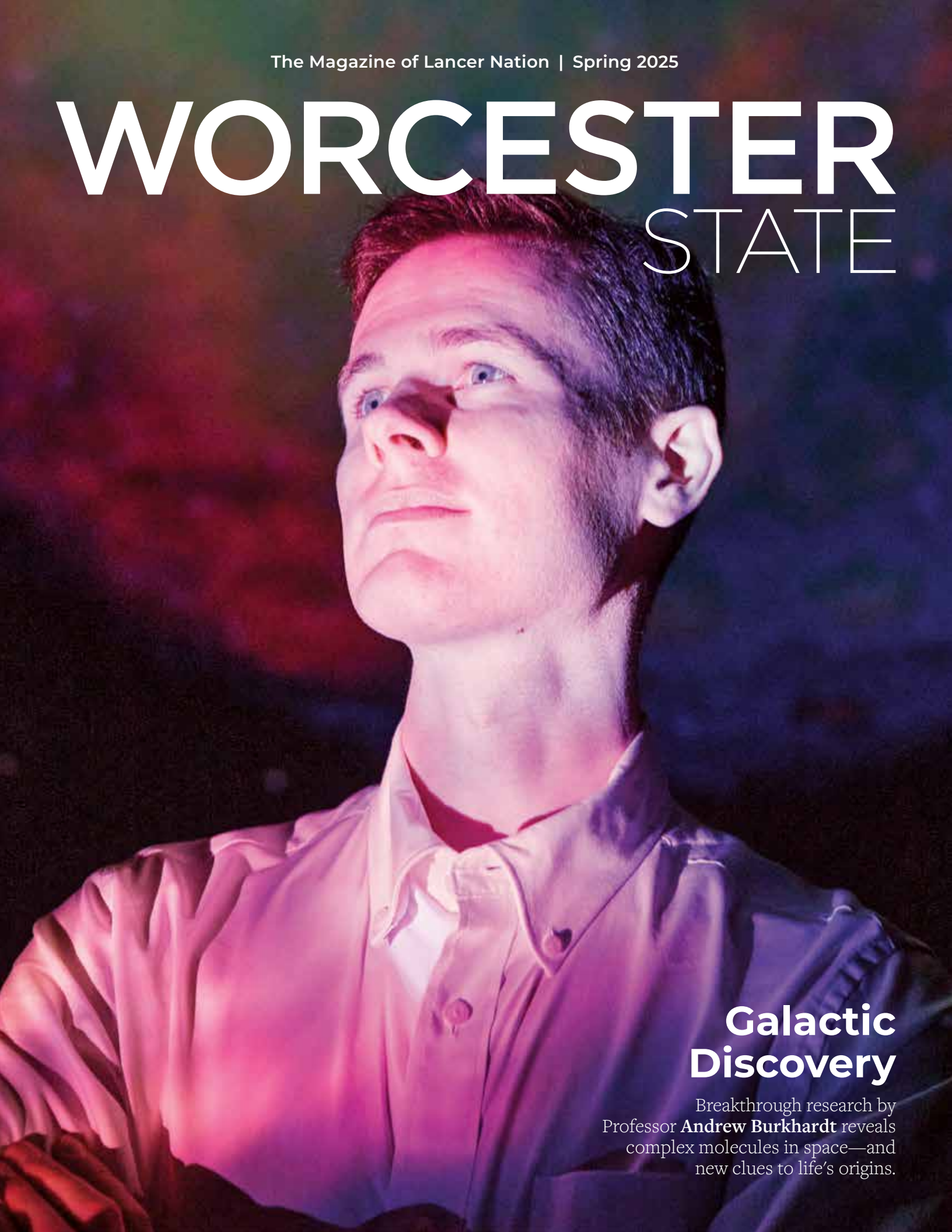
The Magazine of Lancer Nation | Spring 2025

WORCESTER STATE



Galactic Discovery

Breakthrough research by Professor **Andrew Burkhardt** reveals complex molecules in space—and new clues to life's origins.

Photos by Jullian Valadares

Celebrating 150 Years

Lancer pride and joy were evident all over campus on September 28, as more than 3,000 alumni, faculty, students, and their families celebrated Worcester State's 150th anniversary during Homecoming and Family Weekend. Festivities included a carnival with rides and free snacks, a slate of family-friendly activities like bingo and a petting zoo, a Multicultural Experience tent, a lineup of Lancer athletics games, and an ALANA/BIPOC reception at President Barry M. Maloney's house. With clear and sunny skies, the celebration was the largest homecoming event in years.

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Photo by John Lenis

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The Ultimate Equestrian Challenge

Members of the Worcester State Equestrian Team compete on new horses at every event. In the process, they learn to trust and adapt—and to communicate across species. Pictured, from left, are Amelia Skiba Terrinha '26, Julia Haché '26, Luna Hubbell '28, and Ellen Pechinsky '27.

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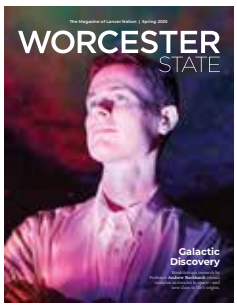
A Cosmic Recipe for the Origins of Life

How do solar systems begin? Assistant Professor of Physics Andrew Burkhardt, by tuning into radio signals from space, has brought us enticingly closer to the answers.



Cover photo of Andrew Burkhardt by George Annan '21, photographed at the EcoTarium's Alden Planetarium in Worcester on March 17. Special thanks to the EcoTarium and staff members Brendan Cole, manager of museum education, and Jason Gurtman, manager of educational programs, for their collaboration and assistance.

President's Note

Photo by Matt Wright '10

Dear Alumni and Friends of the University,

For 150 years now, a Worcester State education has helped individuals scale the ladders of economic success and social mobility.

When founded in 1874 as the Worcester Normal School, we offered a no-cost, two-year program for those seeking to teach in the growing public schools. Teaching was an attractive alternative to factory or domestic service work for young women who sought employment rather than marriage as their path to economic self-sufficiency, and we helped many achieve just that. Among them was Jennie Cora Clough, class of 1878, our first Black student as well as the first Black teacher in Worcester.

By 1932, after becoming Worcester State Teachers College, we phased out two- and three-year diplomas. With our four-year education degree costing 1 to 2 percent of an average teacher's salary, many Massachusetts residents of lesser means took advantage of the opportunity to learn and then earn, whether they taught or not. Even then, our students understood that a bachelor's degree is a transformative credential that opens doors.

Among those who parlayed an education degree into substantial financial success was Framingham resident James P. Sheehan '55, USMC (ret.). With a scholarship to help him afford his $75-a-year tuition, he reportedly hitchhiked the 26 miles from home to campus. He entered the Marines upon graduation. During 22 years in the service, he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and, after retiring, he launched a successful career as a venture capitalist. He is our university's single largest donor, with a residence hall, the honors program, and our annual merit scholarships all bearing his name.

By the 1970s, thousands of young people pursued degrees at Worcester State College every year. Gail Carberry '70, Ed.D., worked her way through Worcester State, later earning master's and doctoral degrees from UMass Amherst. She served as president of Quinsigamond Community College from 2006 until her retirement in 2017.

Worcester State has continued to be the college of choice for such hardworking students. Today, half of our degree-seeking undergraduates are Pell eligible and half are first generation. And we continue to invest in their success. With our recently announced ValuePlus promise, students from families earning $75,000 or less can likely attend for free.

We also have staff and programs dedicated to their success. About 50 years ago, for example, we established the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Graduates from then through today credit OMA for helping them thrive, among them Manasseh Konadu '19, now an assistant attorney general for the State of Illinois, and Tayla Weeden '23, who has worked at Boston Medical Center and is now a staff associate in Worcester State's Office of Multicultural Affairs.

We take pride in helping our students get ahead—and we do it exceptionally well. CollegeNet's Social Mobility Index ranks Worcester State University in the top 15 percent of colleges nationwide. Lake Ellie may not be large enough to have rising tides—but Worcester State itself lifts many boats!

Sincerely,

Barry M. Maloney
PRESIDENT

WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY

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.

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HAPPENINGS IN AND AROUND WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY

Worcester State ValuePlus Provides Free Path to a Bachelor's Degree

Adding Value

In fall 2024, the university launched Worcester State ValuePlus to strengthen its longstanding commitment to making high quality education accessible to all. Through the program, students can attend the university for free if they are Massachusetts residents, planning to commute, and Pell eligible (adjusted gross income of $75,000 or less). Those who qualify will have tuition and fees covered by a combination of federal, state, and institutional aid. The program will take effect in fall 2025. For other students, Worcester State provides generous financial aid and robust merit scholarships. Currently, 78 percent of Worcester State students receive some form of aid, with an average annual award of $10,111.

"We know that a bachelor's degree is a transformational credential that changes lives and enables individuals to achieve their dreams," said President Barry M. Maloney. "As Worcester's only public baccalaureate and master's degree granting university, we take seriously our responsibility to make the aspiration of a four-year college degree real for our hardworking families and students. With ValuePlus, we are leveraging the generous investment of the Healey-Driscoll administration to ensure all students in our community have access to Worcester State's outstanding undergraduate education."

Worcester State and Museum of Worcester Form New Partnership

» A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WORCESTER STATE AND THE Museum of Worcester (formerly the Worcester Historical Museum) will create a hands-on learning laboratory for students while helping the museum become more inclusive and representative of the diverse communities in Worcester.

Signed by President Barry M. Maloney and William Wallace, executive director of the museum, in February, the partnership comes as both institutions celebrate their 150th anniversaries. History professors Erika Briesacher and Josh Koenig were the driving forces in bringing the two organizations together. Students across majors will have access to museum internships in cataloging, collections care, and museum education. Future projects may provide field work in museum studies, communication, journalism, photography, hospitality and tourism, marketing, fundraising, and grant writing.

The Museum of Worcester

Photo by Museum of Worcester

"I cannot think of a better way to celebrate both of our 150th anniversaries than through this agreement, which will provide concrete benefits to Worcester State University's students and to the museum," Maloney said. "It also furthers our public mission, established at our founding in 1874, by helping the museum reach more diverse audiences. In addition to adding value to our already outstanding history program, the MOU will facilitate learning lab opportunities for other disciplines as well."

> *Sea Change* is about how coastal communities are adapting to a warming climate.

