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Western Illinois University School of Agriculture

WIU School of Ag Legacy Sale Has Record Setting Year

A group of Western Illinois University School of Agriculture students set out to plan and run the department's annual fundraising auction to benefit WIU agricultural programming and ended up setting a new sales record for the event. This year's Legacy Sale brought in \$73,000 for the University's Livestock Judging Team and improvements to the University farm, beating the previous record by over \$20,000.

The online sale offered nearly 120 items, ranging from a bar handmade by WIU senior agriculture major Stewart Andrews, using wood from a former Western Hall basketball court, to live animals, frozen genetics and seed corn.

The show is organized each year primarily by students in the livestock merchandising class taught by Associate Professor of Agriculture Mark Hoge.

"The sale was a huge success," said Hoge. "The livestock merchandising class, and the Livestock Judging Team combined efforts to make the sale a hit. I can't say enough thank you's to the donors and the buyers. This sale takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to coordinate, but is well worth it."

WIU School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker said the annual show is becoming one of many traditions associated with the University's agriculture program.

"This year's sale certainly exceeded our expectations as it raised more funds than any of the previous years," said Baker. "The students in the Livestock Merchandising course, and Dr. Mark Hoge, worked endless hours putting together this sale, and it showed. This annual event continues to get better and better each year under Dr. Hoge's leadership, and thanks to the hustle of our students. We can't thank our donors, alumni and buyers enough for their participation in this event."

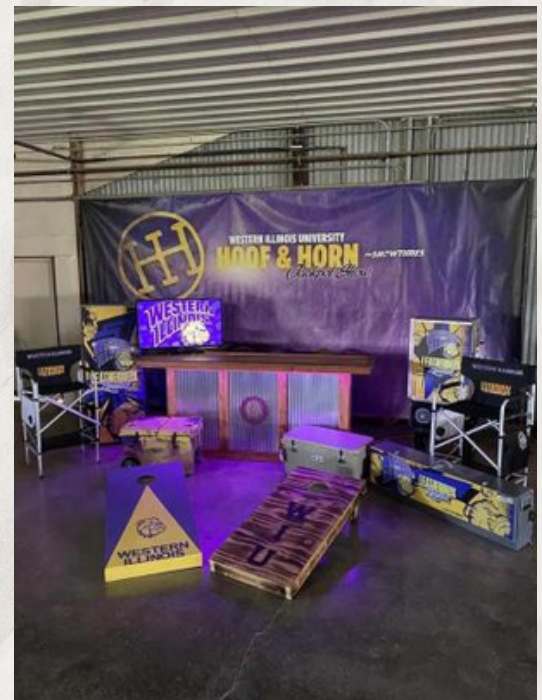
WIU senior agriculture major Mason Hartman, of Attica, IN, the president of the Hoof and Horn Club, said he helped with the show in a variety of ways, including getting donation lots, writing lot descriptions, and setting up for Facebook Live events to promote the sale.

"This was exciting, tiring and rewarding, all in the same breath," said Hartman. "It was a neat deal to be a part of something that helps support the school. It made us proud to be a Leatherneck, and we shattered our previous sale record by over \$30,000."

Hartman and Spring 2021 graduate Bailey Irick said more than 20 members of the livestock marketing class took part in the sale, as well as about 30 members of the Livestock Judging Team. Both heavily credited the work of WIU student Kyle Webster, a senior agriculture major, of Chrisman, IL, who works with Hoge and is a member of the Livestock Judging Team, calling him the "definition of a die-hard Leatherneck" and the "heart and soul of the sale."

Irick worked behind the scenes for the sale, obtaining a few lots prior to the sale, and making sure the successful bidders got their merchandise, as well as sending thank-you notes to buyers and to donors.

"This was a pivotal moment for this sale, as we set a record setting number for the amount raised," Irick said. "I believe it is a true testament to the students here at WIU, as they are hard workers that go above and beyond the job at hand. None of this would have been possible without the collaboration with the students."



WIU School of Agriculture Hosts 50th Performance Tested Bull Sale

The 50th annual Western Illinois University Performance Tested Bull Sale was held March 11 at Lowderman Auction Center in Macomb.

The event had 60 registered buyers from Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Missouri and Iowa, and sold 35 yearling Angus, Red Angus, Charolais, Simmental and SimAngus bulls across the five states. The bulls averaged \$4,073 in this year's sale, which is record-breaking, averaging almost \$1,000 higher per bull than in 2021.



The top sale was an Angus bull consigned by Marda Angus, of Lodi, WI, Marda Black Pearl 1905, which sold for \$9,500 to Larry O'Hern of Vermont, IL. Marda Plus One 188, Angus, sold for \$8,200 to Campbell Land and Cattle of Illinois. Daniel Haege of Nashville, IL, sold the top Red Angus bull for \$6,100 to Painter Starcevich Farms LLP, Farmington, IL.

The top Simmental and SimAngus bulls were consigned by Washburn Simmental of Olney, IL. Both bulls brought \$5,000; one selling to Jim Swartz of Pittsfield, IL and the other to Gerald Prince of Indiana. The top Charolais bull was consigned by future WIU Aggie, Anna Link of Rio, IL.

"Several consignors indicated that the staff and students are to be commended for their excellent care and presentation of the bulls," said WIU Associate Professor of Agriculture and Bull Test Manager Keela Trennepohl. "This is extremely positive momentum in continuing to build the best University-run bull test in the nation. I want to extend a sincere thank you to the farm staff, especially Delson Wilcoxon, the 2022 Beef Production class, and all consignors and buyers for making this a top tier Midwest event."

WIU Alumnus Named 2022 Organic Farmer of the Year

Western Illinois University alumnus Dave Campbell was recently named the 2022 Organic Farmer of the Year by the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES).

The award was presented at the 33rd annual Organic Farming Conference, organized by MOSES, held in La Crosse, WI, from Feb. 24-26. This conference is the largest organic farming conference in the country.

