achieve more during #WNEgives 2027 on Wednesday, February 17!**

## CELEBRATING GOLDEN BEAR EXCELLENCE AT THE 2026 ALUMNI AWARDS

*Michael A. Serafino Alumnus of the Year Award*

**Steve Tremblay '87/G'91, Trustee**

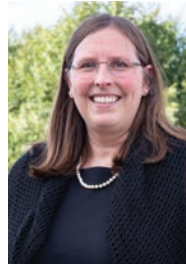
With a legacy defined by exceptional leadership, professional expertise, and a steadfast commitment to giving back, Steve Tremblay '87/G'91 has been named the recipient of the Michael A. Serafino Alumnus of the Year Award. A proud WNE alumnus and former Golden Bear men's ice hockey player, Tremblay's generosity and dedication to supporting future generations of students underscore his enduring devotion to the University and its mission.



*Alumni Achievement Award*

**Laura Sturgis Boulé '01/ G'02**

Recognized for more than two decades of professional achievement and sustained service to WNE, Laura Sturgis Boulé '01/ G'02 is the recipient of the 2026 Alumni Achievement Award. She exemplifies Golden Bear spirit through her enduring leadership and commitment to the WNE community.



*Outstanding Young Alumnus of the Year Award*

**Klaire Bielonko '17**

Through sustained professional leadership, service to society, and ongoing commitment to the WNE's mission, Klaire Bielonko '17 demonstrates the spirit of the Outstanding Young Alumnus Award. A dedicated member of the WNE community, Bielonko leads with integrity, curiosity, and purpose as she mentors current and former students for meaningful leadership and service.



See more at [alumni.wne.edu/alumniawards26](https://alumni.wne.edu/alumniawards26)

## DRIVING IMPACT AT 57TH ANNUAL ALUMNI GOLF TOURNAMENT

On Friday, May 22, Western New England University (WNE) alumni and friends gathered their foursomes at the Country Club of Wilbraham and teed off the summer for the 57th Annual Alumni Golf Tournament. Every year this event brings together the WNE community for friendly competition that supports the Alumni Association Golf Tournament Endowed Scholarship. This year, with the help of our participants and sponsors—including a special thank you to returning Diamond



Sponsor Copperweld—the event raised over \$25,000 to support this scholarship, which has benefited deserving students for the past 20 years. Attendance of the Alumni Golf Tournament allows WNE alumni, family, and friends to contribute to the growth of the scholarship fund, ensuring that WNE can continue its 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](https://alumni.wne.edu/news).



## A GROWING TRADITION OF CONNECTION

From near and far, WNE alumni gathered throughout the winter and spring for monthly midweek breaks. Organized by the WNE Alumni Association, WNE(C) Wednesdays have quickly become a favorite Golden Bear tradition as they offer alumni the chance to reconnect over drinks and hors d'oeuvres in a relaxed, welcoming setting.

In 2026, these popular meetups brought alumni together to cheer on the WNE women's and men's basketball and lacrosse teams, with spirited

pregame and postgame events in between games. In March, engineering alumni came out to reconnect with familiar faculty, including Dr. Mike Rust and Dr. Rob Gettens, and to catch up with fellow graduates.

Together, these gatherings highlight the continued connection among WNE alumni, offering meaningful opportunities to stay engaged with the University community.

**GOLDEN BEAR WEEKEND**

**GET READY TO MAKE NEW MEMORIES AT GOLDEN BEAR WEEKEND 2026!**

Join us back on campus from **Friday, October 16 – Sunday, October 18** for special events, great food, and even better company. Mark your calendars for a weekend celebration of a golden community!

# 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](mailto:alumwne@wne.edu), or visit [alumni.wne.edu/classnotes](http://alumni.wne.edu/classnotes) to submit your note online.

## 1970s

**Peter S. Benton '73** (Accounting) was elected chairman of the board of directors for Sunshine Village, Incorporated, in June 2025. He has been a board member since 2012.

**Wayne Coleman G'73** (MBA) released a new public speaking book titled, *Speak to Lead: Unleash Your Public Speaking Potential! Engage and Influence Every Audience*. In the book, Coleman shares decades of experience with simple techniques from overcoming fear to becoming a dynamic speaker.