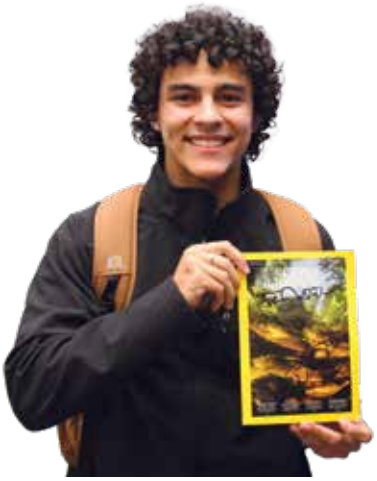


Photo by Nancy Sheehan

FAN ZINE: Justin Gagnon '26 holds a magazine freshly signed by *National Geographic* photographer and filmmaker Brian Skerry '84, who returned to Worcester State in November to present a compilation of his latest work, the three-part PBS documentary series *Sea Change: The Gulf of Maine*, to students, faculty, and alumni. *Sea Change* is about the 36,000-square-mile body of water stretching from Cape Cod to Nova Scotia and how its coastal communities and fishermen are adapting to a warming climate. The Gulf of Maine is warming 97 percent faster than the rest of the global ocean. "We're nowhere near where we need to be in terms of protecting the global oceans," Skerry told the audience. "But I've seen what's possible when we create marine protected areas: The oceans can come back, if we give them a chance."

President Barry Maloney Honored as *WBJ* Large Business Leader of the Year

Leading

In February, the *Worcester Business Journal* named Worcester State President Barry M. Maloney its 2025 Large Business Leader of the Year. The honor is reserved for an exclusive group of Central Massachusetts professionals with great accomplishments in the economy and the community.

"*WBJ* considered dozens of finalists for the honor, but one name rose obviously to the top: Barry Maloney," *WBJ* Editor Brad Kane said. "A steady leader at a powerful Central Massachusetts institution, President Maloney has defied the odds and grown enrollment at the university during a turbulent time for the industry, all while making higher education more accessible for underrepresented populations. It is an absolute honor to have him as *WBJ*'s Large Business Leader of the Year."

From the start of his 14-year tenure, Maloney's focus has been to put students first, and that has resulted in significant gains in academic success and expansion of student life. The university's graduation rate has increased 61 percent, and he has overseen the opening of Sheehan residence hall and the Wellness Center. Annual fundraising has more than doubled from 2011, and the Worcester State Foundation endowment, which supports the mission of the university, has increased 248 percent.

Photo by Phil Smith Photography

FROM LEFT: *Worcester Business Journal* publisher Peter Stanton, President Barry Maloney, and *WBJ* editor Brad Kane at the March 18 award ceremony at the AC Marriott Hotel.

Students Save Money and Show Academic Success in Affordable Course Materials Initiatives

» **UNDERGRADUATES SAVED NEARLY $2 MILLION ON TEXTBOOKS** and course materials during the 2023-24 academic year through the university's more than 1,000 course sections offered with no-cost and low-cost materials. In fall 2024, the university reported the findings of its initiative to lower classroom costs to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

The average cost of a textbook is $117, according to the state. Low-cost materials are defined as costing less than $50; no-cost materials are free. Last year, 62 percent of Worcester State's undergraduate courses used no-cost and low-cost materials.

The report found that academic performance of students in courses that use no-cost and low-cost materials is on par with those in courses with traditional materials. ALANA/BIPOC students, first-generation students, and students older than 40 had slightly higher grade outcomes in classes with no-cost materials versus traditional materials.

"The results are stunning and make a difference to our students every day," said Associate Provost Henry Theriault. "The return on a minimal investment has been staggering and surely meant students have gotten their degrees who would not have been able to if they had to pay thousands in textbook costs over their college careers, with a strong impact on the most racially and economically vulnerable of our students. There can be no loftier outcome for our work."

Reading

Otis and His Amazing Superpower

By Visiting Associate Professor Megan Connerly
Independently published, October 2024

Megan Connerly, visiting associate professor in Worcester State's Education Department, wrote and illustrated a children's book that she hopes will empower neurodiverse children and help reshape how educators approach learning differences.

Connerly's debut picture book, *Otis and His Amazing Superpower*, is inspired by her own experiences as a parent. She noticed that when her children were having difficulties in school, the focus was often on their deficits and behavior rather than on their strengths and perspectives.

"There was no neurodiversity piece to the conversation. It was all just so negative," Connerly said. She was frustrated by the lack of resources to help her children, now ages 7 and 4, feel celebrated for their uniqueness.

When she couldn't find children's books that positively addressed neurodiversity, she decided to write and illustrate her own. *Otis* reframes learning differences as "superpowers" to be nurtured, not weaknesses to be overcome.

The main character, Otis, does not conform to his teacher's expectations, leading to conflicts and trips to the principal's office. But the wise principal recognizes Otis's special way of thinking and helps him channel his energy into positive behaviors.

Connerly crafted the story to resonate with a wide range of neurodivergent children, from those with ADHD to those with autism spectrum disorders. "I don't want to identify any specific learner," she said. "I want to reach a broader audience to help those who deal with any type of learning difference. Hopefully, reading this book will help them appreciate what makes them special."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with glowing Amazon reviews from teachers, one of whom shared on the site, "I love the message of inclusivity in this book. The illustrations are beautiful and engaging—a children's book that will forever have a special spot in my classroom library."

Megan Connerly

For Connerly, the most rewarding feedback is from parents who see their own children reflected in Otis. "There was one parent who talked about how their son, who's been diagnosed with autism, loves the book, and he loves Otis, and they read it to him every night. And I was like, 'That's exactly how I hoped people would respond to the book.'"

Connerly said she has been doodling and drawing since she was young but was hesitant to follow her heart into an art career. "Growing up in the Midwest there was generally this notion that it would be hard to support yourself with art, so I ended up pursuing an education degree instead." She put down her colored pencils when she was in graduate school. Having children reignited her creative side.

The book aligns with the subject matter in Connerly's courses at Worcester State. Education Psychology for Elementary Teachers covers how the brain processes information. It also explores learning theories associated with brain development and how to use those theories in the classroom. Connerly also teaches Adolescent Development, which encompasses both brain development and social/emotional learning.

Now, Connerly is working on a sequel starring a character named Ruby who has anxiety. She hopes these books will continue to provide a much-needed resource for families and educators navigating the complexities of neurodiversity in the classroom.

—Nancy Sheehan

> "I love the message of inclusivity in this book. The illustrations are beautiful and engaging—a children's book that will forever have a special spot in my classroom library."
> —One of the many teachers to leave a glowing review of the book on Amazon

University Receives $25,000 Grant from Santander Bank for Study Abroad

» A NEW, $25,000 GRANT FROM SANTANDER BANK WILL dramatically expand the number of Worcester State students able to study abroad. Awards of $500 to $1,000 will go to roughly 35 students, 75 percent of whom are Pell eligible.

"For some students, this funding makes or breaks their ability to participate in a study abroad program," said Director of International Programs Katey Palumbo.

Students can participate in short-term programs, typically one to three weeks long, led by Worcester State faculty. These cost, on average, $3,000. Some longer programs cost the same as a semester or year at Worcester State, but with the additional expense of airfare. Other programs cost more. The new scholarships will help defray some of those costs.

"We are proud to help impact the lives of these students in collaboration with Worcester State and look forward to their future success," said Christina DeLay, Santander's U.S. head of corporate social responsibility.

University's Board of Trustees Welcomes New Members

Darnell Dunn (left) and Kelly Brissette recently joined the university's governing board.

Worcester State University recently welcomed two new members to the university's Board of Trustees, Kelly Brissette and Darnell Dunn. The first-time trustees were appointed to the university's governing board by Gov. Maura Healey for five-year terms.

Brissette is the deputy district director for U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern and previously worked for Massachusetts State Sen. Guy Glodis. Her areas of focus for McGovern include both hunger and education.

Brissette has served on the board at Abby's House and Interfaith Hospitality Network Charter as well as the chair for St. Peter Central Catholic Elementary School Auction Committee. In addition, she has served on an accreditation site team for Mount Ida College's Veterinary Technology Program.

Brissette is an active member of the Worcester Democratic City Committee and a past recipient of the John F. Kennedy Democrat of the Year Award. She is a graduate of Boston College with a degree in political science.

Dunn is the director of business recruitment at the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, where he spearheads initiatives aimed at attracting new businesses to the Worcester region while fostering the growth and expansion of existing businesses. Previously, Dunn was a senior associate at Rubric Commercial LLC, a full-service, Worcester-based commercial real estate brokerage. Before joining Rubric, he spent nearly a decade in Ecuador providing insightful, data-driven recommendations to real estate clients from North America, Europe, and Asia at Abundant Living Ecuador, a real estate brokerage and property management firm he co-founded.

Dunn earned a B.A. in economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. A resident of Waltham, Mass., Dunn sits on the board of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MassHousing) and the Worcester Economic Club.

Come Visit

Worcester State Launches Upgraded Virtual Campus Tour

View the virtual tour at worcester.edu/#virtualtour.

» WORCESTER STATE IS NOW MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN EVER, thanks to an upgraded virtual campus tour that launched in January.

The tour allows prospective students, counselors, family members, and others to view campus facilities, from classrooms and laboratories to residence halls and student lounges, from their smartphones or laptops 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Other facilities highlighted on the tour include the library, dining hall, and fitness center.

Users can explore the campus through videos, 360-degree photos, and other multimedia content. Additionally, the virtual tour leverages AI technology, allowing visitors to tailor their viewing to their specific academic and campus interests.

FROM LEFT: Aspen Zheng '24, Gregg Rosen '86, Zoe Kalaijakis '24, and Peter Spylios '24. Zheng, Kalaijakis, and Spylios are among those who've been helped by the Rosen Fund.

Rise Up for Rosen!

A surprise gala to honor Gregg Rosen '86 raises $300,000 for the university's Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund. **By Deborah Alvarez O'Neil** | PHOTOS BY MATT WRIGHT '10

Few thought they could truly make it happen. Imagine planning a black tie gala for 200 guests from across the country—a heartfelt tribute to a cherished spouse and father, a dear friend and esteemed colleague, a proud alumnus and generous philanthropist—all without the guest of honor finding out.

Yet, on the evening of October 25, 2024, there was no mistaking the utter astonishment on Gregg Rosen's face when he rounded a corner at the AC Marriott Hotel to a loud cheer of "Surprise!" He stopped in his tracks with arms outstretched. His little granddaughters burst from the crowd and ran into his arms. "You had no idea?" one of them asked. "I had no idea!" he answered, beaming as people encircled him with hugs and handshakes.

The event—Rise Up for Rosen—was organized over the span of more than a year by a volunteer committee led by Worcester State Foundation Board member Ed Sherr and his wife, Resa, and the Worcester State University Advancement team. A combination of celebration and university fundraiser, the evening was a smashing success, with an outpouring of gratitude and recognition for Rosen by his friends, family, and colleagues and an outpouring of support for a cause that is near and dear to him. The event raised $300,000, which includes a matching $150,000 gift from the Rosens, for the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund. The fund is a one-of-a-kind initiative established by Gregg '86 and Pam '87 Rosen at Worcester State after Gregg was diagnosed with cancer.

