

# OnWisconsin

FOR UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON ALUMNI AND FRIENDS SPRING 2026

## **Forever State Street**

Visit old haunts and  
new favorites.

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## **A New Way to Improve Public Health**

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## **The UW's Lost Traditions**





## **Vision**

Winter got off to a fast start with a November blizzard that dropped more than nine inches of snow on campus. The storm inspired the perennial Battle of Bascom snowball fight and, for Mila Bublik x'27, Bascom Hill snowboarding.

*Photo by Althea Dotzour*



# Connect ON



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Photo: Joe Leute

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# OnWisconsin

A beard-growing contest was one of the quirkiest Badger traditions. See page 44.

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TAYLOR WOLFRAM

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MARCUS WESTBERG

A UW alum is helping to protect some of the planet's most endangered species. See page 50.

**Cover**  
 State Street is alive and well. Photo by Jeff Miller

## Nobel Notables

Eighty-three years after my graduation, at the age of 102, I continue to enjoy reading your alumni magazine. I'm impressed by the work being done at the university and by the many awards given to talented faculty, especially the Nobel Prize winners ["How to Win a Nobel Prize," Winter 2025 *On Wisconsin*]. I'm also pleased that the university's emphasis remains on scholarship. Congratulations on creating a magazine that even a centenarian can enjoy.

**Nancy Richardson Fleury '44**  
*Hurricane, Utah*

I just had to tell you how much I enjoyed "How to Win a Nobel Prize." It was one of the most interesting articles I have read in a long time. My father [Irving Shain] was a chemistry professor at UW-Madison and later chancellor. Growing up in Olin House, I met many famous people, but none were more interesting than Howard Temin — the only Nobel Prize winner I ever met in person. Your article brought back fond memories of my interactions with Dr. Temin when I was a high school student and tasked with taking his coat when he attended events at Olin House. Thanks for the great work.

**Paul Shain '85, MBA'86**  
*Verona, Wisconsin*

## Science at Risk

Your last two issues have resonated as strongly as any I have read in decades. The UW's stellar standing as a leading-edge research institution is as threatened as it has ever been.

I served as a lab tech at the Enzyme Institute in the early sixties on Har Gobind Khorana's research team, helping to do the early work, I believe, that led ultimately to Dr. Khorana's Nobel. Of the dozen or so people on the team, only a few of us were native-born. All the rest were world-class senior researchers, with fellowships,

research, or other grant support. Talent of that caliber, among the most brilliant I have known, must now do research outside the U.S. It is not an exaggeration to say that UW-Madison's lead stature — and in fact our nation's apex standing in science — is jeopardized by current anti-science and anti-academic politics.

**W. Michael Bathke '61**  
*Fredericksburg, Virginia*

## A Badger Lens on Hygge

Like Professor Claus Anderson, I've also had to explain the pronunciation of the Danish concept *hygge* (HOOG-uh) to puzzled friends ["Hygge for Happiness," Winter 2025].

I had the opportunity to study abroad in Denmark at the Danish Technical University when I was a junior at the UW. The program immersed our group in Danish culture, and *hygge* was at the center of it. Ever since I learned the word, I've absolutely loved it. What I like most is that it doesn't perfectly translate to English and that its meaning is slightly different to everyone.

Yet, *hygge* seems to perfectly define many of my fondest UW memories. To me, *hygge* is walking around the farmers' market with a coffee on a cool fall morning, having a beer at sunset while a band's playing at the Terrace, taking a group stroll through the Arboretum while the sun pours through the trees, or cozying up for a movie night with roommates after a long week.

**Mitch Drazkowski '19**  
*Chicago*

## Hail the Red Shed!

Reading "Another Round for the Red Shed" [Winter 2025 Destination] brought back memories from the early 1970s of playing on the city league fast-pitch softball team sponsored by the Shed. After our games, the team, including former UW baseball players Dick Phelan and Daryl "Mickey" Hanson '68, would head to the Shed for a few beers

We want to hear from you! Please email your letters to [onwisconsin@uwalumni.com](mailto:onwisconsin@uwalumni.com) or mail them to WFAA, On Wisconsin, 1848 University Ave., Madison, WI 53726. You can also post comments online at [onwisconsin.uwalumni.com](http://onwisconsin.uwalumni.com).

and to play air hockey, foosball, and the new video arcade game *Pong*.

**Ken Warren MS'74**  
*Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin*

Loved the story on the Red Shed. Back in the day, when we were trying to decide which bar we should go out to, we would look at each other and ask, "Shed we?" and then we would head to the Red Shed.

**Alan Lorenz MD '87**  
*Rochester, New York*

## Rennie's Redux

I ate the same breakfast every morning at Rennie's at University and Lake in 1964-65, 61 years ago [Winter 2025 Bygone, "Lunch at Rennebohm Drug Store."] It cost 55 cents (half an hour of minimum wage). The same waitress brought it to me without ordering after a few days.

**Tom Milligan '68**  
*Littleton, Colorado*

## Online



UW ARCHIVES

## A CAMPUS-AREA CLASSIC

In our Winter 2025 issue, "Lunch at Rennebohm Drug Store" paid tribute to a beloved gathering spot for UW students from the 1920s to the 1980s. The article spurred an outpouring of letters from Rennebohm fans, one of which appears on this page. To read more tributes to the company's Bucky Burgers, grilled Danishes, and generous UW scholarships, search for "Lunch at Rennebohm Drug Store: Letters" on our website.

Visit us at [onwisconsin.uwalumni.com](http://onwisconsin.uwalumni.com).



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When you're ready to make your estate plan, our Office of Gift Planning is here to talk with you about your goals and options – so you can be part of the UW's world-class medical advancements.



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Spring 2026

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*The Wisconsin Exchange encourages civil dialogue on campus and beyond.*



BRUCE RICHTER

## The Fine Art of Conversation

Our Spring issue gets the discussion started.

We need to talk.

And not just small talk. I'm referring to the possibility of real communication, no matter our differences. That's the goal of the Wisconsin Exchange, a new UW initiative that encourages civil dialogue on campus and beyond. Turn to page 22 to see why the university considers this goal a top priority.

At a time when higher education faces significant challenges, our Spring issue also explores UW–Madison's contributions to the world. UW researchers are laser-focused on practical innovations: boosting national security (page 13), protecting against severe weather (page 17), and improving health outcomes (page 32). Alumni such as wildlife ecologist Matthew Becker '96 (page 50) and physician Sarah Spelsberg '95 (page 60) are making a difference around the globe.

Of course, there's more to the UW–Madison experience than labs and classrooms. Take a stroll up State Street to remember good times on one of the country's most vibrant campus corridors (page 24). Learn about UW traditions that have faded away, including an etiquette guidebook, mascot kidnappings, and Venetian Night (page 44). Meet UW basketball phenom John Blackwell x'27 (page 21) and tour LaBahn Arena, home of the indomitable women's hockey team (page 66).

We're hopeful that the Wisconsin Exchange will get all of us talking in a productive way. We also hope *On Wisconsin's* Spring issue plays a part by giving our UW community a range of interesting things to talk about.

DEAN ROBBINS

# TOGETHER, WE'RE BUILDING A STRONGER WISCONSIN.

At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, we believe  
in working together to address real-world challenges,  
like helping farmers cultivate healthy food.



**David Anderson**  
Class of '74, JD'89  
Trumpet

**ONE WISCONSIN. ON WISCONSIN.**



Learn more about how we're working with people like you to make  
life better for everyone in Wisconsin at [impact.wisc.edu](https://www.impact.wisc.edu)

# OnCampus

News from UW-Madison



JAMIE ESPINOZA

*“We want to prepare students for a world where computing and technology intersect with every profession and discipline.”*

## Shaping Our Digital Future

*A new College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence will demonstrate UW-Madison’s leadership in the field.*

A proposal from UW-Madison to reorganize the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS) into a standalone college was approved in December by the UW Board of Regents. The vote marks a critical step toward the creation of a College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence, building on the university’s strengths in computer, data, library, and information sciences and statistics. The proposal grew out of the continuing success of CDIS, which was created within the College of Letters & Science in 2019.

The college would be the UW’s first new separate academic unit since 1983. The operating start is expected to be July 1.

“We will be shaping a future where UW-Madison leads in innovation while advancing knowledge for the common good,” says Chancellor **Jennifer Mnookin**. “We want to prepare UW-Madison students for a world where computing and technology intersect with every profession and discipline, from patient care to teaching, biomedical research to the humanities. Our expectation is that this college will engage with AI as a transformative and disruptive force, considering it as a technological tool with vast problem-solving potential while also confronting its significant moral and ethical implications.”

The reorganization will involve CDIS’s three units: computer sciences, the Information School, and statistics.

In recent years, enrollment in CDIS programs has significantly increased. In 2015, 1,043 students were enrolled as computer sciences majors. In fall 2025, that number climbed to more than 3,000.

The college will take a lean start-up approach, limiting the need for new positions and following best practices for financial responsibility.

“Artificial intelligence and computing are transforming every discipline, from veterinary medicine to political science, and we see the formation of a college as an important step toward serving as a campuswide resource while also meeting the needs of our students and the state of Wisconsin,” says CDIS director **Remzi Arpaci-Dusseau**. “The future workforce will be defined by those who can integrate computing and AI fluently into every discipline.”

KELLY APRIL TYRRELL MS’11

## CHANCELLOR FAREWELL

At the end of the academic year, Chancellor **Jennifer Mnookin** will depart UW-Madison to serve as president of Columbia University in New York City.

Since Mnookin arrived in 2022, the university has risen in national rankings, improved student outcomes, achieved record fundraising success, and helped make a UW education affordable and accessible for more Wisconsin students.

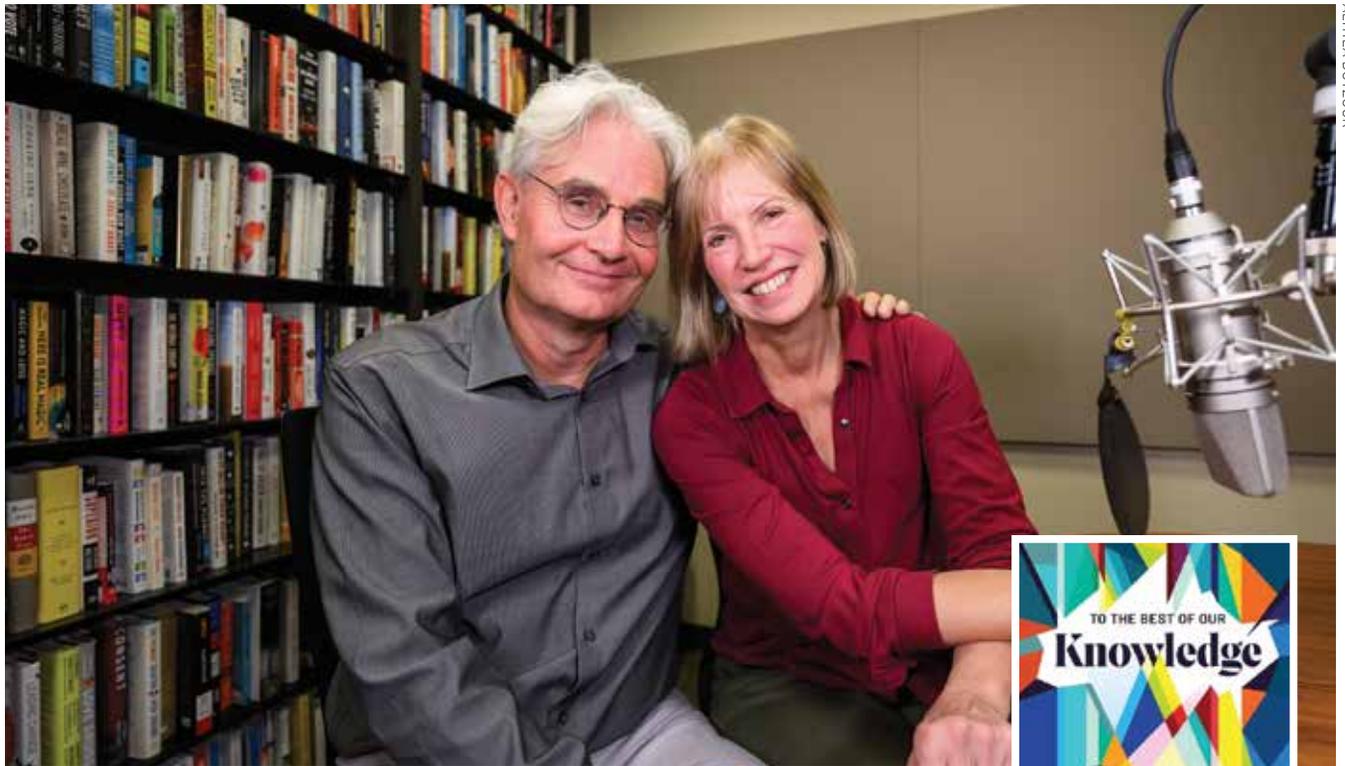
The Universities of Wisconsin plans to name an interim leader, and a search for a permanent replacement will begin later this year.

“It has been a true honor to be a part of the Wisconsin family. I am proud of what we have accomplished together, even in a challenging period for higher education,” says Mnookin.

The chancellor has overseen several new initiatives. Bucky’s Pell Pathway guarantees full financial support for Pell Grant-eligible in-state students. The Wisconsin Tribal Educational Promise program guarantees scholarships and grants to cover the full in-state cost of attendance for undergraduates who are members of federally recognized Wisconsin American Indian tribes and pursuing their first degree. The Research, Innovation, and Scholarly Excellence Initiative harnesses UW-Madison’s research strengths to address artificial intelligence, environmental sustainability, and improvements to human health and well-being.

Last year, Mnookin launched the Wisconsin Exchange (see page 22), which encourages students, staff, and faculty to debate ideas in ways that are respectful and constructive.

DIANA HARVEY



## The UW's Radio Masterpiece

For 35 years, *To the Best of Our Knowledge* informed and transformed its listeners.

The University of Wisconsin was among the pioneers of public broadcasting in the early 1900s, and today's Wisconsin Public Radio is headquartered in Vilas Hall as a vital part of the UW's educational mission. For 35 years, beginning in 1990, *To the Best of Our Knowledge* was its masterpiece.

The nationally syndicated, Peabody Award-winning talk program aired its last episode in fall 2025, but it will not be forgotten — ever. The show's 2,000-plus episodes have been preserved in the American Archive for Public Broadcasting, a project of the Library of Congress. Fans like me always considered *To the Best of Our Knowledge* an American treasure, and now it's official.

The show was an expression of its cocreators' bottomless curiosity. **Steve Paulson MA'83** and **Anne Strainchamps** were interested in, literally, everything, and they designed *To the Best of Our Knowledge* to inform and transform their listeners. Each hour-long episode was crafted around an intriguing theme, explored with multiple interviewees and storytelling techniques. Evocative audio snippets and music set the mood for an intellectual and emotional journey.

*To the Best of Our Knowledge* took the audience's intelligence as a given, a mark of respect in an age of rampant dumbing-down. It gloried in the world's great authors, per the commonly used acronym of the show's name: TTBOOK. Paulson, Strainchamps, and their fellow interviewees were free to explore their personal interests in science, technology, philosophy, history, psychology, spirituality, politics, food, economics, sports, health, and the arts. And their passions became our passions.

Among their hundreds of internationally prominent guests, they

*Paulson and Strainchamps took their audience on an intellectual and emotional journey.*

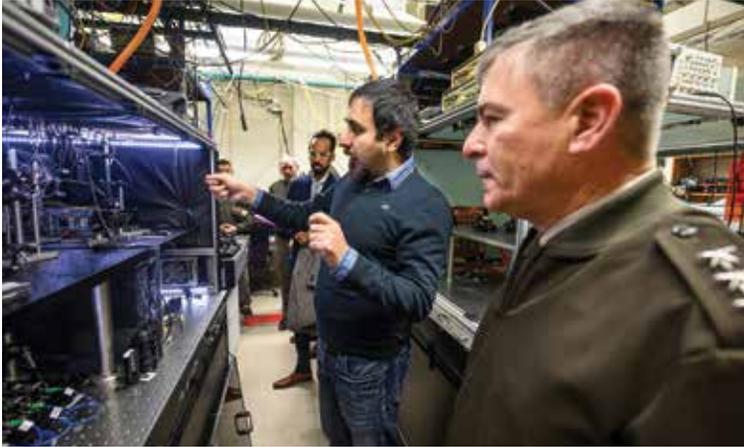
spoke to primatologist Jane Goodall about her "mystical experience" with a favorite chimpanzee and to novelist Toni Morrison about "the tiny thoughts that skitter across the imagination." They put together deep-dive series on the latest psychedelics research and the mind-blowing properties of time. In the best tradition of the Wisconsin Idea, they also featured UW faculty, beaming Madison expertise to the borders of the state and beyond.

Over 35 years, did IQs gradually tick up in the 200 markets where *To the Best of Our Knowledge* aired? I wouldn't be surprised.

That's not to say the show felt like homework. It was always full of laughs and surprises. As it grappled with cosmic questions and eternal mysteries, it also inspired a sense of wonder.

*To the Best of Our Knowledge* had its peers in the public radio pantheon, such as *Fresh Air* and *This American Life*. But it has never — to the best of my knowledge — been surpassed.

**DEAN ROBBINS**



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

## A Matter of National Security

*The UW seeks closer research ties with federal defense agencies.*

Military careers carry an outsize risk for traumatic brain injuries, and that's why the U.S. Department of Defense has invested millions of dollars into university-based research aimed at preventing, detecting, and treating them. Much of that work is performed by a group of engineers and scientists involved in PANTHER (Physics-bAsed Neutralization of Threats to Human tissuEs and oRgans). The multi-institutional collaboration, led out of the UW College of Engineering, is developing better methods for diagnosing brain injuries, as well as advanced materials that promise to improve military helmets. These materials are also improving helmets used by others, from law enforcement officers to athletes.

UW–Madison leaders are hoping to attract more of this “dual use” research, which benefits both the Department of Defense and civilians. The push is part of a broader strategic effort led by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research to increase Department of Defense research funding and expand the university’s national security-oriented research and education opportunities.

The defense department’s research interests are broad, from cybersecurity and quantum computing to food security and disease detection. Vice Chancellor for Research **Dorota Brzezińska** is confident that the UW’s similarly broad research portfolio is well positioned to attract new investment from the agency.

Defense-oriented research has long been an important source of federal funding at the UW. What’s new is a campuswide effort to build on existing relationships and develop closer ties between UW researchers and decision-makers at the Department of Defense and other national security partners.

A recent example was the 2024 visit by a delegation from U.S. Cyber Command (above). The delegation toured labs and met with researchers in the Department of Physics, College of Engineering, and School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences. They heard directly from faculty and students about work in important cybersecurity areas like quantum computing and cryptography, and the visit resulted in an expansion of university partnerships on cybersecurity.

“The strategic growth of UW–Madison’s Department of Defense portfolio will strengthen our standing as a world-class university that trains tomorrow’s leaders and solves today’s problems,” says Vice Chancellor for University Relations **Craig Thompson ’91**.

**WILL CUSHMAN MS’16**



UW ATHLETICS

## UW women’s hockey set a program record by scoring 17 goals

in a win against Stonehill College on November 30. Finley McCarthy x’28 (above) notched the first at the 20-second mark, with 10 other players contributing to the 17–2 score. One almost feels sorry for Stonehill. (Almost.)



JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

**Welcome to Genius U.** Two UW faculty members were awarded 2025 MacArthur Fellowships — known as “genius grants” — for work that benefits society with exceptional creativity. Ángel F. Adames Corraliza (above) studies tropical weather and climate, while Sébastien Philippe aims to reduce the risk associated with nuclear weapons.

## UW–Madison now ranks fifth in the United States for research expenditures,

based on fiscal year 2024 — its highest ranking since 2014. “The rankings highlight the importance of the decades-long partnership between universities and the federal government to tackle society’s greatest challenges, to generate discoveries, to fuel the economy, and to prepare students for the workforce,” says Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin.