Campbell, a 1980 graduate of WIU's teacher education program, was one of four students in his class who were given a unique opportunity to do their student teaching in Montana. During his time in the program, Campbell was awarded the Katherine Thompson scholarship for elementary education majors.

During his time as a student at Western, Dave, along with his training partner Scott Foster, a Macomb native, would spend many weeks running 50 - 60 miles per week around Macomb and the surrounding countryside. Campbell ran a two-hour and 46-minute marathon while attending WIU, and was also a member of the Hall Star basketball team. While he did not major in agriculture, he ventured into organic farming because the teaching job he had originally been offered did not work out, and the next job he was offered was simply not what he was looking for. As someone who was raised by a farmer, farming was the next logical step for him.

"I got to the point where I wanted to be outdoors farming, so I decided to go that route instead," said Campbell. "As it turned out, I have used my education background to assist me through many activities I have participated in over the past 20 years, including curriculum development work for organic farming publications written for some of the Land Grant Universities here in the upper Midwest, presenting numerous workshops, along with serving on National Policy Committees based in Washington, D.C."



Campbell was inspired to go into organic farming specifically because of his father, who adopted the organic method in 1967, when Dave was just 12.

"We believed that organic was the way to do it," said Campbell. "We didn't like spraying chemicals on the farm, and we knew with good management, we could grow our farm that way."

As an alumnus, Campbell has not lost his passion for the University. He returns to Macomb every time he has a chance in order to attend events at the Allison Organic Research and Demonstration Farm, such as the Organic Farm Field Day, to engage with current faculty and students. He has advice for current students, whether they are majoring in agriculture or not.



"Everyone needs to eat so there will always be jobs in the agriculture sector," said Campbell. "If you aren't afraid of hard work, and enjoy the outdoors, it can be a very rewarding field for you."

Andy Clayton, the research technician who manages the WIU Allison Organic Research and Demonstration Farm, said Campbell has been coming to events for many years and has been very supportive of the agriculture program, especially research programs involving current students.



"Dave has generously donated to our program, but has also given back in other ways," said Clayton. "Last year, on our Field Day, we were having an issue with some of our equipment and he went above and beyond to ensure we could fix it even though he was just a guest at the program."

Clayton has attended the MOSES conference before and therefore has an understanding of the importance of this opportunity for not only Campbell, but also WIU as his alma mater.

"This conference is the largest in the country and this award is the most prestigious award given at the conference," said Clayton. "The University should be proud to call Dave Campbell, the Organic Farmer of the Year, one of their own."

WIU Pre-Veterinary Medicine Alumna Returns to Teach Current Students

After starting her academic career at a larger university and finding it did not fit her needs, Western Illinois University alumna Ashley Whiteside knew she wanted to find a smaller, more personalized learning experience. In pursuit of this, she transferred to WIU.

Whiteside graduated from the pre-veterinary program in 2015 with a degree in agricultural science. She gained confidence and took advantage of the many hands-on opportunities presented to her. By the time she graduated, she felt prepared to enter veterinary school from an education standpoint, as well as in terms of the professionalism that she learned at WIU.

The pre-veterinary program is a part of the WIU Department of Agriculture, which Whiteside said helped her push through challenges throughout her time as a student, and made her feel comfortable on campus.

"I really loved being a part of the Ag department," said Whiteside. "It was very inclusive and truly felt like a home away from home."

After graduation, she went on to graduate from Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine. Currently, Whiteside works at the Roseville Veterinary Clinic.

Aside from her professional career, Whiteside continues to give back to her alma mater by not only teaching classes to WIU students, but also mentoring students who are in the same program she was once a part of. The mentorship program, established by faculty member Jana Knupp, aims to pair freshmen agriculture students with a local mentor to help them gain experience in the field. As a mentor, Whiteside meets with students interested in her career and gives them advice regarding the program and the career path, as well as allowing them to shadow her while she's working.

"I think my positive experience being a mentor was influential in my choice to apply for a teaching role here," Whiteside said. "I am excited to be back at WIU as an alumna to teach, and it is something I have really enjoyed so far. I want to do what I can to help support these future veterinarians."

Her journey to becoming a veterinarian was not always easy, and she says that as a student she would have never expected herself to have come full circle and be teaching other students in the program. Whiteside is so grateful for this opportunity and has advice for other students in the program or who may be considering the program.

"Perseverance is key," said Whiteside, "It is not always going to be easy; this program can be extremely challenging and discouragement is a common occurrence. The important thing is to not let the discouragement stop you because, eventually, your hard work will pay off."



WIU School of Ag Honored as a Top Nationwide Program

The Western Illinois University School of Agriculture was recognized as a top nationwide program during the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) convention Nov. 30-Dec. 4 in New Orleans, LA.

School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker was presented with the 2021 NAAE Outstanding Postsecondary Agriculture Program award during the convention.

The award, sponsored by Bayer, is presented to postsecondary programs which "emphasize lasting teaching methods, enhance student motivation and exemplify great experiential learning."

The WIU agriculture program was honored because of strong results in training and placing new agriculture teachers. Over the last 21 years, the program has an 87 percent placement rate, and a 66 percent retention rate.

"The success can be found at the heart of WIU, Dr. Baker," according to an NAAE news release. "Dr. Baker has led the program since 1999, thus providing continuity of focus for all matters. Baker has the primary responsibility for coordinating and delivering the ag education curriculum, supervising faculty and support staff, and coordinating all activities associated with the University farm."

The NAAE pointed to several WIU courses that have helped the University become a leader in agricultural education, including the Summer Experience in Ag Education, where students are interviewed for student teacher placements. They also praised the WIU program for establishing partnerships throughout the state, including working with St. Paul School in Macomb to teach younger children about the agriculture industry, and with the Illinois Farm Bureau to sponsor the Collegiate FFA Greenhand Motivational Conference.

Baker said it is a true honor to have the University's agricultural education program recognized by the national organization.

"This honor truly reflects the hard work and dedication of our graduates in securing teaching positions, and their ability to retain these positions, plus secure tenure," said Baker. "It is also a privilege and honor to be nominated by your peers within the state of Illinois to qualify for a Region IV award. It is a priority of mine to ensure that our graduates take pride in their institutional choice, as well as strive to be the best educators they can be, and that their decision to become agricultural educators is by choice and not by chance."

