

Annual Newsletter 2023 - 2024 Edition

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WIU AGGIES

Western Illinois University School of Agriculture



WIU School of Agriculture Student Wins Award from the Collegiate Farm Bureau



Western Illinois University's School of Agriculture senior Katlin Tapley has been awarded the Outstanding Chapter President by the Collegiate Farm Bureau. Tapley is a senior at WIU and is a member of the McDonough County Farm Bureau (CFB) and WIU Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter.

The Outstanding Chapter President is an award given to the chapter president who excels at what they do through all of the activities that they do throughout the year, including, attending conferences, increasing student engagement and working toward the chapter's goals. Someone from the chapter or the chapter president will nominate them by filling out an application and giving a testimony about why they should be chosen.

"This award is truly an honor that I could have never dreamed of. I worked so hard because I knew that these members care deeply about the organization and agriculture with a passion," Tapley said. "That's what drives me to continue to improve our chapter and work toward bettering our agriculture community. If I have anyone to thank, it would be our members and our advisor, Jana Knupp, for always supporting my crazy ideas and supporting me along the way, especially considering I wouldn't take no for an answer. I cannot wait to see the great things that WIU students will continue to do in the Collegiate Farm Bureau!"



WIU Ag Department Receives \$10,000 Grant for Livestock Center

Recently, the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture (Ag) was presented a \$10,000 check from Compeer Financial toward a Community Building Grant improving the on-campus Livestock Center.

"It is our job as the organization to inform the community about these grants offered through our corporate office," said Compeer Loan Officer Robb Creasey, a '93 WIU Ag alum. "We offer several opportunities to support agriculture initiatives year-round."



Creasey presented the award to Director and Professor of Ag Education Andrew Baker.

"This initiative allows our department to be better prepared for recruitment initiatives and community events," said Baker. "This grant means a lot for our image and will better increase our relationship with Compeer in the future. We thank you, Compeer, for all your support."



The grant will be utilized for the renovation of the WIU Livestock Center. The main hallways and bathroom areas in the facility will be updated. These improvements will include new flooring, paint, and vanities.

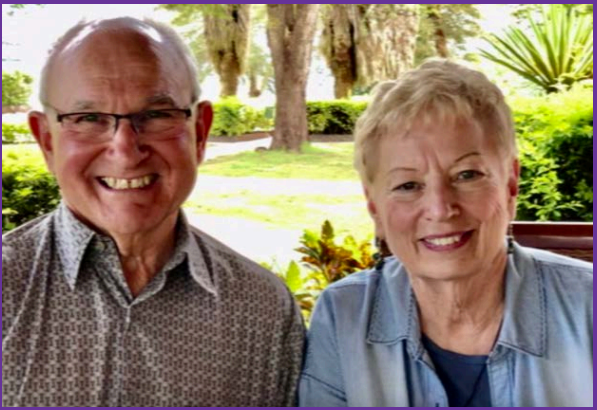
WIU Agricultural program has over 200 students who are actively participating in various degrees. It has an impressive 93% retention rate across the department.

Compeer Financial is a member-owned cooperative that serves and supports agriculture and rural communities. Providing financial services, including loans, leases and risk management, to 144 counties in Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Compeer Financial is located in the upper Midwest and exists to champion the hopes and dreams of rural America. They are well known for offering multiple grants in various areas of agriculture, including scholarships for higher education institutions, renovation of facilities, new construction of facilities and more.



WIU School of Agriculture Receives Gift to Support Female Ag Students

The Western Illinois University School of Agriculture recently received a gift to establish an endowed scholarship from Leatherneck alumni couple Taylor and Lorraine Steinberg.



The Steinberg's met in 1962 at WIU, pursuing degrees in Agriculture ('67) and Communication ('66).

The Steinberg Endowment Scholarship will support the WIU Agriculture undergraduate students, with a preference for female students.

"We have been blessed in our marriage and careers," said Lorraine. "Now that we are retired, we wanted to give back to organizations with which we have been involved over the years."

Lorraine was born in Brooklyn, NY, but grew up in the Midwest. Before having children, Lorraine taught high school English, speech and creative writing at various Illinois high schools. After beginning their family in 1969, Lorraine stayed home for a few years to be a full-time mother. During this time, she opened a dance studio and taught classes for 10 years, and eventually returned to the classroom.

