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# WorcesterState

MAGAZINE



## The Dream Chaser

From his first Big Idea to the tech startup that landed him on *Forbes* 30 Under 30, **Derek Canton '15** is seeing years of hard work pay off.

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# In This Issue

SPRING 2023 | VOLUME 43, ISSUE NO. 1



## New Digital Worcester State Magazine Launches

Worcester State has launched a dynamic new digital version of *Worcester State Magazine* to expand the reach and readership of the university's flagship publication across our community. **Check it out: [worcester.edu/magazine](http://worcester.edu/magazine)**

The new site includes the content found in the print publication and additional photos, sidebars, and other features only possible in digital format.

"We're excited to showcase the stories of the university and alumni on a beautiful new digital platform," said Tara Hancock, executive director of Alumni Relations and Engagement. "We know many of our alumni

will appreciate being able to read and share the magazine in digital format, and we're looking forward to sharing these stories with even more people."

The new *Worcester State Magazine* online is integrated with the university's new website, launched in fall 2022 for its 2.5 million annual visitors. The re-platforming and redesign of *worcester.edu* was led by ERI Design, a digital creative agency with headquarters in Worcester, and the university's Office of Communications and Marketing. The new magazine was designed as part of the website project.



**Scan the QR code** if you'd like to sign up to read the magazine online and opt out of the print magazine. We'll send you an email letting you know when a new magazine issue goes live.

Online Only



### Grant expands Early College Worcester for local students

Since 2018, thousands of underserved students have earned college credit through the Early College Worcester program. A new \$1 million grant to Worcester State will expand the program to more low-income, first-generation, under-represented, and/or disadvantaged high school students in urban and rural areas of Central Massachusetts.



Photo by Nancy Sheehan

## 6

### Educating Scientists

Worcester State University's biotechnology program is educating a new generation of scientists and helping to meet demand in Massachusetts' growing life sciences sector. Shown here is student Emily Griffin working in one of the science labs on campus, and featured inside are alumni Samantha Durand MS '22, a tissue cell scientist at MatTek Life Sciences (page 8) and Nicolas Esper '20, who works at AbbVie (page 9).

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Cover photo by Matt Wright '10



24 School Psychology Researchers Examine Academic Discipline

**Online Exclusive**  
University Wins \$658,000 Mass Life Sciences Grant for Science Lab Upgrades

Read it: [worcester.edu/magazine](http://worcester.edu/magazine)



# President's Note



Photo by Nancy Sheehan

Dear Alumni and Friends,

The Worcester State University community recently marked the passing of my predecessor, Worcester State's first and only female president, Janelle Ashley, Ph.D., who served from 2002-2011. As we reflect on her many important contributions to the university, I am reminded that not so long ago women faced significant barriers in education, especially at the collegiate level.

Worcester's own Sen. Harriette Chandler, Ph.D. who received an Honorary Doctorate of Public Administration from

Worcester State in 1988 and retired in January 2023, is another woman of the same era who broke ground in education. She graduated from college and attained advanced degrees at a time when men earned doctoral degrees at a rate roughly three times that of women.

Since those pioneering years, women have steadily advanced in higher education, and around 12 years ago, began outpacing men in U.S. doctoral programs. Today, they represent the majority of those enrolled in law school since 2016. I am privileged to work every day with a number of women who are advanced degree holders, from the four who sit on my executive cabinet, to our Dean of Science, Technology, and Health Linda Larrivee, Ph.D., to the hundreds of faculty who have taught thousands of Worcester State University students.

Massachusetts also is a beneficiary. From the many law school-educated senators and representatives, like Worcester State alumna and chair of the Higher Education Committee Sen. Anne Gobi '86, to our first-ever elected female governor, Maura Healey, both of whom attended law school when women were underrepresented.

In Gov. Healey's election campaign, she credited her years on basketball courts for her team approach. Fifty years ago, federal civil rights legislation Title IX outlawed gender discrimination in any school that accepts federal funding (virtually every college and high school). Without this law, Healey may not have had that athletic experience. Among those who've benefited from Title IX are my daughter Carden, now a collegiate field hockey coach, and Worcester State's Vice President for Student Affairs Julie Kazarian '98, MA '01, a Worcester State Hall of Fame track and field star, who won the Worcester City Championship in hammer all four years she competed (1995-1998).

Women have been gaining ground in classrooms ever since passage of those 20th-century laws and court rulings extending their equal rights in educational settings. With educational advancement comes career advancement, and higher education is stronger today as women have become equal partners in educational leadership and in the halls of political power. As Healey shatters the last political glass ceiling in Massachusetts, I have no doubt that remaining ones—notably those in boardrooms and C-suites—will also soon crumble.

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Sincerely,

**Barry M. Maloney**  
PRESIDENT



Worcester State Magazine, which debuted in 1980 as *The Worcester Statement*, is published by University Advancement and the Office of Communications and Marketing twice a year for alumni and friends of the university.

**Alumni Relations and Engagement**

486 Chandler Street  
Worcester, MA 01602  
508-929-8141

**Vice President for University Advancement**

Thomas McNamara '94

**Assistant Vice President for Communications and Marketing**

Maureen O. Stokes

**Executive Director of Alumni Relations & Engagement**

Tara Hancock MS '06

**Executive Director of Development**

Jodi Briggs-Pickett

**Editor and Director of Editorial Communications**

Deborah Alvarez O'Neil

**Writers**

Allison Coppinger  
Rebecca Cross  
Krystyanna Ramsdell  
Nancy Sheehan

**Photography**

Matt Wright '10  
Nancy Sheehan

**Art Direction and Design**

Complex Stories

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# Woo News

HAPPENINGS IN AND AROUND WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY

## Nursing Program Ranked #1 in Massachusetts

Worcester State's Lillian R. Goodman Department of Nursing in the School of Science, Technology, and Health was ranked the #1 RN program in Massachusetts this fall by RegisteredNursing.org, a nursing advocacy organization.

The university's program is the only state university on the top 10 list and ranked above larger public, private, and community colleges that made the list. The ranking is based on assessments of several factors such as how well a program supports students toward licensure and beyond and past and present first-time NCLEX-RN pass rates, which were weighted by year. Worcester State's pass rate was 100% for the last five years.

"This is not only exciting, but an honor to be named the top in our program in a state where the number



of qualified registered nurses is on the decline. Our students and faculty work hard, and their efforts are being noticed," said Dr. Sandra Martin, interim dean of the department.

## Students Raise Black Lives Matter Flag on First Unity Day

STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF took part in the university's first Unity Day in October, which included a Unity Walk followed by the raising of a Black Lives Matter flag and a full day of workshops and discussion groups.

"Unity Day is an opportunity for every member of our campus community to come together and celebrate what makes us unique,



Photo by Nancy Sheehan

while connecting us with others who may be very different from us," said Chief Diversity and Equity Officer Maria Isabel Garipey. "At the core of Unity Day is also this environment we build when we create a more inclusive campus climate where we all belong. Unity Day is also about listening to the life stories of people who have different plights than ours, while we also take care of and celebrate ourselves, no matter who we are and how we identify within the microcosms of our university."

Students led a Black Lives Matter flag raising ceremony at the Common Ground, the university's new public space outside the Student Center where a Pride flag anchors the flagpole. Students raised the Black Lives Matter flag on the same flagpole and reflected on its significance for the university.

"We all might come from different backgrounds, cultures, and struggles; however, we all must come together as a community to support and protect each other," said sophomore Brandol Ogando Saladin, president of the Intercultural Student Alliance. "Unity and togetherness is the only way to move forward and progress."







Photo by Nancy Sheehan

Buddhist monks put the final touches on a sand mandala they created at Worcester State this fall.

## Monks Share Mandala Tradition with Students

» OVER THREE DAYS IN SEPTEMBER, monks affiliated with the Namdroling Monastery in South India—including the esteemed Buddhist professor Khenpo Tenzin Norgay Rinpoche and sand mandala master Lopen Rabjee Wangchuk—created a sand mandala in the Mary Cosgrove Dolphin Art Gallery. The visit was sponsored by the Lt. Col. James F. Sheehan '55 Commonwealth Honors Program.

More than 500 students came to watch the creation of the mandala—a vividly colored, geometrically patterned 2-D representation of a 3-D sacred space, made from painstakingly placed lines and small piles of sand. After a week-long viewing, the mandala was dissolved—a practice that aligns with Buddhist teachings about the transient nature of all things.

## State Grants Expand Nursing Pathways

» WORCESTER STATE AND QUINSIGAMOND COMMUNITY College were awarded grants totaling \$1.6 million from the outgoing Baker-Polito Administration in January to strengthen the region's nursing talent pipeline and improve career pathways for the profession. The \$1 million grant to Worcester State and \$600,000 grant to QCC build on an existing partnership between Worcester State's Dr. Lillian R. Goodman Department of Nursing, which awards BSN and MSN degrees, and Quinsigamond Community College's Nurse Education Program, which awards associate degrees. The schools will work to expand pathways for RNs to earn a BSN and for BSN graduates to earn an MSN. The institutions will form a committee of healthcare industry organizations to build a collaboration that meets training needs of employers.

## Ghana Ambassador to U.S. Visits Worcester State

**Global** Ghana's first female ambassador to the United States, Hajia Alima Mahama, visited campus and met with university leaders in July, the first stop on a three-day visit to Worcester. During the visit, the delegation and university leadership discussed ways to expand the University's connections with Ghana and the Ghanaian people through educational and research collaborations with Ghanaian institutions, including exchange programs with faculty and peer post-secondary institutions and/or high schools.

Central Massachusetts is estimated to have about 38,000 Ghanaians, many of whom maintain strong ties to Ghana. "The Ghanaian community is an important community to Worcester, and it's an important community to Worcester State," President Barry Maloney said, as he waited for the ambassador and her delegation to arrive for the meeting at Worcester State. "So, like any relationship, we need to spend some time cultivating that."

Ambassador Mahama said she could see many possible points of connection with Worcester State's educational programs, especially in biotechnology and clinical studies. "I believe research is very important," she said. "COVID has been a challenge for all of us. I feel we need to develop both the infrastructure and human capacity to deal with situations that may come up after COVID. We know there could be another virus, and we have to be prepared."

Worcester State's business program also could help Ghana bolster its plans to grow its economy to provide more jobs and better opportunities for its citizens, she said. Trade between the United States and Ghana amounted to about \$1.5 billion in 2019, and cooperation with Worcester State could help strengthen those ties. "Our students could come here to learn about business and interact with business leaders, so I am looking for a strong relationship with Worcester," she said.



Photo by Nancy Sheehan

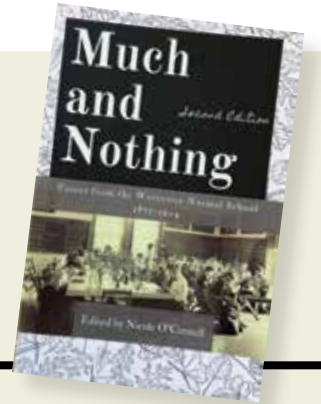
President Barry Maloney and Ambassador Hajia Alima Mahama, (center, blue top), flanked by the Ghanaian delegation and members of the Worcester State community.

“Our students could come here to learn about business and interact with business leaders, so I am looking for a strong relationship with Worcester.”

— Ambassador Hajia Alima Mahama

## Reading

## Much and Nothing Illuminates Lives of Worcester State's First Students



Alumna Nicole O'Connell '19 released the second edition of *Much and Nothing: Voices from Worcester Normal School 1875-1904* in November. The book features the transcribed words of the early students and instructors of Worcester Normal School, a teachers college founded in 1874, which eventually became Worcester State University. For the second edition, O'Connell was able to discover the names of the students who wrote the 1875-1904 diary entries.

"The majority of the student diarists were young white women in their teens and early twenties who were from the New England area," O'Connell said. "A few Black women and white men did attend as well. Most of the women were unmarried, as married women were not often allowed to be teachers at this time."

The project came about while she was a junior in the spring of 2018 and attended a women's history event hosted by Worcester State's Archive. At the event, she saw the 29 years' worth of diaries and heard people discussing the idea of transcribing them. She decided to take on the effort.

For her Commonwealth Honors project, O'Connell



Nicole O'Connell '19

transcribed all of the diary entries into a book, a time-consuming task. She faced some challenges like having difficulty reading some of the cursive writing in the entries and had help from university archivist Ross Griffiths with reading and transcribing the words. English Professor Cleve Wiese suggested she put the diary entries into a book, and the book project was funded by the Alumni Association's Advisory Board.

The first edition included entries with the initials of most of the women, while the second now includes full names, an effort that took close to two years to complete. O'Connell used spreadsheets to match names of the women to initials in the entries and spent time during her spring break finishing the first edition, and then the summer after graduating working on the second edition. Redesigning the cover for the second edition was one of the last steps in the process.

"Transcribing these required extraordinary dedication!" said Griffiths. "Handwriting can be challenging to decipher, and it requires sustained focus and attention to detail. Nicole's painstaking work has made these documents accessible to a much bigger audience."

—Allison Coppinger

## Two Professors Selected for Prestigious Faculty Fellowships



Tanjeem and Morales (right) are taking part in the 2023 North Star Collective Faculty Fellowship.

» DANIELLE MORALES, assistant professor of urban studies, and NAFISA TANJEEM, associate professor in the new Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, were selected by the New

England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) to take part in the 2023 North Star Collective Faculty Fellowship, a multi-institutional collaborative to boost faculty of color at New England colleges and universities.

The North Star Fellowship aims to support early-career ALANA/BIPOC (African, Latine, Asian, Native American and/or Black, Indigenous, People of Color) faculty by providing a nurturing community of care, mentorship, and professional development. It focuses specifically on supporting fellows' writing and publishing endeavors and overall well-being, which are essential to advancement, tenure, and promotion.

Morales joined the Worcester State faculty in September 2022, coming to the area from El Paso, Texas. As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Texas at El Paso, she was part of a research team that conducted various projects examining mentoring relationships. Study results have been published in numerous academic journals.

