

# WCU MAGAZINE WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

SUMMER 2023



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## Congratulations, *Class of 2023!*

In 15 separate commencement ceremonies between Friday, May 12, and Sunday, May 14, WCU welcomed 3,319 spring graduates to the Golden Rams alumni ranks: **2,465 undergraduates and 854 graduate-level students**. This includes graduates from WCU's Philadelphia Campus, who received their degrees in two ceremonies on Saturday, May 13, at the Hilton Philadelphia at Penn's Landing.

Combined with the numbers of graduates from the University's fall commencement last December, WCU has graduated a **total of 4,657 students** (both undergraduate and graduate) for the academic year 2022-2023: 3,466 undergraduates and 1,191 graduates.

This is also the **31<sup>st</sup> year for WCU to host a Kente celebration** at which Kente cloth stoles are awarded, which affirms and celebrates the cultural identity of students who identify as Alaskan Native, Asian and Asian American, Black and African American, Caribbean American, Desi American, Latina/o/x, Native American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial.



## ON THE COVER

06  
**Sustainability:  
The Environment,  
Economy, &  
Social Equity**

On the cover:  
A group of Brandywine Project  
participants gathers at the  
Bartram Oak on the Quad.

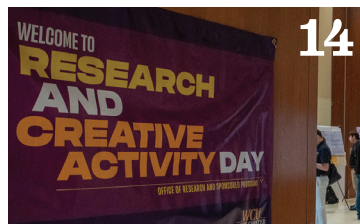


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The recent *WCU Magazine* survey indicated that many of our readers would prefer to receive the magazine in a digital format. With sustainability top of mind and the increase in printing/postage costs, University Communications and Marketing is evaluating the feasibility of printing fewer copies and requesting readers to **opt in to receive the magazine**. This would occur in the spring of 2024. Watch your Ramblings email for details and, until then, please see the back cover to change your information or unsubscribe.

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Respect the Earth. Respect all people and living creatures of the Earth. We were reminded of this meaningful counsel on Earth Day when many gathered to celebrate the on-campus dedication of Diversity Way. The air was fresh. The sky was crystal clear. The campus bloomed purple and gold all over. On what was a beautiful spring morning, those words particularly struck me; all aspects of our University's mission resonated, including our commitment to sustainable practices.

Environmental, economic and social sustainability are core principles that our community of educators applies to our teaching, research, support services, and operations. Thanks in large part to the sustainability pillar that was featured prominently in the strategic plan that we are wrapping up, the University has

made commitments to energy efficiency, carbon neutrality, zero waste practices, as well as to preparing students and staff to advocate for sustainability in all corners of the globe. Sustainability will also be an important facet in our next strategic plan.

We have been intentional about sustainability from our first AASHE Stars submission in 2017 to our investment in geo-thermal heating/cooling technology and energy efficiencies in campus buildings. The establishment of the Office of Sustainability was another critical step forward and, today, a Sustainability Council comprised of dedicated faculty, staff, and students works to enhance University efforts.

Making a difference on our planet takes all of us. Thanks to a great extent to the dedicated work of Dr. Bradley Flamm, director of the Office of Sustainability, with his team and the work of Sustainability Council Chair Dr. Aliza Richman with members of the Council, the University has most recently been selected as a 2023 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School Postsecondary Sustainability Awardee.

While we still have work to do, I am confident in the valuable work that all of us are doing together. As you read this issue of *WCU Magazine*, I hope that you, too, will agree.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Fiorentino".

Christopher M. Fiorentino  
President

**Editor and Senior Associate  
Vice President for  
Communications  
and Marketing**  
Nancy Santos Gainer

**Managing Editor**  
Loretta MacAlpine

**Design**  
WCU Graphics & Printing

**Photography**  
Erica Thompson '10

**Contributors**  
Laura Knowles Callanan  
Christine Kozsuch

**President**  
Christopher M. Fiorentino

**Vice President for University  
Affairs and Chief of Staff**  
Andrew Lehman

**Director of Alumni Engagement**  
Jenna (Cardaciotto) Birch '06

The West Chester University Magazine is published three times a year for the alumni, families, students, and friends of West Chester University. We welcome letters concerning magazine content or issues pertaining to the University. Letters must be signed and kept to one typed page. Please include address and daytime phone number.

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**Diversity Walk Dedicated to Former Senator Andy Dinniman.** Citizens, students, faculty, and staff gathered on the WCU campus in April to unveil "Diversity Walk" a popular campus thoroughfare between the Sciences & Engineering Center and The Commons (SECC) and Lawrence Hall, in honor of the impactful work that continues to be done by former State Senator Andrew Dinniman. Dinniman, who noted that he had "a mustache and long hair" when he first became part of the University community in 1971, recalled how he initially worked with faculty to create a course in human relations. Following the dedication, he opened the First Annual Community Gathering, brought to Chester County by the Dinniman Together Fund at West Chester University (WCU). The focus of the fund is to promote diversity and equity through a renewed emphasis on our common humanity.

State Representative Chris Pielli, Chester County District 156, presented a special citation to former State Senator Andrew Dinniman for his relentless work in Chester County and beyond. Pictured (L-R) West Chester University President Chris Fiorentino, former State Senator Andrew Dinniman, and State Representative Chris Pielli.







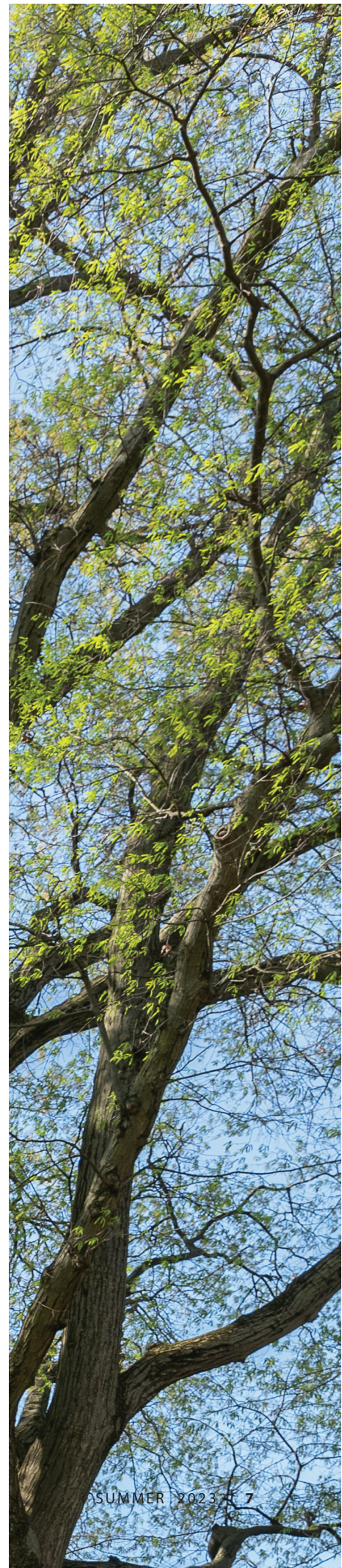
*West Chester University's  
Commitment to Sustainability:*

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**BALANCING**

Environment,  
Economy, &  
Social Equity

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## WHEN CHRISTOPHER FIORENTINO WAS NAMED WCU PRESIDENT IN 2016, ONE OF HIS EARLY ACTIONS WAS TO ESTABLISH AN OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY.

Brad Flamm joined campus in 2017 as that office's first director, highlighting the University's holistic commitment to sustainability in such areas as energy and ecological conservation, education, transportation, social justice, purchasing, and technology.

"A focus on sustainability in WCU's academics and operations supports the ecological, human, and economic health and vitality of WCU, our state, our country, and our planet," he explains. "Sustainability is about protecting our children, our grandchildren, and future generations, and being aware of the world that we will leave to them."



Working alongside the Office of Sustainability is WCU's Sustainability Council. This large, diverse group of students, faculty, staff, and community partners brings together people from all campus areas to advance a culture that thrives on the principles of sustainability.

Sustainability Council Chair and Associate Professor of Sociology Aliza Richman researches social disparities in health and wellbeing and

the influences of the environment on society. She points out that the United Nations has set forth 17 sustainable development goals that depend upon international cooperation to advance social justice, economic equity, and ecological well-being. These goals tie into WCU's initiatives as they relate to teaching sustainability across the curriculum, sourcing food locally, and prioritizing zero waste, among others.

"We all have a role to play in sustainability," says Richman. "We need to be aware that every single-use item we consume and every time we use fossil-fuel powered transportation, we are making a negative impact. Never doubt the significance of individual action to achieve the collective good. The path is steep and urgent."

Richman deployed the first-ever WCU Sustainability Census on campus last fall. With her students, she is now analyzing data that shows that the majority of those surveyed are deeply concerned about the global climate crisis and wish to do more to live sustainably.

"That's why it is so critical to model sustainability practices at WCU, so that students can take these learned behaviors into their future households, professions, and communities," says Richman.

### WCU GARDENS: A LEGACY OF SUSTAINABILITY

WCU's four organic gardens are examples of successful sustainability practices.

Geography and Planning Professor Joan Welch established the first one in 2001 adjacent

# WCU's GREEN FACTS

## WCU IS:

- A 2023 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School Postsecondary Sustainability Awardee (see news article).

- A Tree Campus Higher Education (Arbor Day Foundation).