"Computers were being introduced into schools in the 1980s, and I realized what an advantage it would be if my students were able to use them for their compositions. This interest led me to acquire a master's in Educational Technology, which I earned from Nova Southeastern University. At that time it was only the second institution in the country to offer a graduate degree using online classes," said Lorraine.

Lorraine eventually retired after spending 20 years in the classroom, followed by 10 years working with the Regional Office of Education in West Central Illinois, where she assisted 22 school districts, teaching educators to write grants, incorporate computers into the classrooms and develop tech corps.

Taylor was born and raised on the family farm near Belleview, IL. From the time he was old enough to assist with farm chores and labor intensive activities, he did.

"Every day was a learning opportunity challenged with new responsibilities at an early age – driving the hay truck at age six, signing checks for the farm at age 11 and borrowing money from the local bank, co-signed by my father, to purchase a new hay baler at the age of 13," said Taylor.

Taylor has worked in Ag Mechanics at Steinberg Farms (since 1865) and will continue to raise future generations of farmers with his daughter, son and grandchildren in line to take over.

"Helping others was always the standard growing up," said Taylor. "I wanted to help future generations by assisting friends, neighbors, relatives and others in need. Helping others at an early age instilled this as a core value and continues through our 56 years of marriage and beyond. The joy received from helping others succeed will continue as long as we are able."

After graduating from WIU, Taylor joined International Harvester Company in sales and marketing, and continued in his dealership, Pikeland International in Pittsfield, IL. The early 1980s agriculture market pressures and high inflation interest rates required a new career path in late 1985. Taylor joined the Knapheide Manufacturing Company and retired after 36 years.

"WIU prepared me for a life of opportunities by teaching me how much I really didn't know," said Taylor. "There was a bright new world out there with tons of opportunities on which to build a successful career."

The Steinberg's enjoy traveling the world and experiencing items on their bucket list. They are active in their church and share a continued desire to volunteer. Lorraine shares her computer expertise by visiting retirement and veterans homes and the Senior Center, helping them navigate different technology.

"When you are able – volunteer, " said Lorraine. "The world needs your skills and contributions beyond whatever company might employ you. There is nothing more rewarding than helping people who are not required to earn a grade or pay for your services. When you can – give back."

When asked for a piece of advice they would give a WIU student, the Steinberg's both advised continuing their education.

"Become a lifelong learner by studying constantly, make good decisions, have fun and never do anything in life that you will regret in the future," said Taylor. "Having grown up with tons of hard work that became the norm, I've always been happy to help others succeed."

"Don't expect your education to be completed when you graduate from Western," said Lorraine. "Take every opportunity to continue learning: the world that exists when you graduate will change radically during your years of employment. Be a lifelong learner."



Alumnus Donates Plant and Crop Measurement Equipment to WIU School of Agriculture

A Western Illinois University Distinguished Alumnus has made an equipment donation to the School of Agriculture, which will help students with the use of technology in the field.

Mike Thurow received his bachelor's degree from WIU in Agricultural Engineering-Mechanization with Honors in 1973. He then received his MBA from the Keller Graduate School of Management in 1985.

Thurow recently donated a long list of technological equipment to the University to help show students how plants and crops are performing in University fields. The donation is on behalf of his company, Spectrum Technologies, Inc. in Aurora, IL.

"The assumption is that professors will share the value of measurement technology and the data gathered in their classes," said Thurow. "Also, the vision is that students will use the various meters, sensors and weather stations in their labs and see first-hand the value of measurement data and the correlation with crop quality and yield."

WIU School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker said the donated equipment will greatly enhance the department's current and future research programming.

"It will also greatly benefit us when writing grant proposals that will utilize Spectrum's technology that will capture accurate field and greenhouse data," Baker said. "We are very pleased and excited to be able to use the latest and greatest technology in the industry today for our course labs and research programs, plus the development of undergraduate research projects."

Thurow developed his vision for the measurement and data equipment 40 years ago while working with crop production equipment for the International Harvester Company. While he was in graduate school, he created a business plan to develop and market plant measurement technology for the agricultural and horticulture industry. This resulted in his opening of Spectrum Technologies, Inc. in 1987; a company which has grown into a world leader in advanced plant measuring technology.

"There were no companies doing this at the time," Thurow said. "Our first product at Spectrum was a Soil pH Meter, and many other products followed. Today, a product development team of engineers and software developers at Spectrum create the products, Cloud solutions and apps that bring more value to measurement data."