Tanjeem joined Worcester State in September 2022 in the new Department of Interdisciplinary Studies. Among her research and teaching interests are transnational, postcolonial, and decolonial feminisms; critical race theory; globalization; and feminist politics.



# Educating Scientists

As the biotech sector grows in Massachusetts, Worcester State's biotechnology program garners recognition. **By Deborah Alvarez O'Neil**

## Biotech

**GOGGLES, GLOVES, AND APRONS ON.** Grab a 15 mL tube with the green cap. Don't forget to label everything. The first few minutes of Associate Professor Roger Greenwell's biotechnology lab are a flurry of set-up, instruction, and organization.

The assignment for today: protein purification.

Teams of undergrad and grad students gather around their lab stations as Greenwell leads them step by step through two hours of hands-on lab work—answering questions, troubleshooting, and testing their knowledge. The camaraderie, teamwork, and thoughtful conversations suggest the students also enjoy the work—which might not be the point—but it certainly bodes well for their future as scientists.

"We have a very busy afternoon," Greenwell announces. "I don't want anyone to graduate from here without having run a protein gel."

For those students who want to land a job in biotechnology, this lab training is essential. And such jobs are in high demand—locally and across the state.

By 2024, Massachusetts will need to fill more than 40,000 jobs in life sciences—many of them in the state's growing biotechnology sector. In Worcester alone, there was a nearly 20 percent increase in research and development jobs between 2020 and 2021, according to the Mass Biotechnology Council, and the average salary for industry employees in the city topped \$122,000.

In 2022, Worcester had 389,000 square feet of new biotech facilities under construction, space that will be filled with a combination of biotech/biomed startups and global biotech companies that are expanding research, manufacturing, and operations in Central Massachusetts. Many are eager to hire college graduates with strong lab skills, basic science knowledge, and an interest in pushing the frontiers of discovery.

Worcester State University is providing a clear pathway to these opportunities with its interdisciplinary biotechnology program in the School of Science, Technology, and Health. Combining biological and chemical sciences, and tapping into summer research opportunities in the university's Aisiku STEM Center, the program offers baccalaureate and master's degrees, as well as a 4+1 accelerated dual bachelor's-master's degree program.

In 2022, the program garnered recognition for its combination of small class sizes and mentoring, rigorous hands-on laboratory training, affordability, and value. College Factual ranked Worcester State the #1 best value undergraduate biotech program in New England in 2022, and CollegeChoice ranked the program among its Top 10 Best Biotechnology Degrees in the US, along with schools like UC Davis, Purdue, and the University of Georgia.



Biotechnology major Aman Johnson '23 works on protein purification in lab class.

Photo by Nancy Sheehan

"We prepare our students with the skills and the knowledge, so when they get to the industry, they can quickly hit the ground running," said Associate Professor of Chemistry Weichu (Brian) Xu, who co-leads the program with Greenwell and worked at GL Synthesis in the Massachusetts Biotech Research Park in Worcester before joining the faculty. "We definitely see the opportunities in Central Massachusetts with the biotech industry—new buildings and expanded programs—a lot is happening."

Along with laboratory training, faculty in the biotechnology program have focused on building partnerships with industry leaders. In 2019, the program established an industry advisory board made up of biotech leaders, some of them graduates of Worcester State. By keeping pace with a fast-evolving industry, faculty continually improve the curriculum, establish research and equipment-sharing collaborations, and develop internship opportunities for students.

"One of the things Worcester State does really well is they have a great team that is flexible and creative and really tries to prioritize industry partnership," said Jon Weaver, president and CEO of Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives (MBI), which works across academia, business, and government to promote the startup of biomedical companies throughout the state.

In 2022, CBRE, a global commercial real estate company, analyzed the country's top 74 life sciences labor markets, evaluating both occupational and educational data. Boston/Cambridge and San Francisco were the largest clusters—and Worcester

ranked #15, right behind Houston and Atlanta. Together, that means Massachusetts is *the* place in the world to do biotech research, Weaver said.

"Every major biotech company is represented in Boston and Cambridge," Weaver said. "Being that close to Boston and Cambridge requires a regional strategy, and Worcester is an important part of that regional strategy. A lot of that is tied to Worcester producing really great talent. There's a whole vital ecosystem that comes with having a good percentage of colleges in your community, and Worcester is blessed with that."



Photo by Deborah Alvarez O'Neil

In a 2022 survey, the university found that 79 percent of Worcester State biotech alumni from the past three years are working in the industry and 20 percent were in graduate school—a remarkable track record for any program.


"Our students, who are graduating with a strong foundation in biologic and biotech sciences, are getting cherry picked from one job to the next," said Biology Professor Daron Barnard, who leads the university's Aisiku STEM Center. "We see them getting hired away and going into top companies. Our 4+1 biotech master's has been an incredible boon for our students."

The MS in biotechnology program—designed to be completed in the evening—often attracts individuals already working in biotech who want to further their skills and knowledge. Fitchburg State biology graduate Grace Kim had been working in quality control at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) for five years when she decided she wanted a master's degree.

"What was happening at work was they were bringing on a lot of technology, and because I was a general biology major without a focus on biotech, there were gaps in my understanding," Kim said. "I was getting curious about other things. Worcester State was affordable, and it was close by. The schedule of the program was flexible, so I could go to

school at night while I worked during the day. Worcester State was offering a lot of classes that hadn't been available to me, and those classes were part of my day-to-day work at BMS. Meeting other students who were also out in the field working at different companies was helpful—that's not something I expected."

After finishing her MS at Worcester State in 2017, Kim was able to move into a new role at Bristol Myers as a microbiologist in Process Microbiology, a global unit that oversees control strategies in the manufacturing process of drugs. She now serves on the biotechnology program's advisory board, providing insight to the university about how her education translated in her work at BMS.

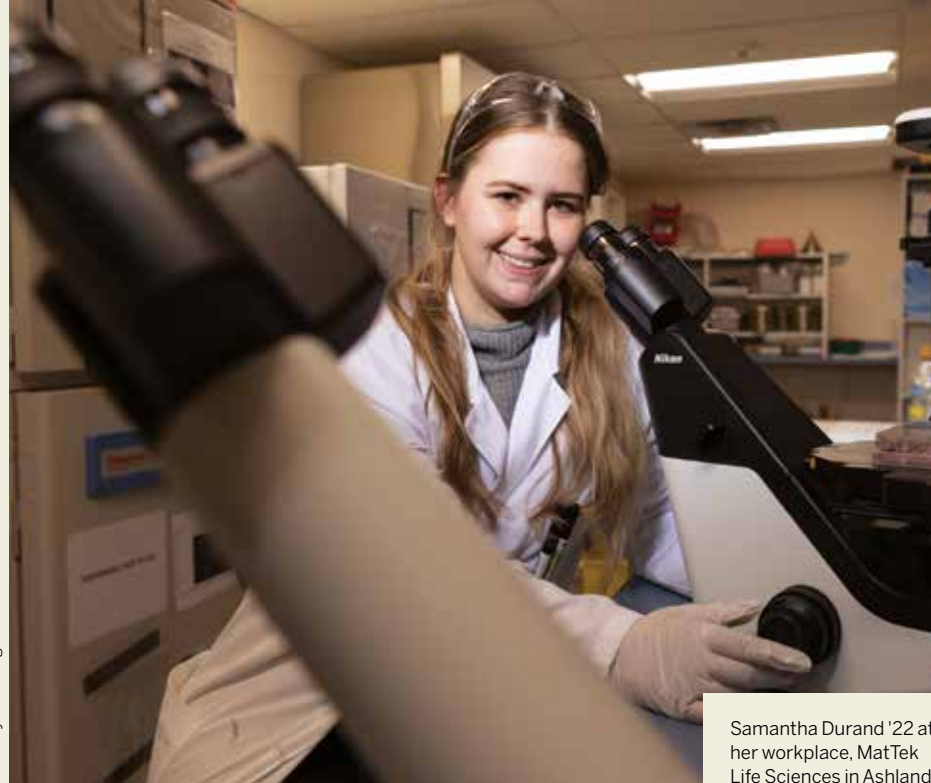
For Greenwell, who teaches many of the biotech classes, knows every student in the program, and keeps in touch with many of them after they graduate, the vision is to establish Worcester State's biotechnology program as the premier public undergraduate institution for biotechnology and to work closely with and integrate support from local biotechnology industrial partners. 

Associate Professor Roger Greenwell teaches students in his biotechnology lab how to do protein purification. From left are: Daniel Clark, Benjamin Bui, Sheila Badu, Roger Greenwell, Aman Johnson, Kya Perez (white sweater) and Emily Griffin.



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Mass Life Sciences Grant provides \$658,000 of science lab upgrades: [worchester.edu/magazine](http://worchester.edu/magazine)





Samantha Durand '22 at her workplace, MatTek Life Sciences in Ashland.

## Cutting Edge Research

Tissue culture scientist Samantha Durand MS '22 creates a beating cardiac organoid in a win-win for her master's degree and her professional work. **By Deborah Alvarez O'Neil**

**F**OR HER MASTER'S THESIS in biotechnology, Samantha Durand proposed a scientifically ambitious and professionally strategic idea. She would attempt to create beating cardiac organoids from human-induced pluripotent stem cells—and the experiment would serve as a pilot project for MatTek Life Sciences, the tissue culture biotechnology company where she works full time as an associate scientist.

Scientists around the world have been working on the development of cardiac organoids—lab-grown masses of cells that replicate the functions of a human heart. These small tissue cultures hold significant potential for modeling heart development, studying disease and heart defects, and safely testing drug therapies. The scientific world is particularly interested in advancing cardiac organoid technology, as heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.

Durand had experience in tissue culture work, but had never attempted to create an

organoid. Working in the MatTek research and development lab with support from her thesis committee, led by Professor Jennifer Hood-DeGrenier, she was able to create cellular-level cardiac tissue from iPS cells, cells that can be isolated and reprogrammed to have the potential to become any kind of human cell. The next step was to see if she could get the organoid to beat like a human heart.

"Creating organoids has a lot of steps, and Samantha was acquiring the knowledge as part of the training," recalls MatTek Chief Science Officer Dr. Seyoum Ayehunie, who also supervised the work. "In the first experiments, she was able to go further but she couldn't get it to beat. I told her to be patient and take it as far as she can."

Durand kept at it—over the course of four weeks she ran several more attempts, making slight adjustments to the culture conditions in the hope of achieving a beating organoid.

"One day she called me and said, 'I have a beating heart organoid,'" Ayehunie said. "Everyone was excited."



**Read Online Only**  
See photos and video of Samantha's cardiac organoid.


That included her mentors at Worcester State. "When Sam emailed me the video of her first beating cardiac organoid, I was totally thrilled and immediately shared it with colleagues in the Biology Department," said Hood-DeGrenier. "Scientists have been working to generate functioning organoids for many different types of organs, but cardiac organoids are especially awe-inspiring because you can see directly that they are doing their job because of the physical beating."

This type of research is on the cutting edge of cellular and developmental biology, said Hood-DeGrenier. "It's terrific that Sam had the opportunity to participate in it as part of her master's degree and to share it with others in the Worcester State community in her thesis defense."

For Durand, the research—and her entire graduate experience at Worcester State—was a win-win, academically and professionally. The Dracut native had come to Worcester State with a bachelor's degree in health sciences from Merrimack College and two internships at Pfizer under her belt. She hoped that graduate school would fill gaps in her education now that she was a working scientist. She defended her thesis in the fall and received her MS in December.

"My major was not specifically in biotech or biomedicine—it was more of a pre-med track," she said. "I wanted to go back to school and gain more experience and take more classes that fit my interests. The classes at Worcester State were awesome. I loved every professor I had, and I was able to build relationships with most of them, and that's really important to me."

Today, Durand is working on an NIH grant to develop bronchial/tracheal epithelial models for SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19. "A lot of new projects come in, and a lot of what I learned in grad school is applicable to what I'm doing now," she said. "It's given me background and ideas on different avenues we can pursue."

Ayehunie is hopeful that the MatTek research and development team he leads can continue to advance Durand's work on cardiac organoids. Development of a typical drug therapy, he said, costs upward of \$2 billion and can take 10 to 12 years in clinical trials. "If we have appropriate models, those times can be shortened and the cost can be minimized," he said. 

## A Model of Biotech Talent

Early career scientist Nicolas Esper '20 found opportunity and real-world training in Worcester's thriving biotechnology ecosystem while he was still an undergrad.

**By Deborah Alvarez O'Neil**

**A**S A JUNIOR BIOTECHNOLOGY major, Nicolas Esper '20 knew he needed to graduate with industry experience. Esper connected with Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives (MBI), a Worcester-based incubator for biomedical startups that has supported numerous Worcester State STEM education programs over the years.

During Christmas break, Esper toured MBI facilities where seed-stage companies can rent lab space, share equipment, and collaborate to grow their business. He realized that MBI offered a wealth of opportunities for someone just starting in biotech or biomedicine. "MBI is great," he said. "It's a huge resource for students."

That tour led to a lab tech internship with

Zata Pharmaceuticals in 2019, where he gained a variety of skills—autoclaving, aseptic techniques, growing bacteria on autoplates. "It translated really well to real-world experience with a lot of valuable resume builders. It led me to make great connections and network with lots of people working in the area."

From that internship, doors began to open. A second internship followed at Lake Pharma, an MBI Graduate Company now known as Curia, where Esper did cell culture work.

Today, the Rutland native who helped pay his way through school delivering pizza, is a junior-level scientist at AbbVie, among the world's largest biopharmaceutical companies, with a bioresearch center in Worcester. He was recently part of the team that supported the Skyrizi program, an FDA-approved therapy for



Nicolas Esper '20 at his workplace, AbbVie in Worcester.

plaque psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis, and Crohn's disease.

"My experience at Worcester State was top-tier," Esper said. "With my degree and internships I had no issue finding work. People love to find students with degrees in biotechnology because it means they are very versatile in their skill set."