In addition to the WIU award, 2015 University alumnus Trent Taber, the agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Cambridge School District, was also honored by the NAAE. Taber and the Cambridge High School agriculture program were one of six agricultural education programs nationwide to receive the 2021 NAAE Outstanding Secondary/Middle School Program award during the national convention.



More than 50 percent of the students at Cambridge High School are enrolled in an agriculture class, where the Three-Circle-Model of Agriculture Education is implemented.

"Mr. Trent Taber has organized and managed the Cambridge agriculture program to be nationally-recognized in a variety of activities, and is more than deserving of his Region IV award," said Baker.

The NAAE said through Taber's work as FFA chapter advisor at Cambridge High School, he stresses the importance of leadership development for all students and encourages their participation and involvement in their chapter.

"This award recognition is a direct reflection of the hard work that the students, school staff, administration, alumni and community have put in to grow the future of agriculture in Cambridge," said Taber. "We are so blessed as a small school to have stakeholders who see the value in agricultural education."

NAAE, with offices in Lexington, KY, is the professional organization for agricultural educators, with over 8,000 members nationwide. It provides professional networking and development opportunities, professional liability coverage and extensive awards and recognition programs to its members. The mission of NAAE is "professionals providing agricultural education for the global community through visionary leadership, advocacy and service."

Ginger, Turmeric Harvested as Alternative Research Crops at WIU

Western Illinois University School of Agriculture Assistant Professor Shelby Henning has added two more specialty crops to his research program in order to provide information to local and regional farmers on growing options and the successful production of a widening number of plant species.

Henning, in cooperation with University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Chris Enroth, recently harvested several varieties of ginger and turmeric in an effort to develop them as alternative crops for Illinois growers. Henning and Enroth agree the work is unique because there is currently a lack of data available about ginger and turmeric production in the state.

Enroth said tomatoes are typically considered the "money maker" of the vegetable crop world, but this trial is intended to both broaden and inform what could be planted as part of a grower's crop rotation.

"Ginger, per square foot has the same income potential," he said. "It can be sold for \$20 a pound, and is super high quality."

As Henning and Enroth dug into the dirt at the School of Agriculture's high tunnel recently, just off Tower Road, the rich aroma of the two plantings was hard to miss. The 30-foot by 100-foot high tunnel was constructed on the University's agricultural research farm several years ago, with grant money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Both of these plantings have medicinal qualities," said Henning. "Ginger is good for digestive health and nausea reduction, and turmeric has anti-cancer qualities."

Henning and Enroth raised five varieties of ginger this year, including Peruvian yellow ginger from plantings sent from Hawaii, and a single variety of turmeric. The pair recently obtained an Illinois Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant to further study the production of ginger in Illinois. They said the hope is that COVID-related supply-chain concerns don't impact the ability to source an even greater number of varieties for evaluation this coming growing season.



The latest batch of ginger was planted in the high tunnel in late May. Henning and Enroth said there are many uses for ginger that extend far beyond baking snaps and houses – a ready example cited by the research team being the donation of 30 pounds of the recent ginger crop to Forgottonia Brewing in Macomb, by Henning and Enroth.

Forgottonia co-owner and brewer Sean West, a webmaster at WIU, said he used part of the crop to brew six kegs, or 93 gallons of Belgian Triple beer, which sold out several weeks ago and was well received. He said the Belgian yeast used in the mix already has a spiciness, and the ginger accentuated that.

"We always like to use local farmers and ingredients when we can," said West. "The community responds well to using local products. There is also the environmental part of the ingredients not having to travel so far."

In addition to ginger and turmeric, Henning has grown a wide variety of specialty crops in the high tunnel, including tomatoes, bell and hot peppers, eggplant, lemongrass, basil, lettuce and a variety of cover-crops. He uses the high tunnel and its plantings for hands-on instruction as often as possible. This semester, for example, the tunnel was frequently utilized for laboratory exercises by students enrolled in an introductory course covering horticulture and agronomy he teaches with Agriculture Professor Mark Bernards.

"This kind of collaborative approach in research and teaching really demonstrates the quality of the agriculture program here at WIU," said Henning. "Also, on a somewhat more selfish level, this research allows me to indulge myself in the enjoyment of cultivating uncommonly encountered crops, as the more unusual the crop is, the more likely I am drawn to plant it."

WIU Agriculture Alumnus Named National Teach Ag Champion

Western Illinois University School of Agriculture Alumnus Riley Hintzsche has been named a National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Teach Ag Champion.

Hintzsche, a Streator Township High School agriculture teacher, and FFA chapter advisor, graduated from WIU in 2014, with a degree in agriculture education. He is one of three agriculture teachers nationwide to win the honor this year. Teachers were selected based on their passion and dedication to transforming agricultural education into a more inclusive and diverse profession, while cultivating the next generation of leaders, problem solvers, entrepreneurs and agriculturalists.

"It's truly outstanding to being named a National Teach Ag Champion by the National Association of Agricultural Educators," said Hintzsche. "I started my career at Streator Township High School, fresh out of WIU. When I started, there was a lot I didn't know about myself and a lot I was struggling to find. Streator embraced that struggle, and allowed me to do what I could to find myself."

Hintzsche said as part of the 2021 awards, the NAAE focused on teachers who are inclusive and diverse in the classroom and the organization.

"It's important for all teachers to understand where they are in the steps of inclusion and diversity, and then incorporate the appropriate steps to own that classroom that allows students to feel included," he said. "There is no handbook, there is no step-by-step procedure for everyone. It simply comes down to being a good human and understanding that every student has a struggle that we have to embrace, just like I was embraced when I came to Streator."

Hintzsche said as a member of the LGBTQ community, and teaching agriculture, he was told many times that he it would limit him in reaching his teaching goals.