"We have to give kudos to all those folks who kept this event a secret from Gregg. That is amazing," said Worcester State President Barry Maloney in his remarks. "One of the best things about serving as president of Worcester State is getting to know alums like Gregg Rosen. He grew up, in his own words, 'a middle-class kid,' someone who duct taped his baseball bat

Continued on Next Page

Cancer Awareness

> **"I want this to be a legacy. I want it to be a legacy that lives on to help others and something that we can be proud of at Worcester State."** —Gregg Rosen '86, pictured with his wife, Pam Rosen '87

together when it cracked. For Gregg, Worcester State University was his obvious college choice for its location and affordability. He worked while attending school. He tells of the strong support he received from our incredible and caring faculty. Gregg is a quintessential Lancer. Gregg and his wife, Pam, who is also a proud Worcester State alum, have given back generously their time and treasures to their alma mater."

The Rosens established the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund in 2022 to support a variety of initiatives centered on health, wellness, and cancer awareness, including the annual Worcester State Wellness Fair and Pink Out Games in Athletics. It provides summer research grants for faculty and students and direct support to Worcester State students who are impacted by cancer.

The contributions raised at Rise Up for Rosen will expand direct support to students impacted by cancer and will underwrite educational programs for clinical students exploring careers that will ultimately treat cancer patients. For example, thanks to the Rosen Fund, the Speech-Language-Hearing Department was recently able to purchase tracheostomy models. The models will be used to train speech therapy students to work with patients with head and neck cancer who may require a tracheostomy as part of their recovery process. This procedure involves surgically placing a tube in the trachea to provide an airway when the patient is unable to breathe through the mouth or nose.

"Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) play an integral role in the care team for these patients," said Andrea Quinn, director of clinical education at the Speech-Language-Hearing Center. "As traditional methods of communication are often lost, SLPs focus on helping restore communication through both verbal and non-verbal means. One effective tool in this process is a speaking valve, which attaches to the

tracheostomy tube. By using these models, students will gain hands-on experience, learning how to properly manipulate speaking valves and how to help restore communication between patients and their loved ones."

Providing such valuable resources for students and patients with cancer is exactly why the Rosens established the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund. At the end of the gala, Rosen took the microphone to share his personal journey with cancer and how it inspired him to establish the fund.

At home, he keeps a drawer full of hospital bracelets—each one a reminder of a visit, a treatment, a moment of uncertainty. "There's a lot of bracelets," he said. "Someday, I'll put them in a jar, and when I'm talking to people about my story and journey with cancer, they will understand better that this may have been a long road, but the outcome is well worth it. It's scary to see how many times I've been there. But thanks to great doctors and treatment, I have a future ahead of me."

Gregg and Pam wanted to do something with their three children, Kaitlyn, Zachary, and Melanie, that would bring some brightness to the difficulty they faced. That something became the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund. "We can make a difference in other people's lives. And I thought to do it at Worcester State because this is where I became an adult. I learned lessons and learned what I wanted to do in life, which was to meet people and talk to people and make friends, and I met my beautiful wife."

He called on his friends and family to be part of the vision of the Rosen Cancer Awareness Fund. "I want this to be a legacy. I want it to be a legacy that lives on to help others and something that we can be proud of at Worcester State," he said. "I need your help. We need each other. It's not about me. It's about the next person. We can help save someone's life or make a difference in their life or comfort them as my family has done for me."

> **"One of the best things about serving as president of Worcester State is getting to know alums like Gregg Rosen. He grew up, in his own words, 'a middle-class kid,' someone who duct taped his baseball bat together when it cracked."**
>
> —Barry Maloney, Worcester State President

ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Gregg and Pam Rosen with their friends Resa and Ed Sherr, who helped plan the event. Ed is a member of the Worcester State Foundation Board.

LEFT: Gregg Rosen speaks at the event, held at the AC Marriott Hotel. All 200 guests managed to keep the celebration a surprise.

FROM LEFT: Maroua Rahaoui '24, Tiernan O'Neal '25, and Professor Tona Hangen in the Museum of Worcester's library, where they spent the summer poring over archival treasures.

From Old Case Files, New Histories Emerge

A history professor and two English majors spent the summer uncovering the early 20th century experiences of everyday Worcester residents.

By Rebecca Cross | **PHOTOS BY NANCY SHEEHAN**

Inside the library of the Museum of Worcester, Professor of History Tona Hangen carefully retrieves a seemingly ordinary folder—one that holds a trove of historical treasures. It is part of an extensive collection of 3,800 case files documenting the lives of people aided by one of the city's most remarkable and enduring social services initiatives. Established in the 1890s, the Edward Street Temporary Home and Day Nursery provided shelter and support to low-income women and children in Worcester for more than half a century.

For 12 weeks last summer, Hangen and two students worked to preserve and digitize this collection. The work was made possible through a Summer Undergraduate Research Grant, provided through the Worcester State Foundation. These grants offer up to $1,500 in funding for faculty and $3,000 for students for 12 weeks of work.

Every time she teaches her Social History class, Hangen takes her students on a field trip to the museum (which recently changed its name from the Worcester Historical Museum) to work with this collection. Each student chooses a file—"the fatter, the better," Hangen said—and tries to write an accurate narrative of the family using only its contents.

"You have these really partial records," Hangen said. "It requires students to do their own interpreting. They like that kind of assignment, because they can't Google the answer. It requires them to do some critical thinking and even imaginative thinking."

The files span the years 1907 to 1952 and represent people who temporarily stayed in the home for either shelter or residential care, as well as children enrolled in Edward Street's day nursery. This time period, which encompasses World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic, the Great Depression, and World War II, was marked by great upheaval in the city, nation, and world. It was also a period that brought many European immigrants to the city.

As a social and cultural historian, Hangen focuses her research on "ordinary" people, those who don't leave behind autobiographies and don't appear in the news. "I have always had an interest in the everyday lives of people," said Hangen. "I guess I'm nosy. Like a lot of historians."

What makes the Edward Street collection so remarkable, Hangen said, is that it's a portrait of Worcester's poor and working class during the

Maroua Rahaoui '24 pulls out an old directory while Professor Tona Hangen and Tiernan O'Neal '25 study a book.

"There's something about history that makes the world seem both so much bigger and so much smaller at the same time."

—Maroua Rahaoui '24

> “A lot of what I do is helping students become aware of history and how they’re a part of it. It’s in their own lives. It’s in our own city. It’s on our own campus.”
>
> —Professor Tona Hangen (shown here looking over some archival files)

years in which a child welfare system developed in the state. “It gives a really interesting portrait of people we don’t usually hear from,” she said. “People who didn’t necessarily leave their own records show up in these records in a way that gives us a fascinating portrait of the city.”

A Trove of Stories—and Data

Last summer, Hangen, along with Tiernan O’Neal ’25 and Maroua Rahaoui ’24, worked steadily for an average of 20 hours a week from June through August. They spent much of that time in the museum archives. The archivist would pull a box of files, and the team of three would photograph every item inside and enter its information into a spreadsheet. It was a slow process. Each Edward Street file typically contains five or six documents, but the thickest files hold as many as 30 intake forms, letters, reports, medical and court records, and the occasional news clipping. Hangen and her students photographed and uploaded 5,648 documents in all.

“They did incredible work, and it was done quite quickly. I couldn’t believe it,” said Wendy Essery, the library’s archivist. The next step will be for Hangen and her students to transcribe the handwritten files, tag and categorize all the files, and ultimately develop a public, open-source, downloadable dataset of the collection. Researchers around the world will be able to access it, but since the files contain sensitive information such as Social Security numbers and medical histories, they will need to first get a log-in from the library. It’s a tricky balance, said Essery. “We’re protecting it, but we want it to be accessible, too.”

Archives like that at the Museum of Worcester preserve materials in paper, but paper is fragile. Digitization offers a more permanent way to preserve collections. Digitized copies can be made more widely accessible than paper materials and allow historians to more easily extract and aggregate data. That data aggregation—of information such as addresses, salary, ethnicity, and birthplace—gives historians a collective portrait that individual case files can’t provide. By crunching this sort of data, Hangen said, historians can raise previously unconsidered questions that might take their research in new directions.

The collection will be of value to researchers in a variety of fields, Hangen said, from public health to criminal justice to psychology.

A Human Experience Across Time

The collection was certainly of interest to the two English majors who worked with Hangen last summer.

O’Neal was born and raised in Worcester, which gave the project special significance for her. “Most of the time,” she said, “you’re learning about the people in power and the people who made incredible change on a national scale, but you’re not looking at the people walking down the street and what they’re going through and what their experience is. Something that I saw while reading these stories in the case files is that they were dealing with the same things that people today are dealing with. There are the same financial struggles or the same family struggles, but also the same funny stories. Even though it’s 100 years ago, it’s still a human experience.”

Rahaoui, who has lived in Worcester since she was 5, became fascinated with the stories contained in the files. “There’s something about history that makes the world seem both so much bigger and so much smaller at the same time,” she said. “Bigger in that there are so many places we don’t know about, cultures and languages and stories that have been forgotten to time. But also smaller in that we’re all human and our stories are all interconnected and interwoven. There’s a special kind of beauty in that.”

The students’ perspectives as English majors and the questions they asked “expanded the work in really interesting ways,” Hangen said. “I find that kind of interdisciplinary collaboration really interesting. That’s one of the reasons I work at Worcester State: We do work across those disciplinary boundaries in ways that, as an educator and as a scholar, I find exciting.”

Today, the former Edward Street Temporary Home and Day Nursery houses the Rainbow Child Development Center, which provides childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs for children ages 6 weeks to 13 years.

“The women who founded this building were empowering other women to succeed and believe in themselves and gain economic self-sufficiency,” said Nancy Thibault, the center’s strategic communication and development manager. “We continue the spirit of what this building was all about. The women who started this would be very pleased. We have to be empathetic and help folks. That’s what Worcester’s all about.”

“History is present in everything around us,” said Hangen. “Everything has a history, and history informs everything, whether you’re aware of it or not. A lot of what I do is helping students become aware of history and how they’re a part of it. It’s in their own lives. It’s in our own city. It’s on our own campus. It’s absolutely essential. If we lose our sense of the past, then we have a really impoverished society.”

And now, the museum is looking ahead to future collaborations with Worcester State.

“In 2019, we got a similar collection, but with case files of elderly people,” Essery said. “Tona’s already eyeing it.”

Celia Johnston Blue '00 is president and CEO of the Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition.

Leading with Purpose

Celia Johnston Blue '00 is creating lasting change through public service, mentorship, and advocacy. **By Alyssa Haywoode** | **PHOTO BY GEORGE ANNAN '21**

Celia Johnston Blue '00 loves leadership.

"I love developing people and watching them go on to higher levels," Blue said, "because as a leader, that's what you want your folks to do."

There is in her conception of leadership an interplay of lifting people and being lifted by them. There are the inspiring examples she sees in other leaders. And there are the challenges of gaining new skills to be able to take on new challenges. In this light, even hostility from others becomes a foundation for appreciating kindness.