Success stories like Esper's are why MBI partners with Worcester State, says MBI President and CEO Jon Weaver. The early stage companies in MBI's ecosystem need a talent pipeline, he said.

"I'm so proud of Nic," Weaver said. "He is a rock star, a really talented and ambitious young guy, and he is great at building relationships. He worked at an MBI startup and ended up at AbbVie. He is a great testament to the Worcester State model of building talent that stays and succeeds in the region."

Esper grew up with a love of science and an interest in technology. Unsure of what to study, he earned an associate's degree at Quinsigamond Community College, where a college advisor encouraged him to look at Worcester State's biotech program. The program, he said, required, "an insane amount of studying and effort. It was to prepare you for the real world, to succeed in life. I don't look back and think, 'I wish they didn't make this hard.' I'm happy they did because I took more out of it."

Classes like chemical analysis and biochemistry that he took as part of his degree have proved to be useful to his work at AbbVie. His work involves setting up and running labs, interpreting the data, and creating results documents for colleagues who have submitted the lab samples.

Working at a global company like AbbVie keeps Esper working at the vanguard of science and innovation. He is earning an MBA at Assumption University and hopes to advance to managerial positions in the pharmaceutical industry, leading teams in the development of disease therapies.

"What's exciting is being able to have an idea and see that idea come to fruition," he said. "At AbbVie, I like hearing about the pipeline and what new ideas are coming out. One of the big things that keeps me inspired is being up to date about new ideas that aren't brought to the general public right away. If that idea is approved, it's really cool because I helped to contribute to it. I feel like I'm helping to make an impact." 



# The Dream Chaser

From his first Big Idea to the tech startup that landed him on *Forbes* 30 Under 30, Derek Canton '15 is seeing years of hard work pay off.

by Deborah Alvarez O'Neil

PHOTO BY MATT WRIGHT '10

**Best.  
Year.  
Ever.**

WHAT ELSE TO CALL 2022 FOR TECH ENTREPRENEUR and CEO Derek Canton '15?

In March, his startup company Paerpay hit an exciting tipping point when it secured \$3 million in venture funding, bringing the company's total capital to \$4.2 million. Then came high-profile recognition through the summer, including Paerpay being selected from among hundreds of applicants as

one of 12 companies for the third class of Google for Startups Accelerator: Black Founders.

November, well, it defied gravity: At age 29, just a few months before his 30th birthday, Canton was named to the 2023 *Forbes* 30 Under 30, securing his name on a rarified roster of entrepreneurs, artists, social change leaders, and innovators transforming our world across every industry, from the arts and energy, to consumer technology and education. Past winners have included the founders of Instagram, Canva, Bumble, Instacart, Spotify, Dropbox, Asana, and DoorDash. The 2023 listing was an historic one, featuring Megan Thee Stallion as the first Black woman to grace the cover of the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 issue.

And in a storybook ending written just for an entrepreneur, Canton closed out 2022 by ringing the Nasdaq closing bell in Times Square — alongside the CEO of *Forbes* and his fellow Under 30 superstars who made the list. The experience, he said in a text message, was “SOOOOO AMAZING!!! The amount of talent was next level. I was just grateful to be in the room.”

Back on campus at the end of 2022, Canton talked about chasing his dreams, a journey in which Worcester State figures prominently. “It’s funny to be on this side of it now,” he says. “2022 is a recognition year for a lot of the hard work that I’ve been doing for many, many years prior to it.”

As dazzling as the 2022 highlight reel is, Canton says it’s not the whole story. It’s important, he said, to not lose sight of what led to the accomplishments. The excruciating long hours. Multiple failures. Rejections. Daunting risks. “You hear about people who went to Harvard, wrote an idea on a napkin, and now they’ve got millions of dollars. That’s not my story,” Canton

(Continued next page)



Derek Canton held the first live product event for Paerpay at Bocado Tapas Wine Bar in Worcester.



(Continued from previous page)

said. “I talk a lot about being in the trenches. That’s been my journey. People ask, ‘What’s your secret to success?’ My answer is, I decided just not to die. That’s it. Stay alive and you will figure it out.”

**R**aised in Shrewsbury as the middle child of three boys, Canton credits his involvement in his church, Liberty Assembly of God, with planting the seeds for his entrepreneurial interest. As the church grew from 45 to 2,000 parishioners over time, Canton did a little of everything.

“That’s where I got a lot of entrepreneurial skills,” he said. “Candidly, I just loved doing projects. That was my thing.”

Early on, he had to figure out what kind of an entrepreneur he would be, particularly in tech, an industry dominated by men who started off as engineers, coders, and programmers. He initially double majored in business and computer science at Worcester State, but found the technical side of tech wasn’t for him. He ended up pairing his business administration major with double minors in economics and communications. “I always had this passion for running a technology company, but how do I do that being someone who does not write code? I found my strength with technology was design. That’s something I did really, really well.”

During Canton’s sophomore year at Worcester State, business professor Joan Mahoney told Canton about a new entrepreneurship competition being launched at Worcester State—The Next Big Idea. The competition was created and funded by a Worcester State alumnus, Robert K. O’Brien ’58, who himself had launched 10 companies and employed hundreds during a distinguished business career.

At the time, Canton was designing and selling T-shirts with positive messages. Mahoney urged him to enter the contest, telling him, “You’ve come too far to just come this far.”

“I felt like I did not belong,” Canton said. “Everyone was juniors and seniors. I was a sophomore and like, ‘There’s no way.’ I almost didn’t apply. And literally in the 11th hour, Dr. Mahoney told me, ‘Just submit it.’”

That decision proved pivotal for Canton’s career. Not only did he win the first prize of \$2,000 for his idea—G1G, an apparel and accessories company—he found career mentors in O’Brien and businessman Craig Bovaird ’77, both of whom had judged the competition.

“A big part of unlocking my entrepreneurial passion was that Bob and Craig really took me under their wings after I won the competition,” he said. “They were like, ‘Hey, let me see how we can plant that seed.’ That’s really what opened up my ideas for entrepreneurship,” Canton said. “The reason why that story is so important to me is there are people from Worcester State who are investing in their students outside of just the classroom.”

What followed his college years was a stint at Dell and a string of “terrible ideas” for startups, Canton says with a laugh. He was undeterred by the possibility of failure. “At Dell, all the executives had done some startups and I remember them saying they had failed and sold their companies to Google. And I’m like, ‘Well, if I fail and sell a company to Google, that would be cool, right? Why not?’”

The idea that finally took off to become Paerpay crystallized after Canton took another leap—the

one of 128 early-stage startups selected from 1,600 applicants for the 2018 MassChallenge cohort. By 2020, Canton had secured an initial round of angel investing and was ready to launch when the world shut down.

For many entrepreneurs, the shutdown was permanent. Not so for a company developing a contactless payment system for food services, a concept that was about to become a game changer.

As the pandemic threatened to leave the restaurant industry in ruins, Canton reimagined his restaurant payment technology as a solution for an unprecedented time. In 2020, conventional wisdom dictated apps were the future and QR codes were dinosaurs. However, in the context of no-contact transactions and social distancing, the humble QR code was making a comeback. Paerpay revamped its product to eliminate the need to download an app and streamlined the restaurant payment process even more through QR codes and a web-based platform that can



Derek Canton celebrates with fellow Forbes 30 Under 30 honorees in December by ringing the Nasdaq closing bell in Times Square.

2017 Money20/20 Hackathon in Las Vegas. He had an idea—a winning idea, as it turns out—but not an invitation to take part in the massive conference of developers competing for substantial prize money. So he just showed up.

“I literally showed up without a ticket, slept on the floor of the Venetian Hotel, convinced them to let me compete and ended up winning it,” he said. “It was crazy.”

With the Money20/20 winnings, Canton founded Paerpay. The next year, the company was

fully integrate with leading point of sale systems and payment technologies.

The tailwind was strong as Canton headed into 2021. Then came a major setback. A significant change in his company’s leadership was followed by a loss of funding. Paerpay was on the verge of running out of operational dollars. “It was one of the most challenging situations,” Canton said. “We were down to our last \$20,000. I remember thinking, ‘This is it. We are done.’”

A mentor stepped up with words of encour-

agement, reminding Canton that he still had a good business model. He looked around at his small team and realized he owed it to them to keep trying. He remembered Professor Mahoney’s words to him years earlier. “I decided I’ve come too far to just come this far,” he said. He doubled down—more long hours, more creativity, more of what he calls “CEO-ing.”

“I probably overcorrected and worked too hard.” Canton recalls. “I just threw all of myself at my work, and I think I could have done that a little bit in a more healthy way.”

Still, the hard work paid off. By early 2022 Canton was closing on \$3 million in seed



Photos by Nasdaq, Inc./Vanja Savic

“2022 is a recognition year for a lot of the hard work that I’ve been doing for many, many years prior to it.”

—Derek Canton

funding led by MassMutual through the MM Catalyst Fund. They were joined by Elevate Capital, MassVentures, Techstars, The Fund, Gaingels, and Chingona Ventures. In making the announcement, MassMutual’s lead portfolio manager Jason Allen praised Canton’s “leadership and vision” and Elevate Capital Founder and Managing Partner Nitin Rai applauded the company for “making a powerful difference in the restaurant industry.”

“If you look at the statistics for people who

look like me who are getting venture capital, it’s abysmal to say the least,” Canton said. “Being able to be an advocate for those other founders has been really cool, and to cross that chasm from raising a couple hundred thousand dollars to millions of dollars is just incredible.”

Today, Paerpay is working with a few hundred restaurants and food service businesses nationwide, including Steak ’n Shake. Next up for Paerpay is transforming restaurant drive throughs with a more effortless payment system. Customers will be able to scan a QR code at the speaker and pay their takeout bill on their phone right after they place their order. For restaurants—and potentially other businesses like pharmacies—the return on investment is significant both in terms of efficiency and accuracy of orders, says Canton.

“The goal for us is making payments as simple and easy as possible for anyone who wants to accept payments, whether that’s through Apple Pay, Google Pay, or credit card, debit card, or whatever that might be,” he said. “And simplifying that in a way that’s meaningful, but also accommodates credit card rates. We’re winning in a lot of ways because we’ve integrated with all the major credit card processors and POS systems in a unique way that allows us to get a location live in a matter of weeks as opposed to months or years.”

As his company takes off and Canton leads a bi-coastal life sharing his time between New York and California, he is turning attention to giving back and volunteering.

“As I’m going into my thirties, I feel like it’s

a new beginning,” Canton said.

In 2022, he joined the Worcester State Foundation Board of Directors, a team of community leaders charged with overseeing the university’s endowment. The board makes decisions about how donated dollars are invested and spent in support of students and university operations.

“For many years the business ran me, and it cost me a lot of time and energy,” he said. “Now, I’m being very intentional about who I am as a person, whether it’s giving back or volunteering

on boards. Being a part of the Foundation Board is absolutely incredible, to say the least. I’m honored to be a part of it.”

**J**ust after Thanksgiving 2022, Canton was in Roseville, California for business. Still on East Coast time, he woke up at 3 a.m. in his hotel and was mindlessly scrolling

Instagram when he saw that *Forbes* had announced the coveted list. In one final attempt to fulfill a dream he’d set for himself more than a decade ago—*Forbes* 30 Under 30—he’d thrown his name in the mix. He’d already applied 10 times in years past and been rejected.

Canton flipped over to his inbox to look for an email from *Forbes*. He didn’t see anything. “I’m like, okay, I didn’t make the list. It’s a data point, not a proof point,” he said. “I had a post-it note of stretch goals and this was on there. I didn’t really understand the caliber. I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn’t realize it was tens of thousands of people.”

Many young entrepreneurs dream of landing on the *Forbes* list. Very few make the cut. The judges are industry-specific experts and *Forbes* journalists who wade through mountains of applications. This year, they received more than 12,000 applications and whittled it down to just 30 people leading the way in 20 industries.

That morning in the pre-dawn hours with disappointment setting in, Canton decided to take a peek at the list—just in case. “You know what? Let me just look,” he thought.

There he was. Derek Canton, CEO of Paerpay, on the list of 20 trailblazers in the Food and Beverage Category. The category was judged by Food Network chef Kardea Brown; *Forbes* Chief Content Officer and Editor Randall Lane; entrepreneur Vanessa Pham, a Harvard graduate and co-founder of the Asian food brand Omsom; and Lee Schragger, founder of the star-studded Food Network South Beach Food and Wine Festival.

In 2018, Canton delivered the keynote address during Worcester State’s Convocation to incoming students—unbelievably enough—of the Class of 2022. He spoke of how through the Next Big Idea, the contest he won his sophomore year, he discovered his passion for entrepreneurship. “I learned the value of stepping out of my comfort zone,” Canton said. “You owe it to yourself to figure out what you are passionate about. Class of 2022, step outside your comfort zone. Dream big dreams.”





# A Common Language

Poliana Alarcón Bustos' journey of language, literature, and connection

By Rebecca Cross | PHOTOS BY MATT WRIGHT '10

**W**hen Poliana Alarcón Bustos MA '18 attended her first day of English-language class at Worcester State in 2015, she realized she was surrounded by students who didn't speak a common language. At first, they found ways to communicate without using spoken language. As the semester went on, they were able to share the excitement of acquiring a new language together and using it among themselves. "Suddenly," Alarcón said, "you're able to share your experience and ideas. All of us came the first day with no English, and at the end we were

all best friends."

Alarcón learned English at Worcester State's Intensive English Language Institute (IELI) after coming to Massachusetts from Chile with no knowledge of the language. It was the influence of her father, who studied business administration at Worcester State from 1976 to 1980, that led her here. The diversity of the students in the program, which was intimidating at first,

As Poliana Alarcón Bustos is earning her PhD at Boston University, she remains active in Worcester theater, teaching after-school acting classes to students at David Prouty High School.

became something she found extremely beneficial. "It opens your mind," she said. "It makes you a better person. You are exposed to people who have different religions, traditions, habits, food, perspectives of reality. You discover these differences are not bad, just different."