"The sad thing is, I believed so many people," he said. "Today, my goal is to provide that inclusive space for my students so they don't live through the same struggles I did. You can do anything, anything at all, even if you struggle to get there. I often tell my students, 'Be you, because that is powerful.'"

Hintzsche said he is grateful for Streator Township High School, which he said he now calls his home.

"They taught me to unapologetic for being me and that is what has taught me how to have the best teaching space," he said. "Without the people and students that I have been able to work with, I wouldn't be me and I never would have learned how to be more inclusive."

In addition to this national award, Hintzsche and the Streator Township High School FFA chapter have received other state and national honors. The chapter's Food Science Team represented the state at the 2019 National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, IN.

The Streator FFA chapter was also named a three-star program, the highest ranking an FFA chapter can receive from the National FFA Organization.

In August, Hintzsche was named a finalist for the Outstanding Early Career Teacher Award by the NAAE.



WIU Alumnus Honored with Illinois Farm Bureau's Highest Award

A life filled with local, state and national volunteer service has earned a Western Illinois University alumnus the highest award given by the Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB).

David Erickson, a 1980 agriculture education graduate, from Altona, IL, was presented the Charles B. Shuman Distinguished Service Award during the IFB's annual meeting in Chicago earlier this month.

"The award honors distinguished service within agriculture, as well as in other organizations," said Erickson.

Erickson and his wife, Nancy, farm in Knox County, and run a farm management business. He was originally supposed to receive the state award in 2020; however, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the organization's in-person, annual meeting.



"David has established a stellar record of leadership within the Illinois Farm Bureau and other community organizations," said WIU School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker. "We are very proud of David's achievements, and the Charles B. Shuman Distinguished Service Award is a true reflection of his advocacy work for the agricultural industry. David is a fine example of WIU's School of Agriculture alumni that are dedicating their time and effort to advance the agricultural industry."

In addition to serving in leadership roles in agricultural associations at the state and national level, Erickson has served as president and vice president of the Knox County Farm Bureau. He has also served as secretary-treasurer of the Illinois FFA organization, and chairman of the Illinois FFA organization.

Within his community, Erickson is a volunteer with the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Altona. He is also past director of the Oneida Telephone and Cablevision Companies, the Knox County Zoning Board of Appeals and past chairman of the Galesburg Cottage Hospital Board of Trustees. He also served on the board of directors for Midwest Bank of Western Illinois, Unit #10 Extension Council and the Knox County Board, and is currently the vice president of the Galesburg Community Foundation.

Within agriculture, Erickson has served as president of the State Soybean Association, as well as chairman of the board and president of the American Soybean Association.

"There I was active in legislative and trade issues," he said.

Erickson earned the American FFA Degree in 2005, and received the state 4-H Alumni Recognition Award from Illinois 4-H the same year. He was also named a Master Farmer by Prairie Farmer and Farm Progress Publications in 2003, and has provided advice as a Profit Planner Panelist for the magazine.

Prior to graduating from Western, Erickson served as a state FFA officer as a student. After graduation, he taught vocational agriculture over four years before moving into farming full time.

"WIU gave me the opportunity to learn in an environment where all students were involved in a wide variety of campus volunteer work," said Erickson. "Western provided me a lot of opportunities to engage beyond the classroom."

The Distinguished Service Award provides an opportunity for Illinois Farm Bureau to recognize an individual who has given a lifetime of exemplary leadership and service to agriculture to a major segment of the state and/or nation. This award honors the memory and service of Charles B. Shuman, a revered Moultrie County farm leader who served as president of both IFB and of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

WIU Ag Alumni Part of FFA Effort to Help Tornado Damaged Mayfield

"In a time of need, the answer is simple, help."

Those are the words of Western Illinois University alumnus Riley Hintzsche, the agricultural educator and FFA advisor at Streator Township High School, in reference to a collaborative project to bring needed supplies to storm-ravaged Mayfield, KY.

When Hintzsche, a 2014 graduate, and fellow WIU alumnus, 2016 graduate Mitch Miller, the agriculture teacher at Midwest Central High School in Manito, IL, heard about the tornado that struck Mayfield, KY, Dec. 10, both knew they needed to take action. Both were immediately contacted by Jesse Faber, the agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Pontiac High School, and the man both call the "ringleader" of collection efforts to gather supplies to send to the region.

Hintzsche and Faber happen to be friends with Mayfield, KY, school administrator and former district agriculture teacher Richard Horn, and contacted him about the needs of the area. In just six days, truckloads of supplies were headed south.

"As ag teachers, we are fortunate to have a very large network of individuals to gain advice from, ask to work with our students, and ultimately call upon in a time of crisis," said Hintzsche. "Well, when people asked what we did, we called upon our resources. The Streator FFA Officer Team put a post on social media to our community, which resulted in numerous donations from local community members."

One of Hintzsche's former students, Ali Talty, is the store manager of the Streator RP Home and Harvest and donated two pallets of water and helped with the purchase of pallets of cat and dog food and pine shavings. A parent of another former student called the Ottawa Community Food Bank, which donated seven pallets of items.

"We belong to a wide network of ag teachers and agricultural enthusiasts that ultimately had no physical way of giving, so they gave a monetary donation, trusting Jesse and the crew to purchase things on their behalf," said Hintzsche.

Miller said he originally thought the response would fit in a few pick-up trucks, but donations reached a point where larger vehicles were needed to fit all of the supplies.

"The donation drive escalated beyond what I ever imagined," said Miller. "We quickly got to a point where a semi and a 53-foot enclosed van trailer were going to be needed and beyond. I reached out to some contacts I had about borrowing such equipment and we (so many were involved with this) made it happen."

Armed with an Illinois Commercial Driver's License (CDL), Miller and others drove three large trucks, full of supplies collected through the effort, to Kentucky. The trip began in Peoria, IL Dec. 17, with a stop at 5 Star Water, owned by a community member in Miller's school district, to add seven pallets of donated and reduced cost water to the truck.

The caravan moved to Manito, then to Pontiac to collect donations from the Midwest Central, Streator and Pontiac school districts and to organize the transport.