Thurow's company has 45 employees and has developed 25 products, which have been named AE50 award winners by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers for outstanding product innovation. Spectrum Technologies, Inc. does business all over the world.

WIU's School of Agriculture has previously ordered equipment from Thurow's company. After meeting with researchers from WIU, Thurow said he decided he wanted to "help these passionate folks enhance their research work with plant measurement technology."

"The need to measure key environmental parameters is relevant to understanding how plants and crops perform, and the yield that's produced," he said. "One of my favorite sayings is that 'we know what we know, but we don't know what we don't know.' Measurement data explains most of these factors and variables that Mother Nature delivers."

Thurow said his experience at WIU was significant in the process of validating his passion for mechanized agriculture. He said he graduated from Western with the confidence that he could achieve anything in life he desired.

"I was motivated to becoming a better student by professors (Ed) Breece, (Safwat) Moustafa and (Bill) Detar, with their support for learning and achievement," he said. "I was active in the Ag Mech Club and the trade show that introduced graduates to career opportunities with the various exhibiting companies. I have great memories of being an officer and soliciting companies in the area to exhibit at the show."

Thurow and his wife, Donna, live in Naperville, IL. They have three daughters and three grandchildren. He was named one of the School of Agriculture's Distinguished Alumni in March during Farm Expo weekend at Western.



WIU Ag Alumnus Leaves Mark on National FFA Convention 2023

Western Illinois University proudly celebrates the remarkable achievements of an outstanding individual in the world of agriculture education. Trent Taber, a WIU alumnus and agriculture teacher, left an indelible mark at the National FFA Convention, showcasing his unwavering dedication and significant contributions to the field of agriculture education.

Taber played a pivotal role in nurturing Cambridge High School's agricultural education program, where he provided invaluable mentorship to students like Kendra Downing. Her tireless commitment to agriculture sales entrepreneurship culminated in her earning the prestigious title of national winner. This accomplishment wasn't merely an individual triumph but a testament to the dedication and guidance bestowed by Taber.

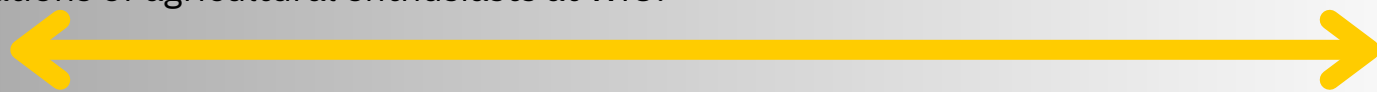
Downing, representing the Cambridge FFA Chapter in Illinois, is the owner and operator of the Downing Daughters' Farm Stand, which she has successfully managed for the past four years. Her enterprise includes the sale of locally sourced pumpkins, honey, mums, popcorn, Indian corn, broom corn and straw, all housed within a charming 15 feet by 50 feet rustic barn. During the months of September and October, the farm stand opens its doors on Fridays and Saturdays. Kendra's achievements are a testament to her hard work and commitment, buoyed by the unwavering support of her parents, Crista and Zane, and her FFA advisor, Taber.

In his role as an FFA advisor, Taber instilled the philosophy of encouraging students to push beyond their comfort zones.

"Kendra is the epitome of a dedicated FFA member. Her five years of hard work within her Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) culminated in this exciting achievement," Taber said. "Our alumni, community and school couldn't be prouder of her!"

Agricultural proficiency awards recognize FFA members who, through their supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs), have honed specialized skills that will be invaluable for their future careers. Students compete in diverse areas, ranging from agricultural communications to wildlife management. Proficiency awards hold significance at local and state levels, providing recognition to members as they explore and establish themselves in various agricultural career pathways.

These notable achievements by WIU's agriculture alumni set a standard for future generations of agricultural enthusiasts at WIU.



WIU Celebrates Distinguished Agriculture Alums

Western Illinois University recognizes the outstanding achievements of its distinguished Agriculture (Ag) alumni, who have made significant contributions to the field. Among these individuals are Trent Torrance, Rodney Main, Dennis Bowman, Dan Loy and Allan L. Watson.

Torrance, who currently serves as the chief operating officer for United Animal Health, has been named one of WIU's Distinguished Ag Alums. With a background deeply rooted in family farming, Torrance's journey from a grain and livestock family operation in west-central Illinois to leadership roles at United Animal Health showcases his dedication to the industry. He received his bachelor's degree in Animal Science from WIU and his master's degree in Animal Science from the University of Missouri.