During her two semesters at IELI, Alarcón was in classes for four hours a day, Monday through Friday. "My experience at IELI was short, but it was super intensive," she said. "Everything I learned there was the foundation for what I'm doing now." Alarcón had planned to learn some English, then return home, but, after completing the program, she enrolled at Worcester State to earn a master's degree in Spanish.

It might seem unusual to some to study the literature of one's native language in a setting where the majority of people speak another language, but it makes perfect sense to Alarcón. "The perspective is wider," she said. "It includes texts about immigration, what it means to be a foreigner."

She had worked in theater companies in Chile as an actress. "I was an actress since I was born. I was always speaking in public and in ev-

ery after-school program." She says she got this love of theater from her grandfather, who was a theater director. "The blood pulls you," she said, quoting a Chilean saying.

As a student at Worcester State wanting to reconnect with that part of herself, she knocked on the door of Professor Adam Zahler, chair of the Visual and Performing Arts Department. In that first meeting, they talked for two and a half hours. "It was the first time since coming to Massachusetts that I could speak to a professor in my own language," she said. "Not Spanish, but theater."

**“It was the first time since coming to Massachusetts that I could speak to a professor in my own language. Not Spanish, but theater.”**

—Poliana Alarcón Bustos


Zahler invited her to work as an assistant in the play he was directing that semester. "I was really glad I did," Zahler said. "I was impressed then by her connection with our students. Since then, seeing her work with community members and other students, I realize how fortunate we are to have such a talented, insightful, and skilled

teaching artist working with the university."

Shortly after that, she joined the university's Latino Education Institute, coordinating theater programs. In that role, she directed members of the community—many of whom had acted before—in a Spanish-language performance of the play *Correr o Volar* (Run or Fly), about the Mirabal sisters. It's an experience she finds deeply rewarding. "That's why I've stayed with LEI, because that's what they do, they give access to the community, to kids and their parents who are workers and never had time to get involved in the arts."

Her continued work with LEI is remarkable when you consider that she is also teaching two acting classes four times a week—while working on her PhD in the Hispanic Language and Literature program at Boston University. She teaches an introductory acting class at David Prouty High School in Spencer, Mass., where students learn the basics of performing arts theory and practice. Her students are preparing a stage reading based on the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, with original monologues about their experiences and views of life and art.

Her dissertation is related to feminist activism through theater in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. She's focusing on the work of theater companies founded by women who are tackling topics that nobody wants to talk about in countries that are heavily influenced by the Church and that have seen multiple transitions between extremely right-wing governments and more progressive ones. She's exploring how women are working within this instability to deconstruct patriarchy.

She is drawn to theater that's political. "If it's only about having fun, that doesn't make sense to me. What is the sense of representing life issues if you're not going to let the audience take something from them. It's not about being leftist or conservative. It's about human rights, equality, respect." 







Alumni family finds sweet success

# One doughnut at a time

By Nancy Sheehan | PHOTOS BY MATT WRIGHT '10

**Rocco's Doughnut Company**, founded by Joe Astrella '91, has an apt company motto: "Just a family bringing people together, one doughnut at a time." The variety of doughnut flavors and the company's social media following have grown quickly with the help of Rocco's children, who have all been key to his success: his son, Vincenzo Astrella '14; his daughter, Lia (Astrella) Scenna '18; and Domenic Astrella, who has taken classes at Worcester State.

The confection company, which started with a shop in Millbury in 2018, now has three locations. The menu rotates, with 15 to 18 flavors at a time, and Rocco's has nearly 300,000 followers on TikTok who offer enthusiastic comments on the company's colorful and upbeat doughnut-making videos, like, "These look AMAZING!" and "I wish I could order from Cali!"

Among menu favorites are Fruity Pebbles, a colorful confection that evokes a favorite childhood breakfast cereal; an oversized gorgeously gooey chocolate frosted doughnut; a maple bacon delight; and perennial pleaser, cookies and cream.

*(Continued next page)*





## Rocco's Do's and Do-nuts

**How many servings per doughnut?**

**Lia:** It's actually a good question because when people say, "How many calories in a doughnut," I'm like, "Well, you should say calories per serving because our doughnuts are definitely more than one serving."

**Joe:** I would say two servings each because they're double the size of other doughnuts.

**Vincenzo:** I just eat the whole doughnut. Plenty of people do.

**Fork and knife, or no?**

**Joe:** The only doughnut you might need a fork for is the strawberries and cream because that's like a sandwich. It's cream and strawberries in the middle, and I would use a fork and knife for that, otherwise you get it all over your face. For some, though, the messier, the better, so it's all good.

**What's the perfect drink to have with a Rocco's doughnut?**

**Joe:** Rocco's coffee. Our coffee comes from a local roaster in Worcester, so we're able to source our coffee right from the same city that I grew up in. I love our iced coffee. It's the best around, but I have to admit I don't drink hot coffee. I have to put a shot of chocolate flavor or something in it, but Vinny drinks it straight—no sugar, nothing.

**What should you do if you can't decide which doughnut you want?**

**Joe:** That's easy. Buy 'em all.

*(Continued)*

These menu mainstays share the shelves with a rotating cast of innovative delicacies that recently included the "cannoli," a yeast-risen shell with house-made cannoli ricotta and vanilla-dip icing, topped with crush cannoli shells, and "caramel s'mores," a raised doughnut dipped in chocolate icing, with a graham cracker cookie rim, topped with a perfectly toasted marshmallow. Flavors change monthly and seasonally, with pumpkin cheesecake being a recent runaway fall favorite.

Inspiration for doughnut flavors comes from many sources, including bakeries and doughnut shops around the world. "Creating flavors is probably one of the hardest things with this business," Lia said. "It's something that we're definitely working on right now. We are in the process of creating an in-house team of people just designated to flavor creating."

After working in the corporate world for more than 25 years, Joe Astrella, who majored in business at Worcester State, says he'd had enough. Earning a living at his own business is the best way to make dough. "I love it," he said. "There are some days that are stressful, but I could never see myself going back to a nine-to-five job in a corporate office cubicle again. I would lose my mind. I am more excited now doing this than I ever have been."

Rocco's is named in honor of Joe's late father, who owned a Dunkin' Donuts shop in the 1950s and later managed one in Worcester. The idea of continuing the doughnut tradition came from Joe's daughter Kerri, who graduated from Worcester State in 2018 with a nursing degree.

"I was looking for something new, and one day Kerri said, 'Have you seen all these gourmet doughnut shops popping up? Maybe you could do something like that,'" Joe recalls.

Though it would be revisiting his father's Dunkin' Donuts roots, Joe had actually never learned how to make a doughnut. On the plus side, however, he and Vincenzo had run a side business for several years making T-shirts and helping companies with branding efforts, and so those business skills were at their disposal.

"I said, 'Let me research it because I need a change in my life,'" Joe said. Encouragement from Vincenzo helped seal the deal for Joe's new direction. "After Kerri suggested that he should do something with food, I knew he

could take it and run with it," Vincenzo said. "Because, even to this day, if there's a church event or a family gathering, he does the food on a restaurant scale. So, I thought the idea of 'let's create a restaurant and have the family included in it' would work. When he gets an idea and has people supporting him, there's no stopping him."

To get started, Joe scanned Craigslist and found equipment for sale from a bakery in Vermont that had gone out of business. Vincenzo and longtime friend Todd Businskas, who's been their head of production since the beginning, rented a box truck and headed north to pick it up. "We were still so new to this industry that we didn't even know to bring some better equipment to move all this stuff," Vincenzo said. "Me and Todd just

manhandled the heaviest of industrial equipment onto the truck, and we finally got it home."

Meanwhile, Lia and Vincenzo began publicizing the doughnut shop on social media, complete with tantalizing images of the kinds of fancy flavors they planned to offer. "We were hyping this whole thing up, but we were also getting into the busy holiday season," Vincenzo said. "Then in January we were like, 'All right, now we've got to figure out how to make doughnuts.'"

Luckily, a friend connected them with someone who had owned a bakery for years. The baker agreed to teach Vincenzo, Domenic, and Todd how to make doughnuts.

"He was this old Italian guy named Joe who was about to retire," Vincenzo said. "So, he comes in and he says, 'All right, boys. What do you know about baking?' We're like, 'Zero,' and he loved that. He said, 'That's great, because you guys are teachable.'"

After the doughnut-making lessons were completed, finally, an opening date was set and announced on social media. Then . . . panic set in. Joe felt something wasn't quite right with the dough.

So, they called the baker and asked him to come back so they could get it perfect.

When the store opened in March 2018, the doughnuts were undeniably amazing,



Fruity Pebbles (left), Peppermint Milkshake, Maple Bacon, Cannoli (bottom) and Apple Fritter, Homer and Cookies + Cream, are just a few of the unique doughnut choices on Rocco's menu.



Joe Astrella, second from left, and his children Vincenzo, Domenic, and Lia are all part of the success of Rocco's Doughnuts.

**“We had a huge social media following before we even knew how to make doughnuts. We opened with a bang.”** —Vincenzo Astrella, '14

and the Astrellas' months-long social media campaign had cultivated a large number of potential customers anxious to sample Rocco's treats.

"We had a huge social media following before we even knew how to make doughnuts," Vincenzo said. "We opened with a bang."

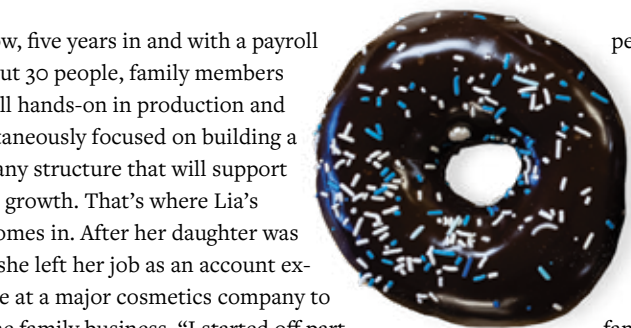
A big bang.

"It was crazy," Joe said of opening day in Millbury. "We had a line going down the street and around the corner. Policemen were coming and telling us, 'What are you guys doing? You can't park on the street.' We sold out in two hours. We didn't have enough doughnuts for everybody, and people

were like, 'What do you mean you don't have any?' But how to make the right number of doughnuts was one of those things we had to figure out over time."




Now, five years in and with a payroll of about 30 people, family members are still hands-on in production and simultaneously focused on building a company structure that will support future growth. That's where Lia's role comes in. After her daughter was born, she left her job as an account executive at a major cosmetics company to join the family business. "I started off part-time just doing catering sales and booking," she said. "Then I slowly took over scheduling of all the stores and then doing the payroll and then events, which we want to do more of."



Those events regularly include doing pop-ups with Tree House Brewing Company, and recently, Tuscan Village in Salem, N.H. "We started in the reverse from where

people usually start," Joe said. "Most people begin with pop-ups then go to brick and mortar. We started with brick and mortar and are finding out we want to do more popups."

Now, Joe says, the family's main goal has moved from just making the best doughnut around to growing one of the best organizations around. "A friend of mine who's very successful in business told me a long time ago that you need to get to a point where you spend more time working on your business and not in it. So, I'm at that point now finally. It took me five years to get things right and get comfortable enough, but now I can focus on where we go from here." 





## End of Childhood

By Judith Hoyer

I was a believer in those honest acres inside  
invisible gates where I ran sunny and solitary  
from my mother's unforeseeable moods.

Where my feet pumped high over the caretaker's  
cottage, summer house and swimming rink.  
Beyond everything, Green Hill, and the buffalo.

Where a grand fountain cooled down geraniums,  
the earth around, the wire surround and boys  
on bikes who rode too close.

Where carp with mouths as wide as galvanized pails  
rose empty from the fishpond underworld  
to fill on bread pilfered from the pantry.

Where I learned to fringe a linen placemat with  
the feel and color of parakeet feathers that cushioned  
my breakfast cereal, banana, and spoon.

Where the facts of life were blabbed to me  
on a stone bridge that led from before to after.  
There weren't many words, and the girl was gone.

Where I can still hear a horseshoe striking  
luck around a metal stake or landing  
with a thunk in a cloud of red dirt.



# A Lifetime of Poetry

Judith Hoyer '65 shares her love of poetry with a new generation  
of students. **By Rebecca Cross** | PHOTOS BY MATT WRIGHT '10



Judith grew up playing in Burncoat Park, also known as North Park, a green space that inspired her poem "End of Childhood." She still visits the park, a hidden gem in Worcester.



The fun thing is when you get to the end of a poem and think, 'Oh, voila!' You realize something you didn't think of before. That's very satisfying. —Judith Hoyer

» When Judith Hoyer was a student at Worcester State in the 1960s, poets like Robert Frost, Randall Jarrell, and Archibald Macleish were household names. Hoyer, who had loved poetry her entire life, attended every reading she could and saw all three poets when they read in Worcester. "Poets were rock stars," she said. "They were my heroes."

Upon completing her degree, Hoyer put aside her dream of becoming a poet herself to focus her energy on her family and her career as a school psychologist in the Medway, Mass., public school system. It was only after she retired in 2005 that she was able to pursue that dream.

She describes the years since retiring as "a little like being an adolescent." Poetry has helped her access great depths of emotion. Her involvement in the poetry world has also

afforded her a chance to be in a community of other like-minded people. She has published a chapbook—*Bits and Pieces Set Aside* (Finishing Line Press)—and has a full-length collection, *Imagine That*, coming out this spring from FutureCycle Press.

"I'm always thinking about poetry," she said, "always. Walking, reading—all of that counts." She does sometimes face writer's block, but she has a way to deal with that. "If I can't come up with something, I go for another walk, read, maybe bake some cookies."

Most of her poems tend to be about herself and her experiences in some way. Her best poems, she thinks, are "about something that I know really well." Nevertheless, one of her favorite things about writing poetry is surprising herself. "The fun thing is when you get to the

end of a poem and think, 'Oh, voila!' You realize something you didn't think of before. That's very satisfying."