- An accredited Level II Arboretum (ArbNet).

- Part of the Green Power Partnership (U.S. EPA).

- A member of Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) with Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) Silver status.

- A Carbon Commitment Signatory in the Climate Leadership Network.





## PHOTOS

**RIGHT:** Nur Ritter, Madeline Mulcahey, Genna Speicher, Alden Ritchey, and Danielle Scudero building the recreation trail at the GNA. **LEFT:** North Campus Garden faculty (L-R) Joan Welch, Jeanie Subach, and Ashlie Delshad.



- **LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified: The Business and Public Management Center is gold. Swope Music Building and Mitchell Hall are both silver. 25 University and the Student Recreation Center both meet LEED standards. LEED rating and certification is in process for The Sciences & Engineering Center and The Commons (SECC).**

- **Reducing energy costs and lowering carbon emissions by more than a third through our geexchange heating and cooling system — one of the largest such systems at any North American university — with almost half of our buildings online.**

- **Using solar arrays on the Student Recreation Center roof and onsite at the Office of Sustainability.**

- **Greening campus with green roofs at the FHG Library and The Sciences & Engineering Center and The Commons, with a green wall at the Student Recreation Center.**

to Merion Science Center, noting, “The organic gardens demonstrate the beauty and complexity of a functioning food-producing system.”

Students can become garden interns or volunteers, stewarding the crops, learning from faculty mentors, conducting research, and ensuring that the University’s Resource Pantry receives fresh produce.

“Our gardens provide an abundance of fresh produce including broccoli, tomatoes, kale, beans, and blueberries that go into meals available at the Resource Pantry, like smoothies and hummus,” says Associate Professor of Nutrition Jeanie Subach,.

She also uses produce from the South Campus garden in her Ram Chefs program, a culinary program for young adults with developmental disabilities.

“The gardens are illustrative of what sustainability means at WCU,” adds Flamm.

### 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE GORDON NATURAL AREA

Another living laboratory is the Robert B. Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies (GNA), one of the oldest local forest habitats, which was dedicated as a protected area in 1973. The GNA comprises approximately 126 acres mostly southeast of South Campus, serving as an outdoor classroom, research site, wildlife refuge, native plant environment, and recreational area. It is home to more than 2,000 species of living organisms.

Biology Professor Jessica Schedlbauer (former Sustainability Council chair) is leading the committee planning events for the 50th

anniversary of the GNA, which will feature a Forest Festival on Saturday, September 23.

With a stream and woodland habitat of several species of oak, tulip poplar, hickory, and other native species including insects and wildlife, the GNA provides Schedlbauer and her students the opportunity to research carbon storage by measuring living trees, leaf litter, fallen wood, and soil. Her research focuses on “ecosystems affected by human activity, and research questions are often centered around the issues of climate change, land-use change, and ecosystem management,” she explains.

“The Gordon Natural Area shows us that there are small ways to make a difference. There is so much more that needs to be done and it can only be done by collective action. For humans to persist on this planet, we can’t give up.”

“The more that people experience the natural world, the more they’ll be willing to reduce their resource consumption to help preserve nature,” adds Nur Ritter, GNA stewardship manager. He oversees ecosystem restoration in the GNA and supervises student interns and volunteers in creating and maintaining trails.

### STUDENT LEADERSHIP

GNA interns and volunteers are part of a growing network of students who are concerned about sustainability on campus and in the community. Student organizations such as Students for Sustainable Action, Veg Out, the Sustainable Fashion Club, the Food



**WE CAN BE CREATIVE IN APPLYING THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENTS, TO SHARE A MESSAGE OF ACTION AND HOPEFULNESS.**

— Brad Flamm,  
Office of Sustainability Director



**The University has earned a national honor for sustainability from the U.S. Department of Education. WCU is among the 2023 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) Postsecondary Sustainability Awardees.**

Recovery Network, and Net Impact draw students who want to make a difference.

Chief among them are Sustainability Peer Educators (SPE) in the Office of Sustainability who, as SPE Alden Ritchey notes, have “ample opportunities to work with campus partners and students who are passionate about furthering WCU’s sustainability efforts.”

Ritchey is an urban and environmental planning major with minors in sustainability and museum studies. He was involved in the Earth Day at 50 exhibit at WCU’s Museum of Anthropology and Archeology, which featured a two-story faux Tree of Life made with reclaimed materials.

Layla Malik, the Student Government Association (SGA) sustainability liaison, urges students to get involved, saying, “We have information on sustainable event planning and funding is available for green projects that students initiate.”

Finance major Josh Filer stresses that, “Ultimately, one person actually can do a lot. You are constantly voting with the purchases you make, and it does make a difference as it changes the demand in the economy, shifting production toward more sustainable goods and services.”

### **WCU’S CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN**

The University’s Climate and Sustainability Action Plan is currently being updated. With continued efforts

to develop and implement Zero Waste Campus guidelines to promote the reduction, reuse, and recycling of material and energy resources, WCU continues to approach sustainability proactively.

The education of campus continues. Sustainability Research and Practice Seminars, which were launched in 2017, are weekly Wednesday lunch-hour lectures by WCU faculty and students (and sometimes guests) that focus on sustainability research.

WCU’s Brandywine Project is named for the Brandywine Valley Watershed. These sustainability-focused workshops for students, faculty, staff, and administrators bring together individuals from across campus to integrate social, economic, and environmental facets of sustainability on both local and global levels. Participants learn about how their fields are addressing sustainability and incorporate this knowledge into their roles at WCU.

“At West Chester University, we are here to educate students by addressing pressing 21st-century challenges such as the climate crisis. We can be creative in applying the knowledge of our faculty, staff, and students, to share a message of action and hopefulness,” says Flamm. “Students’ education at WCU will prepare them for the transition to a sustainable society, whether they become accountants, artists, teachers, or scientists.” **WCU**

West Chester University was nominated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. WCU excelled in the three focus areas promoted by the ED-GRS initiative: reducing environmental impacts, improving health and wellness, and offering effective environmental and sustainability education.

Highlights of WCU’s work includes substantial reductions in carbon emissions thanks to investments in geo-exchange heating and cooling systems, energy efficiency, and alternative fuel vehicles. The University’s commitment to creating and maintaining healthy learning and working environments on campus – through wellness programs, green cleaning systems, and sustainable landscaping practices – was noted. The effectiveness of its Brandywine Project Sustainability Workshops for faculty, staff, and students in bringing environmental, social, and economic sustainability concepts into the curriculum is exemplary. **WCU**

## Senior Recognized for Entrepreneurship in Business Competitions



**With a passion for entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and sustainability, senior Hannah Karaman took top honors in two competitions hosted this spring by the University's Edwin Cottrell Entrepreneurial Leadership Center.**

In the Social Innovation Competition for WCU participants only, Karaman's Second Hand Celebrations was the overall winner.

She describes the venture as a sustainable online registry that will make it easy to give/receive sustainable gifts for important life events such as weddings and baby showers. Partnering with resale platforms like eBay and Poshmark, Second Hand Celebrations makes it convenient for clients to purchase second hand gifts. It will be the only option in the market where clients can click links in a gift registry to directly purchase second hand gifts.

She identified "a major gap in the market," explaining, "There are millions of people who prefer to only buy/use second hand items. However, there are no options for them to create an online gift registry in which their guests can easily purchase second hand gifts."

Karaman already operates Retail Therapy Thrift, an Instagram account dedicated to upcycling and reselling local thrift shop finds.

**There are millions of people who prefer to only buy/use second hand items. However, there are no options for them to create an online gift registry in which their guests can easily purchase second hand gifts.**

In the Business Idea Competition, which is open to the community as well as the University, Karaman won first place in the undergraduate track with her presentation for creating a 501(c)(3) Women in Business (WIB) non-profit organization that would support WIB chapters at universities and high schools across the country.

"My entrepreneurship minor prepared me for these competitions because I was able to work through my business ideas in my classes," Karaman claims. "I had experience in my classes with creating pitch decks, and the entrepreneurship professors were very willing to help me prepare for my presentations."

Karaman is now in a full-time marketing position at LLUNA, an HR tech startup, where she had been a marketing intern. [WCU](#)



### PHOTOS



**TOP:** (standing L-R) Nicole Salapong, sustainability peer educator (SPE); Jenna Speicher, SPE program graduate assistant coordinator; Zahir Chapman, graduate assistant for social media and student engagement; Kathy Tran, SPE; Sean Donoghue-Neider, Office of Sustainability intern; Amy Maxcy, administrative assistant, Office of Sustainability; Brad Flamm, director, Office of Sustainability; Aliza Richman, chair of the Sustainability Council; (seated L-R) Christian Lindsay, graphic design intern; Alex Desjardins, Gordon Natural Area intern; Emily Miller, SPE; Alden Ritchey, SPE; Miranda Davies, Gordon Natural Area intern. Not pictured: Kathryn Krueger, Gordon Natural Area intern; Chelsea Leffler, graduate assistant for data monitoring and analysis; and Maddie Mulcahey and Danielle Scudero, SPEs. **MIDDLE:** Jessica Schedlbauer's summer class is surveying trees in the GNA for carbon storage. **BOTTOM:** WCU President Christopher Fiorentino at a campus tree planting.