He has extensive background in various organizations and serves on the Executive Board of Directors of AgriNovus Indiana, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and the Indiana Advisory Council for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Main is a dedicated agriculture teacher and FFA advisor and an influential individual among WIU's Distinguished Ag Alums. Raised on a family farm in Illinois and a lifetime farmer, his journey led him to a fulfilling career in agriculture education. With 29 years at ROWVA High School and 40 years overall as a high school agriculture teacher and FFA advisor, Main's commitment to the community and the industry doesn't go unnoticed.

Outside of his career, Main has actively participated in tractor pulling at both state and national levels, showcasing his diverse knowledge of agriculture.

Bowman, a 1981 graduate in Crop Science, has been recognized as a Distinguished Ag Alum for his significant contributions to digital agriculture. He currently serves as an extension specialist for Digital Agriculture at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications and holds many achievements in agronomy, county extension and regional crop systems. His background includes the National Association of County Agricultural Agents Distinguished Service Award and the Illinois Extension Individual Excellence Award.

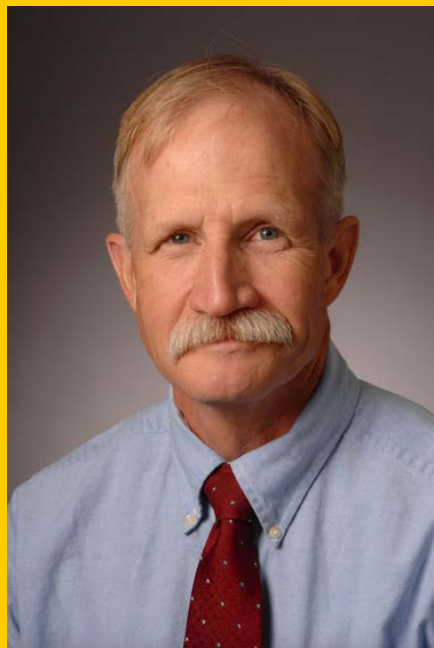
Bowman's expertise extends to drone technology and is a certified FAA Part 107 drone pilot. His involvement in large grant projects at the University of Illinois, including AIFARMS, IFARM (Farm of the future) and SCAPES (Agrivoltaics), proves his commitment to advancing agriculture through technology.



Trent Torrance graduated in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in Applied Sciences.



Allan Watson graduated in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in Applied Sciences and in 1989 with a master's degree in Business Administration.



Dan Loy graduated in 1978 with a bachelor's degree in Animal Science.

Loy, a distinguished figure in the field of animal science, is celebrated as a professor emeritus at Iowa State University. With a doctorate degree from Penn State University, Loy has been a large contributor to applied feedlot nutrition and beef production. He currently has served as director of the Iowa Beef Center for 12 years and received numerous awards, including the Extension Award from the American Society of Animal Science, highlighting his significant impact on the cattle feeding industry.

Watson, who received his bachelor's degree in Animal Science and a Master of Business Administration from WIU, has had a successful career spanning beef production, sales and marketing and financial advisory. Watson's contributions to the agriculture industry include managing amino acid sales and marketing, serving on numerous agricultural boards and serving in his churches and localities. He currently lives in Carefree, AZ, and remains actively engaged in community service.

"WIU acknowledges these distinguished Ag alumni for their outstanding achievements and lasting impact on the agriculture industry," WIU Ag Director Andy Baker said.



Dennis Bowman graduated in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in Crop Science.



Rodney Main graduated in 1983 with a bachelor's degree in Agriculture Education.

WIU Empowers Students with Hands-On Beef Production Experience

Western Illinois University is revolutionizing agricultural education through a beef production class, providing students with hands-on learning experiences. At WIU, students take the reins in every aspect of beef production management, from the preparation of the WIU performance-tested bull sale to cow herd management on campus.

In this dynamic course, students have primary responsibility for the preparation and execution of the WIU performance-tested bull sale. This includes conducting health checks on bulls, preparing bulls for sale by clipping and torching, assisting with picturing and video, proofreading sale catalogs and managing all sale day events such as buyer registration and bull load out.

Students actively participate in the calving crew, performing checks on cows and heifers throughout the calving season, even during nighttime hours when staff availability is limited. This involvement allows students to gain firsthand experience in all facets of beef production at WIU.

As part of the curriculum, students go on a four-day trip to the Dakotas and Iowa, where they engage in networking opportunities with prominent figures in the beef industry. This year, 11 students



participated in the experience.