So when Blue recalls emigrating from Jamaica to the United States at age 11, she remembers it as a time of learning about racism, of students calling her names and telling her to go back to her own country.

"But the light of that experience is that I had teachers who said, *No, we're not standing for that in our classrooms*. And there were other classmates who wanted to know me. And I feel very blessed because my cousins, who also came to

the United States, didn't have teachers who stood up for them and weren't able to make friends as easily.

"I feel very blessed that I got to learn from seeing both sides," Blue said. "And that's the thing about being a Black woman, being a woman of color, is we start navigating the intersectionality of race and gender at a very early age."

In high school, Blue took on more leadership roles, serving as co-captain of the softball team and president of her senior class. She went to other colleges before landing at Worcester State University, which felt, finally, like home. At Worcester State, she was a nontraditional student, attending school and working full time.

"I had a wonderful experience," Blue said of her time at the university. "I met great professors along the way who were willing to help. They wanted you to be successful. They really wanted you to excel."

During her college years, Blue was working in the financial services industry as a manager at Plymouth Rock Assurance Corp. She had considered becoming an attorney, but then she decided she would rather hire the attorneys. She was also considering running a school and teaching.

"In that role at Plymouth Rock, I had a wonderful mentor, my boss. Shortly after I started, he said, 'You're natural for this stuff. Did you say you want to run a school?'"

Blue explained to her boss that she wanted to build a family and have professional flexibility, so, yes, education seemed like a good fit.

"And I remember him saying, 'I think this is a better fit for you. Maybe you should think about teaching at some point. But I really want you to think about it.' So I gave it some thought, and I began to lead in that role, and I realized that this was going to be the right track for me."

Blue kept working and earned her M.B.A. at Anna Maria College. She was indeed on the right track, right up until she wasn't.

"I changed," she said. "I wanted to be in a position where I could do more for the residents and citizens of the Commonwealth. And the way to do that was through public service."

Blue was inspired by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick who, in 2007, became the second African American in the United States elected as a governor. A mentor introduced Blue to Patrick, and that led to her first job in the public sector as a commissioner of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission. It was a leadership challenge Blue loved. The commission already had aeronautical expertise. What Blue brought to the job were leadership and management skills. She balanced local needs and federal laws, pressing to change outdated rules and regulations. One key decision was an expansion of the runway at Worcester Regional Airport that allowed for more commercial flights.

> **"I wanted to be in a position where I could do more for the residents and citizens of the Commonwealth. And the way to do that was through public service."** —Celia Johnston Blue '00

Fueled by her commitment to public service, Blue went to the Registry of Motor Vehicles and eventually became Massachusetts' first African American registrar of motor vehicles. She made history—and she worked hard to make the sometimes onerous process easier for people applying for a driver's license. Blue also worked in Rhode Island in the state's Departments of Transportation and Human Services.

Once again, she found herself wanting to do more for others—and for herself. Years earlier, she'd had a vision of creating an organization for women of color. Now, she shared the idea with mentors and a close friend. That led to an invitation to join Brenda Jenkins at a networking breakfast she was hosting for women of color in Worcester.

"I went," Blue said, "and it was one of the best decisions I've ever made."

Blue and Jenkins were part of a group of 13 women who founded the Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition (MAWOCC), an organization "dedicated to eradicating the racial inequities among women of color created by structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized racism."

The organization started in 2015 and publicly launched in 2016, and two of Blue's mentors—Mary Fernandes and the late Mukiya Baker-Gomez, who had both held numerous leadership positions in Massachusetts state government—were founding members.

"They were my angels. I'd met them years earlier in state government, and they took me under their wings. I have had a lot of angels who have helped me navigate professional spaces as 'a first,'" Blue said, thinking back on the challenges and successes of her career as a Black woman in largely male spaces.

Currently the president and CEO of MAWOCC, Blue is proud of the organization's programs. One example is the Intergenerational Leadership Academy. The academy enrolls women in a 12-week program that includes training on mentoring. The women then become mentors for high-school age girls who are enrolled in a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) program.

"We also weave in a holistic component. So there's a self-care component. We share tips on navigating the world, because we know that girls can start feeling oppressed when they are young. That's real for us. We also include civic engagement, because we want them to start being involved in their communities early and begin voting as soon as they are eligible," Blue said.

For Blue, developing leaders is inclusive work.

"We have a community of people who are very supportive of our organization, who have helped us to get where we are today, and that's important. We knew we didn't want to do this work alone," Blue explained. Among MAWOCC's many supporters is the Esler Family Foundation, MAWOCC's largest private donor.

Blue also pointed to Worcester State President Barry M. Maloney.

"He's been very, very supportive of MAWOCC, making introductions and connecting us to people on his team," she said. "MAWOCC has worked with Worcester State on civic engagement projects and community projects. The president has also attended our annual meetings. And it's great because, as an alumna, it's wonderful to be able to be a partner and give back."

What's next? Blue continues to hone her leadership skills and plans to complete her Ph.D. She's looking forward to the next 10 years of MAWOCC. She has a vision of working with women and girls globally.

There are always more leadership opportunities to lift people up, and to be lifted by the power of doing this work.

Assistant Professor of Astronomy Andrew Burkhardt studies organic molecules in the cold, dark regions of space where new stars form.

Photo by George Annan '21

A COSMIC RECIPE FOR LIFE'S ORIGINS

How do solar systems begin? How does life begin? Worcester State Professor Andrew Burkhardt tuned into radio signals from space to bring us enticingly closer to the answers. By Nancy Shechan

In the vast expanse of the universe,

where stars are born and planets take shape, a class of molecules known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons is playing a crucial role in unraveling the mysteries of cosmic chemistry and the origins of life on Earth.

Andrew Burkhardt, assistant professor of astronomy at Worcester State, along with researchers from MIT and other universities, have made a major discovery of complex aromatic molecules, including the stable four-ring molecule cyanopyrene, in the Taurus molecular cloud, located 430 light years from Earth.

The groundbreaking discovery represents a significant leap forward in understanding the size and complexity of organic molecules detected in the cold, dark regions of space where new stars form. The research team's findings were recently published in *Science*, one of the world's most prestigious science journals, and *Nature Astronomy*, which publishes top-tier research in the field.

Carbon is a fundamental building block for creating the molecules that make up living things, like plants and animals. Detecting large, carbon-rich molecules such as cyanopyrene in space helps scientists understand how the building blocks of life form, Burkhardt said.

The scientists studied the Taurus molecular cloud because it is similar to the types of clouds from which solar systems form, as ours did billions of years ago. As Burkhardt explains, finding polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in space provides evidence for the presence of the "best primordial soup" for the origins of life. The greater the complexity of molecules detected, the more optimistic scientists can be about the chances of life forming from these building blocks.

The discovery of cyanopyrene in this cold, dark Taurus cloud of gas and dust provides clues about how the chemical building blocks for planets and life may have formed in our own solar system, he said.

"This discovery gives us insights into the early stages of solar system and planet formation and how the materials that make up planets like Earth may have originated from ancient interstellar clouds," Burkhardt said. "Ultimately, finding these large carbon molecules in space brings us closer to unraveling the mysteries of how planets and even life can form in the universe."

The cyanopyrene molecule is a type of PAH. In this context, it offers insights into the distribution of carbon throughout the universe, Burkhardt said. Specifically, the discovery suggests that much of the carbon in our solar system may have originated from ancient interstellar clouds, providing crucial clues about the chemical building blocks of planets and life.

An artist's impression of the four-ring molecule cyanopyrene

NSF/NSF NRAO/AUI/S.Dagnello

"What we've found is that these PAHs, which are essentially large aromatic molecules, are not just present in space but are becoming increasingly complex," Burkhardt said. Before he and his colleagues identified the four-ring molecule, no scientist had ever detected such a large PAH in space.

Aromatic Clues in Space

The discovery of this four-ring cyanopyrene molecule is a significant milestone in astrochemistry. To start, it pushes the boundaries of what we thought was possible in the harsh conditions of space. Perhaps even more importantly, it provides crucial insights into the formation and evolution of these complex organic compounds.

PAHs such as cyanopyrene are important because they appear to be ubiquitous in the universe and may have played a role in the origins of life, and their specific molecular properties and abundances offer valuable clues about the chemistry of our early solar system and the evolution of complex organic molecules in space.

"The fact that we're finding these larger and more intricate PAHs is really exciting," Burkhardt said. "It suggests that the chemistry in these cold, dark molecular clouds is much more robust than we previously believed. And it raises the tantalizing possibility that the building blocks for life may be more abundant than we ever imagined."

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of PAHs in the cosmic story, he said. These molecules are believed to be the precursors to even more complex organic compounds, such as amino acids and nucleic acids—the fundamental building blocks of life as we know it.

"When we look at the composition of comets and asteroids, we see clear evidence of these aromatic molecules," Burkhardt explained. "And when we analyze the chemistry of these objects, we find the same kinds of organic compounds that are essential for life on Earth. It's as if the universe is providing us with a cosmic recipe for the origins of life."

In chemistry, *aromatic* describes a molecule that contains one or more ring-like arrangements of carbon atoms with a specific electronic structure that confers stability. The term *aromatic* comes from the fact that many of the first discovered of these compounds had distinctive smells. However, the term now refers to structural characteristics, not scents.

The discovery of the four-ring molecule is just one of the groundbreaking findings that have emerged from the research team. In 2018, they reported the detection of the first-ever aromatic molecule found in the interstellar medium using radio astronomy, a milestone that paved the way for the current study.

"What's really exciting is that we're not just finding these molecules, but we're also starting to understand how they form and evolve," Burkhardt said. "By studying the relative abundances of different PAHs, we can piece together a picture of the chemical processes that are taking place in these extremely cold clouds—processes that may have played a crucial role in the formation of our own solar system and the emergence of life on Earth."

Burkhardt said that, as scientists better understand how aromatic molecules form and evolve, they gain insights into the early stages of planet formation. Knowing where the "Lego pieces" that build planets come from can help scientists understand the right environments for planets like Earth to form, he said.

The Largest Steerable Telescope

For the study, the researchers used the Green Bank Telescope in West Virginia, which can detect faint radio signals given off by molecules in space. The telescope, which measures 110 meters across, is the largest steerable object employed on land.

"The only things bigger that humans can steer are aircraft carriers and oil tankers," Burkhardt said. The massive dish on the Green Bank Telescope acts as a giant antenna, collecting even very weak signals from molecules in other parts of our galaxy—and even in other galaxies. The larger the telescope, the fainter the signals it can detect.

> "It's a reminder that we're all connected, that we're all made of stardust, and that the chemistry of the universe is inextricably linked to the chemistry of life." —Andrew Burkhardt

Because their previous findings were so significant, the team was able to get over 1,000 hours of observation time on the telescope, which is much more than the typical 10- to 50-hour slots, allowing them to examine their target source in greater depth.