## Architectural Treasures

The UW has a wealth of nationally recognized historic places.

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) lists locations whose significance to local, state, or national history merits recognition and preservation. When the register was established in 1966, the first UW building added to its roster was, well, the first UW building:

North Hall, built in 1851. Over the past 60 years, the NRHP has recognized 25 more locations on the UW campus, listed below in order of when they joined the national register. The most recent addition is also the oldest: the Willow Drive Mounds and Habitation Complex, built by Indigenous peoples between 5000 BCE–1200 CE and

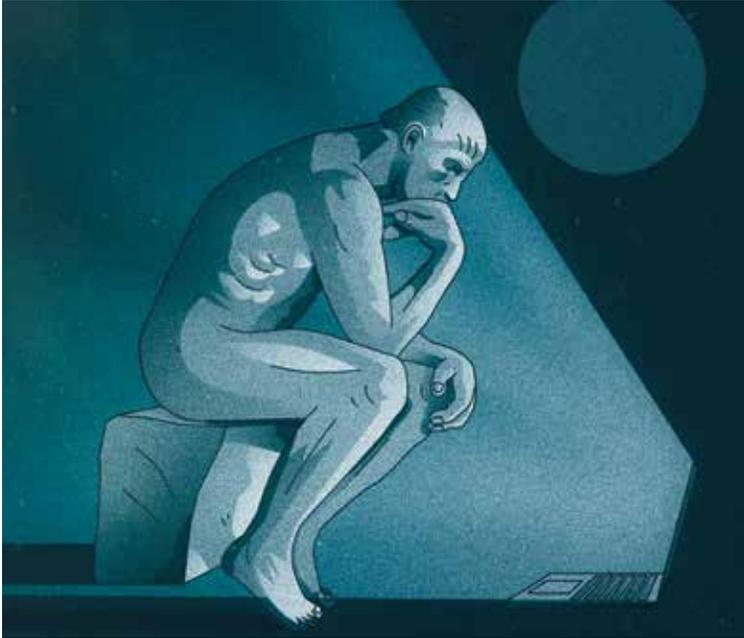
added to the register in 2025. Five of these campus locations are distinguished as National Historic Landmarks for their exceptional relevance to American history. As campus expands and evolves to meet the world's ever-growing demand for Badgers, these culturally and historically significant places endure as physical reminders of the past that makes the future possible.  
**MEGAN PROVOST '20**



- 1. North Hall\* 1851
- 2. Camp Randall Memorial Park 1913
- 3. Wisconsin Historical Society 1900
- 4. Bascom Hill Historic District 1851–1969
- 5. Agricultural Dean's Residence 1896
- 6. Agricultural Bulletin Building 1901
- 7. Agriculture Hall 1903
- 8. Hiram Smith Hall and Annex 1891–1909
- 9. King Hall (Soil Sciences) 1893
- 10. Washburn Observatory 1882 and Observatory Hill Office Building 1854
- 11. Hector F. DeLuca Biochemistry Building 1916
- 12. Agricultural Engineering Building 1907
- 13. Lathrop Hall 1908
- 14. Stock Pavilion 1908

- 15. Materials Science and Engineering Building 1901
- 16. Henry Mall Historic District 1906–25
- 17. Red Gym\* 1894
- 18. Science Hall\* 1887
- 19. Forest Products Laboratory 1932
- 20. Field House 1930
- 21. Dairy Barn\* 1898
- 22. University Presbyterian Church and Student Center (Pres House) 1935
- 23. Observatory Hill Mound Group 700–1000 CE
- 24. Memorial Union 1928
- 25. University of Wisconsin Arboretum\* 1927–43
- 26. Willow Drive Mounds and Habitation Complex 5000 BCE–1200 CE

\*National Historic Landmark



JAMIE ESPINOZA

## AI's Humanistic Angle

*A research center grapples with tough questions surrounding the new technology.*

What are the ethics of artificial intelligence? How will historians look back at the development phase of this new technology? What will be the long-term effect on our society as governments embrace these tools?

These are the types of questions that will be investigated by the UW's new Center for Humanistic Inquiry into AI and Uncertainty.

"We're going through this seismic shift that will have massive impacts on the way we work, on the way we live, and on all aspects of human life and society," says **Grant Nelsestuen**, associate dean for arts and humanities in the UW College of Letters & Science and a professor of classics. "We're applying the basic questions that the humanities are so good at asking to come up with creative and important new ways of thinking about these technologies and shaping their development."

Nelsestuen and his coleader, philosophy professor **Steven Nadler**, have brought together a team of 12 researchers from the Information School, UW Libraries, and the Departments of History, Philosophy, Communication Arts, and English. They will look at the rise of AI from every humanistic angle, aided by a three-year National Endowment for the Humanities grant.

Artificial intelligence has been a focus of the Wisconsin Research, Innovation, and Scholarly Excellence (RISE) Initiative, which the UW launched in 2024 to facilitate transformative discoveries and translate them into real-world impact. RISE-AI seeks to boost the university's network of AI innovators by adding faculty positions across campus.

Nelsestuen got the idea for the Center for Humanistic Inquiry into AI and Uncertainty when he realized just how many researchers from the College of Letters & Science were investigating AI. He had a vision of getting them talking.

"This is the sort of creative, dynamic, and wide-ranging thinking that is characteristic of UW-Madison's faculty, students, and alumni," he says.

**ALLI WATTERS '17**



JEFF MILLER

**It's official: UW-Madison is an influencer.** *Time* magazine has ranked the university 22nd overall and sixth among public institutions for developing future leaders, based on a sample of 4,800 notable policymakers, corporate executives, scientists, educators, and cultural innovators.

**PBS Wisconsin has produced a documentary about everybody's favorite Badger.**

*Bucky!* traces the mascot's evolution from an unruly live animal to today's fuzzy UW ambassador and push-up specialist. At press time, you could watch the film on [pbswisconsin.org](http://pbswisconsin.org), [pbs.org](http://pbs.org), and YouTube.

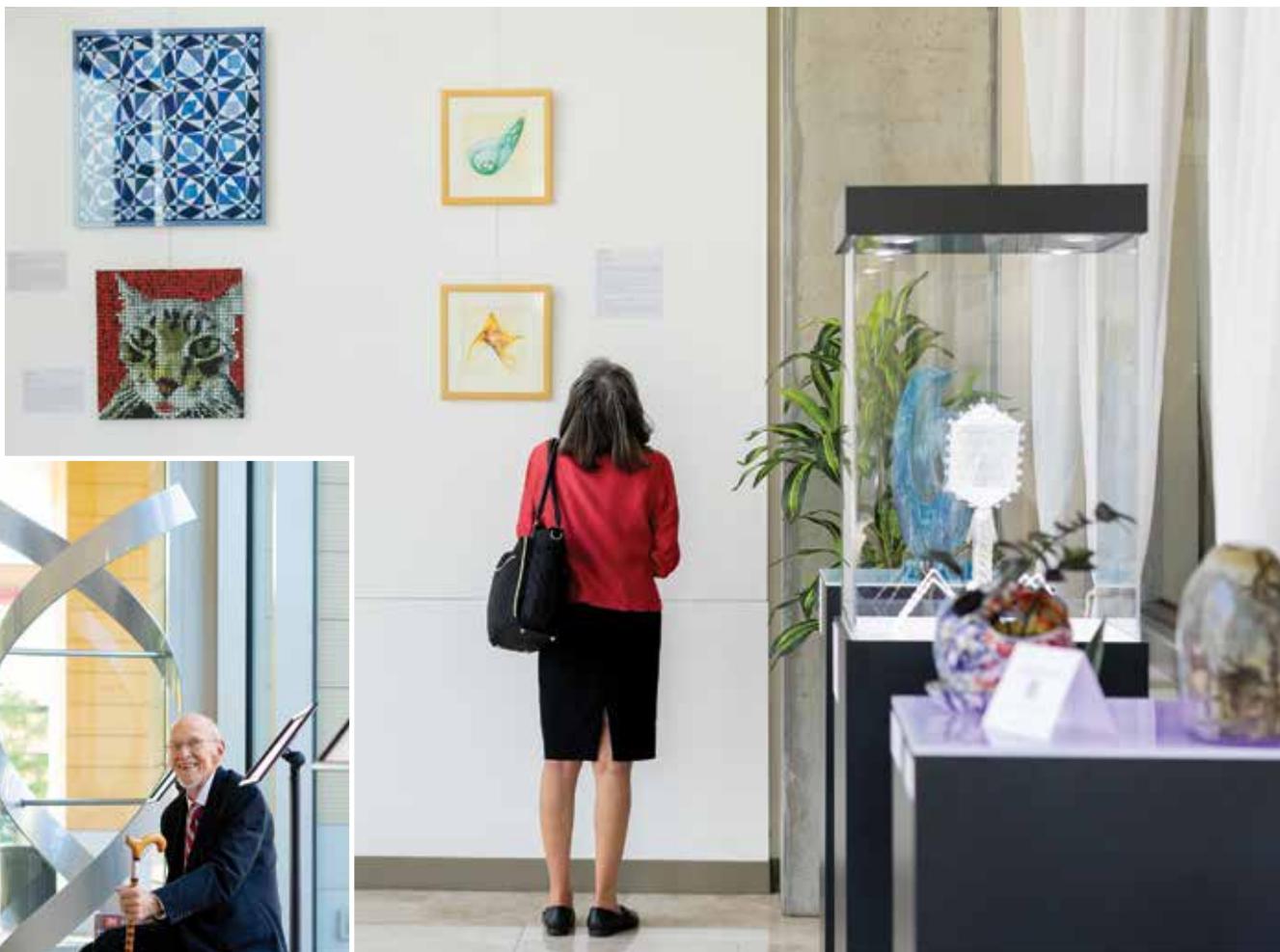


TAYLOR WOLFRAM



NYSE GROUP

**On October 22, students, alumni, faculty, and staff celebrated the Wisconsin School of Business's 125th anniversary** by ringing the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange. The school sends nearly 100 students to Wall Street each year, and the event recognized its status as a force in global finance.



SHARON VANONNY PHOTOGRAPHY (2)



## The Beauty of Discovery

A new campus museum highlights the relationship between art and science.

Leonardo da Vinci recommended studying both “the art of science” and “the science of art” to appreciate their interconnectedness. The John D. Wiley Gallery for Art in Science brings that advice to life.

Located in the northwest corner of the Discovery Building, the gallery opened this past September to a “really positive

response,” according to **Andrew Hanus** of the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery (WID).

Hanus says that the space, which pays homage to the groundbreaking research happening in the surrounding building, includes collected works from professional artists, faculty, and students.

WID director **Jo Handelsman PhD’84**, who was the driving force behind the gallery, wanted it to honor someone who helped create the Discovery Building, who helped support the arts on campus, and “who really breathes the essence of art and science fusion.” That person is **John Wiley MS’65, PhD’68**.

Wiley, a member of the engineering faculty before moving into administration, was pivotal in the creation of the Discovery Building and became its first director. When he was UW–Madison chan-

*Visitors to the John D. Wiley Gallery for Art in Science can explore artworks inspired by the patterns of the universe. Inset, Wiley sits in front of a metal DNA helix weighing close to 500 pounds.*

For more information, visit [go.wisc.edu/wid\\_gallery](http://go.wisc.edu/wid_gallery).

cellor from 2001 to 2008, he advocated for the East Campus Arts Gateway and helped raise funding to create the Hamel Music Center, the Chazen Museum of Art addition, and other arts initiatives.

Wiley, himself a metalworks enthusiast, created several metal Möbius strips for the gallery. “It was a way to demonstrate how art can be intrinsic to math and science,” says Hanus.

Other works in the light-filled, airy space include two huge, metal DNA double helixes, a delicate glass sculpture representing a bacteriophage T4 (a type of virus), and a piece that pays tribute to the Fibonacci sequence.

The Wiley Gallery is open during building hours, Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

**NIKI DENISON**



JEFF MILLER

## Perfecting Storm Studies

*The UW's Daniel Wright leads a multidisciplinary research center on severe weather.*

Engineering professor **Daniel Wright** is adding his expertise in extreme storm prediction research to the new Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Convective Storms (CIRCS), which aims to make society better able to withstand the impacts of severe weather. The collaborative center includes nearly two dozen scientists from the fields of atmospheric science, engineering, geography, physics, computer science, actuarial science, and risk and insurance. Wright is the UW-Madison site director for CIRCS, which will be located at Northern Illinois University.

"We're mainly going to focus on things like hail and wind damage, but also more upstream questions about seasonal prediction," Wright says. "For example, that's trying to see if next summer is going to be at, below, or above average in terms of the number of storms we're seeing and their severity, and whether these patterns are shifting over time."

Damage from severe storms has been on the rise in recent decades, driven by changing weather patterns and shifting geographical populations. According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, the United States was buffeted by 190 billion-dollar weather and climate disasters between 2015 and 2024. These events killed more than 6,300 people and caused roughly \$1.4 trillion in damage.

Wright developed the StormLab software, which calculates rainfall impacts on different areas. StormLab can create millions of hypothetical, realistic storm scenarios for a wide range of applications, and Wright has recently been working to translate that work to hypothetical hailstorms.

"There are synergies with people in atmospheric sciences who do field observations or use satellites for observations, while we create models," Wright says. "The idea with this center is that it will bring all of these people together with expertise from across different disciplines to make the research bigger than it would otherwise be."

ALEX HOLLOWAY

## THE UW EARNS GOLD STAR FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The University of Wisconsin-Madison earned its first gold rating from the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS), marking key progress on five environmental sustainability goals that were announced in February 2024.

"It's a welcome accomplishment to achieve STARS Gold this year," says Chancellor **Jennifer Mnookin**. "It reflects the hard work and dedication of our staff, faculty, and students to make sustainability a priority at UW-Madison."

STARS is the most widely recognized framework in the world for publicly reporting comprehensive information related

to a college or university's sustainability performance, with scoring categories for academics, engagement, operations, and planning and administration.

The UW demonstrated the most improvement in the academics category this year. It now counts 85 departments with sustainability course offerings, 57 of which offer a major or certification that requires sustainability knowledge. The UW also has high levels of student involvement in sustainability, with more than 50 registered student organizations and campus events, including the award-winning Earth Fest.

"Students want more than knowledge — they want practical training in sustainability skills," says **Paul Robbins '89**, dean of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies. "This new STARS designation affirms our commitment and signals that UW-Madison is serious about integrating sustainability into its core mission."

ELIZA WATERS MS'03





BRANA/HILLARY SCHAVE

## TRAINING A NEW CROP OF LEADERS

Next fall, the UW's La Follette School of Public Affairs will launch an undergraduate major in public policy — the first of its kind in Wisconsin.

Students will be able to earn bachelor's degrees in public policy, opening pathways to careers in government, nonprofits, consulting, advocacy, and business. Many will go on to graduate programs in public affairs or international public affairs, law school, or leadership roles in public service. The program will be distinct from other public policy undergraduate programs around the country in that its curriculum will focus on civil dialogue, working across differences, and finding common ground.

For more than 40 years, UW-Madison students have earned master's degrees from La Follette, and beginning in 2019, it began offering undergraduate certificates. The new undergraduate curriculum will include interdisciplinary coursework and hands-on learning to help students develop skills in policy analysis, strategic communication, civil discourse, and evidence-based decision-making.

A foundational course for the new degree, Advancing Public Policy in a Divided America, debuted last spring. The course aims to help students think about public policy as part of everyday life, understand public policy challenges, build critical thinking skills, and value civic engagement and civil dialogue.

"Interest in public policy is skyrocketing," says La Follette Director **Susan Webb Yackee** (above). "Students increasingly view data, dialogue, and diverse perspectives as key to building better solutions."

**TOMMY JAIME**

## A DROP IN LONGEVITY GAINS

A new study coauthored by a UW-Madison professor finds that life expectancy gains made by high-income countries in the first half of the 20th century have slowed significantly.

"[It] appears to be a phenomenon we are unlikely to achieve again in the foreseeable future," says Assistant Professor **Héctor Pifarré i Arolas**.

The study analyzed data from the Human Mortality Database for 23 high-income and low-mortality countries.

The life expectancy for an individual born in a high-income country in 1900 was an average of 62 years. For someone born just 38 years later in similar conditions, longevity had jumped to 80 years on average. But for those born between 1939 and 2000, the increase slowed.

At the beginning of the 20th century, infant mortality fell rapidly due to medical advances and other improvements in quality of life for high-income countries. This contributed significantly to the rapid increase in life expectancy. However, infant and child mortality are now so low that the forecasted improvements in mortality in older age groups will not be enough to sustain the previous pace of longevity gains.

The study provides critical insight for governments looking to anticipate the needs of their health care systems, pension planning, and social policies, as well as for individuals making decisions about retirement and long-term planning.

**TOMMY JAIME**



JEFF MILLER

## It's Bucky Time!

Workers from the UW's Physical Plant have restored the Bucky clock that now hangs on the building at 21 N. Park Street. Generations of Badgers will remember the clock hanging on a bank at 905 University Avenue, but when that building was demolished, the UW moved the clock to Park Street.



SARAH MAUGHAN

## Game Changers

*Badger Inquiry on Sport breaks ground on the science of leadership.*

One April evening, **Peter Miller** got a text from **David Edwards x'19**, an offensive lineman for the NFL's Buffalo Bills, who had a question: Is there any scholarly research about how players mentally frame the pressure they feel during high-stakes games?

"During the AFC championship game, I tried to talk to our guys about pressure," wrote Edwards, a former Badger football player.

Edwards wanted evidence-based research to take back to his teammates. High-level players expect strong science, not only behind their physical training and rehabilitation, but also regarding the psychological aspects of their game.

"There is a space we're starting to occupy where there's a void," says Miller, a professor of educational leadership and policy analysis. "Highly impactful people are eating this work up."

That work is the charge of Badger Inquiry on Sport (BIOS), a research initiative launched in 2021 through a partnership between UW athletics and the School of Education. With leadership from **Maria Dehnert MS'18**, Miller, and **Sara Jimenez Soffa PhD'07** (pictured above), BIOS combines UW-Madison's world-class researchers and its highly regarded Big Ten teams to bring an academic lens to questions about sport.

BIOS is working to deepen the scientific understanding of good coaching, and it partners with the School of Education's master's in sports leadership program, which launched in 2021.

"One of our goals is to be a bridge between research and athletics," Miller says, noting that BIOS plans to help coaches and athletes around the state and across the country. "For a lot of kids, sports are the space where they find the most meaning, where they make the deepest relationships, where they feel most open to learning from an adult."

LAUREL WHITE



The number of degrees awarded last spring — a UW-Madison record. Students are also earning their bachelor's degrees in record time. For 2024–25, the average was a mere 3.78 years.

*“A disgusting amount of optimism is not something to be afraid of. Having hope that the world will get better is worth it.”*

— Former Miss America **Grace Vanderhei '23** at winter commencement



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

**A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PUERTO RICO**

The new Puerto Rican Studies Hub at UW–Madison launched in October. In addition to public programming, it will fund a pair of postdoctoral fellowships and support a cohort of six students for a new mentorship program. To strengthen partnerships beyond the university, it also plans to award grants to community, cultural, scholarly, and artistic initiatives connected to Puerto Rico and its diasporas.

The hub’s founding is timely, says **Aurora Santiago Ortiz**, assistant professor of gender and women’s studies and Chicana/x/e and Latinx/e studies, who has spearheaded it along with associate history professor **Jorell Meléndez-Badillo** (above).

“We see changes in migration patterns, in that there are many Puerto Rican communities outside the major metropolitan centers and throughout the Midwest,” Santiago Ortiz says.

The first of its kind in the Midwest, the Puerto Rican Studies Hub was made possible by a \$3 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. At a time when ethnic studies programs are under threat around the country, Meléndez-Badillo says, he hopes it puts UW–Madison at the forefront of discussions of Puerto Rican history and politics.

“We want it to be a place for connecting folks, not only in the Midwest, but nationally and internationally.”