During the trip, students visit establishments such as Schaff Angus Valley, where they learn strategies from industry leaders in Angus seed stock production. They also explore Keller Broken Heart Ranch, gaining insights into cutting-edge DNA technology and mating strategies for optimal breeding outcomes.

Additional highlights of the trip include a visit to Chad Berger Bucking Bulls, home to legendary bulls such as "Little Yellow Jacket" and Ken Odde's commercial cow-calf operation, where innovative techniques like sexed bull semen and twinning are applied.

The itinerary includes stops at Reimann Ranch, CK Cattle, Fawcett's Elm Creek Ranch and RJ Cattle, each offering unique perspectives on raising club calves, purebred seedstock, and/or show cattle.

The trip also takes students to bull studs such as 605 Sires and Custom Genetic Solutions, showcasing state-of-the-art facilities and attracting clientele from all facets of the beef industry. A recent addition to the experience is Denny Topf of Western Iowa, showing in agriculture with expansive crop acreage, ranching operations and strategic partnerships.

Each encounter provides job opportunities and networking connections for WIU students, distinguishing the university as a leader in agricultural education. WIU's commitment to providing high-level experiences ensures industry-ready professionals who will shape the future of agriculture.



Gruver Selected as PFI 2024 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award Recipient

Western Illinois University Agricultural Professor Joel Gruver has been chosen to receive the 2024 Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award from Practical Farmer of Iowa (PFI).

"Joel is committed to education and innovation. When a row crop farmer experimenting with cover crops asks, 'Have we tried this?' the answer is that Joel is currently doing so or is willing to start," his nominator said.

This award is given annually by PFI to an individual or couple that has shown exemplary commitment to sustainable agriculture, generously shared their knowledge with others in the industry and been influential in efforts to foster vibrant communities, diverse farms and healthy food for the communities they serve.

Gruver was selected for his more than 17 years of activities in the industry: being a member of PFI since 2007, presenting at the PFI conference three times, hosting a group of PFI farmers at the WIU/Allison Farm in 2018 and regularly participating in the PFI email listserv (answering questions and sharing pictures and research results).



"Joel was selected because of his curiosity and generosity in sharing his research and information with others. His willingness to try new things and openly share his findings has a great impact on farmers' ability to increase the diversity and conservation-mindedness of Midwest agriculture," PFI Executive Director Sally Worley said.

"I regularly discuss PFI as a success story in my classes and at farmer meetings. In my mind, PFI is the premier farmer organization supporting all dimensions of sustainable agriculture (profitability, community, environmental quality and on-farm research)," Gruver said.

Results from WIU Agriculture Legacy Sale



Western Illinois University's School of Agriculture recently had its 2024 Agriculture Legacy Sale on April 16. This year's sale raised over \$150,000 in 247 different lots sold online breaking the old record which raised \$132,000.

The Ag Legacy Sale is coordinated and organized by the 335 Livestock Merchandising course. The instructor of this course, Mark Hoge, has led this activity since its implementation. Students enrolled in this course and other students are responsible for securing donations and writing the descriptions of each donation

that is posted on the sales website to be ready for the one-day auction.

"It is a powerful statement when a student walks into a job interview with the story that they assisted with raising \$150,000 in one day," Director of the Agriculture Department Andrew Baker said. "It is a real attention-getter. These are the types of experiences our students receive in the agriculture curriculum. They have plenty of real-life stories to share in an employment interview."

The funds from this sale help fund the travel expenses associated with the Livestock Judging Team and continuing their national recognition.

WIU Ag Alums Sweep Illinois State Discovery Star Awards

The Illinois State Discovery Star Awards, an event Western Illinois University has had a presence in with multiple alumni over the years, has swept this year's event with students of alumni from Western Illinois University's Agricultural Education (Ag) program taking all the awards. Junior High students from across the state showcased their excellence, with four students clinching the top awards in their respective categories.

Among the WIU Ag alumni are teachers of the award recipients: Rickard '09 from Salt Fork, IL, Kane '22 from Franklin, IL, and Riggins '23 from Macomb, IL.

Discovery Star Farmer: Lucy DeAth, Salt Fork Chapter

Lucy DeAth from Salt Fork Chapter was named the recipient of the Discovery Star Farmer award, demonstrating exceptional knowledge and dedication to agricultural practices.