Faber said more than 90 donations of cash and other items were dropped off at the school in Pontiac. That total includes two FFA chapters who combined efforts and showed up with three vehicles filled with donations. A truckload of contributions was also delivered from Platteville, WI, and from local individuals and businesses.

"On Saturday morning, Dec. 18, the convoy of three loads departed for Mayfield, making stops on I-57 to collect items from other FFA Chapters, including Charleston, Sullivan, Olney and others," said Miller. "We arrived at Graves County High School in the early evening and unloaded the three trucks of donated goods with Graves County High School administrator and former ag teacher Richard Horn, and agriculture teacher Kelvin Howard. We filled their shop with the donated items that came out of Illinois. Some of the pallets of water had to be stored outside for the evening because there was not room in their shop."

After delivery of the donations, Horn took the volunteers on a driving tour of the devastation.



"I thought I was in a war zone - homes leveled, businesses in piles, streets barely clear enough to drive through," said Miller. "The pictures I saw on social media throughout the previous week leading up to the trip were seen in person. Richard shared with us that 60-70 students and eight staffers lost their homes."

Miller said a second trip to deliver donations is planned before school starts for the spring semester. He said local volunteers are waiting for confirmation from Mayfield about what specific items are needed.

"I am very proud of my FFA officer team and school community of Midwest Central," said Miller. "Their efforts contributed over \$2,000 in monetary donations and three pallets of miscellaneous donated items. Before we departed to head back home, ag teacher Kelvin Howard, said it best by stating, 'Tough times don't last, but tough people do.'"

WIU School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker said he is extremely proud of the University's agriculture alumni, who didn't hesitate to react to a critical situation.

"Leatherneck Pride is everywhere, and we need to celebrate those Leathernecks who step up and take action at a moment of crisis," said Baker. "Many hands make light work, and the Illinois Agricultural Education family stepped up to assist the Kentucky Agricultural Education family, which is facing a devastating crisis. I am very proud of our alums for being very proactive in this situation. I also want to thank all of those individuals that stepped up to donate to this cause and those who will continue to donate until the city of Mayfield is rebuilt. It is a truly proud moment for the Leatherneck Nation."

WIU Alumni Lead Students to National FFA Awards

Alumni from the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture led the FFA chapters from the high schools where they teach to numerous first place awards at the 94th National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, IN.

Alumni include:

- Bryan Schullian, a 2010 agriculture education graduate and Southeastern High School agriculture teacher and FFA advisor: Students Savannah Ramsey and Amanda Stephens were the first place Agriscience winner in Environmental Science and Natural Resources – Division 2.

"Savannah and Amanda completed an agriscience research project creating a symbiotic relationship between tilapia and tomato plants," said Schullian. "They tested how many plants would be needed to create a healthy living environment for the tilapia, and for the two species to thrive from one another. They found the best ratio to be 18 and 24 tomato plants per two tilapia fish. Through this project, Savannah and Amanda valued the importance of dedication and hard work, checking the fish and environment each day. They also gained skills related to taking care of fish, testing water quality, maintaining growing environments and bacteria growth and properly weighing the plants to measure mass."

- Kent Rigg, a 2001 agriculture education graduate and Williamsfield High School agriculture teacher and FFA advisor: Williamsfield sophomore Sidney Stiers won first place in Creed Speaking.

"Sidney is actively involved in her family farm while also having several SAEs including two entrepreneurial," said Rigg. "Sidney is a fourth generation creed contestant with each generation competing, including her mom winning state a while back. She is the first to capture the national title. She has a passion for agriculture and FFA. Preparing for the creed competition has been a wonderful experience - she had the opportunity to grow as a public speaker and meet so many people along the way. Sidney worked a lot with our school Principal Zack Binder to polish her delivery, as well as State Representative Dan Shawson, Corey Flourney a former National Officer from Chicago Ag Science, and so many more. Additionally, her success in the creed has fueled passion for the FFA program and many students are eager to get involved. The whole school and community have been so supportive along the way and have meant the world to her."

- Cindy Feltmeyer, a 2009 agriculture education graduate and Eastland High School agriculture teacher and FFA advisor: Students Alyssa Miller, Delana Erbsen, Nevin Erbsen and Ella Gunderson won first place in Dairy Cattle and Evaluation.

- Kaylyn Davenport, a 2014 graduate and Merced-El Capitan High School (California): Students Autumn Miller, Nikolas Williams and Makalya Ward – first place in Marketing Plan:

"The Marketing Plan CDE requires students to write and present a marketing plan for a local agriculture business. It was a great experience for my students to help a real business learn methods for increasing their profits by incorporating marketing strategies," said Davenport. "I am very proud of the work my students put in. They have been working on this marketing plan since February. They are very proud of the fact they are national champions, but are more proud of the fact they were able to help local agriculturalists in our community. The skills they gained from this competition will be valuable for the rest of their lives. Even if they do not go into marketing directly, they have gained communication, public speaking and leadership skills that will be beneficial in any career they choose."

- Kyle Miller, a 1993 graduate and agriculture teacher and FFA advisor for Prairie Center High School: First place in Ag Sales and first place in Milk Quality and Products.



WIU School of Ag Course Matches Freshmen with Alumni for Networking Opportunities

A unique opportunity for freshmen Western Illinois University agriculture students matches them with successful program alumni who have excelled in various components of the industry.

The mentoring program, part of Agri 120, the Agriculture in Today's Society class, is taught by Instructor Jana Knupp. She has paired each of the 34 students in her class with a WIU agriculture alumni to connect with throughout the semester.

Representatives of WIU's School of Agriculture reached out to Western alumni throughout the summer to seek volunteers. The purpose of the program is to help students develop a professional network and have someone they can talk to about future career opportunities.

"We are very fortunate in the School of Agriculture to have alumni who are so giving of their time and expertise," said Knupp. "The Agriculture Advisory Board and I thought this would be a great opportunity to connect students with alumni early during their time at Western, and use the knowledge of our alumni to help guide our students through new, professional situations."