**GAYLE WORLAND**



DISNEY/LARA SOLANKI

**UW Freshman, Disney Star**

*Nathaniel Buescher x’29 balances college classes with a lead role in the hit show Electric Bloom.*

UW–Madison’s freshman class can count a rising Hollywood star among its ranks. You might catch **Nathaniel Buescher x’29** climbing up Bascom Hill to get to his biology classes — or appearing on your screen in Disney’s musical comedy series *Electric Bloom*.

In the show, which premiered last July, Buescher plays Lucas Jasper, a high school student who befriends a pop music trio that becomes the biggest band in the world.

“He’s the class crush, whether he knows it or not,” Buescher says. “[The bandmates] Posey, Jade, and Tulip definitely notice when he walks by. He’s a mix of poetic and clueless, someone who can trip over his own backpack two seconds after saying something unexpectedly wise.”

Buescher, who grew up in Chicago, previously starred in the anthology series *Circuit Breakers* and appeared in several other TV shows. He decided to attend the UW because of its balance of competitive academics and social opportunities.

“I wanted a school that was competitive to get into and would actually push me once I got there,” he says. “The UW had that. But I also wanted the full college setup: Big Ten sports, a solid social scene. And the town mattered. Madison has a great vibe. It’s smart, social, and easy to get around. It felt like a place I could actually live, not just go to school.”

Filming for *Electric Bloom* wrapped up last summer, so Buescher has been able to focus on school during his freshman year (with the occasional audition sprinkled in). He plans to major in biology, with an eye toward medical school and dermatology.

On the *Electric Bloom* set, Buescher represented his school spirit with a flag in his dressing room and met fellow Badger **Rachel Lewis ’03**, one of the show’s creators.

At the UW, his classmates occasionally recognize him from their screens.

“One time I was walking across campus,” he says, “and someone pointed and said, ‘Wait, are you the guy from that electric show? Bloom something?’ I said yeah, and they fist-bumped me and kept moving. No selfie. No follow-up. Just a drive-by moment. It was kind of perfect.”

**ABIGAIL BURES X’27**

## Badger Basketball's Steady Hand

In the new college sports landscape, John Blackwell x'27 displays old-school dedication and intensity.

In a college basketball era defined by change and player movement, **John Blackwell x'27** has been a constant for the Badgers over the past three years.

The junior combo guard earned significant playing time as a true freshman in 2023, securing head coach **Greg Gard's** trust for his relentless pursuit on defense, steady hand on offense, and mature approach to the game. Blackwell doubled his scoring output in his sophomore season, averaging nearly 16 points per game while sharing the backcourt with star transfer **John Tonje MS'25**. And this season, alongside junior forward **Nolan Winter x'27** and senior point guard **Nick Boyd x'26**, Blackwell is shouldering an even larger offensive load as the Badgers seek a third consecutive NCAA tournament bid.

"My offensive approach is to be a three-level scorer," he says. "I can shoot the midrange, knock down the three, and get all the way to the rim and draw a lot of fouls."

And his tough defensive mindset, he says, is the result of bringing it every day to practice. "It's not going to just show up for you in a game."

It was a somewhat unlikely journey to Wisconsin for Blackwell, who grew up in Michigan and whose father, Glynn, played college basketball at Illinois. But the UW was the first program from the Big Ten — and all Power Five conferences — to offer him a scholarship. Gard, who's known to value team culture and playing style as much as raw talent and skill, once referred to Blackwell's character in the recruiting process as "A-plus-plus-plus."

*Blackwell took an unlikely journey to Wisconsin.*

Last season, Blackwell showed so much promise as a physical two-way guard that he declared for the 2025 NBA Draft. After receiving valuable feedback in the predraft process, Blackwell withdrew from consideration and returned to Madison for his third college season. "I'm back," he wrote on social media, to the relief of Badger fans, who've also seen players chase new opportunities in the college transfer portal.

"Wisconsin is home," he says. "Obviously there's a lot of money going around, but it's not always good money to take."

The program's belief in Blackwell and Blackwell's dedication to the program have paid off in their own way. In December, he became the ninth-fastest Badger to score 1,000 points with the team.

"It meant everything," he says. "I want to be remembered as a guy who gave it his all, was the ultimate team player, and carried Wisconsin in the right way, on and off the court."

BY PRESTON SCHMITT '14  
PHOTO BY TAYLOR WOLFRAM '24



## The Case for Constructive Conversation

With the Wisconsin Exchange, Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin makes civil dialogue a campus priority.

UW Chancellor **Jennifer Mnookin** has long been passionate about pluralism. Growing up, she often had dinner-table conversations on the subject with her father, an expert in negotiation and conflict resolution. He defined empathy as “working hard to understand the other side’s issues, needs, and perspectives.” And that’s exactly what the chancellor hoped to encourage with the Wisconsin Exchange.

Mnookin is departing to head Columbia University at the end of the academic year (see page 11), but the new campus initiative is up and running. The goal, she says, is “helping students learn to engage productively with others who see the world differently from them.”

### *How would you describe the Wisconsin Exchange in a nutshell?*

With the Wisconsin Exchange, we’re building on existing efforts and creating new opportunities to help students, faculty, and staff learn to engage, live, and lead in a polarized world. We want to make constructive conversation and civil dialogue visible and integral parts of everyday life on campus.

### *What are the project’s main goals?*

I think it’s extremely important for our students and employees to have the opportunity to talk to and learn from people who don’t think the way they do, whether that’s a matter of their identity, their background, or their viewpoint and political differences. We want to

enhance the practice of pluralism and civil dialogue as key aspects of the UW–Madison education and experience; build awareness of activities already underway; and identify new learning and engagement opportunities, both in the classroom and beyond. We want to engage the full campus community and extend bridges beyond campus through partnerships with national organizations.

### *What are some of the most notable programs and curricular tie-ins?*

We will have talks and lectures, and some of those may take the form of debates, but some of them won’t. It doesn’t always have to be many views at the same time. We will be growing different kinds of opportunities, including a grant program where students, staff, or faculty can submit their own ideas for initiatives that widen and deepen the presence of viewpoint diversity on campus and foster dialogue across differences.

I also am excited we’re partnering with the Reagan Institute on a Common Ground Forum this spring that will bring, hopefully, well-known, high-level individuals with different views together to have a conversation. A number of our faculty have exciting ideas for curricular aspects to this initiative. We are also starting a postdoctoral program in this space and will be further

expanding the range of available activities and opportunities as the program grows.

### *Why is this program needed at UW–Madison?*

I think universities need to be spaces where ideas embodied by people from different backgrounds, disciplines, and perspectives come together for the shared purpose of teaching, learning, and producing knowledge. Doing this well won’t always be comfortable, but it’s sometimes in moments of challenge when the most growth and discovery happen. Engaging pluralistically helps us sharpen our own views, and sometimes we might even change our own mind, or realize something we thought was simple is actually more complicated.

Besides that, we are in a moment of a good deal of polarization, nationally, and a commitment to pluralism may help people to find common ground. At UW–Madison, a 2023 survey from the Universities of Wisconsin found that 43 percent of students believed speakers with offensive views should, at least in some circumstances, be disinvited from campus. Yet most students also report that exposure to diverse viewpoints is essential to their education. So, creating both a tolerance for and expectation of a pluralist community seems important to the educational process and important for training citizens and future leaders in our diverse democracy as well.

### *How will students, faculty, and staff benefit?*

It’s extremely important for students, staff, and faculty to



For an expanded conversation with the chancellor, scan the QR code or visit [go.wisc.edu/onwisc1](https://go.wisc.edu/onwisc1).



have the opportunity to talk to and learn from people who don't think the way they do. Here at UW-Madison, we are, in fact, a large and diverse community. I think we are quite good at helping arriving students — some of whom are understandably a bit intimidated by our size and scale — find their people, their groups. But then I worry that they sometimes stay in those comfort zones a little bit more than I think is in their, and our, long-term interests. We want them to be crossing those boundaries and borders and engaging with each other.

***How will the wider world benefit?***

National surveys show that 77 percent of Americans report having few or no friends with different political beliefs. That's a concerning statistic for our polity. Our students are stepping into a world that is both deeply complex and distressingly polarized, and they have the power to do something good in that world, perhaps especially if they can find ways to work with people they might not always agree with. If you know that you don't have to agree with someone about everything in order to work with them constructively about something, you will have many more opportunities to make a difference.

*Interview by Dean Robbins*

*Photo by Althea Dotzour*



1000  
BLOCK

EXCEPT BUSES,  
BICYCLES AND YOLLES  
AUTHORIZED VEHICLES



# STATE STREET, THAT GREAT STREET

*Take a stroll down the iconic  
campus corridor, where old  
favorites meet new trends.*

**BY PRESTON SCHMITT '14**

**PHOTOS BY JEFF MILLER**

**I**f you gave UW-Madison alumni the chance, I suspect many of them would encase State Street in amber to preserve the shops and experiences of their student years.

I'm occasionally guilty of this nostalgic attitude. After all, I'm probably the only person who misses Fat Sandwich, the short-lived and eccentric State Street eatery known for stuffing every imaginable condiment and deep-fried appetizer into sub rolls.

Unlike Fat Sandwich, several timeless State Street establishments survive. Staples range from State Street Brats and B-Side Records to the Chocolate Shoppe and Parthenon Gyros.

Still, stability is not the reality of retail and real estate. And especially not in downtown Madison, where new batches of UW students repopulate the shopping and entertainment scene each fall.

Matt Tramel, the executive director of Madison's Central Business Improvement District, reminds me: "The one way that State Street has never changed is that it constantly evolves."

State Street is alive and well, rebounding from COVID-19 pandemic lows. Nearly a quarter of the street's storefronts saw closures in 2020 and 2021, with total visits dropping from 5 million in 2019 to 2 million in 2020. Now, there are only 10 vacancies among the 160 commercial spaces. And since 2023, State Street is averaging record levels of nearly 7 million annual visits.

On first impression, returning visitors may notice a different State Street — one with a few more high-rise apartments and even swanky Bus Rapid Transit stations, reflecting a growing city.

But the essence of the street, as that vibrant crossroad between the city and the campus, remains awfully familiar. So join us on an eight-block journey as we revisit old haunts and discover new favorites.

## TOWN AND GOWN

The campus end of State Street technically starts on the 800 and 700 blocks, stretching across Library Mall and the **University Club**, **Memorial Library**, **Wisconsin Historical Society**, and **University Book Store**. With Bascom Hall towering behind your shoulders, State Street presents a straight path to the Wisconsin State Capitol, with bustling storefronts perfectly framing the view. Welcome to the ultimate intersection of town and gown.

Most students think of the corner of State and Lake as the true beginning of a State Street trip, the ever-reliable **Walgreens** — and before it, the beloved **Rennebohm Drug Store** — marking the spot. This 600 block is State Street's most-striking blend of old and new, mom-and-pops next to national chains.

The sliver storefront of **City Bar**, the underground cocktail lounge serving speakeasy vibes since 1998, now stands next to a **Target**. The small-scale version of the big-box department store opened in 2021, offering students a sorely needed walkable option for fresh groceries as well as consumer products.

Across from Target's red, modern façade sits the classic Bavarian exterior and biergarten of **State Street Brats**, largely untouched by time since it opened in 1953 (under the name **Shorty and Lammy's Brathaus**). Just as it did then, the bar serves its signature red brat, named for the coloring of its split smoked beef and pork recipe. I'd never been the biggest fan of bratwursts, but after ordering the red brat for the first time, I'm a convert. The recipe delivers a flavor-filled bite. Not bad for a \$7 meal in 2026.

Longtime neighbors on this block include clothing store **Urban Outfitters**, popular lunchtime eatery **Mediterranean Cafe** (friendly competitor **Sunroom Cafe** closed in 2020), and hippie paradise **Sunshine Daydream**. Sadly, no longer to be found is **Paul's Book Store**, which closed the (used) book on its legendary seven-decade run at 670 State in 2025.

The new tenant, the edgy **Raygun** design and apparel store, brings a bit of the same spunky spirit with much less of the musty smell. Other newer storefronts include the adorable **Mochi** Asian gift shop, which stocks brightly colored plush toys as far as the eye can see, and **The Guild**, a video gaming lounge where you can play on PC stations and the newest consoles with food and drinks brought right to you.

## THE LATE-NIGHT BLOCK

It's not hard to tell that the 500 block of State Street caters to UW students and their evolving tastes. A popular stop on the Frances Street corner is **Colectivo**, a Milwaukee-based coffee shop chain. It has glass windows and doors for exterior walls, so

you can always see swarms of students socializing in the modern industrial interior.

For the fast-casual crowd, just steps from each other are **Raising Cane's** chicken, **Mooyah** burgers, **Potbelly** sandwiches, **Jimmy John's** subs, **Qdoba** burritos, and **Taco Bell** munchies. You can bet this is a busy block on late nights.

Interspersed with these national brands are uniquely Madison mainstays.

**B-Side Records**, with remarkable resilience in the music streaming era and a stroke of luck with the vinyl revival, continues to sling albums old and new on State. The shop moved from the 400 to the 500 block in 2022, its loyal customers helping to relocate some 5,000 vinyl records and CDs from the original 1982 location. B-Side's long rectangular layout makes it feel like you're browsing the world's coolest (and best-organized) garage sale. My personal standard for a record store is whether its collection includes Pat Benatar. Sure enough, I found her 1980 *Crimes of Passion* with the sticker price of \$28.99, nestled alongside a whole lot of Beatles and David Bowie.

Early settlers to the 500 block's late-night scene include **Mondays Bar** — which has been offering generous pours, year-round holiday lighting, and free popcorn since the '70s — and the **Stop & Shop** convenience store, which has dutifully held down the Gilman Street corner since the '60s.

*Though State Street may look a bit different to returning visitors, with new storefronts and more high-rise apartments, it remains a vibrant crossroad between the city and the campus.*

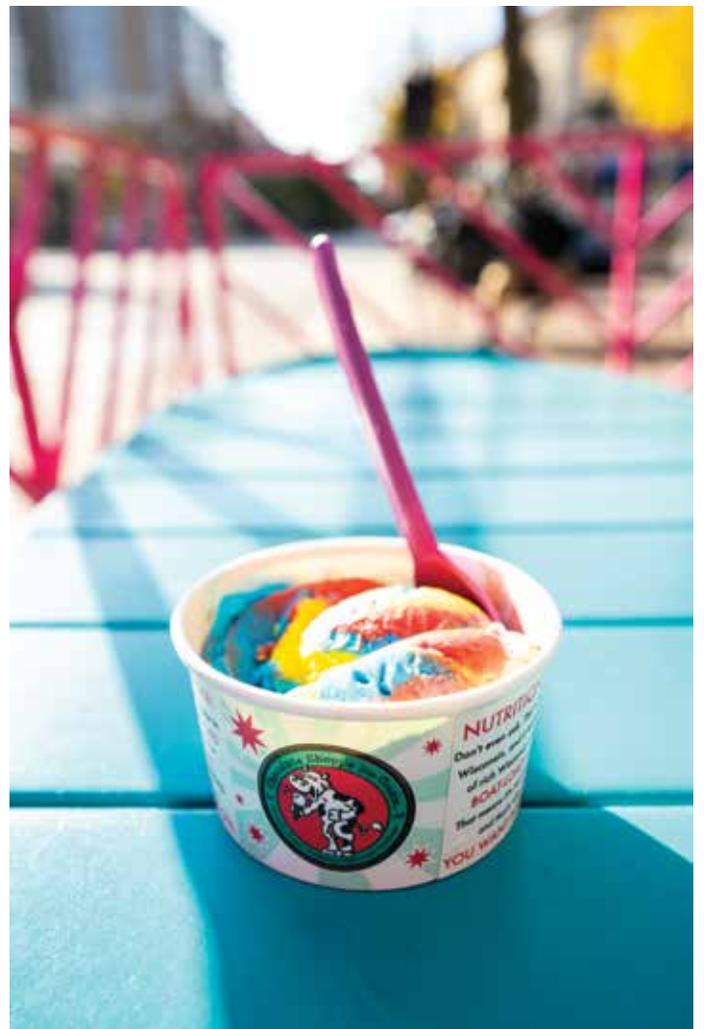
Several since-closed establishments also had long runs on this block, including **Gino's** pizza, **The (Discount) Den**, **Cellar Subs**, the Afghan restaurant **Kabul**, the Turkish restaurant **Hüsni's**, and **The Pipefitter** head shop.

New to the block, but not to Badgers' hearts, is the **Red Shed**. The illustrious dive bar relocated from Frances Street in 2024, hauling its red-and-white striped covered wagon to the front window of 508 State. Cheap Long Island iced teas — served since 1969 — are here to stay.

## STATE STREET'S SWEET TOOTH

State Street's 400 block is a sight for sore eyes and a sweet tooth, thanks to the **Chocolate Shoppe** on the Gilman Street corner. This ice cream operation has been in high demand ever since it opened on State Street in 1964, expanding to several Madison locations and shipping products to sellers across the country.

Chocolate Shoppe produces more than 100





flavors, all in the super-premium category for the ice cream’s dense richness and high butterfat content. Its branded labeling makes no bones about the dietary tradeoffs: “You want nutrition, eat carrots.” To my taste (and with due acknowledgment of Babcock Dairy), the award-winning and slyly named This \$&! Just Got Serious flavor is among the most satisfying scoops around.

And if ice cream doesn’t satisfy your sweet tooth, there’s always **Insomnia Cookies** next door.

Bookending the 400 block is “Madison’s happiest corner,” as self-described by the **Badger Liquor Shop** that’s occupied the Gorham Street intersection since the 1930s. Even if you’re not a drinker, the store’s iconic neon sign — animating liquid drops from a bottle — still gives you something to smile about.

Happy memories also permeate the block. Bygone favorites range from **Gargano’s Pizzeria** and **Ella’s Deli** (now home to **Hawk’s Bar & Grill**) to the **Sacred Feather** hat store and **Tropic Jewel** (which sold its last beads in October). The **Tellus**

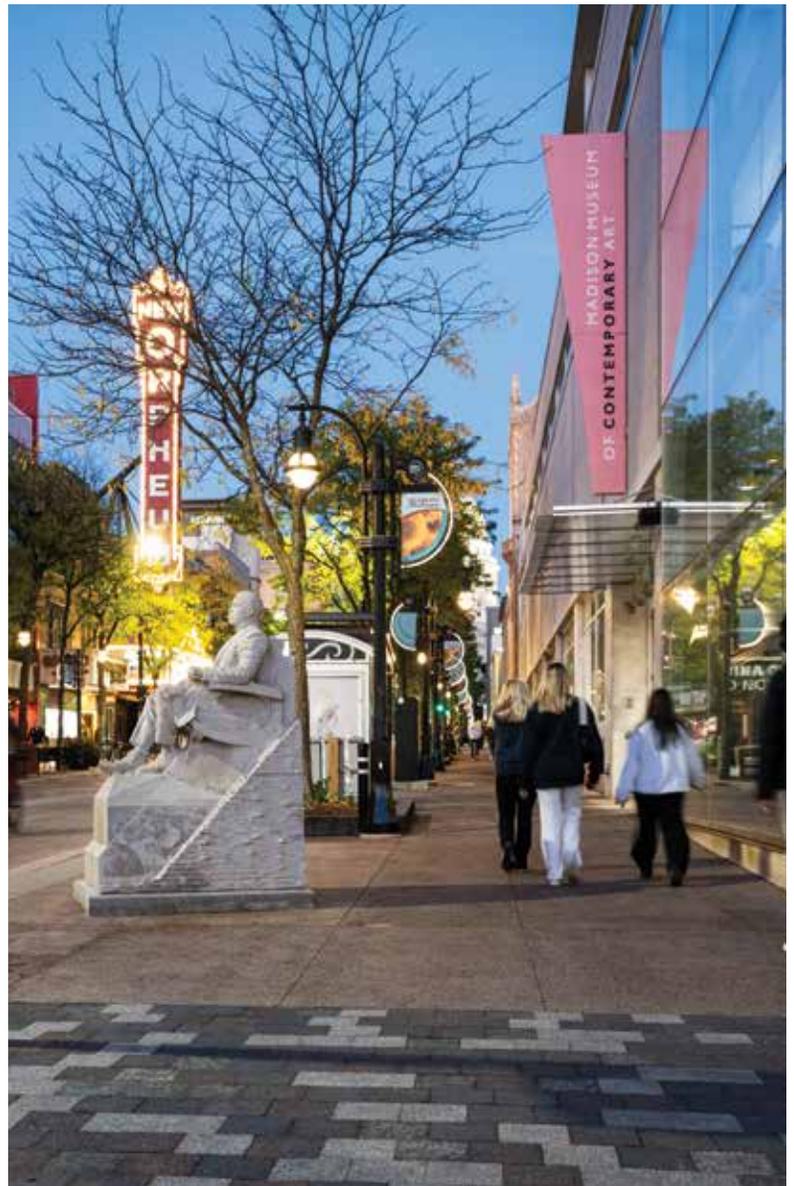
**Mater** kitchenware shop closed in 2019 after nearly six decades on State, but you can still spot its fading name on the storefront now occupied by the **Mimosa** spiritual gift shop, which replaced cutlery and bakeware with crystals and incense.