Discovery Star in Agribusiness: Macie Bartlow, Macomb Middle Chapter

Macie Bartlow of Macomb Middle Chapter exhibited a large base of knowledge in agribusiness, securing the title of Discovery Star in Agribusiness.

Discovery Star in Agricultural Placement: William Smith, Franklin Chapter

William Smith, representing Franklin Chapter, received the position of Discovery Star in Agricultural Placement, demonstrating his achievements in practical agricultural experiences.

Discovery Star in Agriscience: Lily DeAth, Salt Fork Chapter

Lily DeAth, also from Salt Fork Chapter, was recognized as the Discovery Star in Agriscience, showcasing innovation and research capabilities in agricultural science.

"The impact of a classroom teacher is certainly difficult at times to measure or quantify, but the Discovery results from State Awards Day on March 23rd certainly do resonate with the positive impact of WIU Agricultural Education alumni," WIU Ag Director Andrew Baker said. "More and more Illinois agriculture programs are establishing junior high (Discovery) programs to allow this student population to compete and showcase their skill sets. It also takes a quality teacher to recognize, nurture, develop, and train these students to be future agriculture leaders. We greatly appreciate what these WIU alumni are doing in their classrooms and developing the potential in all of their students."

The Discovery Awards, exclusive to Junior High students, serve as a platform to honor excellence in agricultural education. The winners exemplify the future leaders and innovators in the field of agriculture and solidify WIU Ag programs' efforts in teaching the next generation of agricultural principles and innovation.



WIU Ag alumnus Brent Nelson (left), William "Xander" Smith (middle), WIU Ag alumna Kaitlyn Kane (right)



Macie Bartlow (left) and WIU Ag alumna Katie Riggins



WIU Agriculture Alumni Win NAAE Awards

Western Illinois University Agricultural (Ag) alumni Riley Hintzsche and Kaylyn Schiber-Davenport have won NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATORS (NAAE) awards in their respective regions.

Hintzsche graduated from WIU with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education in 2014. He accepted a position at Streator Township High School (STHS), taking over the Ag program. So far,



Riley Hintzsche and Kaylyn Schiber-Davenport

the high school program has expanded from 86 students when he arrived in 2014 to 216 today, leading the school to hire another Ag teacher at STHS, Gwen Heimerdinger.

"It takes a village to run a successful ag program, and although we are very excited to be named a regional winner, we could not do this without the "village" that supports us in Streator and around our nation," said Hintzsche.

Schiber-Davenport graduated from WIU with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education in 2014. While attending WIU, she was involved in CFFA, Ag Vocators, Hoof N' Horn and Ag Council. She went on to student teach at Monmouth-Roseville High School with Mr. Kilburn. She now teaches agriculture at El Capitan High School in

Merced, CA, in a department with five others, where she serves as department chair and teaches in multiple categories, including Ag Chemistry, Horticulture, Ag Biology, Ag Economics/Government and Internships in Agriculture.

"I am grateful NAAE was able to identify the hard work put forth by the members of our department, our community members, parents, and advisory board members. Our department tirelessly cultivates the next generation of industry leaders, guiding students toward prosperous futures in agriculture. To all who support our students and program, your support is truly indispensable. This honor stands as a testament to our collective efforts. I am also so thankful for WIU equipping me with the skills and knowledge essential to my role. Under the mentorship of Dr. Baker and the guidance of WIU, I have been empowered to realize my fullest potential as an agricultural educator," Schiber-Davenport said.

Each year, Ag programs nationwide are nominated to apply for several awards from the NAAE. In each state, the Ag Teacher Association selects one program in the state to advance to the regional level which is then judged among the other states.

Both Hintzsche and Schiber-Davenport won in their NAAE regions for the "Outstanding Middle/Secondary Agricultural Education Program." Hintzsche actively teaches at Streator High School (Region IV) and Kaylyn Schiber-Davenport at El Capitan High School, CA (Region I).

NAAE maintains an extensive awards program to recognize the accomplishments of our many talented and dedicated members. We have awards for agricultural educators in every stage of their careers, from scholarships to lifetime achievement. We also manage grant programs for organizations that want to help support agricultural education and agricultural educators.



Agriculture Alumnus Memorialized Through New Endowment Fund

The life and impressive career of WIU alumnus Cliff Becker are being memorialized through a new fund for the School of Agriculture.