UNIVERSITY NEWS

## WCU Gala Celebrates a TRIPLE RUBY ANNIVERSARY

Forty years ago, the Presidential Scholarship program was established; West Chester State College became West Chester University of Pennsylvania; and President Christopher Fiorentino began teaching at the University. Since then, the Gala has raised more than \$2.6 million dollars for WCU students through a renewable, four-year Presidential Scholarship. More than 250 guests attended the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala on Saturday, March 25, at Longwood Gardens. Kylie Funkhouser, a junior cell and molecular biology major, pre-medical student, and Presidential Scholar, spoke about the impact of donor contributions: “This scholarship made attending WCU very possible for me. I felt as if my hard work was not only recognized by the University but encouraged.”

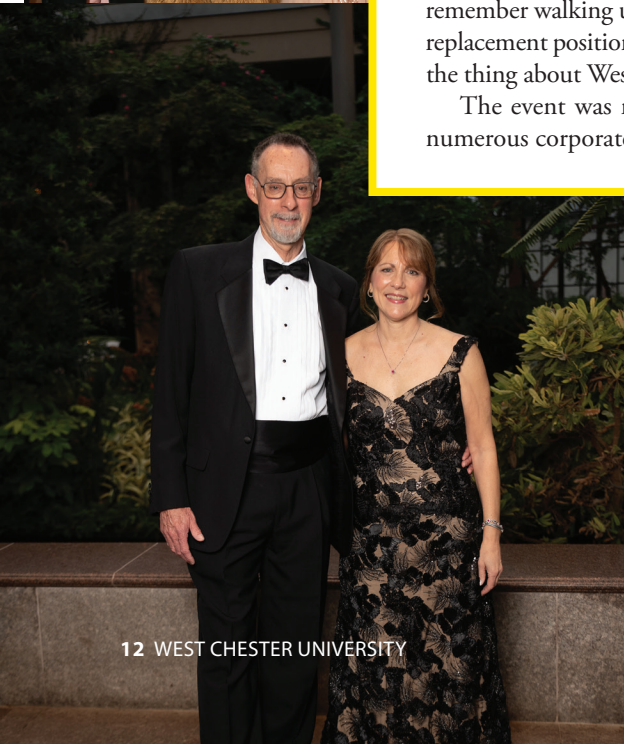
### The Gala has raised more than \$2.6 million dollars for WCU students

Funkhouser continued, “After almost three years of attending WCU, I can gratefully say that the contributions of the University’s donors, leaders, and educators have paved the way for excellence in both my own career path and in the student population as a whole.”

This year’s benefit was co-chaired by Elizabeth and Stephen Leonard ’72, M’80, both proud supporters of the scholarship, which is funded entirely by private donations.

“In the fall of 1983, we had 9,586 students enrolled and ‘Every Breath You Take’ by the Police was on the radio seemingly nonstop,” Fiorentino shared. “I can remember walking up Church Street for my interview – for a one-year sabbatical replacement position. Needless to say, I got the job. And it changed my life. That’s the thing about West Chester University: We’re in the business of changing lives.”

The event was made possible thanks to Presenting Sponsor Aramark and numerous corporate sponsors. [wcu.edu](http://wcu.edu)





Tripp Fischer

TRIPP FISCHER '96:

## A CAREER AND LIFE DEDICATED TO SUSTAINABILITY

Since graduating from West Chester University, Tripp Fischer '96 has dedicated his career to environmental sustainability. He strives to find sustainable solutions where business, technology, and the environment can all thrive.

A bachelor of science degree from WCU in earth sciences and geology and a master's degree in engineering science from Penn State have given him a perspective of not only protecting land, water, and air, but also sustaining our environmental protection in concert with economic growth.

Fischer is the vice president and chief

science officer (CSO) at Brownfield Science and Technology, Inc. (BSTI). He joined BSTI in August 2009 as a professional geologist to support the growth of the company's environmental assessment and environmental risk management services, then joined the ownership team in 2018.

Located in Cochranville, PA, BSTI is focused on assessing and protecting human health, safety, and the environment from natural and unnatural hazards. That includes chemical impacts to air, soil, and water, as well as storm water assessments, water supply issues, waste disposal, and natural resource management.

"We support commercial property transactions where chemical impacts may be encountered during due diligence, perform

forensic studies to determine sources of chemical impacts and timing, as in, 'When did it happen?,' for litigation," explains Fischer.

His role as the CSO and principal hydrogeologist is to maintain quality in the scientific services and the reporting that BSTI provides. He shares their experience and expertise with the scientific community

through global conferences, professional organizations, and committees. He also serves on the board of directors of the global standards development organization ASTM International.

As a WCU alumnus, Fischer serves on the advisory board of WCU's College of the Sciences and Mathematics.

As a donor, he is committed to the University's sustainability and looks back fondly on his four years at West Chester, which he calls "spectacular." West Chester is where he met his wife, Trish.

"In 2014, Trish and I started an endowment in memory of my college roommate, Travis Schaible, also an earth science major, who died in a tragic accident in March of that year,"

he says. "We created the P. Travis Schaible Geology Prize to award gifts to earth science majors wishing to study abroad. This year, we awarded two gifts to students studying in Iceland this summer."

As a WCU student, Fischer quite literally dug into several hands-on opportunities, working with computer technologies related to the earth sciences. "The earth sciences department provided boundless opportunities by providing excellent structured learning and encouraging self-driven curiosity to learn new things on your own."

He used satellite-based global positioning systems (GPS) to map landfills and other environmental sites in conjunction with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping software and hardware which the University invested heavily in during the early 1990s.

Fischer views WCU as being on the forefront of sustainable ideas and has been impressed by how all-encompassing it has been in involving students, ideas from professors, administration, and staff.

"The geothermal system was cutting edge at the time for a university. The speaker series this past semester [featuring Erin Brockovich] was impressive in that it showed how vast sustainability concepts are. It shows how sustainable concepts are involved in every aspect of life." WCU

**Sustainable concepts are involved in every aspect of life.**

## Expanded Research, External Grants Put WCU in a Carnegie Category with the Ivies

In April, the University's Research on Equity via the Arts in Childhood (REACH) Lab hosted its inaugural convening at Philadelphia's Settlement Music School where, for more than 15 years, WCU Psychology Professor Eleanor Brown and her students have been studying how the arts can help mitigate the effects of stress on young children.

Brown's work has been funded with multiple grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), now totaling more than \$384,700. She is one of many WCU faculty whose pursuit of knowledge and passion for teaching and research has brought increased grant funding to the University — and brought WCU into a category with the Ivy League schools, Drexel, MIT, Stanford, and others.

How? In the 2021-2022 academic year, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching revised its classifications, putting West Chester University into a category known as "R2, doctoral universities, high research activity." Carnegie classifies R2 institutions as those that had "awarded at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees during the update year [2019-2020] and had at least \$5 million in total research expenditures as reported through the National Science Foundation (NSF) Higher Education Research & Development Survey (HERD)."

Achieving R2 designation is a positive outcome of the hallmark of our faculty: the teacher-scholar model. Faculty are also responsible since they developed WCU's doctoral programs: Doctor of Clinical Psychology, Doctor of Nursing Practice, Doctor of Education in Policy, Planning, and Administration, and Doctor of Public Administration.

Cheryl Neale-McFall is WCU's associate provost for research and creative activities and a professor of counselor education. Her team in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs manages the University's research enterprise, from communicating to campus about grant opportunities and trainings



Annual Research and Creative Activity Day



Participants in the 2023 Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI)



The Spotlight on Faculty Research showcases the breadth of research faculty at WCU. This year among 20 impactful projects, Lindsey Keenan, assistant professor of sports medicine, developed an app for tracking student-athlete mental health and Laquanna Cooke, associate professor of English, was recognized for iCamp Summer Academy, which brings Philadelphia school children to campus to work on social change through digital media.



“To improve teaching, we engage in high-impact experiential research.”

— Cheryl Neale-McFall, associate provost for research and creative activities

to sponsoring faculty forums and academic seminars that cross disciplines to increasing student-faculty research opportunities.

“In just the past year (May 2022 to May 2023), external grant dollars awarded to faculty increased by 103% from \$3 million to \$6.1 million,” she reports, pointing out that the majority of WCU’s external funding has been and continues to be for programs that support undergraduate students. “To improve teaching, we engage in high-impact experiential research.”

The teacher-scholar model has been inspirational. Neale-McFall has seen an exponential increase in the number of students applying for internal research funding including the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI); Student Research and Creative Activities grants (SRCA); and West Chester’s Undergraduate Creative Activity and Research Experience Stipends (WCU-CARES). “Between May 2022 and May 2023, we saw 120% more student submissions: 53 to 117. That’s a powerful story about the growth in student interest and applications.”

This is only the third year of the WCU-CARES funding. In the first year, 8 students applied; the second year, 11 did. “This year,” she continues, “we received 47 applications. We’re intentional in how we announce

these opportunities with the Division of Student Affairs, our identity centers, and the committees of deans and department chairs.”

Faculty submissions also rose during that period: 24 out of 66 submissions (36%) for external grant funding this past year came from tenure-track faculty, while submissions for internal faculty grants (Provost’s Research Grant, Faculty Professional Development Council Grants, Sustainability Grants) saw an average increase of more than 80% (32 to 59).

WCU does several things differently from some R2 schools. Neale-McFall and her team work hands-on with faculty and students from pre-award through post-award. Also, WCU’s undergraduates are encouraged to engage in research and work with faculty.