For Burkhardt and his colleagues, the journey of discovery is far from over. In fact, this April they announced the first-ever detection of the *seven*-ring molecule cyanocoronene in space. The potential implications of their work are both humbling and inspiring.

"These complex organic molecules that we're finding in space are the same kinds of molecules that are essential for life on Earth," Burkhardt reflected. "It's a reminder that we're all connected, that we're all made of stardust, and that the chemistry of the universe is inextricably linked to the chemistry of life. And that's a truly remarkable thing to ponder."

Manny Ramirez '24, M.S. '26, at left, interviews Paul Zalauskas '25.

Our Resident Influencer

Manny Ramirez '24, M.S.'26, discovered his creative career path while getting a taste of social media stardom. **Story and Photos By Nancy Sheehan**

Manny Ramirez '24, M.S. '26, is an Instagram celebrity on campus thanks to his popular Mic'd Up Mondays video series. What started as a simple undergraduate internship project in Student Affairs turned into a budding viral sensation that showcases Ramirez's easygoing charisma and natural ability to connect with fellow students.

Ramirez is a first-generation college student who, with the support of the Worcester State community, learned to navigate the challenges of higher education and emerged as a campus leader, graduating with a bachelor's in business administration, management, and operations. Now a graduate assistant in the Office of Inclusive Excellence and Belonging,

Ramirez is using his platform to uplift his fellow students.

Mic'd Up Mondays appears at instagram.com/wsureslife and features Ramirez roaming campus with a microphone, asking students about everything from pop culture trivia to rhyming challenges. Students who participate in the video interviews have the chance to win dining dollars. Ramirez exudes a warm personality and genuine interest in connecting with others, making the series a must-watch for students each week.

"I never expected it to go this far," Ramirez said. When he began Mic'd Up Mondays as an undergraduate, "It was more like, 'Okay, I'm here for an internship and I'm going to do this,' and then it kind of just took off." Students now recognize him as he walks around campus with his microphone. Some are more eager than others to participate, and it's always up to each student to decide whether to talk with him.

Each week revolves around a different theme. One week he might ask, "Where is the green light on a stoplight?" and "In which direction does the sun set?" while another might introduce pop culture trivia: "When did the first *High School Musical* movie premiere?" and "Which animated movie features the song 'Let It Go'?"

Ramirez has also approached students wearing headphones to ask what they're listening to. As his video production skills have grown through his hands-on experience with Mic'd Up Mondays, he's become more comfortable in front of the camera. By editing the videos each week, he's developed his creative and technical abilities, too.

Ramirez engages with students in a fun, lighthearted way that resonates with both the campus community and families of students.

"I've had people actually recognize me and come up to say they watch my videos," he said. "It just happens randomly. During the homecoming football game, a mother of a student said, 'Are you Mic'd Up Mondays? I love watching your videos every week.' It's cool to know that it goes beyond just the residents here, that parents and families also see it."

As the youngest of three and the first in his family to attend college, Ramirez carries the hopes and expectations of his family. He said he harnesses this to motivate himself and to give back to the community. As a resident assistant on campus, for example, he works to foster an inclusive space for students.

While he is the one in front of the camera, he said support of others is critical to the series' success. Kristen Nelson, director of residence life and student experience, gave Ramirez the idea of doing the series and provided him with a microphone to get started. Sarah Garabedian, a graduate assistant on the residence life marketing team, does the camera work while Ramirez is wielding the mic and then helps with video editing, especially when Ramirez is busy with class, soccer, and other commitments.

Now, as he pursues his master's degree in business management, Ramirez is exploring job opportunities in marketing and social media, hoping to blend his passions and capitalize on the online influence he has already built.

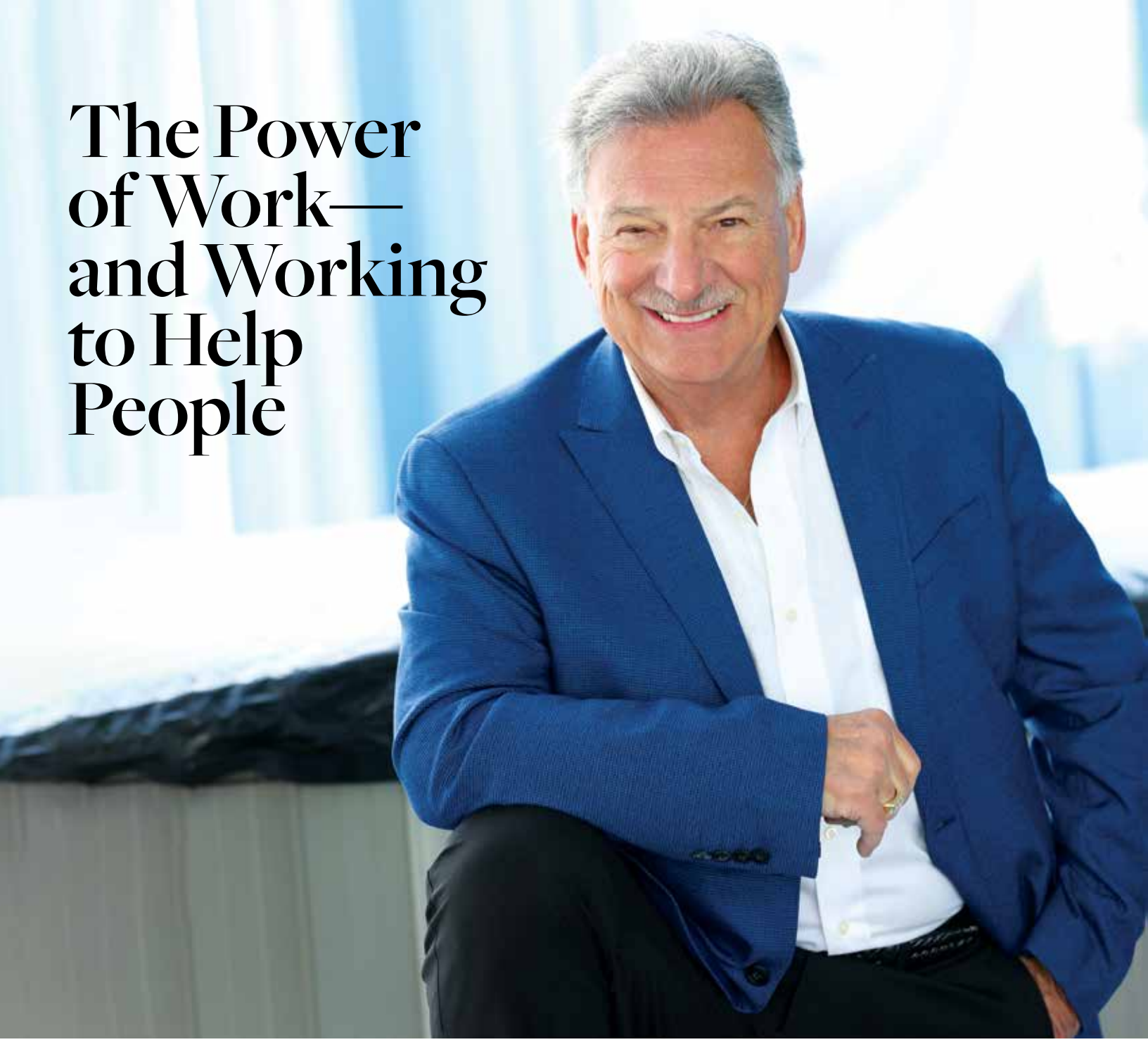
He said the video series has allowed him to learn more about himself and his capabilities, especially in terms of being comfortable speaking to a (virtual) crowd. He's also gained confidence in his creativity, and in his ability to dream up engaging content that connects with the campus community. He sees the potential to someday use his video production skills to benefit him in his future career.

"I've learned a lot about how to create interesting content and connect with people through Mic'd Up Mondays," Ramirez said. "It's allowed me to develop my creativity and people skills, and it would be great if maybe that could translate to a career in marketing or social media someday."

"I never expected it to go this far. It was more like, 'Okay, I'm here for an internship.'"

—Manny Ramirez '24, M.S. '26

The Power of Work—and Working to Help People



Ted Hebert '74 started as a gopher at a swimming pool company at age 14. Today, he owns his own pool company and is a respected community philanthropist. **By Alyssa Haywoode** | PHOTO BY JOHN LENIS

Ted Hebert '74 is made of stories.

There was the time he had the jitters during a hot air balloon ride and couldn't find the ring he was sure he had. Running out of flight time, he finally found the ring, mustered his courage, and proposed to his girlfriend, Barbara. There was the priest he met in Mexico who turned out to be a long-lost relative. There was the time, decades ago, when his mother said she wouldn't be able to spend much on Christmas, and then she turned around and gave money to someone asking for a donation. "There are other people," Hebert recalls her saying, "who need money more than we do."

And then there's the professional story that

Ted Hebert '74 lives a life full of hard work, service, and stories.

starts with 14-year-old Hebert getting a job as a gofer at a swimming pool company and slowly learning the business. In the middle of this story, Hebert is a kid who's worried about the world's tolerance for him. He didn't have a lot of money, and he had a speech disability.

"I always had dreams," Hebert said, recalling his childhood, "but when you stutter, and you can't talk right, when you're scared and insecure ..." Then it seems like dreams are all you have.

And while Cinderella had a fairy godmother, the magic that made all the difference for Hebert was working. He delivered newspapers. He washed neighbors' cars. He mowed lawns and shoveled driveways. At a local diner, he washed dishes and baked muffins. He learned to install pools and earned money doing this work. He saved up $1,600 to buy the car he wanted, a Mustang. But the real payoff was that work was where he could see and feel his own value.

"Work," Hebert said, "is health." It's an affinity that runs in the family. During the 1950s, Hebert had seen his mother work two jobs.

Hebert wanted to be a doctor. He started out at Holyoke Community College and Springfield Technical Community College before transferring to Worcester State University to take pre-med courses. Having access to a public university was crucial, Hebert said, because even as hard as he was working, he couldn't have earned enough to pay a private college's tuition. Worcester State offered him strong professors who provided the flexibility Hebert needed to keep installing pools on the weekend.

Add up Hebert's education and hard work, mix in the connections he made along the way, stir in the fact that he grew out of his stutter, and the result was a young man with a big personality and a swimming pool's worth of empathy for other people.

During his final year in college, Hebert applied to 15 medical schools. He was accepted by only one: the University of Southern California. He'd saved $10,000 to pay for the education, but he was scared of leaving the life he'd built. Then, six days before he was supposed to fly to California, he got a phone call with bad news. His mother had been getting groceries at Stop & Shop when she'd had a mild aneurysm.

"My mom was home the next day. I said, 'You know what, I can't go, I can't.' So I got a hardship leave for a year, and I never went to medical school."