2021 Ag Advisory Board

Becker, originally from Oak Park, IL, graduated from WIU with a degree in Agriculture in 1984. He was a fourth-generation farmer who had an impressive 39-year career in the agricultural field. Becker spent more than 10 years as executive vice president at Farm Journal and 23 years with



Cliff Becker with his wife, Kristine; his son, Ivan; and their daughter, Ruby

Vance Publishing, where he served as senior vice president and publishing director for their food360 division. At his passing, Becker was the vice president of New Campus Development for the American Royal in Kansas City, MO.

Becker was a passionate graduate, staying involved in many capacities with the WIU School of Agriculture, including serving as the vice president of the School's Advisory Board. In 2021, Becker was named a School of Agriculture Distinguished Alumnus.

"Cliff was a very supporting alumnus, who always had a positive, engaging, energetic attitude. He was always willing to share his memories and stories about his time at WIU. Cliff was the keynote speaker at the 2017 Ag Expo and emceed the School of Agriculture 100th anniversary banquet and other alumni events," School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker said.

That passion for Becker's alma mater and academic program has led his wife, Kristine, to choose to preserve Cliff's memory through the new Cliff Becker Agriculture Excellence Fund. When endowed, this fund will provide unrestricted resources annually to allow the School of Agriculture to pursue emerging opportunities, address its highest needs and support student success.

"Cliff was a huge proponent of keeping youth involved in the agricultural sector. He had to work and help himself through school. Staying involved with the college and being able to offer his insight, move projects forward, be an influencer and continue to bring college students into the fields was super important to him," Kristine said.

Becker developed multiple connections throughout his impressive career in the agricultural publishing industry and his accomplishments at the American Royal, providing Kristine with several options for establishing a permanent memorial in his honor.

"I really felt that establishing a fund at WIU really spoke to Cliff and what his desires would be. In terms of moving his legacy forward and having a bigger impact, it made sense to work with WIU," Kristine said.

According to Baker, the Becker Fund will assist his team in recognizing individuals and activities that represent Becker's grit, energy, resilience and positive attitude.

"Cliff was well-loved. He was truly a gift. It's such an honor to see him continue to be recognized for everything that he contributed. My hope is Cliff's name, his passion and everything that he was about remains in the forefront," Kristine said.

"This first-of-its-kind, unrestricted fund is an incredible tribute to Cliff and all that he helped further with his involvement with the School of Agriculture. We are so grateful for the gifts Cliff gave to WIU during his lifetime through volunteering and his philanthropy, and we are overwhelmed by the outpouring of support that others have shown to help establish this fund in Cliff's memory. Our goal is to endow this fund so that it will support the School of Agriculture in perpetuity," College of Business and Technology Director of Development Liz Gougeon said.

The response to the establishment of the Becker Fund has been strong. To date, more than 90 individuals have chosen to honor Becker with a gift to the fund. Alumni, friends and other supporters are invited to support this initiative and push the Becker Fund to endowment level.

The School of Agriculture Advisory Board has elected to champion the Becker Fund during this week's Western Challenge, WIU's ninth annual day of giving, scheduled for Wednesday, April 24. During the 24-hour fundraising initiative, financial support for any area is encouraged. To direct a gift to the Cliff Becker Agriculture Excellence Fund, visit bit.ly/WC24_BECKER_AG_EXCELLENCE_FUND.



Planting Futures: WIU Alumna Honors Family Through New Scholarship Fund

From the farmlands outside Princeton, IL, to the classrooms of Knoblauch Hall on Western Illinois University's Macomb campus, one family's legacy is being immortalized through a new endowed scholarship fund for students in the School of Agriculture. Earlier this spring, Linda (Johnson) Meyer '82, Agricultural Science, reached out to the WIU Foundation to express interest in establishing a scholarship to honor her grandparents.

"They were such a big part of our growing up and in some ways I'm paying forward the benefits that I've received," Meyer said about her grandparents and their impact.

Harold farmed his whole life, and Ella was a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse prior to the two marrying in 1922. Now Harold and Ella's commitment to farming and their belief in the transformative power of education will live on for future generations through the new Harold and Ella Matson Memorial Scholarship.

Meyer and her brother Keith Johnson inherited the family farm in 2012. Meyer, who now lives in Erie, CO, with her husband, Tom, is using some of her income from the annual sale of crops grown on the farm to fund the Matson Memorial Scholarship. Meyer worked with Director of Development for the College of Business and Technology (CBT) Liz Gougeon to finalize the criteria for scholarship.