In 2013, Hoyer attended a poetry reading at Worcester State, organized by English professor and poet Heather Treseler. The reading was the first of a poetry reading series that Treseler was trying to run on a shoestring budget. Hoyer knew right away she wanted to help fund the series. "I wanted the students at my state college to have an experience that's available to students in other colleges in the Worcester community." Through this series, students would be able to hear poets read and also meet them, ask questions, and get answers.

With this idea, Hoyer approached Treseler, whom she describes as a "writer, teacher, poet extraordinaire. She's just the best." Now named

the vast network of poets she knows."


Over the eight years the two poets have known each other, their mutual respect has grown. "Judy is someone I admire so much," Treseler said, "because she pulled off the trifecta of having a successful professional career, having a writing career with two books to her name and many publications in journals, and being a wonderful person. She never lost sight of her literary sense and ambition and pursued it with a lot of diligence, patience, and openness."

Hoyer, who lives in Wayland, Mass., attends all of the readings at Worcester State—but says she can't choose a favorite from among the readings. "They were all terrific," she said. "I see the students flock to these readings, and they feel so comfortable being in an atmosphere where it's okay to ask questions and be enthusiastic about being creative."

"These readings have provided for me a sense of being in a community that believes in art and the value of poetry to enrich lives in a time when people are looking for beauty, for solace, in a time when the world is so fraught with trouble," she said. She hopes that the

students who attend these readings also see poetry as providing community, giving comfort, inspiring people to be creative, and facilitating an appreciation for the arts.

Though Hoyer has favorite poets that she always returns to, like Seamus Heaney, Elizabeth Bishop, Eavan Boland, Rita Dove, and Diane Seuss, she says, "It's always wonderful to hear new poets." She is excited about the state of poetry today. "It's very inclusive in a way that it was not before. Everybody comes with their own background, and that's what's so special." The Judith O'Connell Hoyer Poetry Reading Series has brought poets with a variety of backgrounds and often underrepresented identities.

All told, the university has brought fourteen nationally known or emerging poets to the Worcester State campus in fewer than ten years. Poets who have read at Worcester State are Alan Michael Parker, Joy Katz, Forrest Gander, who would soon win the Pulitzer Prize, Christina Davis, Sandra Lim, Anna V. Q. Ross, Marge Piercy, B. K. Fischer, Kevin Prufer, K. B. Kinkel, Jennifer Militello, Virginia Konchan, Stephen Kuusisto, and Nathan McClain. Hoyer hasn't missed a single reading. 

### About the poem

The poem, "End of Childhood," is from Hoyer's forthcoming book "Imagine That" from FutureCycle Press, and first appeared in *The Worcester Review*. Of the poem, Hoyer says, "The idea for the poem came from a workshop prompt given by my longtime poetry mentor, Tom Daley, who suggested that we write about a memory we had from a public place. It could have been the circus, a ball game, a busy city street, but the park hit a chord for me. Burncoat Park was just a hop, skip, and a jump from where I lived on Barnard Road. It was a place where I could escape. There was a feeling of freedom, of being

in another world. I could ride my bike on the paths, meet my friends, bring a picnic lunch, play tennis, skate in the winter and be a part of nature all year long. Of course, there was an aspect of danger too that went along with that freedom of being alone in a public place. There was a caretaker who lived on the grounds. His name was Bart McKeon, and he loved fussing over the huge, beautiful circle of geraniums in the middle of the park. Although it is much smaller now than when I was young, the park is a lovely, rather private, green space surrounded by an urban environment."



# Rethinking Suspensions

Researchers find educators struggle with academic discipline decisions.

By Allison Coppinger



**E**very day in schools across the United States, principals and vice principals issue out-of-school suspensions to middle and high school students for a variety of offenses, some as serious as having a weapon at school, and others as minor as not following directions. Students missed out on 11 million school days in one academic year due to

out-of-school suspensions, according to a joint report by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies of the UCLA's Civil Rights Project and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. The researchers found glaring disparities in school discipline, with many Black students and students with disabilities and mental health conditions receiving out-of-school suspensions.

Often, school administrators are following guidelines prescribed in school district student conduct handbooks.

“We hope administrators will ... learn how to build a more restorative community to support all students.”

— Worcester State graduate student Emma Duffy



However, research conducted at Worcester State by Emma Duffy, a graduate student in the School of Education's school psychology program, and School Psychology Professor Kristine Camacho M.Ed. '09, PhD since August 2021 suggests such disciplinary actions are largely ineffective and should be replaced with positive behavioral interventions that keep students in school. This research finds that disproportionate suspensions, especially among minority and disabled youth, are the result of zero tolerance practices and administrators having difficulties with unclear district rules and policies.

Duffy and Camacho's study, "Leveraging an Understanding of Administrator Disciplinary Decisions to Reduce Suspensions," will be presented in February 2023 at The National Association of School Psychologists Convention in Denver, Colo., with support from the Worcester State Foundation. The study is part of a bigger research project that Camacho has been working on since 2014, which focuses on discipline among minority students.

To better understand administrative disciplinary decisions, Duffy and Camacho emailed surveys to middle and high school administrators throughout Maryland and followed up with interviews to see what factors contribute to their disciplinary decisions. Answers among the administrators varied, yet many said district policies and the behavior a student presents influence their disciplinary decisions.

Sixty-eight percent of the administrators surveyed said they find the student conduct handbook to be useful when making disciplinary decisions, while 32 percent find it to not be very helpful. Administrators reported that it can be difficult to make disciplinary decisions because handbooks are not always clear and don't provide resources on how to handle the unique situations that arise.


While administrators often feel suspending a student

will decrease the problematic behavior, Camacho said, in reality, removing a student from school won't do that. "Suspensions are not working, and were never intended for low and moderate behaviors," she said.

Duffy and Camacho say their goal is to have administrators move away from zero tolerance and instead develop strategies to keep students in school—for instance by providing more mental health support and peer meditation. "We hope administrators will figure out how to prevent a situation with a student from happening again and learn how to build a more restorative community to support all students." Duffy said.

Both want to continue their research, present their findings in other states, and have their study published. "I hope the research will bring awareness, have educators and administrators think about how to start changes, how these can be implemented at a local level, and for administrators and school psychologists to enact policy changes," said Camacho.

Duffy, who expects to graduate with a master's of education and education specialist degree in May 2023, wants to be a school psychologist at a Massachusetts public high school. The research project, she said, has made her passionate about advocating for students.

"When I move on to being a school psychologist, this research has helped prepare me to advocate for the decrease of overuse of out-of-school suspensions for students, especially for low and moderate infractions that can be addressed within the school setting," said Duffy. "Excluding students is not the answer, and everything I have learned from this research will serve me in the future as a school psychologist." 

*Allison Coppinger is a senior majoring in communications and a writing intern in the Worcester State Office of Communications and Marketing.*

“Suspensions are not working, and were never intended for low and moderate behaviors.”

— Worcester State Professor Kristine Camacho







Worcester State's 2022 Athletics Hall of Fame inductees, from left, Richard "Sonny" Price; Sacha Ashton Langford; Kemani Jones; Frank Hughes, accepting on behalf of his late cousin James 'Jim' Hughes; Christine "Chrissy" Mitchell Gaffney, Thomas White, and Alyssa (Jasper) Guzman.

also in continually encouraging her to complete her degree. Langford is now paying forward that support. After graduating in 2021, she took a position in Worcester State's Academic Success Center.

The inductees throughout the night spoke of how humbled they felt by the nomination, and more so, to be seen as role models and inspirations for student-athletes today and in the future.

With tears in her eyes, alumna Christine (Mitchell) Gaffney spoke about the honor of being nominated by fellow Worcester State volleyball star, and her own daughter, Erin Gaffney, to the Hall of Fame.

"Knowing the health challenges I faced as a kid and overcame, after having open heart surgery at the age of 12, it motivated me and gave me the courage to be the best athlete I could be," said Gaffney. "I'm hoping I have been an inspirational role model for my daughter and I'm so proud of all the athletic accomplishments she has achieved over the years, even after persevering through multiple knee surgeries. My hope is for all young women to have the confidence and courage to face their own challenges with a positive outlook and to be the best athlete and person they can be. I am now

## Honors 2022 Hall of Fame

**Christine "Chrissy" Mitchell Gaffney '89**  
Volleyball, Basketball, and Indoor and Outdoor Track and Field

Posthumous Award

**James "Jim" Hughes '76**  
Men's Ice Hockey

**Kemani J. Jones '16**  
Football 2011–12, 2014–15

**Sacha Ashton Langford '21**  
Women's Basketball 1995–01

**Thomas W. "Tiger" White '76**  
Ice Hockey 1971–75

**Malcolm "Big Dog" Person**  
Contributor, Basketball 1971–74

**Richard "Sonny" Price**  
Contributor, Basketball 1972–75

**1971–72 Men's Ice Hockey Team**

2020 Honoree  
**Alyssa L. (Jasper) Guzman '15**

an Athletic Hall of Fame inductee thanks to my daughter's nomination and the will and strength of that 12-year-old girl that wasn't going to let heart disease stop her from playing the sports she loved."

The Men's Ice Hockey Team, which had two

individuals and a team inducted, continued the inspirational night, looking back on their experiences, sharing laughs on stage, and at their tables. They ended the night by calling upon the crowd to pass on the legacy to the current squad: "They are the future." 🏆

# Celebrating Excellence

Seven athletes and one team inducted into Athletics Hall of Fame

By Krystyanna Ramsdell | PHOTOS BY MATT WRIGHT '10

**W**orcester State University celebrated the achievements, legacies, and contributions of outstanding former student-athletes during the 2022 Athletics Hall of Fame ceremony Sept. 23, 2022. The Homecoming Weekend ceremony honored a diverse class of seven former student athletes and the entire 1971-72 men's ice hockey team.

The 16-member Athletics Hall of Fame committee had the significant task of selecting the former student-athletes who would join the venerated Hall of Famers already enshrined in the Worcester State record books.

The master of ceremonies for the night was local Spectrum News 1 reporter Kevin Shea, who opted to break away from the traditional introduction and speech style for a more personal and in-depth interview style that brought both history and energy to the proceedings. Shea brought serious-

ness with levity as he questioned the inductees, even digging up forgotten memories that brought tears to the eyes of many.

Many expressed gratitude throughout the evening to Worcester State and the Athletics program for the support they have received, not only during their time as student-athletes but through every success, struggle, and accomplishment that has come their way since leaving Worcester State.

Sacha (Ashton) Langford recalled the continued support of her coach, Women's Basketball Head Coach Karen Tessmer, not only during her playing career as a single mother but



The 1971-72 Men's ice hockey team, standing from left, Mike Correa '73, Paul Janowski '74, Robert Tavolieri '75, Frank Hughes '77, Ken Gleisman, Richard Gilmartin, Jim Roach '83, and the late Phil Dumas, who passed away in January 2023. Seated, from left: Thomas "Tiger" White '76, Robert Farley '75, Jack Coleman, III '72, Joe Rinaldi '73, Jack Hehir '73, and Mark Bombard '74.



# Alumni Happenings

- Feb** 25 Annie at the Hanover Theatre
- Mar** 23 Boca Raton, Fla., Event
- 29 Dr. Janelle Ashley's Celebration of Life
- 30 Leadership Donor Recognition Event
- Apr** 15 Women's Lacrosse Alumni Game
- 20 Academic Achievement Awards
- 23 Alumni Birthday Brunch with President Maloney
- 26 Celebration of Scholarship and Creativity
- 27 Tri-Board Night at The Hanover Theatre

- May** 11 Nurses Pinning Ceremony
- 12 Golden Graduate Luncheon, Graduate School Commencement, Party on the Eve: Celebrating the Class of 2023
- 13 Undergraduate Commencement
- Jun** 1 Young Alumni Night at Wormtown Brewery
- 5 30th Annual Worcester State Foundation Golf Tournament
- 10 Resident Assistant Alumni Reunion
- Aug** 7 2nd annual George H. Albro '65 Memorial Golf Tournament
- Sept** 22 **SAVE THE DATE**  
Communication Sciences and Disorders 50th Anniversary: The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a special event for alumni. More details will follow in the spring at [alumni.worcester.edu/csd50](http://alumni.worcester.edu/csd50).



For the most up-to-date listing of events scan the QR code, visit [alumni.worcester.edu/events](http://alumni.worcester.edu/events), or contact the Office of Alumni Relations and Engagement at 508-929-8141 or [alumni@worcester.edu](mailto:alumni@worcester.edu).



Photos by Matt Wright '10

## Calling on Alumni-Owned Businesses



Across the Greater Worcester area, alumni have established a wide range of businesses—from bakeries to bookstores, creative services to financial services, and more. The Worcester State Alumni Association is building an online directory to support and highlight our alumni-owned businesses.

For more information on the Lancer Alumni Business Directory, contact the Office of Alumni Relations and Engagement at [alumni@worcester.edu](mailto:alumni@worcester.edu) or 508-929-8141.

To have your business listed, scan the QR code or visit: [alumni.worcester.edu/businessdirectory](http://alumni.worcester.edu/businessdirectory).



## Nominations for Distinguished Alumni Awards



Worcester State's Distinguished Alumni Awards are the highest non-degree recognition bestowed by the university on alumni. Whether through community service, education, professional achievement, or service to the University, these awardees exemplify the true strengths of Worcester State.

Nominations are currently being accepted for the 2023 Distinguished Alumni Awards. For more information on the categories, criteria, listing of past awardees, and to nominate an alum, visit [alumni.worcester.edu/daa](http://alumni.worcester.edu/daa) or contact the Office of Alumni Relations and Engagement at 508-929-8141 or [alumni@worcester.edu](mailto:alumni@worcester.edu). Nominations close on April 30, 2023.\*

\*CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION'S ADVISORY BOARD, BOARD OF TRUSTEES OR THE WORCESTER STATE FOUNDATION ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR NOMINATION.