New to 419 State Street, where **Yellow Jersey** bike shop once enjoyed a long ride, is the eatery **Izakaya Kuroyama**. This fast favorite serves authentic Japanese street food with cozy, traditional ambiance. I can’t think of a better way to relive the college years than to stop in for some ramen — with, of course, an ice cream chaser.

## A MELTING POT

Among the many pleasures of a stroll down State Street is the diversity of people and places: a remarkable melting pot of cultures and cuisines.

Forty years ago, Krishna Pradhan MA’74, PhD’82 opened **Himal Chuli** on the 300 block with his wife, Bishnu, so they could share their native Nepali food with the Madison community. Himal Chuli was reportedly the first Nepali restaurant in the United



States when it opened in 1986. When it closed earlier this year, it wasn't even the only one on State Street. Indeed, the whole span of State reflects something of a United Nations, with grocery markets and restaurants featuring authentic fare from China, Taiwan, Japan, India, Laos, Thailand, South Korea, Mexico, and the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Next to Himal Chuli's old storefront is the Greek temple façade of **Parthenon**, a cherished greasy spoon for gyro lovers. Stepping inside the temple, you can see — and smell — cone-shaped slabs of gyro meat spinning on large skewers alongside vertical rotisserie grills. Sliced, served on a grilled pita, and topped with tomatoes, onions, and homemade tzatziki sauce, this little piece of Greece has sustained generations of lamb-eating Badgers since 1972. (And always order the side of fries.)

Other familiar faces on this block include **Ragstock**, the vintage clothing store and source of student Halloween costumes since 1981; **The Soap Opera**, which has sold natural bath products inside its pastel-colored walls since 1972; the

clothing boutique **Jazzman** (1980); **Mackesey's Irish Pub** (1983); and **Triangle Market** (1935).

Unfortunately, you can no longer order a morning bun from the **Ovens of Brittany**, bring a date to **Tutto Pasta**, or try on stylish 'fits at **Sassafras** and **Karen & Co.** But there are new memories to be made among the trendier storefronts on this block, including the **Tap Tap** arcade bar, **Little Sweet** bubble tea café, and **Madison Modern Market** gift shop.

## THE ARTS DISTRICT

There is no Madison view quite as memorable as the **Orpheum Theater's** 55-foot-tall sign and marquee lighting up State Street with the capitol building in the background. It's a gateway of sorts to State Street's arts district.

The 200 block of State is home to the Orpheum, **Overture Center for the Arts**, **Madison Museum of Contemporary Art** (MMoCA), and **Comedy on State**. This year, within a one-block radius, you can experience Broadway's *Hamilton* and



*The Great Gatsby* and catch stand-up acts by John Mulaney and Adam Conover.

The Orpheum opened its doors as a movie palace in 1927. The Overture Center and MMoCA complex, spanning the entire south block, was designed by renowned architect César Pelli and completed in 2006. State-of-the-art performance halls and galleries fill out the nearly 400,000 square feet. (Some may remember the former occupants of this lot, including **Yost's** department store and the **Radical Rye** sandwich shop.) Nearly as iconic as the Orpheum's sign is MMoCA's corner façade, with glass panels that rise three stories high and reveal a glorious glass staircase inside.

Comedy on State is your favorite comedian's favorite club, routinely punching above its weight to book national acts such as Michael Che and Taylor Tomlinson.

It's not all art on this block, though. **Paul's Club** continues to serve drinks under the canopy of a real — though long-dead — oak tree. The bar dates to 1962 but moved a few doors down to 204 State in 2012, somehow managing to lug the large tree with it. **Little Luxuries** and **Goodman's Jewelers** have been selling eclectic gifts and engagement rings, respectively, since 1990 and 1933. The **Noodles & Company** on the corner opened in 1996 as the second location of what's become a national chain with hundreds of stores. The original Denver location has since closed, so this now stands as the oldest spot where you can order the creamy cheddar mac and cheese. **Nick's Restaurant**, which provided tasty fuel and supper club hospitality for visiting performers, closed in 2024 after more than six decades.

A newer anchor is the **Cask & Ale** cocktail lounge, which *Bachelorette* fanatics may recognize from a home-visit scene with Peter Kraus in 2017. And how's this for trendy? Last year, **Gacha Madison** became the city's first *gachapon* store. The term refers to capsule toy vending machines and the collectibles inside them. These stores have been popular in Japan for decades but count for a new kind of arcade in the U.S.

## A QUICK BITE

We've made it to the 100 block of State Street, where dozens of vendors and thousands of visitors overflow from the Saturday morning farmers' market on the Capitol Square. But there's no need to wait for the weekend to enjoy a quick bite to eat.

The closest storefront to the capitol is **Teddywedgers**, which opened in 1984. This carryout pasty shop was purchased in 2014 by siblings Anthony Rineer and Karima Berkani '05, who grew up eating the meat pies as their mother played violin at the Overture Center. They've painstakingly preserved founder Miles Allen's original recipe and no-frills service. For the longest time, I assumed this modest corner spot was a convenience store.

Imagine my surprise when I finally stopped in for this story and was treated to the most satisfying \$6 meal in the modern economy. Ready to serve in seconds on a chilly morning, the round, hearty pasty — the traditional version served with ground steak, potatoes, and onions — warmed and filled me up. And trust me: you only need the “half.”

Across the street is **Ian's Pizza**, which has been serving pies by the massive slice since its original store opened on Frances Street in 2001. While past generations of UW students still salivate over the rectangular pan-style slices of **Rocky Rococo** (also

*Among the many pleasures of a stroll down State Street is the diversity of people and places: a remarkable melting pot of cultures and cuisines.*

a staple on State for a time), today's Badgers go wild for Ian's best-selling mac and cheese pizza and other imaginative offerings. In 2011, the restaurant gained national attention for its part in Madison's Act 10 protests, feeding protesters as many as 1,000 pizzas per day and receiving donation orders from all over the world.

Hemp retailers have flourished almost everywhere since a 2018 bill federally legalized the distribution of certain THC products. On the 100 block of State Street, you'll find **Pinebox** cannabis dispensary and **The High Crowd Cafe**, which, yes, serves THC-infused lattes and teas.

You can still get traditional lattes and teas across the street at **Michaelangelo's Coffee House**, a fixture since the '90s.

UW alumni can see themselves reflected in the display windows of **Vintage on State**, which opened last year and almost exclusively stocks old-fashioned Badger gear. Time for another '90s Starter jacket! For dancing enthusiasts and aspiring DJs, the three-story **Cielo** nightclub is another new addition to the block.

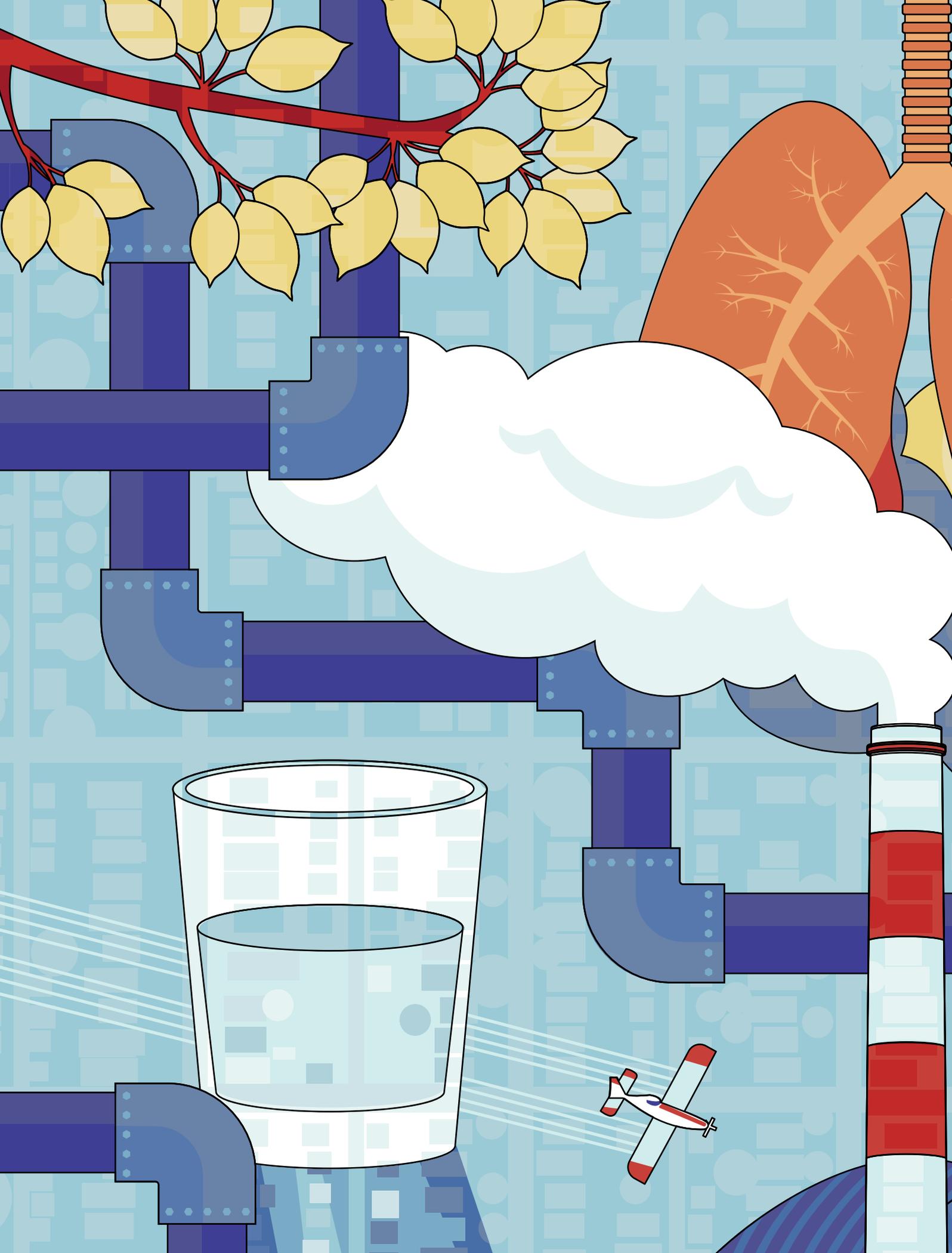
And at the end of this journey, there's one more familiar sight: a construction crane. The five-story Wisconsin History Center will open in 2027 on the corner of State and N. Carroll, showcasing the Wisconsin Historical Society's vast collections for an estimated 200,000 visitors per year.

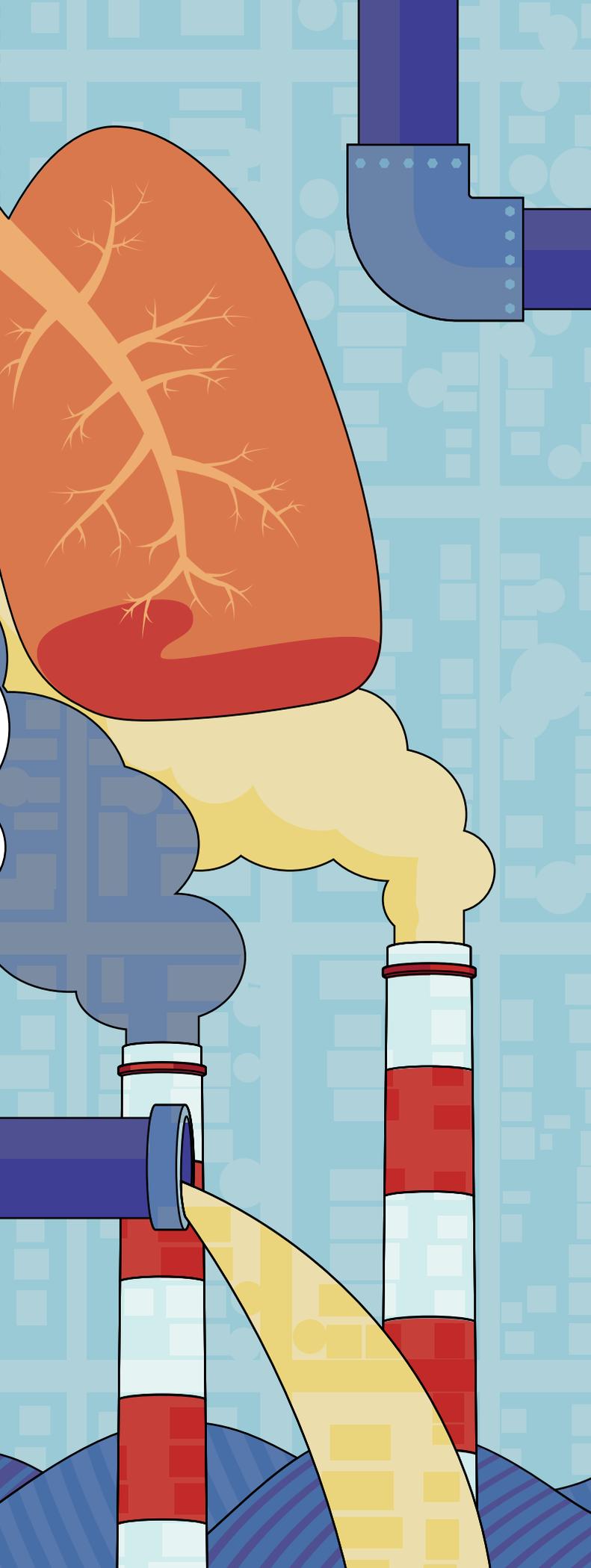
After that will come a reimaged pedestrian plaza at the top of State Street. The City of Madison unveiled design proposals last summer, including a concept that draws inspiration from Library Mall down by the UW.

And that, in short, is State Street: always changing, but forever connecting the campus and city. ●

*Preston Schmitt '14 is a senior staff writer for On Wisconsin.*

What are your favorite State Street memories? Email [onwisconsin@uwalumni.com](mailto:onwisconsin@uwalumni.com); comment on this article at [onwisconsin.uwalumni.com](http://onwisconsin.uwalumni.com); or write to 1848 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin, 53726.





DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP

# Healing the World, Block by Block

*UW researchers are  
helping to improve your  
health, wherever you live.*

**BY WILL CUSHMAN MS'16**

**Y**ou are what you ... drink? In Milwaukee, tens of thousands of households still receive drinking water through lead service lines. The pipes were installed in the 19th century and early 20th century, before medical research made clear that even a small amount of lead is toxic, particularly for small children.

Like many cities in the United States, Milwaukee faces complicated decisions about how to prioritize the replacement of lead pipes. That's where a powerful tool built by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has become indispensable.

The Area Deprivation Index, or ADI, connects millions of data points related to employment, education, income, and housing quality to U.S. Census data to provide a user-friendly map of American neighborhoods ranked by their relative advantage — or disadvantage. The free online tool helps hundreds of organizations like Milwaukee Water Works target their limited resources in addressing public health challenges.

The ADI is a project of the Center for Health Disparities Research, a federally funded program at UW–Madison that promises to improve policy decisions and transform how health care is delivered across the nation. The center’s researchers are also hard at work untangling the complex reasons why people in more disadvantaged areas tend to be sicker and die earlier.

### **The Air You Breathe**

The principle underpinning the Area Deprivation Index is that people’s health is determined not just by their genes but also the environments where they live and work.

“It’s the whole nature-versus-nurture idea — and the real answer is that it is both,” says Amy Kind ’96, MD’01, PhD’11, a geriatrician in the UW School of Medicine and Public Health and director of the Center for Health Disparities Research.

Founded in 2021, the center houses an interdisciplinary team of researchers. Its aim is to better understand how people’s unique circumstances and environments affect their health and to improve policy and health care decisions based on those findings.

“We know that diseases like Alzheimer’s and cancer are partly determined by your genetics, but a whole bunch of it isn’t,” says Kind. “Things like your lifestyle, the air you breathe, and the world around you play a huge role.”

While residents in urban neighborhoods face challenges like noise that disrupts their sleep and more days of poor air quality, Kind points out that rural life can carry its own health risks — ones that she herself may have been exposed to during her childhood deep in the Northwoods of Wisconsin in the tiny village of Niagara.

“Depending on where you live or where you grew up, you might be exposed to toxins like arsenic from your well water or pesticides from farms,” she says.

Ultimately, everyone deals with certain environmental health risks, but those who live in so-called high-ADI areas contend with more risks or more serious ones.

The Center for Health Disparities Research, also known as CHDR (pronounced “cheddar” — this is Wisconsin, after all), specializes in the social factors that influence human health and disease, including transportation access, pollution exposure, and food security.

CHDR has become the nation’s premier center for the study of these social factors. After years of combing through reams of public data with critical funding support from the National Institutes of Health, Kind and her colleagues published their first version of the Area Deprivation Index in 2014. It has since been updated and refined as new census data becomes available and is now the most commonly used measure of such social factors in the U.S. The

ADI has thousands of users, from health care industry giants to tiny nonprofits to federal agencies such as the Department of Defense.

Available to anyone with access to the internet, the Area Deprivation Index has become a go-to resource for researchers, policymakers, and health care practitioners, some of whom stumble upon it while trying to make sense of patterns they see among their patients or within their communities. And the applications they’ve found for it have been extraordinary.

### **“A Very Useful Tool”**

One such user is Shauna Lively, a nurse and project director for the West Virginia Perinatal Partnership. The organization’s mission is to improve health outcomes in the state for expecting and new mothers and their babies.

## **The Center for Health Disparities Research promises to improve policy decisions and transform how health care is delivered.**

“I’m not super technically sophisticated, but I do know how to Google,” says Lively, who found the Area Deprivation Index while searching online for a tool that could help explain social drivers of health in West Virginia for a course she was teaching.

While Lively knew from experience that the state’s poorer and more rural communities had health care challenges, she says the ADI showed this relationship in a clearer and more detailed way than she had seen before.