## 1980s

**Brian Ade L'80** (JD) was included in Bergen Magazine's 2025 Bergen Top Lawyers list. He is partner at Rivkin Radler LLP in the firm's Commercial Litigation, Complex Torts & Product Liability, and Insurance Coverage Practice Groups.

**Michael Serduck L'81** (JD) was one of seven recipients of the St. Thomas More Society Award, presented at the Red Mass held at St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral in Springfield, Mass. He practices law full-time in his hometown of Amherst, Mass.

## 2000s

**Dr. Craig M. Nakashian '00** (History) was named the founding dean of the Texas A&M University–Texarkana's Honors College in 2024.

**Joseph Soper '01** (Finance) has been named vice president of sports and entertainment for Mohegan Sun, where he will oversee strategy and programming for their entertainment operations and collaborate across broader portfolios, including properties in Pa. and Ontario.



**The Honorable Alison M. Thorne L'05** (JD) was elected Town Justice of Colonie, N.Y.



**Matthew B. Harrison L'05** (JD) published *Playing the Clip: The Digital Media Creator's Legal Guide to Fair Use*, which examines how digital creators across broadcasting, podcasting, and streaming rely on third-party media as the content itself.

**Tim Czerniejewski '07** (Accounting) was promoted to vice president of commercial lending at bankESB. He brings 18 years of banking experience and has been with bankESB since 2016, starting as a credit analyst and advancing rapidly within the organization.

**Joseph Nobilio '08** (Business Administration) has started a new position as vice president of iGaming at Pavilion Payments.

**Jessica Joralemon-Syron '09** (Marketing Communications/Advertising) celebrated one year as the event marketing manager at Fleetworthy in Albany, N.Y. In this role, she received one of the 2025 Annual Fleetworthy Marketing Hero Awards for her immediate impact since joining the company. In April of 2026, Jessica earned her Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation recertification through the Events Industry Council.

## 2010s

**Shawn Fitzpatrick '12** (Sport Management) has taken on a new role as an enterprise account executive with Syndigo.

**Hannah Berling '13** (Communication-Journalism) has been promoted to associate director of student life at the New York Institute of Technology.

**Ashley Membrino Fote '13** (Integrated Liberal Studies) has been promoted to partner at Day Pitney LLP. She assists clients in commercial real estate transactions, including acquisitions, dispositions, joint ventures, commercial leasing, and financings for both borrowers and lenders.

**Austin Provost '14/ L'17** (Political Science/ JD) has been promoted to partner at Robinson+Cole. He is real estate advisor who has extensive experience representing landlords and tenants in complex leasing transactions across retail, industrial, and office sectors nationwide.



**Frank Grimaldi '16/G'18** (Sport Management/MSLC) started a new position as assistant athletic director for ticketing operations at Yale University.

**Heather Harris L'16** (JD) has been promoted to partner at Day Pitney LLP. As an attorney, she advises individuals and families on all aspects of estate and tax planning.

**Shaine Spencer '16** (Biomedical Engineering) started a new position as senior systems engineer at Mercy BioAnalytics, Incorporated.

**Anthony Trinchini '18** (Accounting) has been promoted to tax manager at MP CPAS. He provides consulting and tax solutions to a diverse group of clients including individuals, estates, trusts, partnerships, and corporations. Trinchini specializes in working with high-net-worth clients and with family offices.

**Liberta Barcia '19** (Law & Society) was featured in *914INC.*, The Business Magazine of Westchester, N.Y., in recognition of her achievements as an associate attorney at Bleakley Platt & Schmidt, LLP.



## 2020s

**Ryan M. Hartnett L'20** (JD) was selected to the 2025 *Upstate New York Super Lawyers*® –*Rising Stars* list. His practice focuses on advising clients on complex corporate and tax matters, particularly startups and emerging businesses.

**Anna-Maria Ghossein '21** (Finance) has started a new position as personal lines account manager at Foley Insurance Group Incorporated.

**Sam Dinnie '22** (History) was awarded the America 250! Scholarship for \$25,000 from the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) to pursue their Ph.D. research at the George Washington University on women in eighteenth-century western Massachusetts.