SURI is one such opportunity. Undergraduates complete 37.5 hours a week across five weeks in early summer on a project of their own design, with a faculty mentor, and receive a University stipend to support their work. They network with the other participants through weekly research-focused activities and present their final reports at a closing event that, this year, included corporate and community supporters. Most also present their projects at the following spring Research and Creative Activities Day.

Rising senior Allison Magerr worked at Cooper Farm Cemetery (DE) for her 2023 SURI project

documenting unmarked graves at the site using ground penetrating radar (GPR) and ArcGIS under the supervision of her faculty mentor, Heather Wholey, a professor of anthropology whose other work along the Delaware Delaware Bay has been funded by National Geographic. A Russian and French dual major with minors in museum studies and anthropology, Magerr developed a comprehensive map of the cemetery to aid local community archaeologists as well as additional skills that will assist in her pursuit of a graduate degree.

Neale-McFall has also identified “a new mindset among faculty and students since our R2 reclassification. I feel there’s a renewed appreciation for the value of incorporating research into teaching and learning in the classroom.”

When the University’s R2 reclassification was announced in 2022, Executive Vice President & Provost (interim) Jeffery Osgood stated, “Faculty scholarship and program growth have the support of this entire educational community. We are especially proud of the hard work of our faculty in producing research, engaging students in that research, creating new critical-need graduate programs, and being committed to students in intentional ways that allow them to cross the finish line to receive their degrees.” **WCU**

**\$6.1M**

AWARDED EXTERNAL GRANT DOLLARS

**102%**

INCREASE IN STUDENT FUNDED  
INTERNAL GRANT SUBMISSIONS

**35%**

INCREASE IN EXTERNAL  
GRANT ACCEPTANCE RATE

**In FY 2023, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs saw an increase in faculty, staff, and student grant submissions and awards. For external grant submissions, there was a 33% increase (54 to 72) from faculty and staff PIs and a 35% increase in the external grant acceptance rate (32 to 43). The awarded external grant dollars also increased by 103% from FY 2022 (\$3M) to FY 2023 (\$6.1M). Internal grants for faculty and students also increased exponentially, with student-funded opportunities (SURI, SRCA, WCU-CARES) seeing an average increase of more than 120% in submissions numbers (53 to 117) and faculty-funded opportunities (PRG, FPDC, Sustainability grant) seeing an average increase of more than 80% (32 to 59). We also saw an increase in tenure-track faculty submitting for external grant funding this past year, accounting for 36% (24 out of 66) of submissions.**

# MICHAEL BURNS FINDS ZEN

## AS CYCLING ENTHUSIAST AND BICYCLE LENDING LIBRARY CO-FOUNDER

**W**CU Associate Professor of English Michael Burns says riding a bicycle takes him back to his childhood, growing up in Arkansas. Those memories have evolved into his advocacy for increased bicycle usage on the WCU campus.

Burns joined the WCU faculty in 2013. Along with teaching courses that include African American rhetorics and composition, he has made it his mission to foster the sustainability of bicycling.

“It relates to social justice and equity. You don’t have to own a car or waste fuel. It’s a safe way to navigate from point A to point B on your own power,” he says.

A long-time cyclist and bicycle mechanic, Burns is president of the American Bicycling Education Association (ABEA), which provides a variety of programs and resources for bicyclists, engineers, planners, law enforcement, educators, and the public. He is also one of approximately 100 certified CyclingSavvy instructors nationwide, and teaches safety classes for bicyclists beyond campus as well as on campus.

He rides his own bike for daily commuting, road riding, mountain, touring, fixed gear, and gravel events. He is a serious bicyclist:

Not long ago, he made the nearly 300-mile trek from West Chester to Pittsburgh — using back roads.

“When I am on my bike, I am in my peaceful place. I can escape from the worries of the world and just live in the moment.”

To share his passion for bicycling, Burns is a member of a team that has rolled out a bike co-op program at the University so that those without a bike could have access to alternative transportation. He worked closely with several members of the University community, including Director of the Office of Sustainability Brad Flamm, interim Associate Dean for Public Services Dierdre Childs, and Library Business and Operations Manager Cristin Ehr Gott to establish a Bicycle Lending Library (BLL).

“It’s just like checking out a book or other materials from the library, except it’s a bicycle,” says Burns.

The BLL operates from the loading dock of the Francis Harvey Green — library on West Rosedale Avenue. There are 28 Trek bicycles available in sizes XXS-XL that WCU students and employees can borrow for two-week increments or full semesters. Anyone who wants to check out a bicycle needs to fill out an application and wait

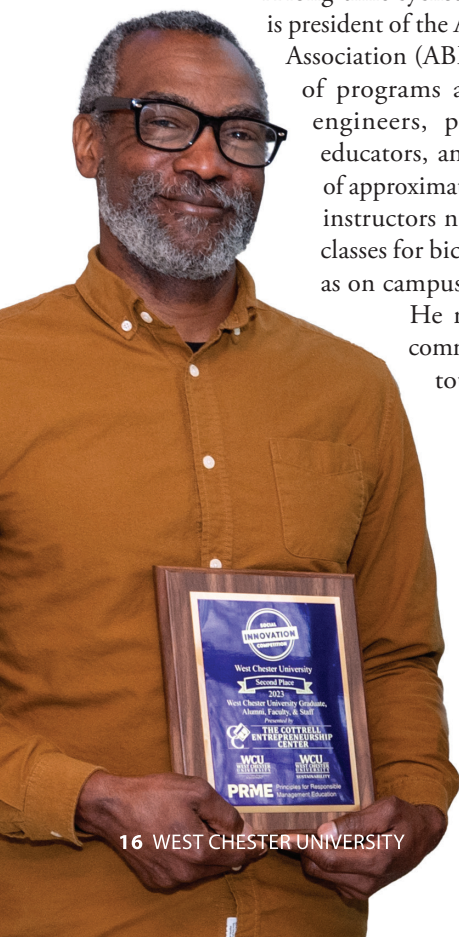
**When I am on my bike, I am in my peaceful place. I can escape from the worries of the world and just live in the moment.**

to be contacted by the library staff. After scheduling a pick-up time, riders will present their WCU ID and receive their bicycle, as well as a helmet and a combination lock. The Library Help Desk also offers pumps and tool kits that can be checked out.

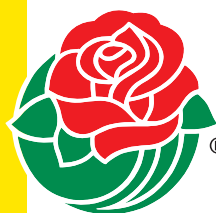
Burns offers free campus bike workshops on bike repairs, teaching the basics such as repairing a flat tire, as well as bicycle safety on and off road. Workshops are held at the library loading dock. Other campus cyclists share their knowledge and passion for cycling and bike maintenance, ensuring the sustainability of the BLL.

“It brings me back to the childhood joy of riding and tinkering with bikes,” says Burns. “It’s about freedom and promoting health and fitness, not only for the person, but for the environment.” **WCU**

Michael Burns was recognized at WCU’s 2023 Social Innovation Competition.







WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY  
**INCOMPARABLE**  
 GOLDEN RAMS MARCHING BAND  
**ROAD TO THE ROSES '24**

This January, it was announced that Incomparable Golden Rams Marching Band will again represent West Chester University and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) on the international stage when they become the first marching band within the PASSHE system to march in the iconic 135<sup>th</sup> Rose Parade in Pasadena, CA, on Monday, January 1, 2024.

In late May, the band's nearly 350 members were selected through a competitive audition process. Band members are now rallying the support of friends and family to "fund a mile" of their 2,675-mile journey to the Golden State as part of the larger "RamBand Road to the Roses '24" initiative.

"The 'fund a mile' crowdfunding effort encourages support at any level by visiting [www.wcufoundation.org/ramband](http://www.wcufoundation.org/ramband)," says Director of Athletic Bands Adam Gumble. "General gifts or gifts made in honor of specific band members are both welcome and appreciated."

Over the summer, the band will be busy preparing a brand new 2023 field show, appropriately titled "In Bloom," which will celebrate the beauty and power of transformation by bringing together a combination of classical melodies and contemporary favorites. The program will premiere publicly at the first home football game on Saturday, September 16, at 12 noon.

Gumble adds, "We know that 2023–24 is going to be extra special for the Incomparable Golden Rams Marching Band and we are grateful for the support of so many in making this longtime dream a reality." WCU

**FOR A FULL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS VISIT [WCUA.EDU/ARTS](http://WCUA.EDU/ARTS)**

Join us on July 20 for the Wells School of Music's Criterions Jazz Ensemble Alumni Reunion Concert!