Instead, Hebert kept living a life full of stories. He traveled, learned to ski, played hockey, kept installing pools, ventured into commercial real estate, and got involved with car racing. "I was even in a play," he said. "Thirty-six shows of *The Graduate*. Hardest thing I ever did in my life."

On the professional front, he committed to pools, launching Teddy Bear Pools & Spas in 1975 in his parents' carport in East Springfield, Mass. The name was his mother's idea: She said *Ted Hebert*, pronounced as it would be in French (Hebert's father's family is French Canadian), sounded like *teddy bear*. Today, Teddy Bear Pools has a bigger home—and a reputation that attracts customers from Western Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont.

> **"I always tell people the most important thing is your happiness—and doing something to make the world better."**
>
> —Ted Hebert '74

"The blessing of it all is that by keeping my business alive, I've been able to accumulate money and give back to my family—who are my employees—by giving them good jobs."

But that's an understatement: He and Barbara, his wife, who said yes to his proposal on that hot air balloon ride, are also busy giving back to their community. And when he tells stories about philanthropy, the ending is mostly the same: Helping is a great way to connect with people, and connecting with people is the best reward.

Take the story about how the Heberts supported Camp Words Unspoken, a camp in Pittsfield, Mass., for kids who stutter. That was personal. Both Hebert and his wife had stuttered when they were young. So they visited the camp and met the students, then Hebert got up to deliver a speech. He told the kids about his childhood: his stuttering, his low self-esteem, how he didn't feel good enough. He told them that visiting the camp now made him feel like he was home.

The unexpected happy ending: "Somehow or another, I almost started bawling. I got my wife to speak," Hebert said. "And I told the kids that Barbara would never speak publicly, that her words were unspoken. But she spoke, and I was totally proud of her."

The Heberts have also sponsored golf tournaments and sports teams. They are involved with Rotary International. They have supported the Make-a-Wish Foundation; the Chicopee, Ludlow, and West Springfield, Mass., Boys and Girls Clubs; and Junior Achievement of Western Massachusetts. And Hebert's board service includes being a trustee on the board of Holyoke Community College.

"We love animals, so we sponsor the Second Chance shelter," Hebert added. "They run clinics for people who can't afford to pay for things like rabies shots. We've supported a couple of clinics." The Heberts have also donated to the Thomas J. O'Connor Animal Control and Adoption Center and to the Zoo in Forest Park, both in Springfield.

In 2022, Roca, a violence intervention and behavioral health program for young people in Chelsea, Mass., named Hebert one of its Difference Makers. The award brought up old feelings of not being worthy enough. But he accepted the award, went to the event, and did what he loves: forged connections with people, in this case Stefan Davis, CEO of I Found Light Against All Odds, an organization that supports at-risk youth—and that Hebert now supports.

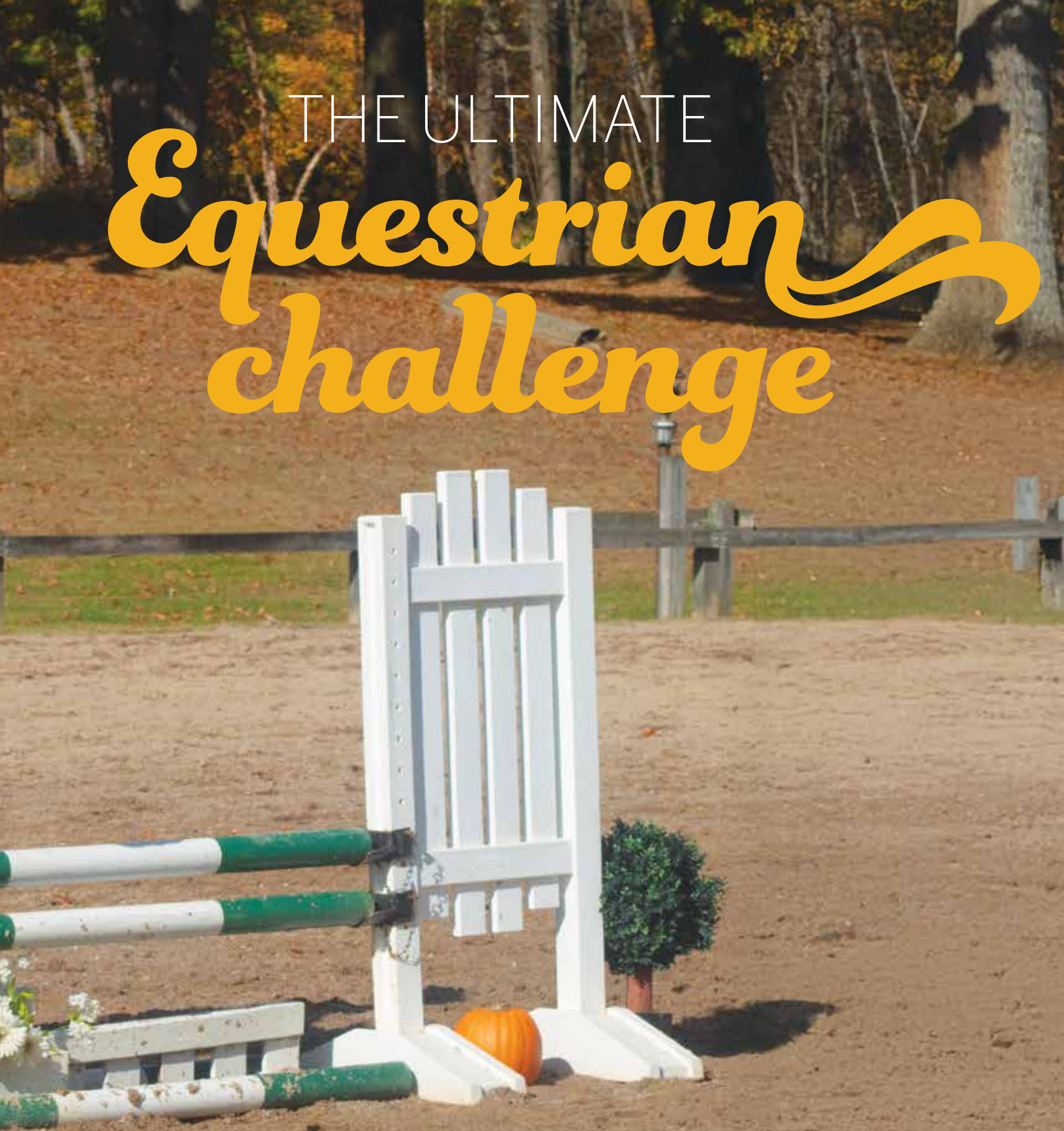
Hebert is also a history buff and a local cheerleader who wants Western Massachusetts and its residents to be better known, so he tells stories about how George Washington made the Springfield Armory the nation's first national armory. Ask him why history is so important, and he says:

"As human beings, if we look back at what others did—or did not do—we can make it a better world. But somehow or another, people think that this is the first time things have ever happened. If they knew history, we would not be making the same mistakes day in and day out. We're making the same mistakes, but people don't want to be bothered with the past. History is so important to human fundamentals."

What advice does he give to young people? "I always tell people the most important thing is your happiness—and doing something to make the world better."

Emmy Forde '28 and Louise make a jump at an October meet.

THE ULTIMATE Equestrian challenge



Members of the Worcester State equestrian team compete on new horses at every event. In the process, they learn to trust and adapt—and to communicate across species. By Rebecca Cross | PHOTOS BY ELLEN PECHINSKY '27

FROM LEFT: Julia Haché '26, Maddi Sheppard '26, Luna Hubbell '28, Coach Courtney Germain '18, Emmy Forde '28, and Ellen Pechinsky '27 show off their ribbons.

COMPARED TO EACH OF THE OTHER 23 VARSITY AND CLUB SPORTS AT WORCESTER State, the equestrian team is an entirely different animal.

In those other sports, athletes test their skills against individuals or work as a team in coordination against another team. Horseback riding tests the communication and coordination not among people but between species: a human rider and a half-ton animal that is almost pure muscle.

"The relationship between horses and humans is amazing," said the team's coach, Courtney Germain '18. "Horses are a thousand pounds and have minds of their own. It's amazing they do the jobs they do, because really they don't have to."

For all their size, horses look to humans for emotional cues and guidance. "Horses pick up on your emotions," said Germain. "I feel like people think you're just sitting up there doing nothing. Like they don't think it's a real sport, but jumping, stuff like that, you're guiding the horse every step. You're guiding the horse off the ground."

Germain started riding at age 12 and got her first horse, a gelding named Sam, when she was 14. She graduated from Worcester State with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice but chose to work full time with horses because she loves them so much. "To me, horses are like big dogs," she said. "A lot of people are scared of them, but they're very gentle."

The eight members of the Worcester State Equestrian Team have weekly lessons with Germain at Windstar Farm in Sterling, Mass. Some members have been riding for years. Others are beginners. They all get personalized instruction and riding experience on each of the farm's seven lesson horses.

Four team members compete in shows run by the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA), founded in 1967. Its mission is to provide equestrian competition for all college and university students regardless of riding level, gender, race, sexual orientation, or financial status. Today, with the costs of owning and competing with a horse easily reaching $15,000 per year, the sport is out of reach for many. IHSA levels the playing field by requiring host colleges to provide tack and horses, which are assigned to riders by drawing lots.

Mastering Any Horse: The Core Skill of IHSA Competition

For a rider, competing through IHSA is far cheaper than owning your own horse. In addition, the way IHSA competitions are structured and judged creates a more level playing field. "When you're competing in the regular horse world, a person could be winning because they have the most expensive horse in the class," Germain said. "With IHSA, it comes down to how well you ride, not how expensive your horse is."

"The whole point of competing in IHSA is to be able to ride any horse that you sit on," said co-captain Ellen Pechinsky '27. Pechinsky

is studying nursing at Worcester State and has been riding since she was 6 years old. She likes that IHSA competition teaches riders to closely observe and flexibly work with their assigned horse. "The judges are very understanding that a horse might do something the rider isn't always prepared for," said Pechinsky, "but they're looking for how you respond to the horse, how we appear and act."

For co-captain and business major Julia Haché '26, who started riding at age 5 to build up leg muscles affected by cerebral palsy, being assigned random horses "really gives you an opportunity to showcase your skills as a rider."

Germain prepares team members for competitions by having them ride many different horses at Windstar. "Riding all these different horses makes you a better rider," she said. "You learn something from every horse you ride."

Pechinsky and Haché have a few favorites at Windstar—although they're quick to note that they love them all. Pechinsky's favorites are Alfie and Autumn. "Both are wildly different," she said. "Alfie is a good, healthy challenge for me, and Autumn is a sweet little mare who tries her hardest for you."

Haché's favorites are Ranger, "a bundle of joy," and Doodles, a 31-year-old kids' lesson pony with a sassy side.