**Megan Hueras '22** (Law and Society) passed the Massachusetts Bar Exam and was sworn in as an attorney in November 2025. She is a law clerk in the Massachusetts Probate and Family Court.

**Danielle Orr '22/G'23** (Accounting/ MS) began a new role as assurance senior associate at PwC.

**Sofia Plaku '22** (Marketing) has joined UBS as a client associate with the Greco Wealth Management Group in Hartford, Conn.



**Hannah Richard '22** (Biomedical Engineering) started a new position as human factors engineer at Gilero, a Sanner Group Company.

**Cameron King '23/G'24** (Management and Leadership/MBA) started a new role as a project coordinator at Market Mentors, LLC.



**Nganji Murenzi '25** (Economics) has been accepted to the prestigious and highly competitive American Economic Association Summer Training Program at American University in Washington, D.C.

# Marriages



**Kristina Cossar '09/G'12** and John Bonang,  
September 20, 2025, in Portsmouth, N.H.



**Caitlyn Kunz '21** and **Jason Cook '21**,  
September 20, 2025, in Saugerties, N.Y.



**Carling Willis '19** and **Joe Holleran '19**,  
October 17, 2025, in Derby, Conn.



**Mia Cariglia '21** and Paul Johnson,  
October 24, 2025, in Amherst, Mass.



**Dr. Eve Carciofi '20/G'22** and **Tyler Clement '20/G'22**,  
November 1, 2025, in Mapleton, Utah.



**Sinetra Fraser '23** and Tyler Paul, November 11,  
2025, in Monson, Mass.



**Paige Hebert '19** and **Dr. Jack Normoyle '20/G'22**,  
November 14, 2025, in Simsbury, Conn.



**David Pearlman '93** and Julie Pearlman,  
November 20, 2025, in Delray Beach, Fla.



**Eric Stinson '16** and Jess Knapp,  
January 17, 2026, in Palm Springs, Calif.



Maxwell Connors, August 2025, to **Katelyn (Bigelow) Connors '18/G'22** and **Joseph Connors '19/G'21**



Brooke Kathlyn, November 2025, to **Nicole (Veronesi) Petrozza '20** and **Jake Petrozza '20**



Eleanor, January 2026, to **Briana (Kubik) Strobel '17/G'23** and **Kevin Strobel '17/G'19**



Kelly Manning, March 2026, to **Dr. Christina (Andros) Hannon '15/PharmD'17/ G'17** and Kevin Hannon

# UNRESTRICTED EXCELLENCE: CELEBRATING YOUR SUPPORT

Each year, Western New England University graduates cross the stage and step into a future of unrestricted excellence—one built on the opportunities and experiences made possible at WNE. From their first day on campus to their last, students receive the support they need to pursue their passions, challenge their minds, and reach their full potential both academically and professionally. Through the generosity of alumni, parents, faculty, staff, and friends, these opportunities continue to grow for every Golden Bear who follows.

Your support allows the University to respond to emerging needs, expand opportunities, and invest in programs that shape the student experience. This collective commitment ensures that Western New England students continue to learn, lead, and achieve without limits.

Excellence at Western New England University begins with opportunity and grows through the strength of our community. We remain grateful to those who have helped us grow, and we invite you to help us continue forging a path of excellence for all Western New England students. Every gift, no matter the size, makes a difference in many lives.

**To learn more about how you can make an impact, visit [alumni.wne.edu/impact](http://alumni.wne.edu/impact) or contact us at [thefund@wne.edu](mailto:thefund@wne.edu) or 413-782-1335.**



Contact The Fund  
for WNE at  
[thefund@wne.edu](mailto:thefund@wne.edu)  
or 413-782-1335.



# CURTAIN CALL

WNE's Stageless Players took the stage with their spring performance of *Carrie: The Musical*.



## THE POWER OF THE GOLDEN BEAR NETWORK

Golden Bears are united by a shared commitment to WNE, its continued growth and long-term success. WNE delivers the kind of education—and alumni community—that creates real-world impact

Join our Alumni Online Community at [alumni.wne.edu](http://alumni.wne.edu) for the latest news, alumni events, and resources.



View the expanded digital version at [magazine.wne.edu](http://magazine.wne.edu) to access exclusive content and share your favorite stories on social media.

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