



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

# CLASS NOTES

**JANUARY 2026**

CLASS NOTES SUBMITTED OCTOBER 15 - DECEMBER 15, 2025

## '72

**Patrick Smith** is retired from the University of Michigan, where he worked in administrative IT as a systems programmer. A long-time writer, editor and publisher, his archive is housed in the Special Collections Library in the Rare Book Room of the university's library. After retiring, he worked for many years as the coordinator of Jazz Studies at the Music School at Michigan State University.

## '74

**Sheila Elliott (Kennedy)** has received the 2025 Prairie State Poetry Prize for her poetry collection, "Memory Coin." The competition, judged by Wisconsin poet Jan Chronister, was exclusive to writers submitting their first complete book of poetry. Highland Park Poetry, a literary organization promoting poetry among all age groups, sponsored the competition.

## '80

**Jerry Poling** recently authored a book, "American Birkebeiner: The Nation's Greatest Ski Marathon," published by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press. At UWL, Poling stepped into cross-country skis for the first time in a physical education course, eventually inspiring him to take up the sport. He has since completed 25 Birkebeiner marathons. This is his fifth book, including two on the Packers and a 125-year history of UW-Stout.

## '82

**Catherine Kiener (Swanson)** retired in August 2024 from the role of Senior Center director for the City of Port Washington in southeast Wisconsin. As a student at UWL, Kiener was a member of Gamma Sigma Sigma, serving as president for one year. She says she was the first UWL intern to complete a therapeutic recreation internship

at Craig Rehabilitation Hospital in Englewood, Colorado. Kiener worked as a certified therapeutic recreation specialist, an assistant director of activity therapy and an activity director in a long-term care and rehab center before moving to Port Washington in 1998.

**Maryann Schroeder (Herold)** is retired and working part time as a K-2 intervention teacher for Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina.

## '83

**Lisa Lehmann**, a former announcer for WLSU, has penned a novel titled, "RADIO STARR," in which a starry-eyed Midwestern DJ spins on-air personas that unravel her identity and moral fabric in the male-dominated world of 1980s radio. Published by Fresh Water Press, the novel hit bookshelves in November.

## '96

**Casey Sarver** has been promoted to senior vice president of People & Culture at Knutson Construction, a Minnesota-based company with more than 100 years in the construction industry, and offices throughout Minnesota and in La Crosse. Sarver will be instrumental in the execution of one of Knutson's key strategic objectives, which is to grow leaders. He will work to ensure all Knutson employees have the tools, resources and support for comprehensive professional development and career growth opportunities.

**Joe Hackbarth** is a teacher and coach for the School District of La Crosse.

**Kevin Svobod** is the director of operations/physical therapist for U.S. Physical Therapy, Inc. in Houston, Texas.

## '05

**Brad Reinhart** is the director of development for the Aquinas Schools Foundation.

**Frank Vitucci** recently got engaged in Venice, Italy.

## '09

**Shane Allen** has been in Tokyo for eight years, having worked back and forth between Japan and the United States. He has contributed toward diversity programs in Milwaukee and worked to have a new flag enacted, the MKE flag. Now he is in Tokyo developing his own design business

after six years of agency work. He says: "Always an Eagle!"

## '17

**Jordan Kvasnicka** is a national account manager-The Home Depot for Milwaukee Tool in Brookfield.

## '23

**Tracie Banning (Thaldorf)** became an "Eagle at Work" – denoting an alum who works on campus – shortly after earning her degree. She is active within UWL Shared Governance and with local theater companies.

## '25

**Hayley Johnson** is an HR generalist for Midwest Medical Center in Galena, Illinois.





Brent Smith was named the 2025 Oktoberfest Festmaster alongside his wife, Ellen, as Frau.



Michelle Skemp was named Mrs. Oktoberfest alongside her husband, Joe, as Mr. Oktoberfest.

## Alumni take center stage at Oktoberfest

UWL was well represented at the annual Oktoberfest celebrations in La Crosse, with several alumni serving in key ceremonial roles. Brent Smith, '13 (honorary), served as this year's Festmaster, while Michelle Skemp, '88, was named Mrs. Oktoberfest.