# Scholarship Brunch

A gathering of generous donors and the students who receive their gifts

PHOTOS BY MATT WRIGHT '10

**M**ore than 250 students and donors connected this year at the annual scholarship brunch, an event that brings together donors who fund scholarships with the students who receive them. The University Advancement tradition fosters intergenerational

friendship, support, and networking. Each year the Worcester State Foundation awards more than 400 student scholarships, most of them established by alumni, friends of the university, faculty, and staff. This year, 22 new scholarships were established.





# The George H. Albro '65 Memorial Golf Tournament

Hitting the greens in support of Worcester State Athletics

**T**he Inaugural George H. Albro '65 Memorial Golf Tournament drew more than 100 participants, all in support of Worcester State Athletics. The event was named in memory of Lancer legend, educator, coach, and mentor George Albro. Save the date on Aug. 7 for the 2nd annual George Albro '65 Memorial Golf Tournament.



## Homecoming and Family Day 2022

Friends, classmates, and alumni come together again.

**M**ore than 1,000 alumni, students, and families gathered at Worcester State University to celebrate Homecoming Weekend 2022. Under sunny skies, many said they were just happy to see friends, classmates, and fellow alumni come together again. Family Day offered a festive carnival-like atmosphere for more than

700 students, parents, siblings, and alumni. Nearby, hundreds of alumni gathered throughout the day Saturday for BBQ, ice cream, and family activities at Homecoming Experience. The Saturday afternoon football game brought a big and noisy crowd to Coughlin Field with the final score UMass Dartmouth 41-Worcester State 20.

Photos by Matt Wright '10

**PUTTERING AROUND: A.** Emma Polak (Student Trustee Class of 2024), Jim Wells, Tracy Wells, Chandler, Ann DeBiasio '79 (Worcester State Foundation Board Chair), and Bob Deraney (Men's Ice Hockey coach) **B.** Three members of the Overall 1st Place team (scoring -10) pose with Chandler and members of George Albro's family: wife Lillian '65, daughter Beth-Ann, son Mick and grandchildren Mickey and Adrienne. **C.** Jerry Hippert '67 and Mark Chanson excited to start the day **D.** Jack Riordan '74, M.Ed. '78 shaking hands with Jay Palermo, President Maloney looks on **E.** Foursome of Kevin Kilcoyne, Al Ratcliffe, Jerome Giedymin '82 and James Murphy '83 **F.** Karen Tessmer (Worcester State Women's basketball coach), Jill Dagilis '78, Janet McGuiggan, Kathy Johnson, the winners of the Women's Division





« **PAYING TRIBUTE:**  
**A.** At the end of the OMA celebration, attendees gathered for an historic photo, bringing together students, alumni, faculty, and staff of the program. **B.** Lisa Maddox '94 thanks the audience as she receives a Key to the City of Worcester from Mayor Joe Petty. **C.** Mannasseh Konadu '19 served as the inspiring emcee for the celebration. **D.** Jennifer (Ablorh-McGregor) Johnson '04, RN, MBA and Lashana Fulton '05.



Photos by Matt Wright '10

# Celebrating 50 Years of Multicultural Excellence

Attendees honor half a century of the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

**H**omecoming Weekend was capped by a semi-formal celebration that drew 175 attendees to honor the 50th Anniversary of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The event paid tribute to OMA leaders Sidney Buxton, Marcela Uribe-Jennings '82, M.Ed. '91, Laxmi Bissoondial '02, and the student-led Intercultural Student Alliance, and to OMA's mission to support first-generation, low income, and ALANA/BIPOC (African, Latine, Asian, Native American and/or Black, Indigenous, People of Color) students.

# Class Notes

THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI

'57

**Class Agent: Elaine F. (Curran) Cousineau, M.Ed. '60**

**Tom W. Jackson** lives in Whittier, Ca., with his wife Carmella. They recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary and have two upcoming cruises planned. Tom has three children and five grandchildren.

**Adele M. (Abood) Millette** is teaching a class on meditation and aging at a senior college.

'58

**Nancy (Forsberg) Comeau** is happily retired and living in a retirement community.

'60

**Class Agents: Mary C. O'Connell, M.Ed. '63, Ann M. (Holohan) O'Leary, M.Ed. '62, Elizabeth A. (Looney) Ouellette, M.Ed. '62**

**Francis P. O'Leary, M.Ed. '65** is proud to have 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

'61

**Class Agents: Nancy M. (Fletcher) Bourgeois, M.Ed. '79, and Bernardine C. (Rourke) Strom**

**Margaret M. (Murphy) Lemoine, M.Ed. '70** is happily enjoying retirement after 34 years of teaching primary grades, which was, she says, "a wonderful experience with many happy memories."

**Joseph J. Monfredo, M.Ed. '64** has six grandkids, three college graduates, and three (triplets) in their junior year at Wheaton College. His son, Mike, is a Worcester State graduate and is an environmental inspector for the state of Massachusetts, helping companies meet federal standards.

**Edward C. Nelson, M.Ed. '63** is working for the Massachusetts Teachers Association as a retirement consultant guiding educators through the retirement system.

**Bob Pano, M.Ed. '64** currently works at Highfields Golf & Country Club and volunteers at K9 First Responders, Pet Partners animal

therapy, and Baypath Humane Society. He has four grandchildren.

**Carol A. (Person) Robbins** reports that four members of the Robbins family are graduates of Worcester State. She is also proud to have nine grandchildren and one new great-grandson.

'65

**Class Agents: Rosanne (Sullivan) Matulaitis, Margaret T. (Trainor) Sullivan, M.Ed. '68**

**Gerry (Kidderis) Mahaney** and her husband, Dave, celebrated their 57th wedding anniversary in June. They have three children and seven grandchildren.

**David Perry** wrote and self-published a book, *Tales of Deception and Imagination*, on questionable John Kennedy assassination theories. The book is available on Amazon.com.

'66

**Class Agents: Janice E. (Hokanson) Baronoski, M.Ed. '75, Vincent J. Matulaitis Jr., Roberta I. (Chicoine) Stencel, M.Ed. '73**

**Stephen T. Hulbert**, now fully retired from his interim position with the Registry for College and University Presidents, has been named the first President Emeritus of Nicholls State University.

**Louis R. Lebel, Jr.** retired from teaching after 38 years.

'67

**Class Agents: Jo A. (Elliott) Luikey, M.Ed. '69, Ann M. (Gingras) Pugliese, M.Ed. '93 Roberta J. (Biron) Kittredge** and her husband, Ed, celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on June 24. They are blessed with three children and six grandchildren.

'71

**Catherine M. (Mahoney) Kabala, M.Ed. '73** has retired after serving on the Dudley-Charlton Regional School Committee since 1984.

'74

**Patrice Bell, M.Ed.**, feels blessed to be healthy and still enjoying a professional career and finding joy in two grandchildren.

**Ted G. Hebert**, founder and owner of Teddy Bear Pools and Spas, was recognized as a 2022 BusinessWest Difference Maker.

'75

**Patricia A. (Dorsey) Daignault** retired after teaching nursery school for 31 years.

**Mark A. Epstein** published his second book, *Jack "The Shot" Foley: A Legend for All Time*, with Togo Palazzi, in October. His book chronicles the history of Central Massachusetts basketball and

is available at the Worcester State Bookstore and online.



**Submit Your Class Note Today!**

We love to share the good news of our alumni. Please send your latest milestones and accomplishments to:

**alumni@worchester.edu  
 alumni.worcester.edu/classnote**

Please include your full name, including your name when you graduated, class year, home address, email address, preferred phone number, and a photo of yourself.



## '78

**Patricia A. Haddad, M.S. '86** retired from Worcester Public Schools and is working part-time at Worcester State University as a clinical instructor in the Communication Sciences and Disorders Department.

## '81

**Class Agent: William S. Hayden**

**Nancy A. (Day) Curci, M.S. '90** published a book titled *Know Me*, in which she interviewed veterans across the nation.

## '82

**Class Agent: Robert E. Valinski**

**Linda A. (Confrey) Guida, M.S. '86** retired in June after 28 years as a speech/language pathologist in West Boylston public schools. Linda also worked in Hudson and Grafton throughout her career.

## '84

**Jim F. Pisegna** was named the new football coach for St. Paul Diocesan Jr./Sr. High School in Worcester.

## '85

**Michael J. Trainor** has been a psychotherapist for many years. Michael lived in Florida for about 25 years and recently moved back to the Worcester area.

## '86

**Class Agent: Lisa A. (Fazio) Leger**

**Patricia-Marie (Maguire) Keenan** is semi-retired and just moved to Florida with her retired husband.

**Ronald W. Smith** retired as a senior non-commissioned officer (sergeant first class) in the U.S. Army. He worked for the Department of Defense after graduation, traveling throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia to military bases as a government contractor for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

**Gary M. Smith** has retired from government service for the Air Force at Hanscom Air Force Base. He previously retired from the Army with 32 years of service.

## '87

**Class Agent: Kenneth J. Brissette**

**Kenneth J. Bates**, president and chief executive officer of Open Sky Community Services, received an honorary degree and served as the keynote speaker at Assumption University.

## '88

**Class Agents: Amy L. (Favreault) Benoit, Tina M. (Manoogian) Healey**

**Janet P. (Miskell) Grene** is a product line manager with Dell Technologies, focusing on education products for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. She lives in Ireland and visits Massachusetts several times a year.

## '89

**Class Agent: Ann Marie Bartlett**

**David J. Huffman, M.S. '01, M.S. '07** was named the new executive director of NESCSO (New England States Consortium Systems Organization).

**Sheila M. (Moran) Jette** was recently named account representative at Delta Dental of Massachusetts. She was formerly at Fallon Health in commercial sales and resides in West Dennis, Mass.

## '90

**Class Agents: Jeffrey L. Busha, Lawrence "Larry" M. Sasso, M.S. '13**

**Beth T. (Tata) Posco, M.Ed.**, retired after nearly 30 years in the Gardner school system.

## '91

**Class Agents: Paul E. Cahill, Lou E. DiMuzio, Daniel M. Harrington, Catherine R. (Foppiano) McGrath, Jeffrey T. Turgeon**

**Andrew L. Ells** started a new job as a controller at Feedback Earth.

**Sally A. Goodhile, M.Ed.**, has retired after 34 years as a physical therapist in Worcester Public Schools.

**Donna L. O'Connor** is a former selectman, former member of the Town Finance Committee, host of the local cable show *Ask The Manager*, member of the Police Station Building Committee, and former chair of the Democratic Town Committee and other town committees.

## '93

**Class Agents: David C. Frederici, John F. Seymour**

**Jodi A. Loverro** joined Fathering Fathers, Inc., the guiding arm of the R.E.A.L. Mentorship Program.



**Bill B. Murphy** released his book *Thriving in the Storm: Nine Principles to Help You Overcome Any Adversity*. The book is available on Amazon.

## '95



**Kate C. McEvoy**, vice president of corporate relations at UMass Memorial Health, was named one of *Worcester Business Journal's* 2022 Outstanding Women in Business honorees.

## '97

**Tara M. (Tokarz) D'Andrea** was recently promoted to director of operations at Oriol Health Care.

**Jennifer A. Glinos** recently got engaged and purchased a condo. She works at Mount Wachusett Community College in Human Resources.

**Malee Ngimrukxa, M.S.**, is working at Plan International Thailand.

## '99

**Class Agents: Brandon E. Frencic, Greg V. Nikiforow**

**Ann Marie (Leonardi) Budness** was appointed director of admissions and clinical liaison at River Terrace Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center.

**Jan C. Davini** retired from teaching last June and moved to Florida. She says, "I loved my years teaching in Worcester! I may live in Florida but Worcester is always my home."

## '00

**Class Agent: Chrissy Remian-Sullivan**

**Teresa F. O'Neill, M.Ed.** retired as North High School's assistant principal after 35 years.

## '01

**Class Agent: Shawn Gersbach**

**Kristina M. (Ostlund) Guberski** is a working professional and mom of four kids.

**Cora B. Volchok, M.Ed.**, is a professional actress with a broadcasting and programming license based on her Seattle heritage and areas of expertise in music, drama, and culture.

## '02

**Class Agent: Nadia L. (Saleh) Dorval**

**Michael F. Diggins** was promoted to senior director of family support and programming at Thrive Support and Advocacy.

## '03

**Class Agents: Monica A. (Labbe) Davis, Carrie A. (Stewart) Piermarini**

**Derrick C. Kiser**, former leader of the Kilby Street Posse and founder of the nonprofit organization Fresh Start 508, was featured in a recent story about mental health awareness in the *Worcester Telegram*. Derrick's work focuses on mentoring at-risk kids and building community throughout Worcester.

**Amy L. Peterson**, senior project manager and communications specialist in the Office of the Worcester City Manager, has been elected to the Worcester State University Board of Trustees by the Alumni Association's Advisory Board.

## '04

**Class Agents: David D. Cairns, Michael P. McCarthy**

**Justin D. Margadonna, M.Ed.**, published his first book, *Parallels & Facades*, through Amazon.

**Samantha L. Santiago**, vice president and head of claims strategy and automation at Farmers Insurance, was named one of the Top 50 Women Leaders of Massachusetts of 2022 by Women We Admire. In her role at Farmers Insurance, Sam is responsible for claims digital transformation, advanced analytics, claims customer experience, centralized strategy, and competitive intelligence.

**Melissa J. (O'Malley) Tuomi, Ph.D.**, returned to UMass Memorial Health as the senior director of quality, safety, and regulatory affairs at UMass Memorial HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital after seven years as director of professional practice, research, and quality at Baystate Medical Center.

## '06

**Class Agent: Joseph M. Corazzini, M.S. '11**

**Kathlene M. (Higgins) Donahue** is a volunteer with PinkHippy.org, board member with Audio Journal, Inc., justice of the peace, and notary public.