Students in the class are enrolled in various agriculture-related majors, including pre-veterinary medicine, agriculture science, agriculture business and agriculture education. Alumni are encouraged to share their WIU stories of key lessons they learned throughout their time on campus.

One of those alumni is 2004 agriculture business alumna Joanne Beeler, a human resources supervisor at The Knapheide Manufacturing Company in Quincy, IL. She said she volunteered to be a mentor because she felt it was important to let students know how the agriculture-related campus organizations enhanced her Western education.

"I was an Ag Vocator for three years and now I work in HR and recruiting, so that transferred and prepared me very well," she said. "I have had one call with my mentee so far, and felt it went very well. We spoke about her major and interests and I tried to give her some things to think about as far as careers go. I was able to reach out to a friend that works for another ag company and passed her information along for another perspective of what's out there."

Ashley Whiteside, a veterinarian and 2015 WIU agriculture business graduate, said she volunteered to help with the program because she felt it was important to give back to "the University, the professors who shaped my education and the current students who are obtaining their education now."

"Thus far, I have enjoyed getting to know the students and just talking to them about their time at WIU," she said. "I've enjoyed listening to their experiences and comparing them to my own. I love WIU, and I am so thankful for the education I gained while there, prior to veterinary school. The ag and animal science department was home to me while I was there, and I want other students to gain that same experience."

Jeremy Kane, a 2002 agriculture science graduate and area business manager for crop protection and seed growth at Bayer Crop Science – North America, said he has enjoyed the opportunity the partnership affords him to share knowledge.

"I enjoy mentoring our next generation of agriculture leaders by sharing insights to help them understand the opportunities we have in the ag industry and the skills they need to gain at WIU to have a successful career," said Kane.

WIU student Cody Cornell, of Columbia, IL, who is mentored by 2000 graduate Illinois Senator Dawn Driscoll, said it is the preparation for his future the program is giving him that he appreciates most.

"The mentor program at WIU has allowed me to become involved in the working world without actually being there already," he said. "It prepares me for the real world and the path that faces me in the near future."

Agriculture Business student Ryann Zimmerman, of Tennessee, IL, said the program has provided valuable insight to maximize the opportunities available at WIU.

"My mentor did an amazing job of not only explaining her job and her daily tasks, but also provided wonderful advice on navigating college and making the most of my time at WIU," she said.

WIU Ag Teams Win Numerous Honors at National Barrow Show



The Western Illinois University School of Agriculture's Livestock Judging Team and Show Team recently earned numerous team and individual awards at the National Barrow Show in Austin, MN.

The WIU Show Team was named Champion in the purebred truckload section, which then led to being named Grand Champion Overall in the truckload portion of the competition. The students spent countless hours in the barn working with these pigs to get them just right for the show.

"During my time gearing up for the National Barrow Show, I learned a lot from the day we pulled our set of truckload pigs off of the cold nursery at the swine farm, to when we were throwing up the 'W's' at the backdrop in Austin," said junior agriculture major Dane Robertson, from Mooresville, IN. "To say the least, my favorite thing from my experience feeding the truckload was the bonding and getting to know all my teammates and classmates, who I'm now calling some of my best friends."

WIU's Livestock Judging Team won High Team Overall, as well as Second High Team in Reasons.

WIU had two students place in the top 10 in the individual competitions: Senior agriculture major Kyle Webster, of Chrisman, IL, captured High Individual Overall and Second High Individual in Reasons and senior agriculture major Leremy Jackson, of Unionville, IA, won Fifth High Individual Overall and Seventh High Individual in Reasons.

"That special Monday at NBS was truly a dream come true for not only me, but for our team and school," said Webster. "The whole experience was a representation of what we do here at WIU. We are in the trenches every day trying to out work everyone else, and at the end of the day we hope we land on top."

The teams are advised by Associate Professor Mark Hoge and graduate assistants Cooper Bounds and Bailey Irick.

WIU Alumna Chosen for Statewide Agricultural Grant

A 2020 Western Illinois University School of Agriculture alumna has been named one of four winners statewide of an agricultural grant which helps support and retain new teachers.

Anna Shupe is in her second year teaching in the Paris (IL) School District. She was recently named a winner in the Illinois Agricultural Education Teacher Grant Program.

The grant was given to four Illinois agriculture teachers who are in their first-fifth year of teaching. She will receive \$2,000 a year for the next five years, as long as she continues teaching agriculture in Illinois.

"I applied for this grant this past May after completing my first year of teaching," said Shupe. "The application consisted mainly of setting goals for myself professionally and for my program."

Shupe applied for the grant in May and said she realized she may be one of the winners after representatives from the Illinois Farm Bureau, Edgar County Farm Bureau, FCAE and IAA Foundation showed up at her school's Homecoming celebration.

"At that point, I realized what was going on," Shupe said. "I was absolutely speechless and had no idea what to think. Being a teacher isn't the most glamorous, high paying job out there. It takes countless hours of work that no one sees and involves lots of unnoticed work. By receiving this award, it just validated that what I am doing is making a difference and that people are noticing all of the hours that I put into teaching and that I am doing something right. This was a huge honor, and I can't thank the IAA Foundation and Illinois Farm Bureau enough for the opportunity."



Macomb Hy-Vee Begins Selling WIU-Produced Hydroponic Lettuce

Through a second partnership with Hy-Vee Food Store in Macomb, the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture is now growing hydroponic lettuce marketed through the local grocer.

The "Rex" butterhead lettuce is grown in WIU's Knoblauch Hall through collaborative research and classroom work by two agriculture professors and their students.

"We just delivered our first load of hydroponic lettuce to the local Hy-Vee store," said School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker. "I have been working with Gary Jenkins, the Macomb Hy-Vee's produce manager, to get this accomplished. Hopefully we can grow our relationship with Hy-Vee even further in the future. We are super excited about getting additional food products, raised in the School of Agriculture, into our local Hy-Vee store."

WIU Agriculture Assistant Professors Shelby Henning and Dan Atherton started working together a few years ago when they built a small system in the basement of Knoblauch Hall to grow the produce. The production process allows for several research opportunities for students, including the process of detecting nutrient deficiencies.