The Rewards of Riding: Mental, Physical, and Emotional

Just like humans, each horse has a distinct personality. For a rider, learning to read that personality quickly and adapt in response is part of what makes IHSA competitions so, well, competitive.

Some horses are sensitive, some are lazy, some need a firm hand, some need a soft hand. Some have longer strides, and all have quirks. ISHA judges evaluate riders partly on how well they adapt to an unfamiliar horse.

For safety, professionals carefully evaluate each rider's ability so they are matched with an appropriate horse. All riders wear helmets, and many wear air vests to protect their chests. EMTs attend every show.

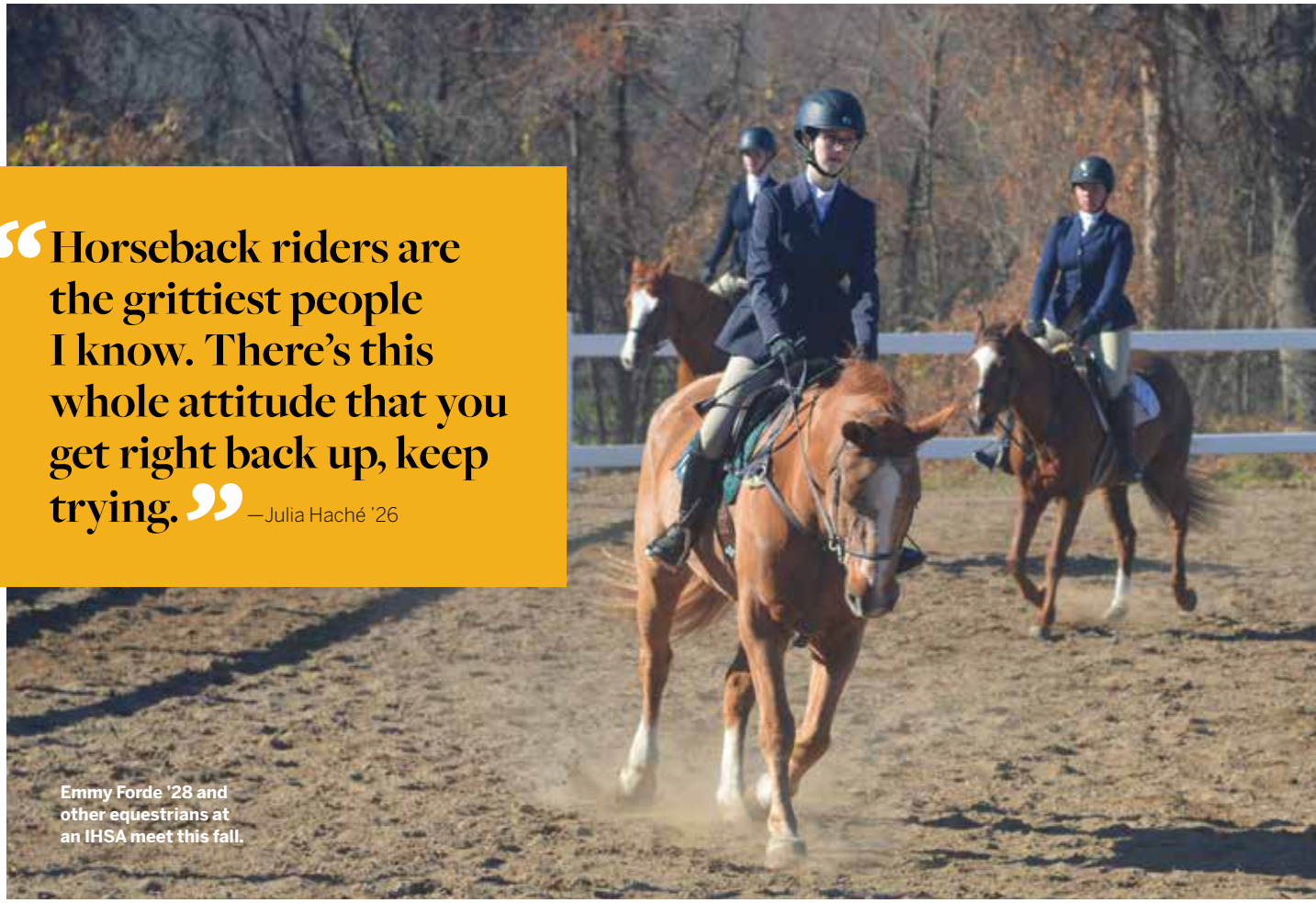
"Horseback riders are the grittiest people I know," said Haché. "There's this whole attitude that you get right back up, keep trying." Last summer, she was jumping a pony that had a short neck. "I kept getting nervous I would just go right over her. Courtney said, 'Just sit back and cement yourself in the saddle.' It's about getting out of your head and trusting the horse you're on, trusting yourself, and trusting your coach."

The team is always recruiting, and when the co-captains talk to potential new members, they tout both the physical benefits and the emotional ones.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Pechinsky loved to go out and ride. "It was a tough time for me," she said. "It was important for me to get out of the house, to focus on something other than myself and how I was feeling."

"Life is hard, let's be honest," added Haché. "Being on a horse takes you away from all the stuff going on in your life. All your stress, all your worry is completely gone, and you're just in the moment, riding a horse."

> "Horseback riders are the grittiest people I know. There's this whole attitude that you get right back up, keep trying." —Julia Haché '26



Emmy Forde '28 and other equestrians at an IHSA meet this fall.

Our Place.
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The Power of the Student Press

From mustache bans to Fleetwood Mac, newly digitized newspapers shed light on Worcester State across generations. **By Natalie Boutiette '25**

For a brief time in the 1960s, mustaches were banned at Worcester State. In 1970, a little-known band called Fleetwood Mac performed in Sullivan Auditorium.

Both of these details are gleaned from the new digitization of Worcester State's student-led newspapers. As the university marks its 150th anniversary this year, this newspaper archive is available to all at libguides.worcester.edu/archives/newspapers. Led by university archivist Ross Griffiths, the digitization project was made possible by Worcester State's membership in Digital Commonwealth, a nonprofit managed by the Boston Public Library.

Newspapers exist to inform audiences, and, in the process, they create community and a collective memory. They also preserve history. Founded in 1874 as a commuter school, Worcester State at first struggled to foster a sense of community, Griffiths said. Starting in 1942, the first student-led newspaper, *The Acorn*, became a resource for students to learn about upcoming club and organization happenings. *The Acorn*, in other words, helped campus life emerge at Worcester State.

The Acorn and its successor publications also offered professional experience and bonding opportunities as student journalists raced to meet deadlines in the newsroom. "It was as serious a newspaper as the *Telegram & Gazette*, with students tracking down sources and meeting tight deadlines," Griffiths said.

Today, the papers offer a retrospective look at student life. For example, the mustaches: They were banned because the administration was worried about Worcester State being associated with hippies. And the Fleetwood Mac performance? The paper reported that the 1970 Winter Carnival would feature Fleetwood Mac, Butterfield Blues Band, and Mountain, noting that "Butterfield is the better known of the

Voices Across the Decades

1942

First Issue of *The Acorn*
The staff held a contest to name the newspaper and chose *The Acorn*. Its tagline: "Big oaks from little acorns grow."

1952

Predicting the Year 2000
A (presumably) satirical article anticipated cars that go 1,000 years on a "single charge of atomic energy" and "nutritional cigarettes" to replace meals.

1961

Student Illustration: A Ride to the Future
This issue had a front-page drawing by staff cartoonist Pat O'Grady and interviews with "married senior women."

1967

Goodbye to *The Acorn*
This edition introduced *The Student Voice*, which aimed to cover the "vast unexplored world" instead of merely looking inward.

three groups." It's an interesting reflection for today's reader: Fleetwood Mac became one of the most popular bands of the 1970s.

Browsing the digital archive, today's reader also learns about policy and cultural changes in higher education. Between 1967 and 1970, students protested for more independence on campuses nationwide. They wanted to be treated as adults. That's reflected in *The Acorn*'s 1967 name change to *The Student Voice*. "The newspaper became adversarial with the administration," said Griffiths. "Students fought to make campus more democratic."

The Student Voice had a long and successful run—through the 2012-13 academic year, when it published its last edition. A year earlier, student journalism at Worcester State had joined the digital age with the online news and literary magazine the *New Worcester Spy*.

Published for more than a decade, the *New Worcester Spy* became dormant at the end of the 2022-23 academic year. Its faculty advisor, Associate Professor of English Cleve Wiese, said, "There's always rising and falling engagement" in student groups. But in this case, the digital paper reemerged soon after as the *Wormtown Herald*, which is now thriving in its first year on campus.

Reporters from the *Wormtown Herald* took a recent field trip to meet Griffiths and explore the earlier student papers. "It was eye-opening to see the evolution of student-led publications over time," said Associate Professor of English Jamie Remillard, who, with Wiese, is faculty co-director of the *Wormtown Herald*. Seeing the old papers informed the student journalists' understanding of how the *Wormtown Herald* fits into the history of newspapers on campus. It also helped them understand how to create a publication that meets the needs of today's students.

Today, the *Wormtown Herald* publishes at wormtownherald.com and on social media. When asked about the reality of shortened attention spans among modern readers, Remillard replied, "We can't combat those challenges, but we can adapt to them. The fact we have student journalists on campus who are curious and care, and are willing to write journalism, is giving hope that students will feel compelled to read those stories despite short attention spans. Humans are social creatures who love narratives. That doesn't change if it is an Instagram post or a feature story."

The *Wormtown Herald* has provided editor in chief Dakota Gelinas '25 with a sense of community. "I feel more involved as a commuter now, being a part of the paper, than I was as a resident," she said.

While it was not a conscious choice for the start of the *Wormtown Herald* to coincide with Worcester State's 150th, it's an appropriate one. The *Wormtown Herald* marks the "beginning of a really golden age of newspapers on campus," said Wiese. "It is the right time for a vibrant paper to take hold. There is a lot of energy on campus and people want to participate."

Natalie Boutiette, a student writer in the communications office, graduates this May with a business degree in marketing and a minor in writing.

1970

Fleetwood Mac Plays Campus
The band was less well known than Butterfield Blues Band, which also played the Winter Carnival that year.

1994

Farewell to Kurt Cobain
The death of Nirvana's frontman hit college campuses hard. "Kurt wrote from his heart and touched the hearts of millions," said the paper.

2009

In Full Color
The paper began printing in full color in 2009. Fittingly, this issue introduced the new visual and performing arts major.

2012

Last Digitized Edition
The archive ends with this issue, but student journalism continues. In 2024-25, the online-only *Wormtown Herald* published its first issue.

Meet the New Hall of Famers

BELOW: Worcester State inducted five former student-athletes, one coach, and the 1972 men's outdoor track and field team into the university's Athletic Hall of Fame on September 27. The individual inductees are, clockwise from top, Thomas Moore, head coach of men's basketball from 1989 to 1994; Courtney (Salisbury) Peloquin '17, M.O.T. '18, softball and women's volleyball; Jeremy Gaucher '08, football; Lindsay (DelleChiaie) Rocco '10, women's basketball; Marcus Price '15, football; and Terrence Gibson '16, men's track and field and football.