**SEPTEMBER**

15

WCU Mather Planetarium: *The Galactic Center* (Live Show! Tix on sale 8/25)

22

Wells School of Music Concert: Criterions Jazz Ensemble

23

Gordon Natural Area 50th Anniversary Forest Festival (rain date 9/24)

29

Wells School of Music Concert: WCU Symphony Orchestra

30

**WCU Live!**  
**Comedian Jay Pharoah**  
 (Homecoming & Parents Weekend)



**OCTOBER**

6

**WCU Mather Planetarium:**  
**Back to the Moon**  
 (Live Show! Tix on sale 9/15)



**GIFTS CAN BE MADE AT [WWW.WCUFOUNDATION.ORG/RAMBAND](http://WWW.WCUFOUNDATION.ORG/RAMBAND).**

**OCTOBER**

19 – 22

Dept. of Theatre & Dance presents *Kiss Me Kate*

29

Wells School of Music Concert: Wind Ensemble

**NOVEMBER**

3

Wells School of Music Concert: Criterions Jazz Ensemble

10

WCU Mather Planetarium: *Killer Rocks from Outer Space* (Live Show! Tix on sale 10/20)

10 – 11

Dept. of Theatre & Dance presents Fall Dance Concert

16 – 19

Dept. of Theatre & Dance presents *Me, War and Toy Grenade*

17 – 18

WCU Opera Theatre presents *Beauty and the Beast*



**UPCOMING!**

Wells School of Music Presents the Annual Holiday Program Saturday, December 9

WCU's INCOMPARABLE Golden Rams Marching Band marches in the iconic 135<sup>th</sup> Rose Parade presented by Honda on Monday, January 1, 2024

Behind the Nobel Peace Prize:  
**Norwegian Nobel Committee Members Visit Campus**

In March, the University hosted members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, which selects the annual Nobel Peace Prize laureate, to share conversations about issues related to global peace and conflict, fraternity, civil conversation in the face of conflict, and behind-the-scenes stories of how the Peace Prize laureates are selected. The esteemed guests were Asle Toje, deputy leader of the Norwegian Nobel Committee; Jørgen Frydnes, the youngest member ever to be appointed to the Norwegian Nobel Committee and a prior deputy leader; and Henrik Syse, a former member and deputy leader of the Norwegian Nobel Committee who is now a research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), a professor at Oslo New University College, and currently a visiting professor at West Chester University.

In addition to a free public forum addressing issues related to global peace and conflict and two open sessions, the guests worked with students in a five-hour workshop.

Based in Oslo, Norway, at the Nobel Institute, the Norwegian Nobel Committee comprises five members who are elected for six-year terms and can be re-elected. While the Nobel Peace Prize has principally been awarded to honor efforts related to fostering peace, the Nobel Committee has most recently embraced efforts to limit the harm done by man-made climate change and threats to the environment. **wcu**

**Pictured L-R:** Jørgen Frydnes, Henrik Syse, Olwen DeSarno '20, Asle Toje. DeSarno introduced the panelists at the Nobel Peace Forum. She was part of the Nobel Leadership Series when she was an Honors College student and currently works in the registrar's office.



**83**  
FUNDS

**803**  
UNIQUE DONORS

**205**  
FIRST TIME DONORS

## Day of Giving:

**Because of you, our Golden Rams have the resources they need to reach their highest aspirations.**

This past March hundreds of alumni, students, parents, current and retired faculty and staff, corporations and organizations, and friends of West Chester University participated in the third annual Day of Giving and raised more than **\$175,900** to support student success.

Providing scholarship dollars, ensuring our students have access to advanced technology to stand out in their fields, helping student-athletes to compete at the highest level, and creating ongoing opportunities for growth outside the classroom... It's our shared mission on Day of Giving, and every day.

All monies raised on Day of Giving support 150Forward: The Campaign for WCU. We've surpassed **\$57 million** toward our goal to raise **\$65 million** by June 30, 2024.



**Learn more and make your gift at**  
[www.wcufoundation.org/150Forward](http://www.wcufoundation.org/150Forward).

## STATE SYSTEM HONORS WCU'S JOCELYN BROWN WITH THE ALI-ZAIDI AWARD



This spring, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) Board of Governors honored WCU senior Jocelyn Brown with the 2023 Syed R. Ali-Zaidi Award for Academic Excellence.

On accepting the award, Brown said, "It is the ultimate proof that I worked extremely hard in college to get where I am today, especially as a first-generation college student."

Hailing from Mercer, PA, Brown, who graduated in May, is a political science major specializing in international relations with

minors in global studies, civil & professional leadership, and philosophy. An Honors College student, she maintained a 4.0 GPA and held many student leadership positions. She earned numerous academic awards.

In spring 2022, Brown led WCU's four-student team in the European Union's Schuman Challenge national competition in Washington, D.C. The team competed against 21 universities, including Georgetown and Harvard, and took top honors.

Brown also participated in the University's study abroad programs. In the summer of 2022, she spent two weeks in Germany exploring the successes and failures of democracy in German and American politics plus a month in Ireland researching how Irish media differs from American media.

In 2021, she completed a research project for WCU's Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI) titled "Goats Die, Butterflies Fly: Portrayals of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891-1961) in Historical Fiction and Non-fiction." Brown's findings were published in the college journal *Ramifications* and she presented her work at the University's Latina/x/o Communities Conference and the Middle Atlantic Council of Latin American Studies.

Brown was the second international intern for the Norwegian Nobel Institute. She also interned with Interfaith Philadelphia and the University's Center for Women and Gender Equity. She completed more than 200 hours of community service.

During her time at the University, she was president of Pi Sigma Alpha (national political science honors fraternity) and was inducted into Omicron Delta Kappa (national honors fraternity) and Alpha Alpha Alpha (national first-generation honors fraternity). She was president of Model United Nations, Interfaith Action Committee co-founder, and student body representative for the Council on Undergraduate Research. She was also the secretary for *Stitched Together*, a new fiber arts club for students.

Brown plans to pursue a doctorate on a path to becoming a professor of international relations.

Founded in 2000 by Dr. Syed R. Ali-Zaidi, a charter member of the Board of Governors, the Syed R. Ali-Zaidi Award for Academic Excellence is conferred each spring upon a graduating senior from one of the PASSHE universities. Funding was made possible through gifts from Dr. Ali-Zaidi, Highmark Inc., and the State System Foundation, Inc. **WCU**

## STUDENT PROFILE

# Layla Malik '25 A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AT WCU AND BEYOND



Layla Malik

Layla Malik is dedicated to making the world a better place in many ways.

The rising junior is the Student Government Association liaison to the Sustainability Council and vice president of the Sustainable Living Yoga Club. She is set to graduate in 2025 with a dual major in social work and women's and gender studies plus a minor in peace and conflict studies.

"It might seem that sustainability and social work are not necessarily connected, but they most definitely are," says Malik. "Sustainability is universal. It's about quality of life. It's something that affects everyone."

Malik is involved in Phi Alpha Honor Society, a social work honor society, and the service-oriented Abbé Society, volunteering on service projects for marginalized communities.

### Sustainability is universal. It's about quality of life. It's something that affects everyone.

Environmental issues affect all populations, she notes, but especially those who are in lower economic situations. They are the ones most affected by poor water and air quality in cities. That translates into health issues and a general reduced quality of life, which brings to the forefront a myriad of social justice concerns and is part of what drew her to social work.

"Everything is interrelated. We all have to do our part," she emphasizes.

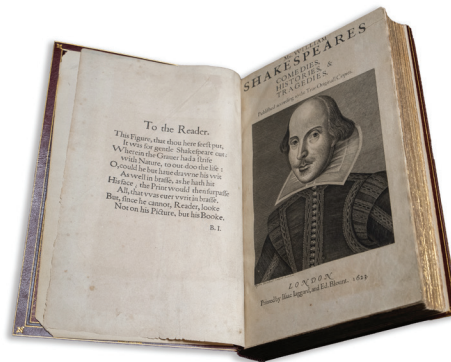
Members of the Sustainable Living Yoga Club, for example, "make exercise, eating well, and caring about the environment a lifestyle choice, now and into the future," she continues. "The club connects students' passion for yoga to our environmental responsibility in a way that people can feel empowered by."

Other campus clubs such as VegOut, Students for Sustainable Action, and the Sustainable Fashion Club provide students with opportunities to connect, share ideas, and take action.

Malik has become an informal sustainability ambassador to her friends and classmates.

"I try to have conversations about making small changes rather than criticizing their actions," Malik. She tries to set an example so that they will start to pay attention to little things, like taking shorter or fewer showers, walking or bicycling, and eating organic foods.

"I don't see my involvement in sustainability to be just something I do here at West Chester while I am a student. This is a lifelong commitment that I will carry forward in my life." **WCU**



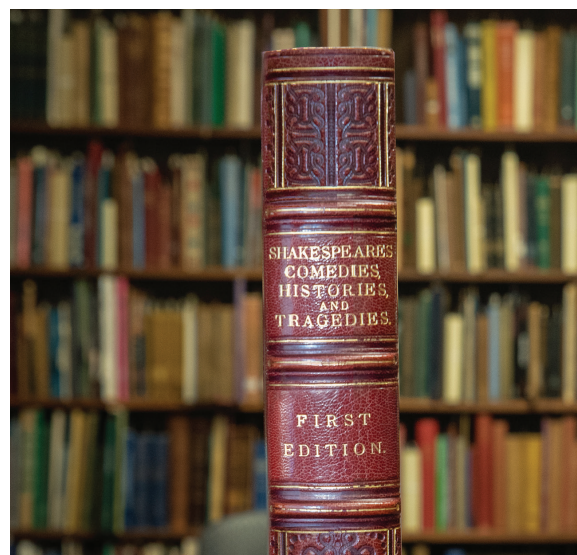
### Celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Shakespeare's First Folio

West Chester University celebrated William Shakespeare on the Bard's birthday, April 23, with a Renaissance Fair and a free afternoon performance of *Twelfth Night* in a recreation of the Globe Theatre on the Quad. It was the culmination of a "Fortnight of Festivities" that marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio, the first collected works of Shakespeare.