Alumni were also instrumental in organizing the celebration behind the scenes. Hannah Amundson, '17, is executive director of the celebration; Jennifer Krisnowich, '15, is

vice president of the Oktoberfest Board; and Alex Lueck, '02, is president of the Oktoberfest Board.

"Oktoberfest is more than just a festival – it's a cherished tradition that brings the La Crosse community together in celebration, pride and joy," Lueck explains. "Serving in this role means helping preserve the legacy of an event that has shaped our city's identity for generations."

## In Remembrance Alumni

- 1960 – Orlando Wadel, Holmen
- 1962 – Harley Haefs, La Crosse
- 1963 – Joanne Seeger (Rossel), Elm Grove, Wis.
- 1964 – Bill Temte, Onalaska
- 1965 – Janice Jeffers (Fish), Elkhart, Ind.
- 1965 – Chuck Rodell, Saint Cloud, Minn.
- 1966 – Marie Brueggen (Sullivan), Sparta
- 1969 – Darrell Dvorak, La Crosse
- 1969 – Marc Nelson, Westby
- 1969 – Tom Unangst, Winona
- 1970 – Robert Bush, La Crosse
- 1970 – Susan Jensen (Parker), Viroqua
- 1970 – John Whitsett, Waupaca
- 1972 – Joan Henthorne (Bartlett), Gilbert, Ariz.
- 1972 – Vivian Turner (Olson), Beloit
- 1973 – Robert Dahm, Wilson, Wis.
- 1973 – Bobbie Young (Phillips), Viola
- 1974 – Michael Schultz, Saint Paul
- 1975 – Rich Althaus, La Crescent
- 1975 – Gale Sanders, Sharpsburg, Ga.
- 1975 – Darryl Westlund, Mosinee, Wis.
- 1979 – Mary Kay Skemp (Hartman), La Crosse
- 1982 – James Becker, La Crosse
- 1983 – Carol Pesch (Papacek), La Crescent
- 1985 – Gordie Mengelt, Winona
- 1987 – Pat Dailey, Sparta
- 1989 – Elizabeth Veldey, La Crosse
- 1992 – Marcus McMahan, Sparta
- 1996 – Tina Buchal, Onalaska
- 1999 – Kathy Reilly (Sweeney), La Crescent
- 2025 – T.J. Kinney, Sun Prairie



# Faculty & Staff



## David Pehl

David Pehl died Oct. 23 at age 55. He had recently retired from his role as an officer with the UWL Police Department. Pehl was widely known on campus and in the community for his giving nature and sense of humor. Once a year for several years, he dressed in a pink tutu and handed out snacks by UWL's Hoeschler Tower, spreading awareness and raising money for breast cancer research.

## Leah Mathy

Leah Mathy died Nov. 13 at age 89. Taking great pride in her family, she was described in her obituary as "the silent support and foundation" for her husband, Charles, and their family business, Mathy Construction in La Crosse. She also served on the UWL Foundation Board.

## Robert "Bob" Treu

Robert "Bob" Treu died Sept. 26 at age 84. Treu taught English at UWL for 37 years and described the university as his "academic

home." An award-winning fiction writer, Treu was an active member of the La Crosse writing community, participating in poetry readings, mentoring emerging writers and searching for new books.

## Lois Stuhr (Wartinbee)

Lois Stuhr (Wartinbee) died Oct. 5 at age 78. Stuhr spent over 40 years working at UWL, ending her career in the Psychology Department.

## Gerald (Jerry) Hartung

Gerald (Jerry) Hartung died Oct. 7 at age 76.

Hartung retired from UWL after 30 years of service as the lead groundskeeper. He was a Vietnam War veteran and enjoyed boating, fishing, and spending time with family and friends.

## Jean Schrader

Jean Schrader died Oct. 10 at age 84. Schrader worked in food service at UWL and enjoyed traveling, playing card games, and spending time with family and friends.



## Submit UWL Class Notes

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Phone/email

Kyle Farris | University Marketing & Communications  
608.785.6640 | [kfarris@uwlax.edu](mailto:kfarris@uwlax.edu)

## Class Notes Policy:

Class notes and obituaries are published online in January, April, July and October. The deadline is the 15th of the month prior to the month of quarterly posting.

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