**Tara B. (Gliesman) Gunduz** had her first child, a baby girl, in July.

## '07

**Class Agent: Brittany N. Rheault**

**Heather M. (Lacroix) DeFeo, M.O. '08** welcomed her second child, a daughter in December 2021.



**Alise M. (Karle) Breton**, vice president and retail director of Millbury Federal Credit Union, was named one of *Worcester Business Journal's* 2022 Forty under 40.

## '08

**Class Agent: Brandon Huggon**

**Michael J. Rana** graduated in August with a master's degree in legal studies and a paralegal certificate.

## '09

**Class Agents: Jacquelyn "Jacqui" F. Kasper, Sofiela "Sofie" Zhidro**

**Elias. A. Ayoub** joined LCMC Health System as vice president of specialty pharmacy in New Orleans, La.

## '10

**Steven Kladas** was promoted to director of global supply chain finance at Hologic.

## '11

**Class Agent: Giselle M. Ortiz-Reyes**

**Elizabeth A. (Bitar) Resteghini** is a corporate law associate attorney at Morse and was named a Super Lawyers Rising Star in 2022, a list of top attorneys.

## '12

**Class Agents: Elizabeth A. Chapman, Sean P. Dugan, Ian E. Fields, Patrick D. Hare, M.S. '14**

**Manza B. Arthur** was appointed supervisor of public records by Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin. An experienced public records attorney, Arthur has been with the Public Records Division since 2017, most recently serving as senior attorney and assistant director of the division.

**Renee A. (King) Diaz** has owned the small business The Queen's Cups in Worcester for 10 years and has recently signed another five year lease in her Canal District location.

**Meghan A. (Alarie) Telemaque** started a new position in June as the brand marketing assistant manager at Dexter-Russell, Inc. in Sturbridge, Mass.

## '13

**Class Agents: Mary E. Laycox, Jose C. Lewis, Joseph D. Nawn, Colleen M. (McKenna) Sansoucy, Trevor J. Sansoucy**

**Jordan K. Duffy** works as a senior audio engineer for Earwolf/Stitcher/SiriusXM, working on several top-rated podcasts. He also released his first single and music video for the song "No Big Deal" in September. Jordan will be releasing an album this year.

**Joseph D. Nawn** began his master of accounting program at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School in the United Kingdom. Cambridge requires each student to also be a member of a residential college while attending, and Joseph is now a member of Pembroke College, Cambridge, as part of the class of 2024.

**Dr. Elora E. Orazio** left her position at Johns Hopkins University to become the inaugural director of assessment, evaluation, and strategic planning at Towson University in Maryland.

**Daniel J. Rowland** started a position as a patient support specialist at Vertex Pharmaceuticals.

## '14

**James L. Campbell** was selected as the ninth state command sergeant major and senior enlisted leader for the Massachusetts National Guard.





**Alexander T. Curley** and **Ashley A. Hardenstine '15, Ed.S. '19** married in August at Wedgewood Pines Country Club in Stow, almost ten years after meeting during their junior year at Worcester State. Ashley works as a school psychologist at North Middlesex Regional School District in Pepperell. Alex works as a global security and resiliency intelligence analyst at Boston Scientific in Marlboro. They are currently living in Lunenburg, Mass.

**Kerri A. (Coughlin) Mahota, M.E. '18** recently accepted a position as principal at Wales Elementary School.

**Tony M. McDonnell** was recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow, considered the highest honor bestowed by Rotary International, by the Rotary Club of Foxboro.



**Masielle Paulino**, executive director of Ritmos Dance Studio in Worcester, was named one of *Worcester Business Journal's* 2022 Forty Under 40.

**Cynthia C. Romero** started a new position as associate attorney at Monteforte Law, P.C., practicing estate-planning, probate, and elder law.

'15

**Class Agent: Brittany King**

**Nicole L. Cote** and Rich Collins opened their business, Root and Press, just down the street from the Worcester State campus three years ago. The neighborhood is loving the winning formula of coffee, books, and fun.

**Daniel F. Figueiredo** was accepted to Harvard Business School.

**Andro S. Hannoush** started as an associate attorney at Littler.

**Jeffrey A. Purslow** began his postdoctoral research fellowship through the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

'16

**Lynn F. Blanchard** started a position at Children's Advocacy Center of Franklin County and North Quabbin, Inc., as a child and family outreach clinician.

**Tatum R. (White) Coraccio** started at the Worcester Art Museum as a diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion committee member.

**Alex J. MacDougall** has joined the *Worcester Business Journal's* newsroom to cover the health care and diversity and inclusion beats.

**Jacob A. Thompson** is one of eight new firefighters in Marlborough.

**Tammy M. (Brideau) Wylie** was a 2022 Scrubs with Style We Love Nurses Award recipient.

'17



**Katherine Aguilar**, founder and CEO of Kommon Sense Co. in Worcester, was named one of *Worcester Business Journal's* Forty Under 40.

**Chris R. Frissore** was named girls' basketball coach at Wilmington High School.



**Emily A. Walker** married Aaron Pearl on July 16, 2022 at Highfields Golf and Country Club in Grafton.

'18

**Monica Bhakhri** was accepted into Dartmouth University's Tuck School of Business.

**Julia M. Snow** was named assistant athletic trainer for the St. Louis Blues hockey team's AHL affiliate, the Springfield Thunderbirds.

'19

**Sierra R. Chauncey '19** and **Jacob Q. Lawrence '20** were married on October 1, 2022.

**Nana A. Darkwa** recently took and passed the Massachusetts bar exam and became a licensed and barred attorney in mid-November. Nana would love to thank Dr. Marilyn Cleary, Dr. Roberta Kyle, Sara Grady, and all of the wonderful people who work at the DGCE; Dr.

Alex Briesacher for helping her realize that a law degree was obtainable; and Dr. Mark Wagner for all the valuable volunteer experience.

**Alba A. Diaz** recently graduated with a master's degree in business administration with a concentration in marketing.

**Demek "Joey" Edmonds** was an instructional assistant at South High Community School this past school year and recently became a building substitute at Vernon Hill Elementary School.

**Manasseh A. Konadu** recently passed the Massachusetts bar exam.

**Haley E. Melanson** started a new position as a senior staff accountant at Katz, Nannis & Solomon.

**Ryan E. Robichaud** started a new position as a staff accountant at American Tower.

**Samantha K. Tran** works for Fidelity Investments as a user experience designer.

'20

**Ashley A. Downes** is enrolled in the University of Denver's online graduate program to obtain her master's in library and information science.

**Zachary J. Grenon** was named head coach of the Lancers men's and women's golf programs.

**Maia Shalev, M.S. '21** was accepted into UMass Chan Medical School.

**Tete "Brenda" Thomas** is currently a post-baccalaureate and lab technician in the Mary Munson Lab at UMass Chan Medical School.

'21

**Kelsea M. Blair** started as a human resources coordinator at Devoted Health.

'22

**Charles N. Bray** was honored as one of Massachusetts' 29 Who Shine.

**Robert G. Megerdichian, M.S.**, received a grant from the Worcester State Foundation to finance an exhibit of objects crafted by his late father, Abraham, at the Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures in Tucson, Ariz.

**Julia Ravenelle** was nominated for 2022 NCAA Woman of the Year.

**Collin Turner** underscored music and sound effects for magician Paul Gertner's recent show, *Miracles and Other Deceptions*.



# Worcester State's Dr. Janelle C. Ashley Left Lasting Legacy

The Worcester State community mourns the passing of **Dr. Janelle C. Ashley**, the university's 10th president and the first woman to hold that position. She passed away peacefully at home in Nacogdoches, Texas, on October 7, at the age of 81.

Dr. Ashley was known as a mentor and role model who touched the lives of many. "Those that worked with her including faculty, administration, staff, and students will say she was ever present, gracious, hospitable and, most importantly, attentive to the needs of the University and its students," said President Barry Maloney. "She expanded the brand of Worcester State University by serving on local, regional, and national organizations to which she belonged. She will be greatly missed by all that knew her."

Dr. Ashley broke ground in higher education years before, as the first woman to receive a doctorate from the school of business at the University of North Texas. After earning her bach-

elor's in business administration from Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas in 1962, she started her teaching career at Nacogdoches High School in Texas, teaching business communications. She went on to earn a master's in English, also from Stephen F. Austin, and her doctorate of philosophy in management while making strides in her career. In 1965, Dr. Ashley started teaching business at Stephen F. Austin. She became the university's dean of business in 1981 and, later, vice president for Academic Affairs.

In 2002, the native Texan made the move to Massachusetts to become the president of Worcester State, where she oversaw a period of expansion until her retirement in 2011. During her tenure, Worcester State College became Worcester State University. Worcester State was named one of the "Best in the Northeast" by The Princeton Review for seven consecutive years, and the university earned the highest federal designation for community service in 2008. Dr. Ashley oversaw a \$10 million Opportunity of a Lifetime fundraising campaign, which raised \$12.43 million in the midst of the 2008 economic crisis, and she and her husband, Ray, endowed a scholarship in 2011.

Under Dr. Ashley's leadership, research initiatives expanded, and the university launched a 10-year, \$250 million campus renewal project that included the construction of Wasylean Hall, the parking garage, and renovations of the Helen G. Shaughnessy Administration Building, Dowden Hall, and the Learning Resource Center, which had the largest solar panel array in Worcester at the time. When Dr. Ashley retired, Worcester State Board of Trustees Chair John P. Brissette '88 said, "The scope of improvements on our campus while President Ashley has been at the helm are breathtaking. We are so proud of the legacy she is leaving with us."

In addition to her professional success, Dr. Ashley had a large and loving family. She was a dedicated mother of three and beloved grandmother to nine, and was married to Ray Ashley, her high school sweetheart, for nearly 62 years. A proud mother, she supported and cheered her children on in their endeavors. In the years since her retirement, she was able to spend time with her children and grandchildren and to travel with her husband, sister, and brother-in-law. 🍷

**Celebration of Life**

Worcester State University will hold a celebration of life for Dr. Janelle C. Ashley on March 29. For more information contact University Advancement at [alumni@worcester.edu](mailto:alumni@worcester.edu) or 508-929-8141.



# InMemoriam

## Claire H. (Cavanaugh) Cunningham

» CLAIRE H. (CAVANAUGH) CUNNINGHAM '57, M.ED. '60, 86, of Chatham and formerly of Worcester, passed away on October 13, 2022. Claire was born in Worcester to James E. Cavanaugh, district fire chief in Worcester, and Mary Ellen (Kerrins) Cavanaugh. She graduated from Worcester State University in 1957 and earned a master's degree in education from Worcester State in 1960. She taught elementary grades in Bethesda, Md., and in the Worcester Public Schools for 24 years and religious education at Our Lady of the Angels Church. She also was an active volunteer with numerous organizations in Worcester. She leaves her husband of 62 years, Dr. Thomas H. Cunningham; four children, Patricia Easterly and her husband Timothy, Deborah Finnerty and her husband David, Theresa Cronin and her husband James; and Thomas Cunningham Jr. and his wife Kathryn; nine grandchildren, Brendan Finnerty and his wife Teresa, Colleen Finnerty and her wife Holly, Liam Finnerty, Kara Finnerty, Lauren Behlke, William Easterly, Joseph Cronin, and Thomas and Sarah Cunningham; great-granddaughter, Beatriz Cunningham; sister-in-law Terry Cavanaugh Cunningham.

## Douglas R. "Duke" Dawson

» DOUGLAS R. "DUKE" DAWSON, 63, beloved husband of Trish Dawson, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on May 30, 2022 in Worcester. Duke was born in Hartford, Conn. to Robert and the late Margaret (Robertson) Dawson. He grew up in Ellington, Conn. attended Princeton University, and later earned a Ph.D. in neuroscience at the University of California at Irvine. He worked as program director at the EcoTarium, where he was honored as Worcester County Science Educator of the Year in 1998. Duke was a stay-at-home father when his son and daughter were young. He spent his time building intricate homemade dollhouses and forts, setting up science experiments, and organizing frequent trips to museums. He taught evening classes at Anna Maria College and the University of Hartford and later became a full-time tenured professor at Worcester State University. In his free time Duke read science fiction books, collected comics and action figures, and enjoyed sitting outside with Trish and their dog Toby doing crossword puzzles. Duke is survived by