Of the 750 initial copies of the First Folio, approximately 200 copies remain in the world – and West Chester University is proud to own one. The University acquired the First Folio through a generous gift from the son of George Morris Philips, principal for 40 years and namesake of WCU's Philips Memorial Building and the Philips Autograph Library.

Special Collections Librarian Ronald McColl emphasized the honor of owning "one of the most desired and rare books of the world. Without the First Folio, we might never know some of Shakespeare's greatest works including *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*. The First Folio was also the first to divide Shakespeare's plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories."

From April 10 to 23, WCU showed the First Folio many times throughout the festival; mounted a special library exhibition "A Great Variety of Readers: Celebrating 400 Years of Shakespeare's First Folio"; hosted guest speakers and poets; presented multiple *Twelfth Night* performances; and more.



As the first and only bachelor's/master's program of its kind in the U.S., a new 3-2 dual degree program in quantum science and engineering (QSE) has launched to prepare students for a technical revolution: the emerging \$3.2-billion quantum-computing market.

In partnership with the University of Delaware (UD), the 3-2 dual-degree program allows students to spend three years at West Chester University earning a bachelor of science in physics and two years at the University of Delaware earning a master of science in quantum science and engineering. The WCU-UD collaboration is at the forefront of preparing a new workforce that integrates the fields of computer science, physics, chemistry, and materials science.

"With this burgeoning new field, we have to 'grow' skilled experts," says Associate Professor of Physics Brandon Mitchell, who leads the new dual-degree program at WCU and who was awarded a \$450,000 National Science Foundation Grant in 2021 to explore new materials for quantum computing and next-generation displays. "This program, on the undergraduate and master's level, is the pathway to a highly specialized workforce. Together, WCU and UD are early in this game. This new program lowers the financial burden and the time-to-degree, which is important in today's economic climate, and will encourage students from all backgrounds to pursue a career in this important new field."

The new QSE program at UD is a result of a recent \$4 million National Science Foundation grant awarded to UD's Matthew Doty, professor of materials science and engineering and director of UD's quantum science and engineering program, in collaboration with University of New Mexico's Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering Ganesh Balakrishnan, also director of New Mexico's Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR).

With applications yet to even be imagined, Fortune Business Insights projects the QSE market to grow from \$486 million in 2021 to \$3.2 billion in 2028, an average annual growth rate of about 31%.

QSE focuses on understanding and exploiting the unusual behavior of particles and excitations governed by the laws of quantum mechanics. This improved control over the quantum world has already found its way into a tremendous number of applications spanning a broad range of fields. For example, quantum communication uses the phenomenon of entanglement to securely transmit data over large distances. Quantum computers can perform calculations that would take current classical computers decades or even hundreds of years, which will in turn have implications for medicine, finance and defense. Quantum materials applications include using 2D semiconductors for more efficient solar cells and quantum dots that can potentially be harnessed to drive ultralow power consumption devices. Quantum magnetic field sensors will enable improved functional brain imaging. [WCU](#)

## QUANTUM SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING DUAL DEGREE NOW OFFERED AT WCU & UD

This program, on the undergraduate and master's level, is the pathway to a highly specialized workforce.

## YMCA Honors WCU with Service to Youth Award

The YMCA of Greater Brandywine (YGBW) has honored the University with their Service to Youth Award, which recognizes an organization that has made a significant and positive difference in the lives of youth in the community. WCU has partnered with YGBW in developing curriculum for youth programming, supported YGBW's internship program, and contributed in other ways to youth development – a pillar of the YMCA mission.

Dean of WCU's College of Health Sciences Scott Heinerichs remarked on the complementary partnership between WCU and the YMCA, through which "both organizations help each other to achieve their respective missions. Our institution

can assist the YMCA in meeting member needs and, by doing so, we create rich learning experiences for our students in return."

WCU and the YMCA have long supported each other. WCU sources interns for the YMCA, helping advance the YMCA mission while providing hands-on experience to students. WCU also provides curriculum support for YMCA programs like STRIDE

**...both organizations help each other to achieve their respective missions.**

for ALL, the Family Whole Health Challenge, and youth culinary classes, part of the YMCA's monthly programming that launched in 2023.

The award was presented by Donna Urian, board chair and chief volunteer officer at YGBW, which recently celebrated the 3,215 volunteers who contributed an impressive 52,000 hours of service over the past year.

One of those volunteers is WCU student Jessie Snodgrass, who was named Volunteer of the Year for the Oscar Lasko YMCA Branch. Awards are given

to one or two volunteers per branch who have made a significant impact on a YMCA program, committee, or campaign. [WCU](#)

## ALUMNI

# CHAPTER NEWS

Congratulations to our newest alumni! We're excited to add you to our global network of more than 127,000 Golden Rams! You're a Ram for Life and we welcome you into the WCU Alumni Association!

As this network grows, we will continue to enhance our alumni engagement opportunities and provide resources that keep you and all Golden Rams connected to WCU!

We had a great time hosting our alumni and friends in New Jersey for our annual Rams in the Sand event and are looking forward to celebrating on campus in September for Homecoming and Family Weekend, September 29 – October 1.

Are you a WCU graduate of the last decade and looking to get involved with your fellow young alumni? Check out our new opportunities available through our Gold X Alumni Chapter as we get ready to welcome the Class of 2027 to campus next semester. For more information on specific chapters and how you can get involved, visit our website: [www.wcualumni.org/chapters](http://www.wcualumni.org/chapters).



### Girl Scouts Honor Three Alumnae

Three of the four women honored this spring for their leadership by the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania (GSEP) are Golden Rams (L-R): Desha

Dickson '01, vice president of diversity, equity & inclusion and community wellness, Tower Health who serves on several professional and community-based health committees, including the Board of Centro Hispano Daniel Torres; Virginia Rush, vice president, Wyomissing Foundation (not a WCU alumna); Virginia Dodge '89, VA Productions, Inc., who has served as a committee or board member for organizations including the Rotary Club, Leadership Berks, Olivet Boys & Girls Club, and GSEP; and Adelle Schade M'93, dean of pre-college & summer programs, Albright College, founder, Total Experience Learning, and adjunct instructor of pediatrics in the Penn State College of Medicine. Each woman leader was paired with local Girl Scouts as mentors. Take the Lead honorees exemplify Girl Scouts' values through their continued service and leadership in their communities. GSEP is the largest girl-serving organization in Pennsylvania.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Congratulations to all the new Golden Rams who will soon start their undergraduate and graduate studies at WCU! To our returning Rams, get ready for another exciting year on campus! You should be proud of what West Chester University in its 152 years has contributed to our world in the past and be excited about how you, personally, will contribute to the University's reputation and legacy in the future.

Like many WCU students, I worked full-time while pursuing my degree. If you are in this situation, it can be a tremendous challenge and you should be proud of all you have done to get yourself where you are today. No matter how you achieve your academic goals — undergraduate, graduate, full-time, or part-time — you are Golden Rams and valued members of our community.

For those who have already graduated, there are numerous ways you can join the excitement on campus. Your Alumni Association is planning a wide variety of events designed to help you connect with current students, faculty, and more than 127,000 of your fellow alumni. Visit [www.wcualumni.org](http://www.wcualumni.org) to learn more about upcoming alumni events. Mark your calendar for Homecoming/Family Weekend September 29-October 1 and plan to make new friends, network, and cheer on the football team as they tackle Bloomsburg University. If you haven't been on campus for a while, attend Homecoming and walk around campus to see what's changed.

On behalf of the Alumni Association, we look forward to meeting you at an upcoming on-campus event and wish you a great 2023-2024 academic year.

Rams Up!  
Patrick O'Connor M'93  
President, WCU Alumni Association

## SONYA HARRIS '98: DIGGING IN TO PROVIDE FRESH, NUTRITIOUS FOOD

No one is more surprised than Sonya Harris '98, founder and CEO of the Bullock Garden Project, that she is a certified Master Gardener.

After earning her bachelor's degree in special education, she became a first-grade special education teacher at Dorothy L. Bullock Elementary School in Glassboro, NJ.

The beginning of her mission began quite simply as a math project in her classroom. She wanted to come up with an outdoor assignment that would provide a lesson in measurement and give the students some fresh air. Planting a garden seemed like the perfect way to measure the growth of a plant.

That's how the young woman who knew nothing about gardening — and was not a fan of getting her hands dirty and messing up her manicure — eventually became a master gardener through the Camden County Extension of Rutgers University's Master Gardeners Program.

"The first time I dug into the dirt, a spider ran out, and I hate spiders," says Harris. "But I did it all for the kids."

She founded the Bullock Garden Project (BGP) in 2017, originally a small-scale school garden project. That concept took root and grew into an initiative that has consulted

and helped schools, institutions, and local governments to get their community gardens growing. BGP also offers assistance to individuals wanting to embark on their own growing journey by offering free education and start-up materials.

Harris admits knowing nothing about gardening at the time, "but I did my research, read everything I could get my hands on, and watched the DIY Network."

She boldly reached out to gardening expert Amhad Hassan, who hosted DIY's

gardening programs like *Yard Crashers*, *The Dirt On...*, and *Green Me Up*. To her delight, Hassan recognized her passion and became her gardening mentor, providing countless tips and materials for the school garden project.