The roots of the lettuce grow in channels similar to vinyl rain gutters, which allow for the introduction of nutrients. LED lights are utilized to increase production and to ensure the lettuce has adequate hours of light during the day.

In October 2020, the School of Agriculture began selling ground sausage, as well as links and patties, in traditional and zesty flavors, produced by Leatherneck Country Meats (LCM), through Hy-Vee's East Jackson Street location. LCM is an organization that sells pork products that were raised on the University Farm.

The products are processed by Farmhouse Meats in Carthage, IL, which is partly owned by several WIU School of Agriculture alumni. Products are also sold on the LCM website at bit.ly/LCMorder.

It is also anticipated that bell peppers and tomatoes, grown through the University's agriculture program, will be sold through Hy-Vee's produce section beginning soon.



WIU Weed Science Team Wins Undergraduate Division of North Central Weed Science Society Competition

The Weed Science Team from the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture recently captured first place in the undergraduate division of the North Central Weed Science Society competition in July in Fargo, N.D.

The team was made up of agriculture science majors junior Dustin Steinkamp, of Coatsburg, IL; senior Luke Bergschneider, of Franklin, IL; junior Jacob Johnson, of Geneseo, IL; and junior Stephanie Reiter, of Hebron, IL. The students are coached by WIU Agriculture Professor Mark Bernards.

Steinkamp received first place in weed identification, while Bergschneider received first place in herbicide identification and farmer problems. Bergschneider and Johnson won first and second place respectively in the undergraduate overall individual competition.

"Dr. Bernards has done a fabulous job in the classroom preparing us," said Johnson. "WIU has the most underrated agricultural undergraduate program in the Midwest, period."

WIU alumna Claudia Bland, a Spring 2020 graduate with a bachelor's degree in agriculture, received second place overall in the graduate competition and first place in the herbicide identification graduate division. Bland is now a graduate student at Purdue University.



Family of WIU Alumni Named IBA Commercial Producer of the Year

The family cattle operation, run by two Western Illinois University alumni, has been recognized as the 2021 Illinois Beef Association Commercial Producer of the Year.

Larry Joe O'Hern, a 1982 agriculture graduate, and his son, Patrick, a 2004 agriculture graduate, are two of the owners of O'Hern Stock Farms, a 5,000-acre operation. Both men were members of the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity during their time as students at WIU.

O'Hern Farms was nominated for the award based on its operation in Vermont, IL, about 30 miles southeast of Macomb. In addition to raising cattle, the operation grows corn and soybeans, as well as cannabis under the business name Nature's Grace and Wellness, LLC.

The O'Hern family has farmed in the area for five generations, with two generations currently working there together. The O'Hern grandchildren will soon begin working on the farm, adding a third generation.

Larry, and his wife, Kelley, began farming in 1981, but the O'Hern family began working the family's land in the 1950s.

The O'Hern family stays connected to WIU in a variety of ways, including Patrick's service as a member of the School of Agriculture's Advisory Board. The family has also supplied cattle for research at the University.

"My education at WIU was the launch pad for a successful career in agriculture," said Larry Joe. "The lessons learned during my time at Western, and the relationships that were made there, have stayed with me through my career."

WIU Alumnus Awarded International Crop Adviser Honor

Western Illinois University alumnus Todd Steinacher has been around the world to teach better farming practices, which has led to him being named the 2021 International Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) of the Year.

Steinacher, a 2006 graduate of WIU's School of Agriculture, is an agronomist for the AgriGold seed company, and provides agronomic support to farmers in west central and southwest Illinois. He was named the Illinois CCA of the Year in 2020, and AgriGold Agronomist of the Year in 2018.

The international award was announced during the American Society of Agronomy's March CCA webinar. It will be presented at the American Society of Agronomy-Crop Science Society of America-Soil Science Society of America international annual meeting later this year.



Steinacher is the third Illinois agronomist to receive the honor since its creation in 1992.

"Receiving this award is truly humbling," he said. "I truly love what I do, and have a strong passion for agronomy and helping farmers."

The International Certified Crop Adviser of the Year Award recognizes a CCA who delivers exceptional customer service, is highly innovative, has shown that they are a leader in their field, and has contributed to the exchange of ideas and the transfer of agronomic knowledge within the agriculture industry.

"Early on I set my goal of being an agronomist," Steinacher said. "I've spent most of my career now as an agronomist and what better way to culminate 15 years of agronomy than winning this. It's pretty exciting for me because believe it or not I was actually a very shy kid from a small town and being able to do these things is pretty cool."

Steinacher has also been heavily involved in a Rotary International program in Zambia, Africa, which brought modern farming and planting methods to a group of 11 farmers in the region. The program asked for one acre of land for each farm, lining up the seed fertilizer, herbicide and custom tilling, and buying new planters and an ox for each farmer.

The team Steinacher worked with continued to monitor the progress of the farmers and returned to Africa to observe the results of the harvest. Travel to the region this year, the third season for the program, was not possible because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the first farmers Steinacher worked with in Zambia is now supporting his family with the corn he grows and has expanded his operation to include chickens because he has grain to feed them.

"He is able to feed chickens, which then are going to feed his family," said Steinacher. "Animal protein is very hard to come by over there. He is introducing animal protein to his family, but he's also selling chickens to other people and to restaurants."

Steinacher has worked for Agrigold since 2015. Prior to that, he worked at GROWMARK/FS for about 10 years, doing agronomy sales and consulting.

He credits his education through WIU's School of Agriculture for giving him a great foundation for his agronomic journey.

"The Ag-Mech Club, Agronomy Club and Alpha Gamma Rho are organizations at WIU that sparked my desire for services and leadership during my time at WIU, as well as my professional career," he said.

Steinacher currently serves on the Illinois Certified Crop Advisor Board of Directors. He was presented with his award during a March 24 webinar and will be recognized at the American Society of Agronomy-Crop Science Society of America-Soil Science Society of America annual meeting in November.