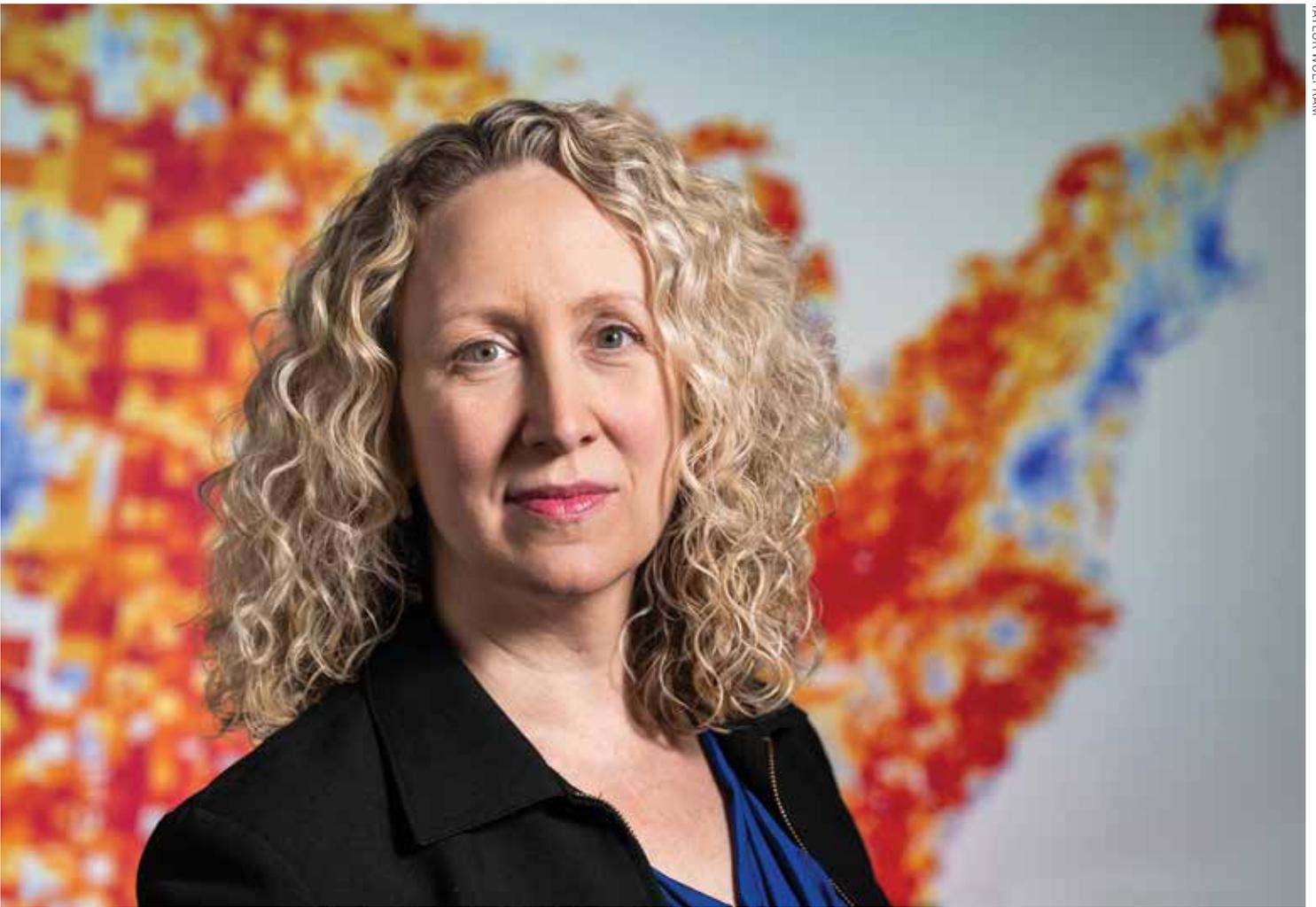
“Looking at that map really helped me explain some of the issues we have in the state with maternity care and access to care,” says Lively.

She then used the Area Deprivation Index to make the case for funding to improve access to health care providers in central West Virginia, where poverty and remoteness have long been barriers to quality health care. The West Virginia Perinatal Partnership was awarded a grant in 2021 and has since employed the ADI to prioritize maternal care resources in an eight-county region with historically poor perinatal health outcomes.

“We’ve found the ADI to be a very useful tool in trying to understand where we are with resources, or lack thereof,” says Lively. “We’re using it to see where we can target our outreach. We have so much appreciation for the folks who built the tool — I think it was very forward-thinking.”

The ADI’s uses are as varied as the health

The Center for Health Disparities Research relies on federal funding. To learn more about how UW–Madison researchers are turning federal investment into tangible societal benefits, visit [federalrelations.wisc.edu](http://federalrelations.wisc.edu).



challenges its users are trying to address. Researchers have incorporated it into an algorithm for targeting neighborhoods in Chicago for rat extermination. The U.S. Social Security Administration uses the ADI to better understand the relationship between socioeconomic deprivation and participation in its child supplemental income program. The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas has used it to assess pediatric airway surgery patients for additional interventions.

And then there are the lead lines in Milwaukee.

#### **A Eureka Moment**

The Milwaukee water utility began incorporating the Area Deprivation Index into its strategy for replacing lead lines in 2024. That followed guidance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources that municipalities should include disadvantaged neighborhoods in their criteria for prioritizing replacement work.

Patrick Pauly, superintendent of Milwaukee Water Works, recalls learning about the Area Deprivation Index as a eureka moment. He was attending a conference for water utility professionals, and representatives of the Washington, DC, utility described how they were incorporating the ADI into their strategy for replacing lead lines.

*Kind and her fellow researchers are untangling the complex reasons why people in more disadvantaged areas tend to be sicker and die earlier.*

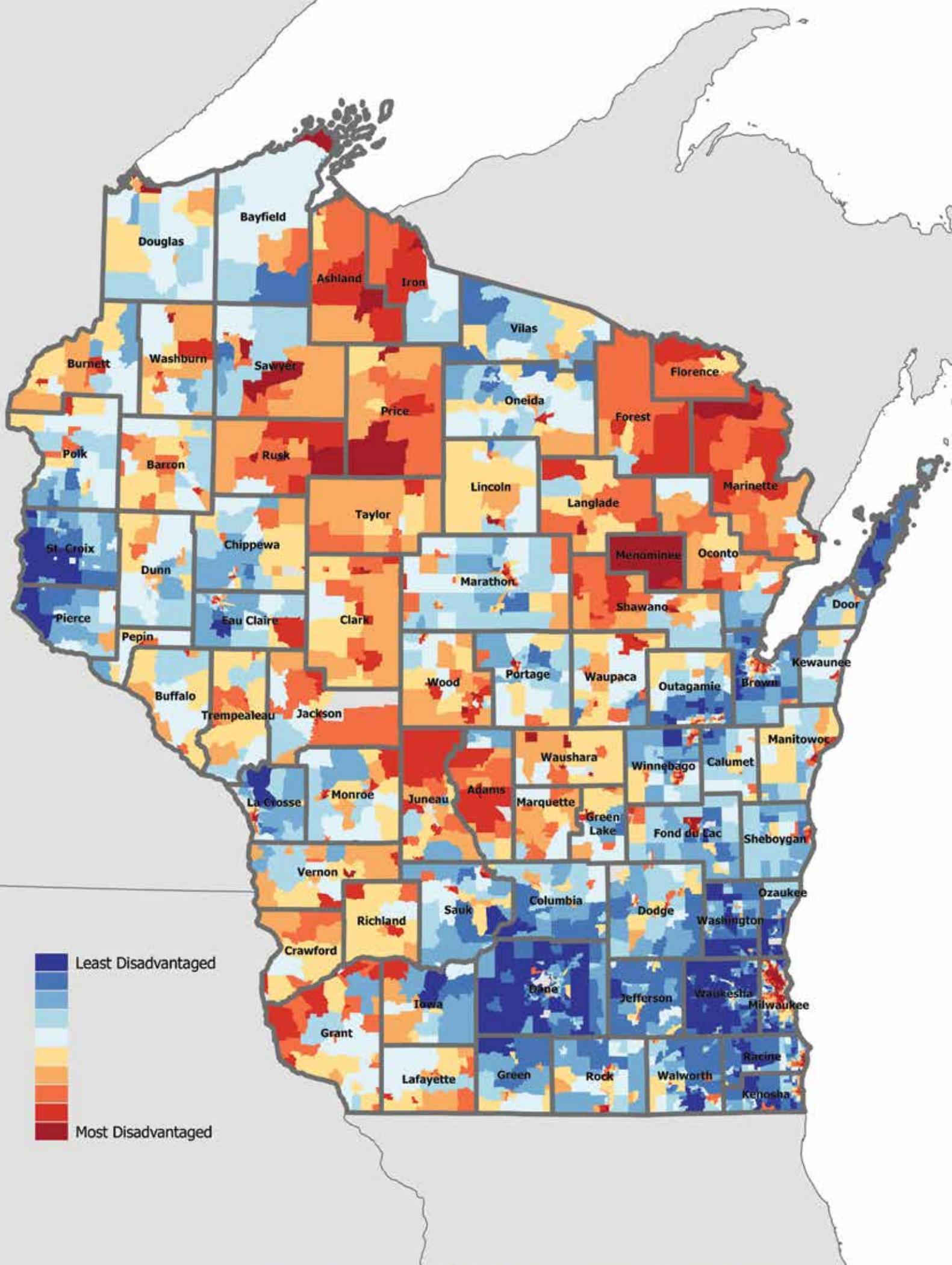
“So we did some research, and the ADI provided exactly what we needed,” says Pauly.

That’s because its scoring system is simple and intuitive and based on factors the city needed to account for, including housing, income, and education level. Built around census blocks, the Area Deprivation Index is also granular enough to provide actionable information about individual neighborhoods.

## **People’s health is determined not just by their genes but also the environments where they live and work.**

The ADI came into play as the utility worked with the city’s elected officials to change an ordinance that had previously required property owners to share the cost of replacing lead service lines — a prospect that was simply unrealistic in neighborhoods riddled with the old pipes.

In addition to changing that ordinance, the city adopted a new prioritization system built largely around the Area Deprivation Index. It significantly



Douglas

Bayfield

Ashland

Iron

Vilas

Burnett

Washburn

Sawyer

Florence

Polk

Barron

Rusk

Price

Oneida

Forest

Marinette

St. Croix

Chippewa

Taylor

Lincoln

Langlade

Menominee

Oconto

Pierce

Dunn

Eau Claire

Clark

Marathon

Shawano

Door

Pepin

Wood

Portage

Waupaca

Outagamie

Kewaunee

Buffalo

Trempealeau

Jackson

Manitowish

Manitowoc

La Crosse

Monroe

Juneau

Adams

Marquette

Waushara

Winnebago

Calumet

Vernon

Richland

Sauk

Columbia

Dodge

Washington

Ozaukee

Crawford

Iowa

Dane

Jefferson

Waukesha

Milwaukee

Grant

Lafayette

Green

Rock

Walworth

Racine

Kenosha

expanded the replacement program from around 1,100 replacements in 2023 to a goal of 5,000 in 2026 and beyond. The primary benefit of the ADI, Pauly says, is that it provides an evidence-based approach to expanding replacement work from individual homes to entire neighborhoods.

“Coming from the UW School of Medicine and Public Health and being online where people can look it up made the conversations so much easier,” says Pauly. “It was a very trusted, respected, simple, and easily explained method that provided us a huge benefit.”

While the Area Deprivation Index shows where deprivation can worsen health risks, scientists at the Center for Health Disparities Research are also hard at work to understand how social factors interact with biology to cause disease.

### Writing Your Future

Kind says that living in adverse environments actually gets under the skin and leads to worse health.

“A lot of the work that goes on at CHDR is trying to figure out why that happens, and then how we can change it.”

These questions have opened doors to innovative studies, particularly in understanding the aging brain and how social factors affect the risk for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s. CHDR is leading a \$38 million national study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, to examine how lifelong social exposures shape the brain.

“One of the interesting things about the brain is it interacts with the environment like no other organ,” says Kind.

Scientists at 23 sites across the U.S. begin with tissue from individuals who donated their brains to research after their deaths. Some of the samples go as far back as the 1980s.

A team of historians pieces together each person’s life history through obituaries, military records, and census records, back to the point of birth.

“We can connect an entire lifetime of experiences to where they’ve lived and then link that to exposures,” says Kind. “We can understand what air you were breathing during certain periods of your life. We can understand what water you were probably drinking, what schools you were going to, where you were deployed if you were in the military.”

These reconstructed life histories are then linked with neuropathology, genomics, and imaging data. The result is a robust dataset connecting lived experience to biological outcomes, and CHDR scientists are drawing some sobering conclusions about the risks of social deprivation to brain health. For instance, childhood exposure to adverse environments increases the risk of cerebrovascular disease eight to twelvefold.

“These are exposures in your childhood writing your future 50 years from now,” says Kind.

*The Area Deprivation Index connects millions of data points to provide user-friendly maps of American neighborhoods ranked by their relative advantage or disadvantage.*

These findings underscore the biological weight of disadvantage, she adds, and the potential impact of interventions that incorporate the Area Deprivation Index.

But while the Center for Health Disparities Research is already making an impact across the U.S., its reach is being supercharged by a partnership closer to home.

### Where It’s Harder to Be Healthy

Verona, Wisconsin’s Epic Systems, founded by Judith Faulkner MS’67, is the nation’s largest provider of electronic health record software. Epic’s Cosmos dataset contains more than 300 million anonymized patient records, enabling insights into patient outcomes to improve care and advance medicine. Many organizations started participating in Cosmos during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the need for up-to-date data became more urgent.

## The Area Deprivation Index has become a go-to resource for researchers, policymakers, and health care practitioners.

Cosmos has evolved into a powerful engine for rapid research and clinical pattern-finding, according to Jackie Gerhart ’04, Epic’s chief medical officer. Recognizing the importance of geography to health, Gerhart says Epic wanted to incorporate data that could help researchers identify patterns based on life circumstances.

“We realized that we had a couple of different ways to measure disparities, but the ADI work being done at UW was the most in-depth,” Gerhart says.

While that depth requires more data entry, it also translates into better insights. So far, ADI metrics have been incorporated into around 130 million patient records. Gerhart sees a future where the Area Deprivation Index reshapes how organizations spot and support patients whose needs extend beyond their visit to a clinic.

For Kind, it’s personal, given her roots in rural Niagara.

“When we look at Niagara on the ADI, it’s one of the most disadvantaged places in Wisconsin,” she says. “When I’m writing a research grant for the National Institutes of Health, I am thinking about towns like Niagara, where it’s harder to be healthy. It’s my mission as a professor at UW–Madison to advance research that improves their lives.” ●

*Will Cushman MS’16 is a writer for the UW–Madison Office of Strategic Communication.*



To find your neighborhood on the Area Deprivation Index, scan the QR code or visit [go.wisc.edu/onwisc2](http://go.wisc.edu/onwisc2)

A full-page photograph of a woman with dark hair pulled back, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a white, textured, long-sleeved sweater and high-waisted, rust-colored pants with large brass buttons. Her hands are on her hips. She has a nose ring, large hoop earrings, and several rings on her fingers. A gold watch is visible on her left wrist. In the background, a city skyline is visible through a window or balcony railing. To her left, a small green cactus in a teal pot sits on a wooden tray. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an indoor or sheltered outdoor setting.

*Moniz's stories  
give rich voice to  
the interior lives  
of Black women  
and girls.*

A photograph of a room with a pink wall. On the left, a potted plant with green leaves sits on a black tray. A round mirror with a dark frame is mounted on the wall, reflecting the plant and a window. The window shows a view of a blue body of water and a distant shoreline. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Writer on the Rise

*An extraordinary story collection has made  
UW professor Dantiel Moniz MFA'18 an  
up-and-coming literary star.*

**BY DOUG ERICKSON  
PHOTOS BY TAYLOR WOLFRAM '24**

**O**n a fall day last semester, 12 UW–Madison undergraduates in an advanced creative writing course provided feedback to one of their classmates on a short story. When the topic turned to the story’s ending, they debated whether it was clear to the reader what had happened.

After the students weighed in, Assistant Professor Dantiel Moniz MFA’18 gave her take.

“A short story is a slice of something that represents the invisible whole around you,” she told them. “You are suggesting an entire world, an entire life, that goes beyond this last page. I love a story where the ending is more like a window than a door. It allows me, as the reader, to never really leave the story.”

The students nodded, aware that they were learning from a top practitioner of the craft. In 2021, Moniz’s debut short story collection, *Milk Blood Heat*, was published to great acclaim, earning a raft of industry awards and anointing Moniz an up-and-coming literary star. Her highly anticipated first novel is scheduled to be published next year.

The 11 stories in *Milk Blood Heat* are set in Moniz’s home state of Florida and give rich voice to the interior lives of Black women and girls.

“From meticulously executed twist endings to striking imagery, Moniz has an impressive handle on all aspects of the short story,” wrote the *Berkeley Fiction Review*. The *Washington Post* said reading one of Moniz’s stories “is like holding your breath underwater while letting the salt sting your fresh wounds. It’s exhilarating and shocking and even healing.” The *Chicago Review of Books* found it difficult to imagine the book as a debut “given that the stories read with the ease of an author well into an established career.”



*Moniz’s creative writing students appreciate learning from a top practitioner of the craft.*

Moniz was named a “Writer to Watch” by *Publishers Weekly* and Apple Books, and *Milk Blood Heat* was chosen as a “must-read” by *TIME*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Elle*, *O*, BuzzFeed, and others. The book was a finalist for the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize, and the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, and it was longlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize and The Story Prize.

“It’s rare for a first book to make the kind of splash *Milk Blood Heat* did with both critics and readers,” says Amy Quan Barry, the Lorraine Hansberry Professor of English at UW–Madison and herself an acclaimed novelist, poet, and playwright. The fact that Moniz’s book is a short-story collection only amplifies the achievement, Quan Barry says. Publishers tend to favor novels, viewing them as easier to market to the public.

“When a book like *Milk Blood Heat* has so much success, it demonstrates that readers are hungering for engrossing and carefully crafted work

regardless of length,” Quan Barry says, adding that she’s excited to have Moniz, her former student, as a faculty colleague now.

How Moniz came to be a Badger is a tale that surprises even Moniz, though it speaks to something she’s trying to do more of — trust her gut.

### “A Little Voice Inside of Me”

Moniz had never visited Wisconsin and knew no one in the state when she moved to Madison alone in 2016 at age 26. She was looking to pursue a master of fine arts degree in creative writing and had been accepted to several programs, including the esteemed Iowa Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa. For many aspiring writers, the reputation of the Iowa program would have shut down any further considerations. But Moniz couldn’t shake the feeling that UW–Madison was a better fit for her.

She liked the deliberately small size of the UW’s MFA program. It typically admits just six students each year, alternating between fiction one year and poetry the next. “I was drawn to the intense level of personal mentoring here,” Moniz says.

She appreciated the UW’s generous financial aid offer and felt an immediate connection with Professor Judith Claire Mitchell, who helped found the UW’s graduate program in creative writing in 2003.

“The acceptance letter she wrote me made me feel so seen,” Moniz says. “She wasn’t even trying to sell me on the program. She just let me know that she was already proud of me as a writer.”

And then there was the intangible. “I have a little voice inside of me that is very clear,” Moniz says. “It’s not coming from my head. It’s coming from the center of me. Whenever I’ve listened to that gut feeling, it’s never led me wrong.”

### “A Great First Paragraph”

That voice told her she was supposed to be at the UW. She’s never looked back. The UW enveloped her in a robust writing community, something she’d been craving since her youth in Jacksonville, Florida, where she attended an arts magnet school and fell in with a creative writing crowd. Schoolmate Sabrina Enders befriended Moniz as a freshman — she calls her Dee. Enders remembers the two furiously sharing journal entries, engaging in sometimes “brutal” critiques of each other’s work, and creating a faux fashion magazine together.

**It’s rare for a first book to make the kind of splash that *Milk Blood Heat* did.**



## For Moniz, fiction suggests an entire life that goes beyond the last page.

“We were playing at being writers, always imagining what our lives could be like if we pursued it as a career,” says Enders, a social worker who remains Moniz’s close friend. “Dee stuck with it, and I’m not surprised. She’s very intentional. She sees what she wants and focuses on it.”

The magnet school chose students through a competitive portfolio process. “It was the first time I had to audition for something I really, really wanted,” Moniz says. “When I was accepted, people couldn’t believe I would be attending a high school that didn’t even have a sports program. Writing was our extracurricular activity.”

Still, it would be a few years before Moniz landed on the idea of trying to earn a living by writing. And there were detours along the way. She tried Eckerd College in Saint Petersburg, then a community college before briefly moving to Washington state and working at an Abercrombie & Fitch store. Broke, she returned to Jacksonville and tended bar and waitressed. Of this period, she says, “The life experiences were happening.” The struggles provided grist for some of her early fiction.