"The first thing Amhad asked me was what I wanted to grow.

I said tomatoes, of course, since we're in New Jersey. And maybe corn and blueberries."

The resulting garden at the elementary school was filled with tomatoes, beans, lettuces, blueberries, peppers, peas, onions, herbs, flowers, fruit trees, and more. It far surpassed Harris' dream for teaching her students how



to measure a growing plant. She realized that the garden's greatest gift would be to enable the children and their families to have fresh, organic produce to eat. Plus, she could help fight food insecurity for families by teaching them how to grow their own nutritious food.

"Children can't learn when they are hungry," says Harris. "And by teaching them how to produce their own seeds and grow their own food, we can help them and their families become more self-sufficient."

Now retired as a teacher, Harris remains an educator at heart. She founded the Bullock Garden Project to provide a community garden that could help nourish all people in need, from migrant workers to children whose families have financial need. In the summer of 2022, she launched the Garden Teacher's Yard Farm, which provides low-cost, organic seedlings and produce to the public.

"Through the Bullock Garden Project, I speak and conduct workshops about the importance of gardening with children, work with schools and organizations to help build and maintain gardens, and teach individuals how to garden," says Harris.

Harris is grateful to her education at West Chester University, where as a single mom, she was nurtured, and then able to nurture her own students in creating a sustainable future as life-long gardeners who could provide for themselves. [WCU](#)

**Children can't learn when they are hungry. And by teaching them how to produce their own seeds and grow their own food, we can help them and their families become more self-sufficient.**

# Distinguished Alumni



## Fonda L. Akins '90

**Fonda L. Akins** has been educating students with learning disabilities for 30 years and has been employed by the Springfield School District since 1994. She earned her bachelor of science degree in special education from West Chester University in 1990 and a master of arts degree in special education from Cheyney University.

Akins, who teaches full time for the Springfield School District, was the acting department head at Springfield High School during the years when the district implemented the "Full Inclusion" model for special education students. She has facilitated workshops to train faculty and staff on inclusive practices and co-teaching.

Akins believes all students can thrive and meet with success when given the proper tools, a proper learning environment, supportive administrators and parents. Because of her expertise in the learning styles of learning support students, in 2010 she co-authored an educational article, "Nine Co-Teaching Tips From Two Co-Teaching Gurus," which appeared in *Randi Stone's More Best Practices For High School Classrooms: What Award-Winning Teachers Do*. In 2017, Akins was the recipient of the Helen Still Education Award and the Franklin Mint Federal Credit Union Excellence in Teaching Award.

Akins is very active with her students outside of the classroom, sponsoring many service groups including her multicultural club, R.E.A.C.H. (Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritages) and the W.E.B. DuBois Honor Society. She also mentors young women and men in conjunction with her sorority, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and West Chester University. She has also served as the vice-president of WCU's Black Alumni Chapter.

In 2019, Akins was diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer. While undergoing radiation treatment, she conducted a service project where she collected gift cards and care packages for donation to cancer patients at Riddle Memorial Hospital in Media, PA. Since the fall of 2020, she has also collected money through a faculty fundraiser to donate to local breast cancer organizations.

Akins believes in these three guiding principles:

Turn Your Test into a Testimony.

To Whom Much Is Given, Much Is Required.

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child.



## Bill Blystone '78

**Bill Blystone** graduated from West Chester State College in 1978 with a bachelor's of science degree in health and physical education.

Blystone excelled on the football field and was selected as the 1976 American Football Coaches Association All-American Team First Team running back. He also received the prestigious

Maxwell Award as College Football Player of the Week. The honor was based upon his record-setting performance running for 254 yards in a single game, setting a new West Chester school record. After graduation, Blystone had a free agent tryout with the Philadelphia Eagles.

Blystone turned his professional career to sales and marketing, joining the E.K. Lay Company in 1983, and has been an integral part of the company his entire career. Today, E.K. Lay is the largest and most successful manufacturers representative organization in the mid-Atlantic region, focused on food service packaging and janitorial supplies, and representing more than 25 manufacturers. Blystone has been awarded numerous sales achievement awards including salesperson of the year by the manufacturers, distributors, and customers with whom he works. The company has been recognized nationally for its outstanding overall performance.

In 1995, Blystone was inducted into the Killinger Foundation Football Hall of Fame at West Chester. The following year, he became a member of the Killinger Foundation executive board, which he has served for the past 27 years. The Killinger Foundation's mission is to provide football scholarships to worthy West Chester University scholar-athletes. Blystone has given his time, talent and treasure to support the Killinger Foundation and West Chester University football.

He has volunteered within his community, serving on many volunteer organizations, coaching youth sports programs, and serving his church.

He met his wife, Jeanne Marie, their sophomore year at West Chester. They have been married for 44 years and have three sons, Bill, Mark, and John; two daughters-in-law, Diana and Cate; and four beautiful grandchildren, Johnny, Alyssa, Leah, and Luke. Bill and Jeanne Marie live in Unionville, PA.





## Michael J. Hirsch '96

Michael J. Hirsch earned his B.A. in mathematics and computer science from West Chester; his M.S. in applied mathematics from the University of Delaware; and his Ph.D. in industrial and systems engineering (operations research focus) from the University of Florida.

Hirsch was senior principal scientist for Raytheon Technologies until 2014.

While at Raytheon, he led small and large engineering teams, developed cutting-edge research, and transitioned that research into fielded programs for the Department of Defense.

In 2014, he founded ISEA TEK, where he continues to serve as president and chief technologist. The company develops technologies using mathematically rigorous techniques from operations research, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. ISEA TEK has been awarded multiple government contracts from the Office of Naval Research, the Naval Air Systems Command, and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. The company has also worked with several Fortune 100 companies.

In 2022, Hirsch founded and serves as CEO of the software development company TOXEUS Systems, which develops cloud-based technologies to solve challenging optimization problems.

Hirsch has published 58 peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings; edited three books; holds five patents; and has presented his research at multiple national and international conferences. He has co-chaired three international conferences; moderated numerous conference sessions; participated in three Ph.D. dissertation committees and co-chaired one; and mentored countless junior engineers throughout his career. He has received numerous awards including the University of Florida Gator100 Award (2023), the Raytheon Mentoring Excellence Award (2013), the Swope Scholarship (1995), and numerous WCU Department of Mathematics awards while an undergraduate.

As a Junior Achievement of Central Florida board member, Hirsch helps guide and tailor high-school programs focusing on STEM education, business leadership, and entrepreneurship. One of his primary goals is to intellectually inspire and motivate students to reach farther, dig deeper, and take risks to creatively solve complex problems and dramatically impact their future for the better. He is currently collaborating with a team of 12th-grade students from Osceola High School on their senior 3DE project, developing a marketing plan for technologies that route data and information across temporally varying mesh networks. He is mentoring students through understanding of technical concepts and their application to commercial markets.

In 2016, Michael and his wife endowed a scholarship to the WCU Mathematics Department. The scholarship is awarded annually to a junior or senior majoring in mathematics.

Michael has been married to his wife, Jackie, for 13 years and they have one spectacular daughter.



## John W. Vilella '76, M'82

John Vilella earned his master's and bachelor's degrees in music education from West Chester University and his doctorate in higher education leadership from Widener University.

He retired June 30, 2022, from West Chester University with 39 years of service. Vilella was the vice president

for University Affairs and chief of staff, coordinating the efforts of senior staff in the Office of the President. He supervised University departments including Communications and Marketing; Alumni Relations; Cultural and Community Affairs; the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; the Office of Sustainability; the Center for Community Solutions; Continuing Professional Education; and WEDnet Services. He was also liaison to the WCU Foundation.

Vilella worked with government and business leaders and the University Council of Trustees to ensure timely advancement of initiatives, communications, and policy development and adherence. Prior to this appointment, he served seven years as the associate dean for the College of Visual and Performing Arts. His duties as a faculty member included directing the Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Band, Concert Band, and Marching Band. He also taught in the music education department as a supervisor of student teachers and instructor of instrumental methods and techniques.

In May 2022, WCU awarded Vilella emeritus designation as an administrator and faculty member. He has also been recognized with the Irving Cohen Faculty Merit Award (2008); WCU Council of Trustees Certificate of Recognition (2005 and 2022); and the Division of Student Affairs' Legacy of Leadership Award (2005).

Vilella is also the president of Vivace Productions, Inc., a national leader of summer camps including band leadership training and the marching band workshops. He frequently serves as a guest conductor, adjudicator, guest lecturer, and director of music festivals in the United States, Canada, and Europe. In addition, he reviewed new band music for each issue of the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) magazine, *PMEA News*, from 2006 to 2015. He was recognized with the PMEA Citation of Excellence in 2015 and inducted into the Cavalcade of Bands Hall of Fame in 2010.

He continues to serve the music field as a member of the Sudler Shield Committee for the John Philip Sousa Foundation. His professional affiliations include membership in the National Band Association, College Band Directors National Association, both state and national music educators organizations, Phi Mu Alpha, Kappa Kappa Psi, Tau Beta Sigma, and Sigma Alpha Iota.

He has been married to Colleen for 36 years and they have been blessed with one son, Evan.

# 2024 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD NOMINEES SOUGHT

The Distinguished Alumni Awards have been presented by the West Chester University Alumni Association annually since 1963. The WCUAA Awards Committee seeks candidates to be selected and recognized for this prestigious honor at the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Awards Celebration.