The Matson Memorial Scholarship will be awarded annually to a student pursuing a degree in Agriculture with a minor in Plant Breeding or Agronomy, honoring Harold's involvement in alfalfa



WIU Alumna Linda Meyer

seed test trials and seed corn sales. In line with Meyer's academic path, first-generation students will be first preference. The Matson Memorial Scholarship will be a first-of-its-kind opportunity for the School of Agriculture, with its focus on first-generation scholars.

Choosing WIU for college was an easy decision for Meyer.

"I may have visited one or two other schools, but there was something about Western," Meyer said. "From the first time I visited Western's campus, it just felt like home and the longer I was there the more I felt at home."

As a student, Meyer busied herself with several activities including membership in the Agricultural Mechanization Club, Alpha Zeta honors fraternity and the Agriculture Council.

"I loved my time as a student at Western. I never felt like I belonged anywhere until I went to Western," Meyer said. "Going to school there helped me grow in many different ways, not just academically. Western just means friendship to me. It's family."

The growth and connections Meyer made during her time at WIU are still evident today, including a cherished friendship, meeting her best friend, Sue (Berry) Busker '82, Agriculture Science, on the 10th floor of Thompson Hall their sophomore year.

"Sue and her husband live in eastern Nebraska, and whenever we drive to or from the midwest, we usually spend a night with them," Meyer said. "She and I pick up and go from where we last left off."

Meyer continues to keep a strong relationship with WIU today, returning to Macomb every few years and always making a point to stop at the Alumni House. When there is a WIU alumni event in Colorado, Meyer is in attendance.

"We attend events in Colorado, and go see the Leathernecks in action whenever they come to Colorado. It's important to me to keep connected with Western," Meyer said.

Meyer's experiences at WIU and her grandparents' commitment to agriculture and education inspired her to establish this new scholarship fund.

"This is about honoring their commitment to education and paying forward all of the benefits that I've been given because of their hard work and their love for education," Meyer said. "I'm trying to give someone a hand up and help them fulfill their own dreams."

Meyer plans to have the scholarship fund fully endowed by June of 2025, and the scholarship will be awarded for the first time in the 2026 academic year.



Harold and Ella Matson in 1922



Matson Family Farm: Harold built the barn pictured with reclaimed lumber.

"The Matson Memorial Scholarship will greatly enhance our ability to recruit and financially support students who are interested in Agronomy and/or Plant Breeding," School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker said. "Our Alternative Crops program and the Allison Organic Research Farm provide a unique educational experience for students pursuing an Ag Science degree in the option of Agronomy. We truly do appreciate the opportunity to represent the Matson family."

Individuals interested in providing financial support for programs within the CBT can contact Gougeon at e-gougeon@wiu.edu. Details about the For The W comprehensive campaign are available at wiu.edu/ForTheW.

WIU Introduces Master of Science in Engineering Technology with Precision Agriculture Emphasis

Western Illinois University will launch a Master of Science in Engineering Technology program, featuring a Precision Agriculture emphasis beginning Fall 2024. This 30-semester-hour program is designed to prepare professionals with advanced knowledge and leadership skills in agricultural technology.

Key Benefits:

- Nearly 100% placement rate
- Small student-to-faculty ratio and class sizes
- Collaborative learning environment
- Industry certification opportunities
- Competitive salaries and team-oriented work environments
- Internship opportunities

Program Highlights:

- STEM-Designated Curriculum: Advanced coursework in strategic planning, continuous improvement, quality and leadership
- Real-World Applications: Includes designing experiments, presentations, continuous improvement studies, intellectual property documentation and team-building activities
- Industrial Work Experiences: Opportunities for internships, independent studies and research projects
- Technical Writing: Emphasis on industry-standard technical writing

Career Opportunities: Graduates can pursue careers in:

- Agricultural Business
- Agricultural Education
- Agricultural Technology Management
- Farm Operations
- Precision Agriculture
- General Business and Industry

Students can complete internships with companies that offer expertise and leadership roles, available during any academic term.



Applicants need a bachelor's degree in an Engineering-related or Agriculture program with at least 15 hours of technical courses. Students with fewer technical hours can enroll in a two-phase program to meet requirements.

Completion of a minimum of 30 semester hours, including core courses and directed electives, plus one of three exit options: thesis plan, professional internship plan or independent research plan.

For more information on the new program, visit wiu.edu/cbt/set/ms-pa.php.



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NECKS!