Moniz returned to college, earning a bachelor’s degree in English from Florida State University in 2012. By this time, she had amassed tens of thousands of words of unpublished fiction and felt in need of further mentoring. She used an eight-page

short story titled “Outside the Raft” to apply to the UW. The story follows two young girls during a pivotal day on a beach that illuminates their differing paths. It would later end up in *Milk Blood Heat*.

There were more than 600 applicants for six fiction spots at the UW the year Moniz applied. She learned years later that she was far from a shoo-in. The initial screener who read her short story submission placed her application in the “no” pile. Moniz says it’s important for

other writers, especially young ones, to hear such stories, as fiction is a subjective art form requiring great perseverance.

Mitchell, who was director of the MFA program at the time, rescued Moniz’s application.

“Sometimes people miss things, they’re tired, they’re reading for their own taste,” says Mitchell, who retired in 2018. “I made it my business to go through the submission folders at the end of the screening process just to look at everyone’s first paragraphs.”

She pulled out Moniz’s short story, and “to my shock, holy moly, this is a great first paragraph,” Mitchell remembers thinking. “And by the end, I thought, ‘This is the best thing I’ve read in years.’

It was my prerogative as director to put it forward, and I did.”

### “I Had This Deep Sense of Fear”

Moniz describes her two years as a UW graduate student as nearly ideal — once she got over an initial period of imposter syndrome.

“I felt super-supported here,” she says. “I got a lot of work done — numerous short stories, the first draft of a novel — and I learned how to teach creative writing.” (MFA students teach courses in creative writing and English composition and are provided a semester of teacher-training and support.)

While a student at the UW, Moniz acquired an agent and began attracting national attention for her short stories, earning publication in *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *Pleiades*, and *Apogee Journal*, among others. Back in Jacksonville after graduation, she entered into conversations with multiple publishers for *Milk Blood Heat*, choosing New York-based Grove Atlantic. It was another trust-your-gut moment. Though larger publishers were showing interest, she liked Grove Atlantic’s reputation for cultivating and sticking with young talent.

The night before *Milk Blood Heat* came out, Moniz barely slept.

“Writing is a solitary practice until it isn’t,” she says. “I had this deep sense of fear — oh, no, everyone is going to read it and I’ll be exposed. This thing I created will have its own life and I will no longer be able to control it.”

She had little to fear.

“To get the kind of recognition her book received — well, it’s the jackpot. She hit it big,” says Mitchell, who remains close to Moniz. “And to have it happen to such a nice person made it even sweeter.”

A writer for the *Los Angeles Review of Books* praised Moniz’s command of language, saying, “Her sentences are something I want to hold up to the light and study in detail to understand just how they do what they do.” *Elle* magazine said Moniz addresses “charged subjects of racial identity, family obligation, romantic entanglement, and wholehearted friendship, always lingering on fragile moments that are quotidian in scale but existential in meaning.”

Moniz says the response from critics and readers has been gratifying, though “there comes a point where you have to detach yourself from it. The book is just out there having its own life now, and I can’t be attached to that life because I still have things to do.”

### “The Most Fun Thing on Earth”

Those things include teaching and keeping her own writing going. After earning her MFA, Moniz taught for a semester at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton as a visiting assistant professor, then began a two-year lectureship at the UW in the spring of

2021. The lectureship turned into her tenure-track professorship in English.

“Because I had such a positive experience here, I want that for my students, too,” she says. “Seeing them come into their own or understand something about their own process — that is the most fun thing on earth.”

Senior Jamie Restieri x’26, a double major in film and creative writing from Greenwich, Connecticut, took Moniz’s advanced creative writing course last fall. Prior to the course, he read the first story in *Milk Blood Heat* and was so impressed he immediately bought a copy of the book for his mom.

“When I found out I could take a class with her, I had to do it,” Restieri says of Moniz. “She’s already a master of what she does. It’s insane that we have a chance to get to learn from someone like that.”

### “It’s Part of Being Human”

Moniz devotes Mondays through Thursdays to students and university work, then tries to carve out writing time for herself on long weekends. “Has that gone perfectly? No,” she says, laughing. “But I *am* writing.”

She is not an early riser or a write-every-day kind of writer, but once she focuses, she can write for hours, especially at a coffee shop.

Moniz is most interested in writing about the things people *don’t* say, especially those things that have shame or guilt or “badness” attached to them.

“I want to lift up the rock and see all the little albino creatures crawling underneath there, even if it’s a little gross or makes people uncomfortable. I want to know that stuff because it’s part of being human. We would do a lot less harm to ourselves and to others if we understood that the very temporary feelings we all have that might be thought of as wrong or bad are really just natural and human. It doesn’t make you a bad person.”

Moniz had a realization about her writing after the death of her mother in 2022 from complications of COVID-19.

“You learn a lot about yourself when you lose someone who means so much to you,” she says. “I really didn’t know that motherhood and daughterhood were major themes for me. But now I realize that even the stories that aren’t about that are about that.”

Her mother’s voice continues to speak to Moniz. It helps her process all the things that have happened to her since moving to Wisconsin. And it helps her to keep trusting her instincts.

“At one point, I told my mom, ‘I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop. It’s happening too easily. What’s the catch?’ And my mom said, ‘Maybe there is no catch. Maybe there doesn’t have to be one when you’re on the right path.’” ●

Doug Erickson is a Madison-based freelance writer.



## What a Writer Reads

The full power of literature hit Dantiel Moniz at age 14 when she stumbled upon *White Oleander* in her high school library. The novel, by Janet Fitch, explores a complex mother-daughter dynamic and wrestles with challenging issues around identity and self-discovery.

“I remember pulling it from the shelf and being just floored,” Moniz says. “I didn’t know you were allowed to write about things like that, to say those things out loud.”

*White Oleander* broadened Moniz’s already expansive taste in literature. As a child, she read across genres and age categories, encouraged by a mother who was a devoted and adventurous reader.

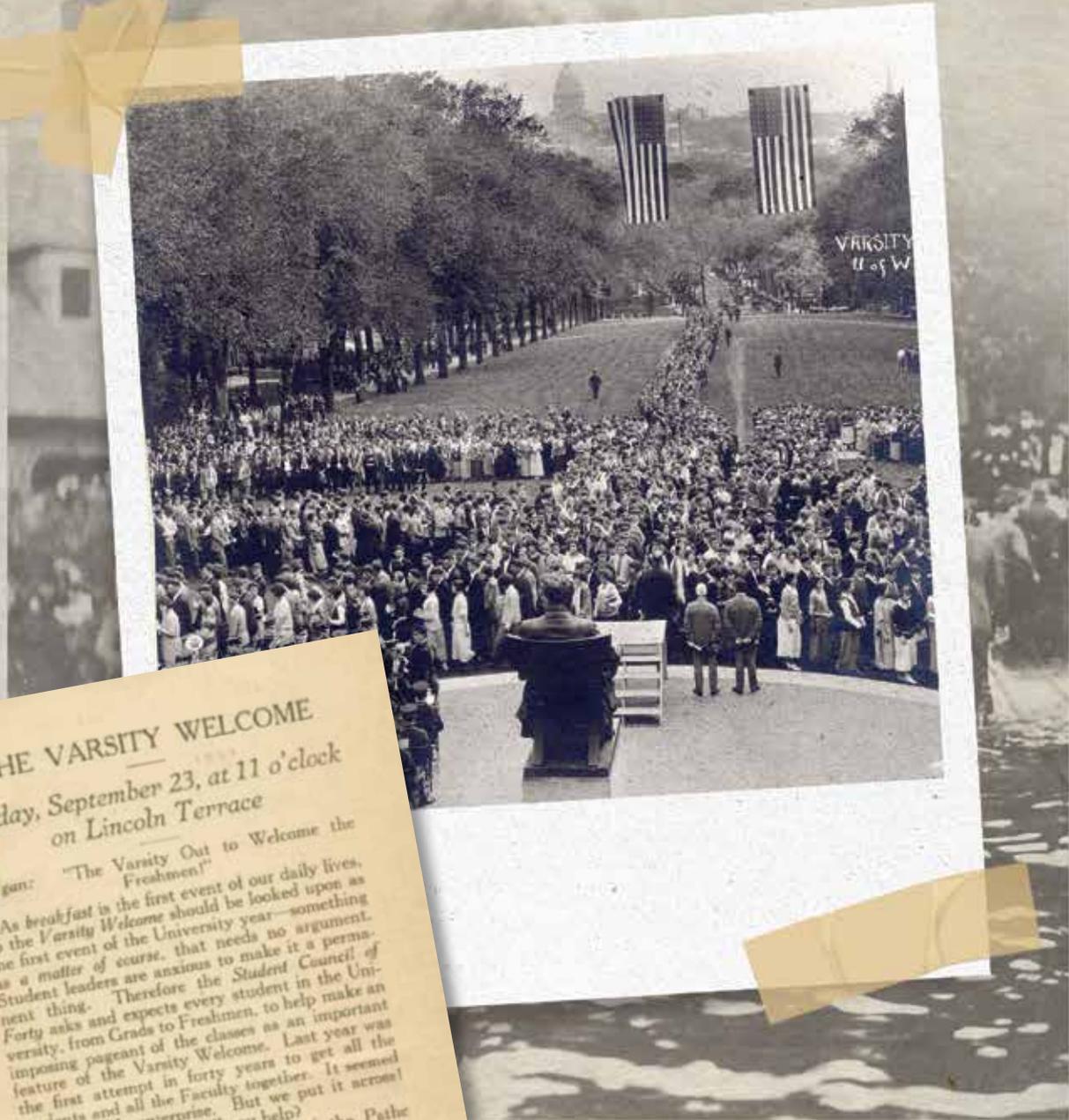
“She didn’t limit what I could read, and I’m so appreciative of that,” Moniz says. “She’d say, ‘You can’t watch that TV show,’ but then she’d hand me *Flowers in the Attic*.”

Some of the books Moniz read as a child may not have been considered age appropriate, she says. “But it helped form me in some way, just to be able to read whatever I wanted. That’s why I’ve been so interested in relationships and the secrets they can create.”

While doing publicity for *Milk Blood Heat*, Moniz mentioned *White Oleander* as a formative book. Fitch saw the interview and acknowledged the compliment on social media.

“That felt like a full-circle moment,” Moniz says.

— D.E.



**THE VARSITY WELCOME**  
 Friday, September 23, at 11 o'clock  
 on Lincoln Terrace

F9029  
 U58  
 1921

garr: "The Varsity Out to Welcome the Freshmen!"

As breakfast is the first event of our daily lives, so the *Varsity Welcome* should be looked upon as the first event of the University year—something as a matter of course, that needs no argument. Student leaders are anxious to make it a permanent thing. Therefore the *Student Council of Forty* asks and expects every student in the University, from Grads to Freshmen, to help make an imposing pageant of the classes as an important feature of the *Varsity Welcome*. Last year was the first attempt in forty years to get all the students and all the Faculty together. It seemed an impossible enterprise. But we put it across! We can do it again! Will you help?

The moving picture machines of the *Pathe Weekly* will record the result and scatter it over this whole country. Let us make it an inspiring spectacle, worthy of Wisconsin!

A brief, snappy and interesting program of songs and speeches will be given at the Lincoln Monument after the Pageant. The President, the Governor, a Dean, a Professor, an Upper Classman and a representative citizen of Madison will do the speaking.

The President has ordered that no classes be held at 11 o'clock on Friday—if the weather is fair. He will request the members of the instructional force to attend. Seats will be provided for them at the Monument.

The *Daily Cardinal* will serve a daily supply of Pep and Punch for free distribution to promote the Preliminary Pageant. Read it!!



# The UW's Lost Traditions

*From roasting hot dogs in the Rathskeller fireplace to throwing rivals off the boathouse pier, what it takes to be a Badger is continually changing.*

BY WENDY KRAUSE HATHAWAY '04

PHOTOS FROM UW ARCHIVES

Whether it's sitting on Abe's lap after graduation or jumping around at Camp Randall, UW-Madison has never lacked for traditions: some solemn, some silly, some strange. And while many practices have evolved or disappeared, each left its imprint on what it means to be a Badger. How many of these Wisconsin customs — ranging from quaint to chaotic — have you heard of?

## WELCOME TO WISCONSIN

Today's Wisconsin Welcome spans several weeks and gives incoming students many ways to connect. While Badgers now use an app to plan out their first few weeks and line up for free T-shirts, earlier generations had different methods of exploring campus, meeting new people, and scoping out complimentary refreshments.

In 1913, Scandinavian studies professor Julius Olson 1884 (who later wrote the lyrics to "If You Want to Be a Badger") proposed a campuswide event to help foster a sense of community and class spirit. Thousands of students, from freshmen to seniors, crowded into the Red Gym for speeches, songs, and fruit punch. By 1920, the gathering had outgrown the indoor space and the **Varsity Welcome** moved to Bascom Hill. Each class would line up along the grassy slope and, led by the University Regimental Band, seniors would escort incoming freshmen to the Lincoln Terrace for a program and more pageantry.

By the 1930s, university officials shifted to

a convocation more in line with today's format. **Orientation Week** planning was handed over to student leaders and campus organizations to coordinate tours, information sessions, and entertainment, along with smokers (for the men) and teas (for the women). For decades, the Memorial Union hosted a fall kickoff resembling a county fair, complete with caramel apples and hot dogs roasted in the Rathskeller fireplace, as well as palm readers, casino games, and film screenings.

Amid all this activity, women were carving their own traditions. From the early 1900s through the 1960s, the UW hosted a separate **Women's Convocation**. Usually held under the guidance of the dean of women and other female campus leaders, the event offered incoming women their own dedicated welcome to the university.

Residence halls and independent houses also organized welcome events. For students living off campus, Associated Women Students (AWS) sponsored the **Big Sister program**, pairing first-year "little sisters" with more seasoned students who offered advice on study habits, extracurriculars, and making friends.

AWS produced *Wiscetiquette*, a pocket-sized guidebook that began as a satirical feature in the *Octopus* humor magazine — practical advice with a wink. (From the 1956 edition: "Tradition has it that a girl isn't really a coed until she's been kissed while Music Hall clock is chiming midnight!")

*Customary ways of welcoming new students to campus have moved on from the formal pageantry of early years.*



*Bag rush was a muddy, rowdy contest between freshmen and sophomores for possession of giant, straw-filled bags. It replaced a competition to throw the most opponents off a pier, which resulted in some near-drownings.*

## NOT-SO-WARM WELCOME

Collegiate class rivalries and initiation rituals date back to the colonial era, and the UW followed suit. Billed as class bonding and good-natured fun, many of these customs veered closer to harassment. As early as the 1870s, university leaders and campus organizations spoke out against hazing. UW President Thomas Chamberlin referred to the practice as “childishly inappropriate”; a student newspaper described hazing as “a meaningless, purposeless, idiotic legacy.”

But before the student body voted in 1909 to abolish hazing, freshmen might have found themselves abducted and stashed in agricultural barns or tied up in a train boxcar. The tradition of “baptizing” freshmen in a blast of bone-chilling water at the old pump in front of North Hall may have given rise to the **annual lake rush**. That chaotic contest to see who could throw the most opponents off the old boathouse pier ended only after a string of near-drownings and was replaced by the **bag rush**. For one raucous afternoon, the lower campus became a mud-soaked battlefield as freshmen and sophomores grappled for control of lines of giant straw-stuffed sacks, resulting in plenty of black eyes and broken teeth.

Even after these rough-and-tumble rites ceased, **freshmen laws** lingered. In addition to

the infamous **green beanies** (first-year men were expected to wear them at all times and tap the button on top of the cap when speaking to upperclassmen), male freshmen were forbidden to smoke or even carry a pipe in public; wear a “stiff hat” except to Junior Prom; sit on the gymnasium fence; or visit a saloon.

Women embraced more civilized expressions of class identity. First-year students wore funny outfits to dinner, baked cookies for older students, or carried upperclass students’ books across campus. Before long, female freshmen adopted green buttons as their own version of the beanie, a signal of solidarity that spread: sophomores took the name Red Gauntlets, juniors Yellow Tassels, and seniors Blue Dragons. These groups organized dances, sports contests, and social gatherings, cultivating class pride without the combat.

Other rivalries persisted, though. The most notorious was the **annual feud between law and engineering students**, who debated, with mock sincerity, whether Saint Patrick was properly the patron saint of engineers or of lawyers. The feud began in 1912 and escalated from harmless pranks and a beard-growing contest to mascot kidnappings and pelting each other’s parade floats with insults, eggs, and rotten fruit. After a 5,000-person brawl in 1938, Madison police and UW officials stepped in

to put an end to the nonsense. The feud faded, but a separate Law School ritual lives on: graduating law students attempting to **toss their canes** over the north goalpost at Camp Randall to forecast their luck in their first case.

## CLASSROOM CUSTOMS

While the cane-toss ritual has survived, most traditions that unfolded in classrooms, lecture halls, or labs have not.

In the 1910s, UW medical professor William Middleton created a lighthearted tradition centered on an old brown **derby hat**. Borrowing from a popular expression, “That takes the brown derby!” he would place a hat on students who answered questions incorrectly; they had to wear it until the next student erred.

A sound once ubiquitous in UW classrooms was the **skyrocket** cheer. Badger fans of today may recognize the familiar “Sss ... Boom ... Ah!” But long before it echoed at sporting events, students launched it across their lecture halls. First-year students learned the cheer during orientation, and for decades, Badgers used the skyrocket to salute favorite professors (especially when class ended early). It’s said that professors like “Wild Bill” Kiekhofer and Benjamin “Benny” Snow rarely made it through a day without receiving one. By the 1950s, the tradition had fizzled in the classroom, but the UW Marching Band has kept it alive by using the vocal salute, followed by a whistle, to mark transitional moments at football games.

## CARNIVALS, CIRCUS ACTS, AND CATTLE CALLS ... OH MY!

Student life outside the classroom was just as full. Beginning in the 1940s, student organizations transformed the Stock Pavilion into a riot of color, music, and fun with the annual **Campus Carnival**, part of a yearlong fundraising drive sponsored by the Wisconsin Student Association to support the Campus Community Chest. Nearly every student group devised creative booths and attractions that included mock marriages, comedy skits, and pie throwing.

The carnival evolved from the much earlier **Varsity Circus**. First held in the Red Gym in 1901 to raise funds for athletics, the circus featured trick bicycle riding, tumbling, trapeze acts, and musical numbers. The final circus, in 1920, opened with a massive street parade leading to the fairgrounds, where sideshow tents and the big top covered the entire lower campus.

The **Little International Livestock Show** also flourished in the Stock Pavilion, debuting in 1909 shortly after the facility opened. The showcase inspired the creation of the Saddle and Sirloin Club and helped expand student involvement in hands-on animal training and public exhibitions



with UW-owned livestock. The annual program, which ran through the late 1990s, typically included parades of beef and dairy cattle, sheep exhibitions, horse-jumping demonstrations, showmanship contests, and student emcees. One year, a greased-pig chase turned the sawdust ring into pure chaos.

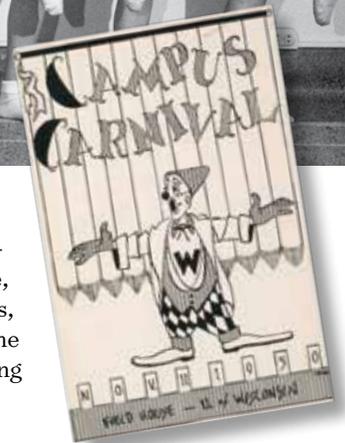
## SPRING FEVER

Every year, as the lakes thaw and the Terrace chairs return, winter-weary students rush outside to welcome spring, just like generations of Badgers before them.