Celebrating the 1972 Men's Outdoor Track and Field Team

ABOVE: Inducted into Worcester State's Athletic Hall of Fame on September 27, the team posted a 17-1 record during the 1972 season and won the inaugural Massachusetts State College Athletic Conference Championship, scoring 89 points, taking home the top prize in five events, and establishing Massachusetts State College records in the process. Pictured at the ceremony are (left side, from top) President Barry M. Maloney (top left) and team members Paul Blaquiere, Don Hurme, Jim MacCallum, Pat Mahoney, Eric Adamson, Curt Blanchard, Ken Warchol, Ernie Dew, and Ron Wilmont, as well as (right side, from top) team members John Delaney, Don Gribbons, Keith Scott, Bill Hamilton, Dennis Mulryan, Gary Jusseaume, Kevin Campbell, Steve Widen, Rich Riley, and Bill Johnson. Not pictured are team members Mike Loosemore, Paul Ludvigson, Ken Troy, Don Bergan, and the late Bob Knox.

From 74 Points to 1,000 and Beyond

Women's basketball star Katie Hurynowicz '25 leads by example on and off the court. In January, she achieved a rare milestone. PHOTOS BY FRANK POULIN

Resilience and dedication have defined Katie Hurynowicz '25's college basketball journey. On January 13, the guard/forward achieved a rare feat, scoring her 1,000th career point during the Lancers' 58-34 victory over Mount Holyoke College.

Hurynowicz had a tough start as a collegiate athlete. With her first season cut short by COVID, she managed only 74 points. Sophomore year, she scored 255, and from there, her numbers skyrocketed: 440 as a junior and 399 as a senior, bringing her four-year total to 1,168. "She worked extremely hard to accomplish this goal," said women's basketball coach Karen Tessmer. "She is an excellent leader and sets the example for all her teammates in work ethic, commitment, loyalty, and passion."

Hurynowicz—a Communication Sciences and Disorders major whose goal is to work as a speech pathologist—spoke with us about her accomplishment.

What brought you to Worcester State, and to basketball?
When I stepped onto campus, I loved the sense of community. It made my decision so easy. My family brought me to basketball: I have three older brothers, and they all played. My dad and mom played too. I was born into it, and I fell in love with it.

Hurynowicz (Number 10) came a bit closer to 1,000 career points when she made this shot in November against Wellesley College.

This was your second time reaching 1,000 career points. The first was at Tyngsborough High School. What was the transition from high school to college basketball like for you?
My first full season—my sophomore year—was difficult. Most Division III athletes were the best in their high school and are used to playing the entire game, but then you come to college and that's how it was for everyone else on your team, too. I didn't get the playing time I thought I deserved—which, looking back, I know I didn't deserve.

Now you're one of the best in the league and a two-time MASCAC All Conference Player. How did you do it?
I listened to Coach and followed her advice, even though at times I didn't like to hear it. I put in the work in the offseason to get into college shape, so I could go up against bigger, stronger girls. And that paid off.

Can you tell us about the moment on January 13 when you got your 1,000th point?
I had come into the previous game 32 points away and scored 20 in the first half. In the locker room at halftime, Coach said, "Just so everybody knows, Katie is 12 points away." The jitters were there for sure. I ended up with 10 more that day—two short. The next game, I just let it come to me. I was relaxed. It actually happened on a free throw, which is how it happened for me in high school, too. It was a full-circle moment, and my whole family was there.

You're a leader on your team. What do you strive for in that role?
I try to lead by example, to be the teammate that I want to have. As a younger player, I always had people on the team I looked up to. I took their words and incorporated them into my game—and into my life. It's nice for me to now be a teammate someone can listen to on and off the court.

What advice do you have for next year's new players?
Push yourself and don't give up. The transition from high school to college is difficult. Some freshmen on my team right now might not play at all. They can look at me and say, "Well, Katie didn't really play either." I can give them hope that if they work hard, it does pay off.

> “I just let it come to me. I was relaxed. It actually happened on a free throw.”
>
> —Katie Hurynowicz ’25

Hurynowicz is among the best in the league.

The Alumni Association's Advisory Board awarded grants to 14 campus groups this year, including the Asian Cultural "Boba" Club. Here, the K-pop dance group Thrice performs at the club's Lunar New Year celebration.

Photo by Nancy Sheehan

Alumni Association Advisory Board Gives $10,000 to Enhance Students' Experience

Every year, the Alumni Association's Advisory Board invests in the campus community by awarding grants that bring student-driven ideas to life. This year, the board gave a total of $10,000 to 14 Worcester State University campus groups.

Among this year's recipients, the Asian Cultural "Boba" Club received an $800 grant to enhance its signature Lunar New Year celebration, pictured above. Thanks to the Advisory Board's support, the club was able to upgrade decorations, offer better prizes, and cover most food costs. The annual event—open to all students and catered by local Vietnamese restaurant Mint Kitchen and Bar—was a resounding success.

"Everyone was coming back for seconds," said executive board member Justine Mai '25. The club has seen attendance at the event grow every year, and Mai especially loves the opportunity to share her culture with fellow students.

Among the other recipients of this year's Advisory Board grants were the senior class, which received funding for the popular Party on the Eve on the day before Commencement; men's and women's track and field, to replace worn-out equipment; the university library, to provide study break treats during finals; and women's basketball, for its annual Alumni Day.

Grants from the Advisory Board helped the cheerleading team travel to Florida this spring to participate in a national tournament. It helped the Muslim Student Association host memorable Iftar dinners during Ramadan. And it helped the Student Nurses Association purchase MP3 players that simulate auditory hallucinations—a valuable learning tool for future nurses to understand mental illness.

"The university is so grateful for the Alumni Association's Advisory Board and its unwavering support for our students," said Suzanne Nebelung, associate director of alumni relations and engagement. "Through these grants, our students bring their ideas to life, enhance their educational experiences, and build lasting connections with alumni."

Alumni News in Brief

Tee Up for Worcester State

The 32nd annual Worcester State Foundation Golf Tournament will take place June 2, presented by the university's friend and longtime supporter Gene J. DeFeudis. As always, there will be simultaneous outings at Wachusett Country Club and Kettle Brook Golf Club. This year, the Wachusett event will benefit student scholarships, while Kettle Brook will support athletics. Play at Kettle Brook also continues the tradition of honoring the memory of coach and mentor George Albro '65. To register as a player or participate as a sponsor, contact *University Advancement at development@worcester.edu or 508-929-2485.*

WooGives Raises $37,270

During the WooGives campaign on February 10-11, 36 student-and department-led teams took part in a friendly fundraising competition, raising $37,270 from 644 donors. The teams that raised the most money were Women's Lacrosse, the Education Department's Kenya program, the Dance Team, and Thea's Pantry. "WooGives shows students the value of philanthropy," said Assistant Director of Development Caitlyn Costello '13, "and the value of giving to each other and to their own teams."

Family Day at the Woo Sox

Join the Alumni Association August 1 at Polar Park for a Woo Sox game and barbecue in the Shaw's Bullpen Terrace. The Woo Sox will face the Lehigh Valley IronPigs at 6:45 p.m.

Class Notes and In Memoriam

The magazine's Class Notes and In Memoriam sections are now available online only. Read them at *worcester.edu/magazine.*

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"Getting a master's degree will help set me up for success in my career." *-Alexis V., M.S. in Management*

Photo by Bethany Paradis

5 Questions for Samantha Paradis

Q+A

SAMANTHA PARADIS '20, M.S. '22, owns Sam's Stems, a floral boutique in Central Massachusetts that works with local flower farmers to source fresh, sustainable blooms and preserve their beauty, and that offers flower-arranging workshops. We caught up with Paradis to talk about her business, her time at Worcester State, and the power of flowers.

Tell us about your entrepreneurial journey.
My journey to opening Sam's Stems was guided by my appreciation of small businesses and my passion for floral design. While I built a strong foundation in the corporate world, I dreamed of becoming a florist. In 2023, I took the leap. Sam's Stems has grown into not just a floral boutique but a space for creativity, connection, and community. From designing wedding florals to leading workshops and crafting large-scale installations, I get to combine strategy with artistry every day. What I cherish most are the relationships I've built with my clients and within the local floral community.

You talk about the "transformative power of flowers in bringing communities together." How does that work?
Flowers have always played a role in human connection, from ancient rituals to modern celebrations. They mark life's most significant moments, like weddings and memorials, and serve as everyday gestures of kindness. At Sam's Stems, strangers become friends while creating arrangements together, and my collaborations with local flower farmers further strengthen connections. From ancient times to today, flowers have brought people together. That understanding drives everything I do in my business.

We know that plants talk to each other in nature. They also talk to us, don't they? What have you learned from your work about the language between flowers and people?
Flowers speak through color, scent, and symbolism. A single stem can evoke emotions, carry memories, and convey messages that words cannot. People often gravitate toward flowers that mirror their emotions, even if they don't realize it. Each floral arrangement is a way of telling a story, honoring a memory, or capturing a feeling through nature's most beautiful language.

How did your time at Worcester State inform or support your entrepreneurship and creativity?
Studying business administration and accounting provided me with a strong technical foundation. As a graduate assistant, I managed projects, collaborated with diverse teams, and adapted to different roles. All of these skills help me run my business. As the student representative on the graduate disciplinary committee, I reinforced my ability to navigate complex discussions with fairness and professionalism. And being a member of the dance team gave me a perspective on discipline, creativity, and performance that shapes my approach to floral design. Just like dance, floral artistry requires a balance of structure and spontaneity, technique and emotion. The support from faculty, peers, and mentors reinforced that business and creativity can go hand in hand.

You probably can't pick just one flower, so—favorite combination of flowers?
It is so difficult to narrow it down, but I do have a special love for lilacs and bleeding hearts. There's something about flowers that make you wait for them. They remind us to pause and appreciate the moment, and to consider how life unfolds in cycles. I also adore lavender for so many reasons, especially how it bridges fresh and dried flowers, offering beauty that lasts beyond its season.

We're Bringing Worcester State to You!

Help Us Build the Lancer Network Nationwide

» Lancer Nation is spreading across the country! The Worcester State Alumni Association was thrilled to host Regional Reconnects in Washington, D.C., and Florida this winter. Now, we're planning our next stops, and we want to visit your area.

These gatherings are a fantastic way to reconnect, network, and hear the latest updates from Worcester State—all in a fun, casual setting with fellow alumni.

We're hitting the road across New England this summer, and we're open to any location where Lancers are making their home.

If you'd like to help bring Worcester State to your region, please reach out to the alumni office at *alumni@worcester.edu* or 508-929-8141. Let's reconnect—wherever you are!

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