**The WCUAA Awards Committee is looking for candidates who have:**

- Achieved outstanding recognition in their chosen professions;
- Rendered unusual service to a particular segment of society either vocationally or avocationally;
- Achieved outstanding recognition or rendered unusual service by volunteering in a non-profit organization; or
- Positively influenced large numbers of people throughout the candidate's career.

If you would like to nominate a deserving alumnus/a, please complete and mail this form to the WCU Office of Alumni Engagement. You may also submit a nomination online at [www.wcualumni.org](http://www.wcualumni.org). Nominations must be received by 4 p.m. on Friday, September 22, 2023. Upon receipt of a nomination, a packet will be sent to the nominator for completion.

## 2024 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD NOMINATION FORM

Name of Nominee \_\_\_\_\_

Class Year(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_

Class Year(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Please mail this form to:**

WCUAA Awards Committee  
c/o Office of Alumni Engagement  
202 Carter Drive  
West Chester, PA 19382

To submit this form electronically, visit [www.wcualumni.org](http://www.wcualumni.org). Nominations must be received by 4 p.m. on Friday, September 22, 2023.

During the April 2021 WCU Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony, many former WCU boxers had the idea to honor Coach Alan McChesney and Dean Plemmons, the founders and coaches of the West Chester State College boxing club, by establishing a scholarship in their names. If you would like to support the “In your corner: Al McChesney and Dean Plemmons Club Sport Award” (fund #4000-917FN) you can donate at <https://go.wcufoundation.org/give>.



**PLEASE JOIN US FOR A  
CLUB SPORTS REUNION  
DURING HOMECOMING WEEKEND!**



Walton '91



Redick '18

## 1960s

**William J. Bruehl '56** recently produced his sixth volume of literary fiction entitled *Coupling*, a collection of 16 interrelated short stories.

**James E. Williams, Jr. '59** was selected to receive an American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Special Award at the 2023 ASCO Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL, in June 2023.

## 1960s

**Harvey "Brew" Schumer '68** was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame on April 18, 2023.

## 1970s

**Marian E. Washington '70, H'98** has been selected as one of 12 finalists for the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame's Class of 2023.

## 1980s

### Elizabeth A. Claghorn '80

presented at the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses Association Global Expo and International Surgical Conference on teamwork and happiness at the workplace.

**Matthew J. Blimline '88** received his doctorate in education for health sciences with a concentration in administration with high honors from the University of St. Augustine .

## 1990s

**Kate Walton '91** started an entrepreneurial publishing and professional development company, Camp Kindness Press, which published a series of innovative 21-day guided journals for elementary, middle, and high school children.

**Jyl C. Barlow '93** recently published her debut memoir, *What to Expect When You Weren't Expecting*, which debuted on February 1, 2023, as a #1 New Release in Amazon's step parenting and blended families category.

**Gloria A. Casarez '93** posthumously received the honor of having an elementary school named after her. The Gloria Casarez Elementary School in Philadelphia, PA, is a beacon of hope and inspiration for the young students in the community it serves.

## 2000s

**Mary K. Dolan '03** is the owner of Creative Dolan Design Studio, with clients that include Adam Gaynor from Matchbox Twenty, Georgia Department of Veteran Services, Coca-Cola, Macon Cherry Blossom Festival, and others. She has been in business for 17 years.

**Philip A. Pinti '05** recently released a documentary, *A Long Way From Nowhere*, which tells his inspiring story of using ultra marathon running — through the desert in the summer — as a way of healing from tragedy and trauma.

**Kyle Rheiner '06** was named one of the 2023 VISTA Today's Millennial Superstars.

## 2010s

**Samuel Krepps '11** recently accepted the position of designer with Hershey Entertainment & Resorts.

**Amanda Juisti Peabody '13** was named one of the 2023 VISTA Today's Millennial Superstars.

**Michael Flemming '14** and **Marsalis Chism '17** were among those featured on the *Today Show's* Sunday Spotlight and *NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt*. Flemming and Chism are among a group of four Black male teachers who have raised their hands high to teach students at Philadelphia's Martin Luther King High School, so students have male teachers in the classroom who look like them.

### Josephine (Lisbet) Byler '14

recently opened her own business in Lancaster, PA, called So Organized LLC.

**Alexa R. Taicher '15** is a speech pathologist in acute care inpatient rehabilitation at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore, MD. She received her master of arts in speech language pathology from George Washington University in 2017.

**Johanna M. Redick '18** earned her doctorate in physical therapy from Messiah University in May 2023.

## 2020s

**Laura-Caroline O'Connor '20** was named one of the 2023 VISTA Today's Millennial Superstars.

**Erin J. Palm '21** was hired as postproduction artist, live event painter, and photography assistant at Philip Gabriel Photography, a commercial and event photography company, based in Media, PA, and serving Philadelphia and the tri-state area.

## In Memoriam

1952 Elizabeth Jentsch  
 1956 Dorothy W. Christine  
 1958 M'80 Barbara Hare  
 1959 Charles P. Kane, Jr.  
 1960 Robert Fanelli  
 1973 James Bruce MacCall  
 1978 Heidi Lit Greenwald  
 1992 Kevin D. Redding

**PHOTO SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

Photos should be no less than 300 DPI and in JPG format.

If you are scanning a printed photo, please set the scanning resolution to at least 300 dpi.

Digital camera and/or cell phone shots should be taken on the highest resolution setting available.

Photos should be emailed as an attachment, not pasted into the email or document.

*We reserve the right to not publish a photo of low quality, and not all photos can be published.*

Please send your photos as email attachments to the attention of the Office of Alumni Engagement at [alumni@wcufoundation.org](mailto:alumni@wcufoundation.org).

**SUBMIT** your class notes to the Office of Alumni Engagement at [alumni@wcufoundation.org](mailto:alumni@wcufoundation.org).

**DEATH NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE**

Contact the Office of Alumni Engagement with a copy of the decedent's obituary from a newspaper or the internet, or a copy of a letter or email from a family member of the deceased. Please note: Death notifications will not be accepted via telephone.



**CONNECT WITH US**  
[www.wcualumni.org](http://www.wcualumni.org)  
 610-436-2813



1.



2.



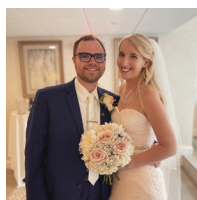
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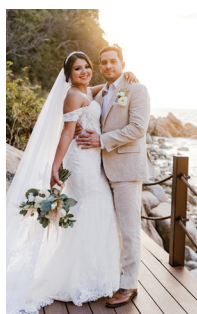
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9.

## Engagements

**1. Jason Jewell to Theresa Ryckman '10**

**Bobby Nangle '19 to Kayla Ortman '19**

**2. Tyler Drob '18 to Jillian Grammer '19**

**5. Dustin Owen '14 to Kylie McHugh '17** on May 28, 2022.

**6. Michael Tracy '17 to Sarah Donley '17.**

**7. Joseph Monastero '19 to Caitlyn Verdin Soriano '19** on March 11, 2023.

## Marriages

**3. William Reed to Amy L. Snukis '99** on November 24, 2022.

**4. Alex Pauloski to Ashley Diefenderfer '14, M'19** on October 16, 2022.

## Future Alumni

**8. John Farley '08 and Elizabeth (Gower) Farley '08** welcomed Shane Thomas in November 2022.

**9. Dylan J. Nowak '14 and Stephanie L. (Thompson) Nowak '13** welcomed Eleanor Nowak in November 2021.

# Nominations are now being accepted for the WCUAA Board of Directors

The Nominating Committee of the West Chester University Alumni Association (WCUAA) is accepting nominations for candidates who wish to serve on the Association's Board of Directors for the 2024-2027 term. Please review the following information prior to submitting your nomination.

Nomination forms must be completed and received by 4 p.m. on Friday, September 22, 2023. The form below will also be available online at [www.wcualumni.org](http://www.wcualumni.org).

- There are six seats on the WCUAA Board of Directors up for election each year.
- Board members are expected to serve the full three-year term for which they are elected.
- The terms of the newly elected members will begin on July 1, 2024.
- There will be a minimum of six (6) and a maximum of twelve (12) candidates on the election ballot.
- Board elections ballots will be available in the spring issue of the WCU Magazine. You may nominate yourself to run for the Board of Directors.

After all nominations are received, nominees will receive a biographical form/application to complete and a detailed description of duties associated with being a board member. This must be completed in its entirety to finalize the nomination.

## 2024 WCUAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS NOMINATION FORM

Name of Nominee

---

Class Year(s)

---

Street Address

---

City/State/Zip

---

Phone

---

Email

---

Nominated by

---

Class Year(s)

---

Street Address

---

City/State/Zip

---

Phone

---

Email

---

**Please mail this form to:**

WCUAA Nominating Committee  
c/o Office of Alumni Engagement  
202 Carter Drive  
West Chester, PA 19382

To submit this form electronically, visit:  
[www.wcualumni.org](http://www.wcualumni.org). Nominations  
must be received by 4 p.m. on Friday,  
September 22, 2023.

ALUMNI



APRIL 28 & 29, 2023  
*Alumni  
Weekend*



**West Chester University**  
West Chester, PA 19383-7401

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SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

**HOMECOMING**  
*plus* Family  
Weekend

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