**Ethel Abramoff '93**  
July 2, 2022

**Veronica E. (Shaw) Adams '61**  
June 23, 2022

**Janelle C. Ashley, Ph.D.**  
October 7, 2022

**Kirsten M. Backlin '92**  
July 7, 2022

**Paul K. Bitter '69**  
M.Div., LPC  
October 13, 2022

**John P. Borci '63, M.Ed. '69**  
October 17, 2022

**Mary-Ellen Boyle, M.Ed. '62**  
August 25, 2022

**Dorothy A. Brophy '86, M.Ed. '90**  
April 10, 2022

**William Brouwer '65**  
October 21, 2022

**James H. Burns '73**  
May 9, 2022

**Constance H. Burr, M.Ed. '74**  
April 20, 2022

**Lillian R. (Cederlund) Carroll '51**  
June 10, 2022

**Donald A. Cherry '91**  
August 8, 2022

**Carole Anne (Amour) Chiras '64, M.Ed. '81**  
July 12, 2022

**Anthony J. Cimino '58, M.Ed. '64**  
June 23, 2022

**Margaret M. Clancey '82**  
October 2, 2022

**Ruth Cohen '73, M.Ed. '76**  
August 6, 2022

**Jean T. Corbett '77**  
June 10, 2022

**Claire H. (Cavanaugh) Cunningham '57, M.Ed. '60**  
October 13, 2022

**Lois A. (Wennerstrand) Dahlin '58, M.Ed. '76**  
August 11, 2022

**Douglas R. Dawson, Ph.D.**  
May 30, 2022

**Elizabeth Leanna Dickinson, M.Ed. '83**  
September 7, 2022

**John M. Duffy '83**  
June 21, 2022

**John V. Dunn**  
May 24, 2022

**John E. Durkin '54, M.Ed. '58, Ed.D.**  
September 2, 2022

**Richard B. Dymek '54, M.Ed. '63**  
July 29, 2022

**John A. Ehret '61**  
May 15, 2022

**Diane M. Epstein '69**  
May 19, 2022

**Paul M. Fernandes '90**  
July 17, 2022

**Joseph B. Finnegan '71**  
October 29, 2022

**Barbara A. Gianaris, M.Ed. '78**  
April 19, 2022

**Anne L. (Brierly) Gordon '67**  
April 25, 2022

**Marie D. Granlund '98**  
October 14, 2022

**Andreana M. Grimaldo '88, M.S. '93**  
August 6, 2022

**John F. Grogan, M.Ed. '72**  
August 8, 2022

**Cynthia A. (Barnes) Herrick '59**  
August 14, 2022

**Diane J. (Dalton) Hersey '81**  
April 29, 2022

**Dawn M. Hoyle '92**  
September 3, 2022

**Robert B. Isenberg '74**  
May 6, 2022

**Lorraine Jankowski '96**  
October 24, 2022

**Janice L. Jolly, M.Ed. '90**  
June 30, 2022

**Richard F. Jones '80**  
August 28, 2022

**Norma T. (Griffin) Kallio '56**  
June 26, 2022

**Thomas P. Kelly, M.Ed. '72**  
July 26, 2022

**John M. Lajoie '85**  
August 10, 2022

**Catherine E. Levasseur '96**  
July 19, 2022

**Gail C. Lock '68**  
August 5, 2022

**Barbara A. (Birch) Mahoney '57**  
May 26, 2022

**Barbara L. Martel**  
June 6, 2022

**Keith W. Mattei '93**  
September 27, 2022

**William J. Moran '99**  
September 25, 2022

**Gerald F. Moynihan '63, M.Ed. '67**  
May 5, 2022

**Cheryl Murray '68**  
August 21, 2022

**Kathleen M. (Zaterka) Napoli '69, M.Ed. '74**  
October 3, 2022

**Virginia N. O'Neil '05**  
October 10, 2022

**Nancy A. (Stefanik) Pelland '77**  
June 22, 2022

**William F. Perron '78**  
July 13, 2022

**Cecile Plotkin, M.Ed. '76**  
June 20, 2022

**Francis A. Porcaro '75, M.Ed. '85**  
April 1, 2022

**Patricia A. (Reed) Proulx '73**  
June 2, 2022

**Jon J. Raymond '99**  
April 8, 2022

**Leo H. Roberge III '74**  
April 29, 2022

**Ann-Marie (Lefave) Roche '93**  
April 9, 2022

**Miriam C. Roeder '73**  
May 4, 2022

**Robert M. Sabatalo '77**  
April 30, 2022

**Clifford R. Sawyer '73, M.Ed. '77**  
June 9, 2022

**Dorothy R. Scanlon '72**  
May 29, 2022

**Angelo R. Scola, M.Ed. '71, Ph.D.**  
June 6, 2022

**Arthur D. Shea '73**  
August 13, 2022

**Dorothea R. Simmons**  
July 1, 2022

**Barbara A. Spence, M.Ed. '80, Ed.D.**  
June 8, 2022

**Heather E. Taurus '05**  
May 3, 2022

**Mary-Ann B. Tellier, M.Ed. '91**  
April 17, 2022

**Eugene F. Ticknor, M.Ed. '70**  
May 26, 2022

**Carol M. Tinsley '84, R.N.**  
June 13, 2022

**Gary J. Vecchio '75, M.Ed. '81**  
July 18, 2022

**Joseph M. Vecchio '80**  
June 6, 2022

**Richard T. Vigeant '80**  
April 29, 2022

**Elaine K. (Kirby) Vitone '58**  
June 7, 2022

**Francis L. Walsh Jr. '63, M.Ed. '69**  
August 2, 2022

**Nancy E. (Peterson) Weissinger '53**  
July 25, 2022

**Susan M. Wise '90**  
May 30, 2022

his wife, Trish, and their two children, Joey and Celia, as well as father Robert, brother Robert, sister-in-law Bernadette, nephew Robbie, and sister Margaret. Family, friends, and colleagues created The Douglas R. "Duke" Dawson Science Award in his memory.

## Caitlyn Dawn Despres

» CAITLYN DAWN DESPRES '22, 24, of Worcester passed away unexpectedly on July 24. Caitlyn was a 2022 graduate of Worcester State University and achieved her goal of getting her degree in her dream field, criminal justice. She had a double minor in forensic science and education studies. Her plan was to work in 911 dispatch and eventually become an EMT. She passed suddenly a mere two months after graduation, never having fulfilled the goal of getting her dream job.

Caitlyn was a kind, yet outspoken, young woman who loved helping her community. She was overjoyed to be involved in running the COVID Clinic at Worcester State University, with over 86 hours invested in the project. She was a big supporter of her peers and never stopped cheering others on to reach their goals and personal growth as she strived for her own. She enjoyed donating to various causes close to her heart such as Thea's Food Pantry and worked with the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, which works toward creating the best possible environment for nonprofits through their work in advocacy, building public awareness, capacity building and resource development. She will be missed by all who knew her and forgotten by none. Her time with us was not long enough, but we know that she will live on with those who loved her and continue to celebrate her beautiful spirit.

Caitlyn is survived by her parents, Richard and Lori (Pellerin) Despres, and her brother, Richard. She leaves many aunts, uncles, cousins, a grandmother, and many friends who loved her.

## Lt. Col. John V. "Jack" Dunn

» JOHN V. "JACK" DUNN, JR., retired Massachusetts State Police Lieutenant Colonel, 71, passed away on May 24, 2022, at UMass Hospital, surrounded by loving family. He is reunited with his daughters Lauren Nicole and Vanessa Ann Dunn, who both predeceased him. Jack is survived by his loving wife of thirty-eight years, Deborah N. (Brown) Dunn; son, Massachusetts State Trooper John R. Dunn and his wife Kristen, and their son—his beloved

grandson—John Joseph Dunn. He is also survived by two sisters, Maryann Dunn and her husband Rick Gilbert, and Patricia Dunn; brother-in-law, Phil Desrosiers; and nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by a sister, Sheila Desrosiers. Jack was born in South Boston to John V. and Anna M. (Feeney) Dunn and graduated from Gate of Heaven High School. He later graduated from Boston State College and received a master's degree from Framingham State University. He served his nation proudly in the United States Navy. Jack served the people of the Commonwealth for thirty-six years as a member of the Massachusetts State Police. He loved to golf and was a member of Blackstone National Golf Club, where he and Deborah won the Goodwin Cup Championship in 2010 and 2019. He was a member of the Tuttle Post American Legion in Auburn and was Past President of the Massachusetts State Police Commissioned Officers Association.

## John E. Durkin

» JOHN E. DURKIN '54, M.ED. '58, ED.D. died peacefully surrounded by his family on September 2, 2022, after a brief illness. He is predeceased by his beloved wife of 57 years, Joan (Barry) Durkin, and dear daughter, Christine M. Durkin (wife of John A. Menslage). John leaves five children, thirteen grandchildren, and four great grandchildren. His family includes his daughters Patricia Durkin Franklin, Maureen Durkin O'Connell and her husband Charles Peceovich, Eileen M. Barry and her husband Kevin Harkins, and his sons Timothy J. Durkin and Brian P. Durkin. In addition he leaves his cherished grandchildren Elise Franklin and her husband Scott and their children Calla and Adele, Marisa Graybill and her husband Raphael and their children Genevieve and Vivienne, and Garth Franklin and his partner Anna Moore; Ryan O'Connell (Brother Theophilus) and Annie O'Connell; Michael and Maeve Barry; Connor, Leeanne, Maxx, and Joan Durkin; and Grace and Luke Menslage. He leaves many devoted nieces, nephews, godchildren, and friends. He also leaves his sisters Arlene F. Yenovkian and her husband Donald, Kathleen F. Donoghue and her husband Thomas, and his brother Thomas F. Durkin and his wife Judith.

John was born in Worcester to Mary (Guilfoyle) and Anthony Durkin. He graduated from Worcester State Teachers College in 1954 and received his master's in education from Worcester State in 1958. He earned

his education doctorate from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1975. He was honorably discharged from the United States Marine Corps in 1956, having served as a first lieutenant. He dedicated his 39-year career to the Worcester public schools. After retirement he was assistant director and founder of the Massachusetts Academy for Math and Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and executive director of the Center for Effective Instruction at Worcester State University.

## Kathleen M. (Zaterka) Napoli

» KATHLEEN M. (ZATERKA) NAPOLI '69, M.ED. '74 passed away after a short illness at the age of 75 on October 3, 2022. Kathy was born on June 25, 1947. A lifelong Worcester resident, Kathy was a graduate of Worcester State University and a teacher in the Worcester Public School system for over 40 years, a profession she loved. Nothing in this world meant more to Kathy than her adoring grandchildren, whom she babysat and proudly supported in their sports and activities. Each day, you could find her driving them to school, sports, ballet, gymnastics, rock climbing and karate. Kathy leaves behind her two daughters, Amy Reid and husband Dennis and Jenny Montiverdi and husband Michael. She has four grandchildren: Casey, Zack, Leo, and Lucia. Kathy also leaves behind her sister Margie Sundstrom and husband Paul; her companion of over 30 years, John Brodrick; and nieces, nephews, and lifelong friends lovingly known as "the girls." Kathy was the daughter of Marguerite and Emil Zaterka. She was predeceased by her husband, Peter Napoli. Her loved ones find comfort in knowing that they are reunited once again. 🕊

## In Memoriam Gifts

If you would like to make a gift to Worcester State University in memory of a member of the Worcester State community who has passed away, please visit [worcester.edu/inmemoriam](https://www.worcester.edu/inmemoriam) or send your check to:

Worcester State University  
University Advancement Division  
486 Chandler Street  
Worcester, MA 01602

Please specify for whom the gift is in memory of, as well as how you would like your gift to be used. Gifts are tax deductible.





Photo by Matt Wright '10

# 5 Questions for Seth Pitts '10



**THIS PAST FALL, ALUMNUS** Seth A. Pitts '10 drew huge applause from students, faculty, and staff after delivering an uplifting and encouraging Convocation

keynote address full of wisdom from his own experiences as a young man finding his way through college. (You can read his full speech at [bit.ly/sethpitts](http://bit.ly/sethpitts)). After college, Pitts went on to spend over a decade with the U.S. government in financial services, earned a master's degree in finance from UMass Boston, and is a certified fraud examiner. He now serves as executive vice president and chief financial officer of Bay State Savings Bank and serves on the Worcester State Foundation Board of Directors.

**Your convocation keynote address was a huge hit. What did it mean to you to be up there sharing your story with more than 400 new Worcester State students?**

**Pitts:** It meant a great deal to me. The overwhelming positive response proved one of

the same messages that I had hoped to deliver without sounding cliché: "Anything is possible." Prior to that day, I had never written a formal speech or delivered it in front of such a large crowd. I enjoyed the creative process, and it was a joy to come back to the university to help others.

It was a true honor to share that time and space with so many people. I've always looked forward to sharing the energy, insights, and experiences that have shaped me with those that may strongly connect with, and benefit most from, my story. I'd like to continue to help younger generations recognize that the options in front of them outnumber the setbacks behind them. I hope to continue to grow into an example of great possibilities derived from humble beginnings and hard work.

**The theme of your talk was "making the most of it," and you encouraged students to do that by changing how they look at things, choosing progress over perfection and worrying less. Have you continued following that?**

**Pitts:** Absolutely. I learned these simple points the hard way and they continue to add value to my life. The harmony of simplicity and effectiveness within those guiding principles has allowed me to stick with them throughout my journey. They help me reduce personal stress and pursue my goals without getting overwhelmed or burning out.

**What's your favorite part of your job?**

**Pitts:** I love that I can give back to the same community where I grew up. My role plays a part to help a local bank serve local businesses and employ local people, which helps communities thrive. We all know that communities extend beyond simple geographies or borders. I feel that community banks help build stronger communities whether or not you define your community as your location, friends, or families. I enjoy leveraging my skills to play a small part in improving the lives of others. My slight knack for numbers helps get the job done, but I most enjoy the people side of community banking. The better we do as an organization means the more people we can help, which means the bigger the impact we can make in every community, especially right here in Worcester, Mass.

**Can you share some banking trends on the horizon?**

**Pitts:** The banking industry has evolved significantly over the last decade and continues to rapidly change. Much of this change remains increasingly aligned with technology and "anytime/anywhere" access to services. I also see growing segments of the population that still want personalized services to remain core to community banking. I think we will continue to see a competitive banking environment that seeks to strike the optimum balance between technology and personalized experiences. This creates opportunities for people to choose the banking industry as a career and help us make the next generation of innovative products, services, and experiences. You may not end up on the cover of a magazine, but you will be able to help many people and businesses achieve financial success.

**What are your long-term aspirations?**


**Pitts:** I want to be a great dad to my two kids. Besides that, my long-term aspirations boil down to hopefully leaving people better off and more positive for having known me. I'd like to be an example of how ordinary can become extraordinary. It's not that hard, it just takes a lot of hard work. 



Photo by Nancy Sheehan

## Health, Wellness, and Overcoming Challenges

Dozens of students, faculty, and staff took on the Grit 'N Wit Challenge this fall to kick off a campus-wide program to increase cancer awareness. Grit 'N Wit is a confidence boosting, team-building mental and fitness challenge. The event was presented by the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund, a new initiative by Worcester State alumni Gregg and Pamela Rosen, and their children Kaitlyn, Zachary, and Melanie. The Rosens established the new fund in 2020 and recently expanded it to build a comprehensive program for cancer awareness, research, education, and student support at Worcester State.

Shown here are (standing) senior Ciara Cargiulo, junior Jackson Reidy, sophomore Egan Davidson, and (seated) Timothy Lucey.