Becoming a Certified Crop Advisor is a program of the ASA and is considered a professional benchmark.

Steinacher is an Illinois Soybean Association CCA Envoy alumnus, writes three blogs monthly for ISA's ILSoyAdvisor, coordinates the current Soy Envoy program where six CCAs from across the state provide blogs and podcasts of agronomic information, and assists in lining up speakers for ISA webinars and the annual Soybean Summit.

Beyond his duties with AgriGold, Steinacher serves on the Illinois CCA Board of Directors, is a mentor to new CCA candidates and represented the CCA program while promoting the importance of ag research funding at ASA-CSSA-SSSA Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC.

Four WIU School of Ag Graduates Named Distinguished Alumni

The honor is a tradition that started in 2020 during the school's 100th anniversary. This year's honorees are 1985 Agriculture alumnus Mary Barnes, of Nebo, IL; 1983 Agriculture and 1986 MBA alumnus Marsha Webster, of Allerton, IA; 1987 Agriculture alumnus Kurt Rahe, of Bluffs, IL; and 1987 Agriculture alumnus Mark Dempsey, of Fowler, IL.

Marsha Webster: Webster, who received her bachelor's degree in Agriculture in 1983, and her Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in 1986.

Her professional career has involved many roles - Commodity Trader, CFO, Director of Operations, Consultant - to name a few, at a wide array of companies - Hawkeye Gold Division, The Andersons, PIC, Tyson Fresh Meats are just some of the 12 companies she has worked for in her career. For the past 10 years she has been employed by J.D. Heiskell Company, a 136-year, family-owned company.

"I am humbled to receive the WIU School of Agriculture Distinguished Alumni Award," said Webster. "WIU was my home for six years while I received my undergraduate and graduate degree. The School of Agriculture gave me a great foundation to build my career and many life-long friends."

Webster's true passion is the livestock industry. She and her husband, Jon, also a WIU animal science alumni, live in southern Iowa and have a cow/calf herd in northern Missouri with their son, Ty, and his family. Marsha and Jon also have a daughter, Jessica Moore, who lives in Madill, OK.

Mary (Turnbull) Barnes: Barnes, a 1985 graduate with a degree in Agriculture, was the first female WIU graduate to secure a secondary agriculture teacher position in Illinois and one of four who taught in the state in 1985. She has also served on the section, district and Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT) and the Illinois FFA Board of Directors.

Barnes has taught at Barry Community School in Pike County; Western High School in Barry (consolidation of Barry and West Pike); and Pleasant Hill High School.

She received the 2008 National Association of Agricultural Education (NAAE) Teacher Mentor award winner in Illinois, in 1995, was named the Outstanding NVA (NAAE) outstanding Region IV teacher, in 1996 and 2019, received the District III Excellence in Teaching Award along with her FFA American Farmer Degree in 1983 and the Honorary American FFA Degree in 1999.

Barnes completed her Master of Science degree at Southern Illinois University in Agriculture Education and Mechanization. She retired in 2019, after 35 years of teaching.

"Through the years, I have seen many changes in agriculture and education, but the students still need and want to have someone believe in them," she said. "All teachers have that ability to make a positive difference in their students' lives. Making the difference has led me to enjoy a simple life, raising my children, teaching God's children, and caring for the land. I credit my success to doing things I have a passion for and being adaptable to life's change."

Barnes has served as an advisor to four FFA chapters and taught more than 4,000 students about agriculture and FFA. She and her husband, Jerry, have two children.

"I am so honored to be among an elite group of individuals such as the WIU Distinguished Alumni within the School of Agriculture," she said. "My life's work has allowed me to make a positive difference in the lives of youth."

Mark Dempsey: Dempsey, a 1987 WIU graduate, with a degree in agriculture science, currently owns Bignneck Outfitters, a hunting business, and RKBA Gun Range. After graduation, he returned to his family farm near Quincy, IL and is now in his 35th year operating the farm, first with his father and now with his son. During his farming career, Dempsey won second place in the National Corn Growers yield contest in 2004, and took first place in 2008, with a 348-bu. yield per acre. He also enjoys focusing on the marketing side of agriculture.

While at Western, Dempsey was a member of AGR, the Hoof N Horn club, as well as a member of the 1987 Livestock Judging Team. He is still active on campus, serving six year on the School of Agriculture's Advisory Board, and many years as the president of the AGR Alumni Association.

Dempsey, and his wife, Milicent, have two children, Grant and Gabrielly, who are both WIU School of Agriculture graduates.

Kurt Rahe: Rahe, a 1987 agriculture business graduate, began his career as a sales representative with Asgrow Seed Company in the Illinois and Wisconsin sales territories. After six years, Rahe was promoted to lead a sales team in Indiana for three years, before becoming the Eastern Regional Manager for Asgrow. When the company was purchased by Monsanto, Rahe and his family moved to St. Louis, MO to continue his career and to begin working in marketing, supply chain, strategic account operations, and account management within the licensing organization.

Rahe led one of the top Strategic Accounts and eventually headed the U.S. Soybean Portfolio team, before retiring from Bayer in 2019, after 32 years of service. He and his wife, Dana, who graduated from WIU in 1987, with a degree in administrative office management, purchased a home farm in Bluffs, IL, where they raise corn and soybeans, along with registered Angus cattle. Rahe also became the general sales manager for Burrus Seed Company in Jacksonville, IL.

At WIU, Rahe became a member of the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity, like his four brothers before him - becoming president during his time on campus. He became a member of the 1984 Livestock Judging Team, and served on other ag-related clubs, including Hoof N Horn, Collegiate FFA, Ag Business Club, Ag Council, and Alpha Zeta.

Rahe and Dana have two sons, Nathan and Jared.

"I'm very honored and humbled to receive the 2022 School of Ag Distinguished Alumni recognition," said Rahe. "WIU prepared me very well for my 35-year career in the seed industry, bringing innovations, technologies, and improved genetics to growers across the US. My passion for WIU continues as I'm currently serving on the Ag Advisory Board to assist in the growth of the School of Agriculture."