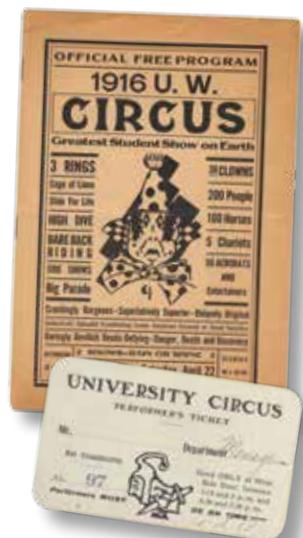
Beginning in the early 1900s, the UW hosted separate springtime celebrations for mothers and fathers, with **Mothers’ Weekend** evolving into a multiday showcase featuring tours, pageants, and athletic events. In 1934, the university combined that with the newer **Dads’ Weekend** into a single student-run **Parents’ Weekend**, drawing thousands of families for concerts, honors ceremonies, and a formal banquet at Memorial Union. Today, the tradition lives on in the form of fall’s **Family Weekend**.

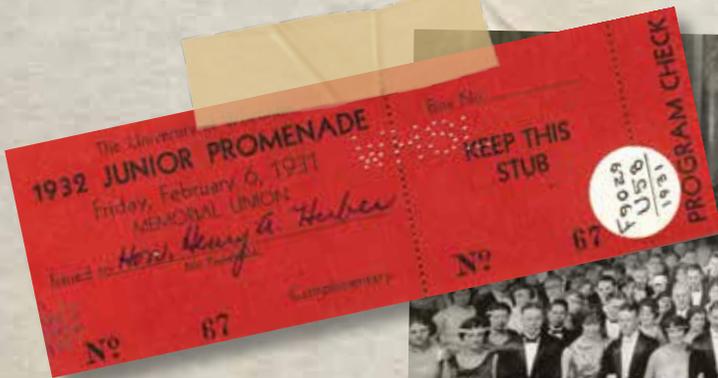
Springtime revelry took many forms. **Fasching parties**, the German take on Mardi Gras, burst onto the UW scene in the 1950s in — where else? — Der Rathskeller. Polka bands and jazz trios filled the Memorial Union with music, and between free helpings of sauerkraut, wieners, and cheese, partygoers could try their hand at yodeling, pretzel-making, and beer-brewing workshops.

In the first half of the 1900s, hundreds would flock to Bascom Hill for **May Fete** — a Victorian reinterpretation of older Celtic customs — to celebrate the season with singing, dancing, and winding



*The women in the chorus line above were part of the entertainment for Campus Carnival.*





brightly colored ribbons around a collection of tall maypoles.

**Venetian Night** offered a different kind of spectacle. Canoes and rafts packed with revelers pushed off onto Lake Mendota, drifting through floating lanterns and shimmering water displays before fireworks erupted overhead.

## BALLROOM BADGERS

For much of the 20th century, formal dances were an important centerpiece of campus life. In fact, it wasn't a social season at the UW without a dance or 10: **Homecoming Ball**, the **Saint Pat's dance** (the grand finale of the engineers' beard-growing contest), **Senior Ball**, **International Club Ball**, **Panhellenic and Intra-Fraternity Balls**, **Pre-Medical School Ball**, and a rotation of **residence-hall dances**. **Summer Prom**, held from the 1930s through the 1960s, drew students and alumni back to campus for a warm-weather weekend of dancing, live bands, and, depending on the weather, a memorable whiff of midsummer Lake Mendota algae blooms.

Some celebrations even had their own pre-event gatherings. The year's **Badger Beauties** were crowned at a pre-prom ceremony, and the Scabbard and Blade Society hosted a **Pre-Military Ball** a week before the main event. The **Military Ball** itself was a full-dress formal complete with grand marches and uniformed ROTC pageantry.

The most dazzling of all, though, was the **Junior Prom**, the successor to several years of informal class parties held in Music Hall. On February 22, 1895, more than 250 couples arrived in carriages for the first of these dances. The newly built Red Gym armory was trimmed with the class colors of yellow and white. Tickets cost \$2.50 per couple and included a late-night supper of chicken salad, ham sandwiches, coffee, olives, and almonds. The first UW prom queen, Bessie Bowman Harper x1896, later described the event as "just a simple affair, but a very impressive one."

Over time, the prom evolved from waltzes and two-steps to tangos and foxtrots and moved to the marbled halls of the state capitol from 1916 to 1928, where dinner was served in the basement restaurant. After the Memorial Union opened, the prom returned to campus until its final run in 1958 — aside from a return to the capitol to celebrate the state's 100th birthday in the 1948 Centennial Program, which featured music by Lawrence Welk's orchestra and a late-night balloon drop.

Formal dances live on today, evolving to reflect communities and cultures. The Wisconsin Black Student Union has been hosting its **Ebony Ball** since the 1980s. Last spring, as part of Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Heritage Month, the Asian American Student Union put on its sixth annual **APIDA Gala**. That same month, the UW's

Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps held its own annual **Spring Ball**.

## HOW SENIORS SAID GOOD-BYE

For all the traditions that still mark graduation, many others have gone: class sing-alongs on Lincoln Terrace, outdoor "dance dramas" performed in the natural amphitheater behind Bascom Hill, women's field days on the lower campus, and a senior gala held at Camp Randall.

One of the most striking customs was the **Senior Swingout** to honor graduating women. On Bascom Hill, younger students clad in white or pastel dresses formed a human archway, and the seniors — wearing traditional black caps and gowns — processed beneath while each class performed its own songs with the backing of the University Regimental Band. This chain was meant to symbolize unity across the classes, and the event became a poignant moment when seniors passed the torch.

**Class Day Exercises** brought the entire senior class together for a daylong program featuring farewell addresses, class histories and prophecies, and poems. The **Senior Play** was a popular element of Class Day, with seniors staging productions at the Orpheum Theater on State Street and at the elegant Fuller Opera House on the Capitol Square, which was razed in the 1950s.

From the late 1800s into the early 20th century, Class Day also included two beloved outdoor rites: the **Ivy Oration** and the **Tombstone Ceremony**. Inspired by traditions at several East Coast colleges, seniors would plant ivy on Bascom Hill while a designated class orator delivered a closing reflection. Then they'd cross what is now Observatory Drive toward the lake to lay small granite or marble markers, etched with the class year or a favorite phrase. Over the decades, these markers on Muir Knoll occasionally confused unsuspecting visitors. Some mistook them for a tiny hillside graveyard. (At one point, someone even added a stolen tombstone to the mix; mercifully, it was returned to the family.) Others were puzzled by inscriptions whose meanings have been lost to time: "In Memoriam, Senior Vacation, 1893."

Both ceremonies faded out by the 1930s, but the broader tradition they belonged to — the **senior class gift** — persisted. Since the first class gift in 1868, which was a white marble marker of indeterminate nature near Observatory Drive, UW alumni have helped shape some of the university's most cherished icons, from the Lakeshore Path and Picnic Point to the Carillon Tower and Memorial Union. The spirit of giving back and leaving something behind for the next generation may be the most lasting Badger tradition of all. ●

*Wendy Krause Hathaway '04 is a Madison-based freelance writer.*

*Clockwise from top at left: upperclass women calling their "little sisters" to help them adjust to campus; a parade float depicting the classic rivalry between engineers and lawyers; students dancing at a Fasching party in Der Rathskeller; 1924 Junior Prom attendees posing with their very impressive chandelier; and students at the Wisconsin Black Student Union's Ebony Ball.*

WHERE  
THE WILD  
THINGS  
ARE



*The Zambian Carnivore Programme fights the illegal bushmeat trade. For every 60 or so lions saved from snares, more than 360 cubs can be born, helping to restore the species.*

*Matthew Becker '96 runs one of the world's largest carnivore conservation projects, protecting big cats, African wild dogs, and other threatened species.*

**BY SANDRA K. BARNIDGE '09, MS'13**



**T**he Luangwa River Valley in eastern Zambia stretches more than 430 miles and encompasses floodplains, miombo woodlands, and oxbow lagoons. It's home to one of Africa's largest lion populations, along with elephants, hippos, giraffes and blue wildebeests. Four national parks and the adjacent game-management areas within the valley connect a massive, unfenced region that's around eight times the size of Yellowstone National Park.

For 17 years, Matthew Becker '96 has called the Luangwa Valley home. As CEO of the Zambian Carnivore Programme (ZCP), he leads one of Africa's longest-lasting efforts to safeguard large carnivores and ecosystems. The program has a team of nearly 100 people working in five ecosystems to protect more than 1,200 carnivores each year — big cats, wild dogs, and hyenas — from snaring, poisoning, poaching, and other threats.

Becker's path to Zambia began in Bozeman, Montana, where he grew up with academic parents who'd met in graduate school at the UW. Michael MBA'64, PhD'71 and Stephanie Becker '63, MA'64 raised their son to be curious and to feel a personal connection with the natural world.

"I think my parents, who learned this in part from their time at Madison, really emphasized the importance of education and also the importance of doing something bigger than yourself and making a contribution in the world," Becker says. "I was one of those kids who knew from around age five what I wanted to do. I always wanted to work with wild animals."

Deciding where to attend college was easy for Becker, thanks to his family's connection — and thanks to the fact that the UW happened to have one of the top-ranked programs in wildlife ecology. But he didn't enroll immediately after high school. Instead, he did several internships at wildlife refuges across the United States, and by the time he moved to Madison, he was ready to take his coursework seriously.

As an incoming freshman, Becker met Robert Garrott, then an assistant professor of wildlife ecology, at a department social. "[Garrott] stood out as someone who was very enthusiastic and helpful, who genuinely enjoyed assisting young people just starting out in the field," he says.

A year later, Becker saw a flyer for a field assistant position in Yellowstone with Garrott and graduate student P.J. (Patrick) White PhD'96. "It pretty much read like a litany of how you could get killed during backcountry fieldwork: freeze to death, drown in icy rivers, get buried in an avalanche, fall in geothermal pools, bison goring, grizzly mauling in the spring, etc.," Becker says. "Starry-eyed, I was

immediately sold and promptly marched into Bob's office and declared my interest in the job."

## *The Making of a Conservationist*

He didn't get it. But he did get a mentor who offered an independent study instead, also in Yellowstone, and Becker jumped at the chance. He describes the first season working with Garrott as one of the most enjoyable of his career. It set the stage for several decades of work. Garrott encouraged Becker to get a wide variety of experience and not to be in a hurry to get to graduate school or start a professional job. "Enjoy these years," he would say. "There's no rush."

Becker graduated in December 1996 with a triple major in wildlife ecology, entomology, and biological aspects of conservation. With those credentials, he ventured to Antarctica to manage what was at the time the longest-running penguin project on King George Island. He spent five months at a time monitoring Adélie, chinstrap, and gentoo penguins, along with flying seabirds. He also traveled to Alaska and the Arctic to work on various seabird-related projects.

Eventually, Becker landed a job as project manager for the Kibale Chimpanzee Project, a long-term effort to study chimpanzees at the base of the Rwenzori Mountains, along the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He was there in 1999 when armed rebel groups roamed the mountains and attacked communities and parks. After rebels targeted Kibale National Park and started moving toward the project area, Becker and his colleagues were quickly evacuated. He was only two months into what was supposed to be a yearlong job. "It was really sad," he says. "Ugandans are wonderful people, and it was a great project."

But the chimp project had opened his eyes to a wide range of opportunities in Africa. He moved to the Okavango Delta in Botswana to volunteer for a wild dog project that would eventually evolve into what is now the Botswana Predator Conservation Trust. Becker only planned to stay for a couple of months, but he fell in love with wild dogs, captivated by their social bonds and cooperative hunting. He spent nearly two years there, becoming an expert at fieldwork and running projects.

But he realized that he didn't have the training needed to become a scientist. By then, his



MARCUS WESTBERG

*Becker knew from the time he was five that he wanted to work with wild animals.*



undergraduate mentor, Garrott, was a professor of ecology and the director of the fish and wildlife management program at Montana State University. And so, Becker went back to his hometown of Bozeman — and back to work with Garrott in Yellowstone.

## Big-Picture Thinking

In the 1940s, wolves were destroyed in the Yellowstone area as part of a nationwide predator-eradication program. But in 1995, the National Park Service reintroduced wolves, and scientists were eager to understand how that affected the region. Intermittently over the years, Becker had visited the park to help with fieldwork and training on Garrott and White's project. He'd witnessed the work grow from an elk-monitoring initiative into a 20-year, multidisciplinary effort to understand large mammal dynamics and the impacts of snow, vegetation, geothermal features, and more in addition to the effects of wolf reintroduction.

The National Science Foundation provided a fellowship for Becker's dissertation, which evaluated predator-prey dynamics among wolves, elk, and bison in central Yellowstone. The work helped him learn how to design and implement long-term,

*A field team fits a cheetah with a tracking collar. Program staff monitored more than 1,200 carnivores in 2024, allowing them to send antipoaching patrols to key areas.*

integrated projects in arenas with a lot of controversies and differing values, which struck him as similar to working with lions in Africa. Becker also took note of the broader effects of climate on the species he studied. "We need to align and protect the areas that wolves and elk evolved to coexist in," he says. This sort of urgent, big-picture thinking would soon become a hallmark of Becker's vision as a researcher and leader.

As his graduate studies wound down, Becker found himself dreaming of starting his own long-term project somewhere new, and he caught wind of one based in Zambia called African Wild Dog Conservation, which was the first of its kind in that country. Becker was hired on a two-year contract and left Montana for the Luangwa Valley. Seventeen years later, he's still there.

Under Becker, African Wild Dog Conservation expanded into the Zambian Carnivore Programme, which now encompasses a sprawling network of projects across the country involving 15 populations of large carnivores. The work includes reducing conflict between lions and humans in Luangwa; saving carnivores from illegal snares in Kafue National Park; supporting the recovery of carnivore populations in Liuwa Plain National Park after decades of



heavy poaching; and monitoring wild dogs across several regions.

“The most important thing is that ZCP is multi-species, multisite, and integrated — we do the same thing in each area for the long term,” Becker says. “We don’t just look at lions, for example. We look at their competitors, their prey, their habitat, and the human influences and drivers.”

### *Riding Till the Wheels Fall Off*

Scott Creel, a distinguished professor of letters and science at Montana State, has worked with ZCP for nearly 15 years as its senior scientist and graduate student adviser. Creel wrote the first scientific book on African wild dogs, based on his work in Tanzania, and he was on Becker’s dissertation committee. “Matt is an exceptional blend of scientist, NGO leader, and diplomat, and I do not know anyone who could have done a better job of building the Zambian Carnivore Programme,” he says.

Creel remembers the early years of ZCP, when the team relied mostly on grit and improvisation to get things done. “Sometime around 2012, when we were a small group working on a shoestring, I was meeting up with Matt at our research camp in central Kafue. Shortly after I arrived, Matt came rolling in

*A leopard naps peacefully on a shady perch. ZCP combats a growing illegal trade in big cat skins and parts.*

Learn more about the Zambian Carnivore Programme at [zambiacarnivores.org](http://zambiacarnivores.org).

from Liuwa in an old Land Cruiser that we’d brought down from our research in Kenya. After 10 hours on the road, they pulled up ... and a front wheel promptly fell right off,” Creel says. “Lacking any alternatives, we collected the fragments of the wheel bearing from the dirt, cobbled it back together, and carried on.”

For 30 miles, the Land Cruiser limped along with a failing wheel bearing, so slowly the team was able to count the tsetse flies they killed along the way: 1,228, a record that still stands among ZCP scientists.

“The first four years I can confidently say virtually nothing went right,” Becker says. “There were so many daunting challenges, and we had so little money to start these additional projects, like spending three to five thousand dollars for a vehicle, and it was just a complete crucible.”

When ZCP began, there were more important things than the Land Cruiser (which Becker still drives). For example, they weren’t able to provide many opportunities for local Zambian conservationists within the organization. But they persisted, and in 2011, one of the team’s Zambian members received a Fulbright award to pursue a doctorate with Creel at Montana State. The next year Creel received a prestigious National Science Foundation grant to study predator-prey dynamics at ZCP’s sites.

“The grant was ambitious and challenging, but that was the start of things really moving upward fast, and all the work we had put into building the foundation started to pay off,” Becker says. “As we’ve grown, we’ve gotten to a point where now we have some of the largest and longest-running projects on the continent, and there’s a growing interest and opportunity for people across Africa who want to get involved in this work.”

## The Resilience of Wild Dogs

The Zambian Carnivore Programme currently partners with nearly 50 organizations, agencies, and institutions, including Zambia’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife and several universities around the world. The data its teams collect have informed government policies and dozens of wildlife ecology research papers and projects.

The organization also makes a concerted effort to share its work with the public. The team collaborated with the BBC for five years to produce *Kingdom*, a documentary released in November 2025 and narrated by David Attenborough. The series follows the real-life sagas of four predator families in Zambia, including wild dogs, lions, leopards, and hyenas. In 2021, ZCP began tracking a wild dog tagged EWD 1355 and her two sisters as they embarked on the longest recorded journey for the species — 1,300 miles across Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique over the course of nine months. A year later, the *New York Times* published a “dog log” of their travels.

Though Becker says he has a “great appreciation for all creatures, great and small,” he holds a special passion for endangered African wild dogs. Smaller and far less famous than Africa’s other carnivores, they are intensely social and astonishingly resilient. Unlike lion prides, in which

*Though Becker says he has a “great appreciation for all creatures, great and small,” he holds a special passion for endangered African wild dogs.*



MAROUS WESTBERG

the females hunt so the males can eat first, wild dog packs ensure puppies are the first to feed. And they’re cooperative breeders, meaning one female and male pair will produce puppies that are supported by the other adults.

Yet wild dogs are severely endangered, with a population that numbers fewer than black rhinos. Zambia is an important stronghold for them. “With all the natural threats and human impacts around them, it’s a miracle they’re able to make a go of it,” Becker says. “They’re amazing animals to watch. They look out for each other and take care of each

other. We just had a dog that almost died in a snare that weekend, but our partners were able to rescue it. She basically has no use of her front leg, but she’s alive, and she’ll survive because she can keep up with her sisters, and they’ll feed her and they’ll protect her.”

The resilience of wild dogs carries a lesson for the human conservationists who monitor them. “This is very challenging work,” Becker says. “You never finish, and you never do enough because there are so many challenges for them. But it’s rewarding work.”

Wildlife ecologists, as a professional species, tend to be as peripatetic as wild dogs, and Becker is no different. Yet he seems to have found his home territory in the Luangwa Valley. He lives with his partner, Rachel McRobb, who runs the nonprofit Conservation South Luangwa. “I think it was a combination of working on species that I really was passionate about and being able to start and design long-term projects [that has kept me with ZCP for so long],” he says. “That was always my dream, but I never imagined we’d be doing it at this scale. It can be difficult to accomplish things here, but when you do accomplish them, it can be pretty significant.”

These days, Becker finds himself offering younger conservationists the same advice that Garrott once gave him: start every project as if you’re going to run it for 20 years, and enjoy every season in the field. ●

*Sandra K. Barnidge '09, MA'13 is a writer based in Gainesville, Florida. She's the author of The Diamondbacks, and diamondback terrapins are the wild creatures closest to her heart.*

# On Alumni

News from Home and Abroad

## Adventures with Fellow Alumni

*WAA tours allow UW grads to see the world while enjoying Badger camaraderie.*

Imagine sleeping in an igloo with a skylight that reveals a dazzling array of the northern lights. That will just be one of the attractions on the Wisconsin Alumni Association's Arctic Magnificence trip to Finland at the end of March. Since 1963, Wisconsin Alumni Association (WAA) tours have allowed UW alumni to explore destinations around the world.

**Shirley Krsinich MS'76**, one of WAA's most frequent travelers, has signed up for 20 trips. Krsinich says that one big draw for her is the friendliness of Wisconsin travelers.

"I have traveled with my husband, with my friends, and with my nieces, and all were warmly welcomed. And I have traveled by myself, and I was warmly welcomed and felt included, which can be a fear for many first-time single travelers. I've always appreciated my fellow Badgers for being so hospitable."

Madison physician **Christopher Harkin '84, MD'89**, who took the Egypt and the Eternal Nile trip with his wife, **Jacquelyn Arbuckle '91, MD'95**, says their trip was "so much better than we could've imagined. The educational value was just a much higher level than any other professional tour because our group was educated at the University of Wisconsin. ... We are always going to take our future tours through WAA."

Some of the program's most popular trips include European river cruises, with a Dutch waterways tour to Holland and Belgium



ROBERTO MOJOLA

during tulip season taking first place.

Other favorites are ocean cruises to ports of call such as Alaska, Australia, New Zealand, and the Mediterranean. Popular land options include African safaris, Italy, Japan, and Iceland. Every other year, adventures in Antarctica, Southeast Asia, and the Galápagos Islands are on offer.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of all trips in 2020 and many in 2021, travel director **Amy Klus '05** says the program quickly bounced back in 2022, with the only difference being that more travelers now opt for travel insurance.

According to Chief Alumni Officer and Executive Director Sarah Schutt, "The WAA travel program plays an important role in our efforts to connect alumni and friends. For more than 60 years, alumni have shared memorable moments around the world and have created lasting friendships by traveling with other Badgers. The wonders of travel are taken to a higher level in the company of those with whom you share a special UW bond."

**NIKI DENISON**

*WAA's Moroccan Discovery trip, October 25 to November 7, will showcase endless deserts, storied mountains, an age-old culture, and hospitable people.*

## UW NOW LIVESTREAM

We're living in a complex geopolitical moment, but *UW Now Live* can help make sense of it with insights from UW-Madison faculty and alumni experts. Recent topics have included tariffs, the U.S.-China rivalry, and immigration. Watch archived presentations at [youtube.com/wisconsinalumniassociation](https://youtube.com/wisconsinalumniassociation).

**66**

Number of years the WAA travel program has offered alumni trips

**45**

Number of WAA tours offered in 2025

**850+**

Number of WAA travelers in 2025



## MAKING GIVING FUN

Fill the Hill, UW-Madison's fall event that celebrates gifts by planting plastic flamingoes on Bascom Hill, raised more than \$752,000. Be sure to mark your calendar for spring's Day of the Badger, April 14-15. In the span of 1,848 minutes (a nod to the year the UW was founded), Badgers unite to support the people, places, and programs that make UW-Madison exceptional. See more at [dayofthebadger.org](https://dayofthebadger.org).



TAYLOR WOLFRAM

## Your Turn

Game night at Union South is a social space where everyone is welcome.

On Sunday evenings at Union South, students gather to roll dice, cut decks, and make friends. What started as a way for them to connect virtually during COVID-19 has turned into a weekly in-person event hosted by students for students.

“It started in the midst of the pandemic, with people looking to find connections and a lot of that being done through online spaces,” says **Safyr Barlow x’27**, director of the Wisconsin Union Directorate (WUD) Games Committee.

The committee initially hosted events in online spaces, but students liked the game nights so much that when they returned to campus, they wanted to continue the events in person. Today the Sett — the term for a badger’s den — is a hub for student recreation at Union South.

*Students kick off spring semester’s Union game night with Catan. Game nights are free, and any student may participate, regardless of skill level. At other tables, students played Decrypto, Wyrmspan, and Onitama.*

Barlow says game nights are about more than friendly competition with peers — they’re about creating an inclusive environment, a space where anyone can try new games for free.

“There are a lot of barriers within the game space,” Barlow says. “The goal has always been to create a community where everyone is welcome, regardless of financial ability, regardless of skill level.”

With more than 100 options in its collection, WUD features video games, virtual reality games, and board games, with new additions arriving each month. The event is staffed with students ready to explain rules and guide groups along the way. Although attendance varies, some 50 students turn out for the event each week.

“You don’t have to know games, and you don’t have to have been in gaming spaces before. You don’t have to have friends that you’re coming with,” Barlow says. “It’s open to anyone who just wants to try a game out, or take a break, or just have fun.”

**BLAKE MCCOY MA’23**

## 40s–60s

“Some of us oldies are still around,” writes **Dale Bruhn ’48, MS’74** of Simpsonville, South Carolina. “I’m [101] years old. Received my [bachelor’s degree in agricultural education] in 1948 after WWII interrupted my UW education. Started my freshman semester in September 1941. I still live alone, play bingo [and] Pokeno, and do several Sudoku puzzles every day to keep my brain sharp.” We say your Badger brilliance hasn’t aged a day, Dale!



The late **Jerry Apps ’55, MS’57, PhD’67** (above) received the 2025 National Distinguished Service Ruby Award from Epsilon Sigma Phi, the nation’s largest organization of Extension professionals. Apps began his career as an Extension agent before joining the UW faculty, and he spent 30 years as a professor and chair in the Divisions of Extension and Continuing Studies and College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. He was also a prolific author of Wisconsin’s rural history, industries, and communities, publishing more than 1,000 columns for Wisconsin newspapers — in which he coined his iconic tagline, “the Old Timer says” — and more than 50 books. His last book, *Lessons from 90 Years of Living*, was published in July 2025. Apps died in December after a brief illness. To borrow from the Old Timer: Without Jerry Apps, where would Wisconsin be?

**Bill Nasgovitz ’66** of Milwaukee received the Teen

Financial Champion Award from SecureFutures, an organization that provides financial mentorship and education to high school students in Wisconsin. The award recognizes Nasgovitz’s commitment to empowering young people through financial literacy. He is chairman and portfolio manager at Heartland Advisors.

## 70s–80s

For his illustrious coaching career and transformation of the East Michigan University (EMU) men’s basketball team, **Ben Braun ’75** was inducted into the Mid-American Conference Hall of Fame in May 2025. Braun coached EMU from 1985 to 1996, logging three NCAA Tournament appearances and becoming the most successful coach in program history. In 2024, EMU named the basketball court in its George Garvin GameAbove Center “Ben Braun Court.” Prior to his coaching career, Braun played for the Badgers from 1972 to 1975.

**John DeDakis ’77**’s latest novel, *Enemies Domestic*, received the grand prize in the thriller and suspense category at the 2025 Chanticleer International Book Awards. DeDakis is the author of six novels set in the world of journalism, where he spent most of his career. After starting out as a reporter for the UW’s campus radio station in 1969, he went on to be a special events reporter with the U.S. Army, a reporter and news director, a White House correspondent, and a senior editor on CNN’s *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*. He’s now a writing coach and leads workshops around the world.

**Patrick Green ’80, PhD’88** was named a 2025 Distinguished University Professor by Ohio State University. Green is a professor in the school’s College of Veterinary Medicine and director of its Center for Retrovirus Research, where he

conducts pioneering research on understanding human T-cell leukemia viruses and retroviruses in order to develop treatments and vaccines. Green is also a senior adviser at the Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center and a member of the President’s and Provost’s Advisory Committee.

Inspired by the large, motorized spin brushes that keep his dairy cattle coiffed and calm, **Ron Brooks ’82** invented the 4 Fur automated dog-grooming machine. The device features a soft-bristled spin brush, which is activated when the dog approaches, and a built-in vacuum to collect the shed hair. Brooks is a fifth-generation dairy farmer at Brooks Farms in Waupaca, Wisconsin, which his family has operated since 1855.

**Robert Giblin ’82** of Jefferson, Wisconsin, was inducted into the Agricultural Public Relations Hall of Fame by the Agricultural Relations Council. The council recognized Giblin’s 45-year career in communications, which spans the armed forces, domestic and international agricultural industries, and global health. His achievements include editing an award-winning Army-community newspaper; helping to facilitate the first global conference on sustainable beef; and working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess communications efforts around the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

*Super Lawyers Magazine* named civil rights attorney **Antonio Romanucci ’82** number two among its 2026 “Top 10 Super Lawyers in Illinois.” Romanucci is a founding partner of Chicago-based law firm Romanucci & Blandin. He began his career as a public defender in Cook County and spent more than a decade as an attorney before cofounding his national trial practice in 1998. Romanucci has represented the

**BOOK NEWS?**  
See page 64.

**CLASS NOTES SUBMISSIONS**  
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victims of several high-profile cases, including those of the 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas; the 2018 killing of Botham Jean in Dallas; the 2019 Boeing 737 MAX airplane crash in Ethiopia; and the 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Other Romanucci & Blandin attorneys named to the 2026 *Super Lawyers* lists include **Michelle DiSilvestro '16**, who was recognized as an “Illinois Rising Star.”

Do you hear that? It's the sound of **Christopher Struck '85** receiving the 2025 International Electrotechnical Commission 1906 Award from the Acoustical Society of America! Struck is the founder, CEO, and chief scientist of CJS Labs, a San Francisco consulting firm that focuses on sound and product design. Before founding his company, he was vice president of engineering at audio technology company Tymphany and director of engineering with Dolby Labs.

As president and CEO of the Congo Rainforest Fund, **Robert Kain MS'86** of Novato, California, is helping to engineer a more promising future for gorillas. Kain cofounded the fund in 2022 after witnessing the endangered Grauer's gorilla in the Congo rainforest during a trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In June 2025, he delivered a TEDx Talk titled “Why the Congo Rainforest Is Critical to Climate Change” that details his experience. Before cofounding a conservation nonprofit, Kain spent more than 40 years as a civil engineer overseeing the sustainable design and construction of energy-efficient buildings, including the Salesforce Tower in San Francisco.

Congratulations to **Dennis Sampson '87**, who was promoted to executive vice president of Ixonia Bank in Ixonia, Wisconsin. Sampson joined the bank as a senior lender in 2017 and currently serves as its director of commercial lending.



COURTESY OF TODD MILLER

## Just Do It

Todd Miller '83 has completed marathon events in all 50 states.

When **Todd Miller '83** crossed the finish line at the Midwest Financial Group Madison Mini Marathon in August, it was the end of a 12-year quest to run a half or full marathon in all 50 states. The Madison finale was fitting for Miller, a hardcore Badger who currently lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

A lifelong athlete, Miller wasn't always a serious runner. “In my early 50s, I joined an early morning exercise boot camp,” he says. “It was a fitness community with other runners, and they were very encouraging.”

After completing marathons in Washington, DC, and Philadelphia in 2013, it was off to the races with 49 to go. The pace was grueling. “You're either getting ready to run, running, or recovering from running,” Miller says. The feeling of accomplishment was powerful, but pounding that much pavement also gave him a sense of “the slow destruction” of his body.

Muscle soreness aside, every race had memorable moments. While running with his brother and fellow Green Bay Packers fan, **Jamie Miller '86**, the pair outran former Packer quarterback Brett Favre in a Mississippi race near Favre's hometown. And locals were generally supportive. After a Waffle House bathroom stop during the same race, Miller received a round of applause from diners.

Miller almost missed the Newport (Rhode Island) Half Marathon after locking his keys in a rental car. “I tried to break the car window with a metal rod outside my inn near Newport,” he recalls. “Miraculously, after about 20 minutes, a young couple came out from the inn, and I asked them if I could have a ride to the starting line. The guy said, ‘Sure, but can you put down that rod?’ They were definitely weirded out.”

Miller spent more than 15 years in management at Fannie Mae before joining the cryptocurrency industry. He currently serves as managing director of Phlomis Finance, a global advisory company focused on digital assets and blockchain technologies.

Juggling a busy career with planning and logistics for each run was complicated, but one decision was a no-brainer. “I knew I wanted to finish in Madison, because it's such a special place for me,” he says.

Running by Bascom Hill as a 64-year-old triggered a flashback to Miller's first day of classes. “It was a warm September day in 1979 when I walked up Bascom and saw the pink flamingos set up by **Leon Varjian x'83** and his Pail and Shovel [student government] party. I knew I had picked the right college!”

JOAN ELOVITZ KAZAN

## Saving Lives on *Survivor*

Physician Sarah Spelsberg '95 has provided care on the popular TV show as well as in other extreme environments.

As a UW–Madison undergrad, **Sarah Spelsberg '95** — a psychology major who'd been told by an adviser that she'd never get into medical school — began to feel a deep pull toward the magic of the wild. After graduating, she moved to Telluride, Colorado, where she planned to work for one year in a ski lodge.

Instead, Spelsberg joined the local search-and-rescue team, and her one-year mountain adventure turned into nearly a decade of tracking down missing people and rescuing them from swift-water accidents, avalanches, rockslides, and much more.

Spelsberg eventually earned a master's degree and became an orthopedic surgery physician assistant at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida. She then traveled to Alaska's remote Aleutian Islands to work in emergency medicine before returning to medical school and an emergency medicine residency at UNC Health Southeastern. Now, she's the director of U.S. operations for World Extreme Medicine, which trains health professionals to work in challenging environments. Patients include wilderness adventurers, explorers in hostile climates, and victims of war and natural disasters.

But the highlight of her career came last year when she served as a physician for Seasons 49 and 50 of the TV show *Survivor*. Spelsberg had actually been invited to be a contestant on the first season of the show but ultimately decided against it. However, she loved every minute of her behind-the-scenes role as a healthcare provider.

"It was really fun to work with people who are at the top of their game and aren't afraid to adapt in remote areas," she says. "Everyone there had a can-do attitude. If every corporation, hospital, city, and country ran the way they run themselves, the world would be a better place." Spelsberg describes longtime host Jeff Probst as "one of the nicest people I've ever met."

She spent a lot of her time helping to care for the production crew, which encompassed more than 800 people. "It takes a lot of people to pull together a production of that caliber," she explains. Perhaps the most notable moment occurred in Season 49, when one of the contestants was bitten by a banded sea krait, a snake with venom that can render one bite fatal. Fortunately, it turned out to be a "dry bite," which does not include venom.

Spelsberg would go back to Fiji in a heartbeat. "If there's something you want to do, find a way to do it," she advises. "Don't ever feel stagnant. Don't feel like a caged lion in your life or career. It is never too late to achieve your dreams."

**SANDRA K. BARNIDGE '09, MA'13**



COURTESY OF SARAH SPELSBERG

Before joining Ixonia, he was the executive vice president of First Business Bank in Madison and Milwaukee.

Patients no longer have to wait for time to heal all wounds, thanks to **Thomas Chernes DVM'89** and his novel skin-healing technology. Chernes is an associate professor in the Ohio State College of Medicine's Department of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, where he helped develop a peptide that promotes the healing of skin wounds. Chernes partnered with colleagues in the university's Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences to test the peptide's effectiveness in horses, which are especially affected by skin wounds. The team was granted a university Accelerator Award to help commercialize their invention and bring it to veterinary markets. "Because horses and humans use a similar mechanism for wound repair, our technology may also have applications for humans," Chernes said.

## 90s

**John Piper '90** was inducted into the National Interscholastic Lacrosse Coaches Association Hall of Fame as a member of the Class of 2025. Piper first picked up a lacrosse stick as a high school freshman and played through his time at the UW, during which he competed for three Big Ten championship titles and won two. After graduation, he helped build up his hometown's fledgling lacrosse program before joining the coaching staff at his alma mater, North Carroll High, and leading the struggling program to a county championship and repeated appearances in the state championship. Since 2010, he has been head coach of men's lacrosse at Manchester Valley High School in Manchester, Maryland.

More than three decades as a production manager in sports

television have taken **Kari Nelson '91** around the world. As a production manager with CBS Sports in 2016, she was part of the team whose Super Bowl 50 coverage won a Sports Emmy for Outstanding Technical Team Live Remote. She received another Sports Emmy with NBC Sports in 2023 for their cover-

**“It’s pretty amazing to know that we have put together something that is saving lives and property across the country on a daily basis.”**

— **Michael Staudenmaier '91, MS'93**

age of the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing and was recognized by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for her work as broadcast manager on NBC’s *Primetime in Paris* during the 2024 Summer Olympic Games. As a senior manager of studio operations at NBC Sports, Nelson worked on the NBA’s return to the network at the start of the 2025–26 season and oversaw broadcast coverage of figure skating during the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan.

The Partnership for Public Service presented **Michael Staudenmaier '91, MS'93** with a Samuel J. Heyman Service to America medal — the nation’s premier award for federal public servants — for his lifesaving work on the National Weather Service’s (NWS) heat-alert system, HeatRisk. HeatRisk is the first system to combine the NWS’s climatology data with mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to predict the risk levels of heat-related effects and provide safety recommendations for both vulnerable individuals and communities facing extreme heat. As the now-retired chief of the Science and Technology Infusion Division of the NWS’s Western

**WELCOME, ALL!**  
The Wisconsin Alumni Association encourages diversity, inclusivity, nondiscrimination, and participation by all alumni, students, and friends of UW–Madison in its activities.

**X-PLANATION**  
An x preceding a degree year indicates that the person did not complete, or has not yet completed, that degree at UW–Madison.

Regional Headquarters in Salt Lake City, Staudenmaier led the team that developed HeatRisk and is credited with both its CDC partnership and with the tool’s national expansion. “It’s pretty amazing to know that we have put together something that is saving lives and property across the country on a daily basis,” Staudenmaier said.

**Joe Engel JD'96** joined Atlanta-based accounting firm PYA as principal of the company’s new international tax services. He will oversee the development and execution of tax strategies that comply with international laws. Engel comes to PYA from The Coca-Cola Company, where he served as senior tax counsel.

**Garrett Klassy '98** began his tenure as director of athletics with California State University–Fresno in 2024. In his first year on the job, he secured the school’s move into the Pac-12 Conference, which will go into effect in July, and launched a novel model for managing name, image, and likeness among student-athletes. Under his direction, Fresno State athletes have collectively logged a record-high GPA, led the Mountain West Conference in academic all-conference honors, and won several conference and national championships. Klassy came to Fresno State with nearly two decades of leadership experience in collegiate athletics.

## 00s

**Kristyn Hare '00** is the recipient of the 2025 Clinician of the Year Award from the International Society for Clinical Densitometry. Hare is a physician assistant at the UW Health Orthopedic Bone Health Clinic in Madison, where she’s helped develop the Fracture Liaison Service and Bone Health Optimization program. She was also named the 2024 Andrew D. Bunta Clinician of the Year by the American Orthopedic

Association.

**Alon Stein JD'02** of Evanston, Illinois, was sworn in as a judge in the Circuit Court of Cook County in 2024. Prior to his election, he spent 22 years as a trial attorney in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Arizona. During his time at the UW, Stein was a managing editor of the *Wisconsin Law Review*.

Chicago-based law firm Romanucci & Blandin has named **Sarah Raisch '08, JD'11** a partner. Raisch joined the firm as a senior attorney in 2022 and handles cases in civil rights, police misconduct, sexual abuse, and medical malpractice. In 2025, she was a key member of the trial team that secured a historic \$15 million verdict in a sexual abuse case against a Chicago-area high school. As a pro bono attorney on a Hague Convention case, she helped a mother stay in the U.S. with her young son. She has also represented victims of mass shootings around the country. In April 2025, Raisch was appointed by Governor J. B. Pritzker to the Illinois Torture Inquiry and Relief Commission, which investigates claims regarding the use of torture to obtain confessions that lead to criminal conviction. Before joining Romanucci & Blandin, Raisch spent 10 years as an assistant public defender in Lake County, Illinois.

**Matt Rauenhorst MBA'08** is taking the reins as the new president and CEO of Minneapolis-based commercial real-estate developer and construction company Opus. Rauenhorst joined Opus in 1997 as an hourly laborer and interned with the company while earning his college degree before returning in 2008 as a senior director of development. He most recently served as the company’s president and chief executive officer of development.

**Daniel Correa '09** is flying high as one of *Negocios Now’s* 2025 “Latinos 40 under 40.”

Correa is a director of workforce development with the Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA), where he works to inspire individuals to pursue careers in the aviation sector. A first-generation college graduate, Correa began his career in wealth and investment management with Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase before joining the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection as a business consultant. He started with the CDA in 2024 as a program administrator of concessions development and operations at O'Hare and Midway International Airports before stepping into his current role in 2025.

## 10s

As a contestant on reality show *The Blox*, **Sarah Harrison EMBA'10** of Brookfield, Wisconsin, used her system-and-spreadsheet savvy to tackle complex business problems. The show invites entrepreneurs to live together for a week and solve challenges to win money and improve their businesses. Harrison was one of 100 contestants chosen from more than 50,000 applicants to appear on the show's 16th season. As the founder of consulting firm Order of Operations, Harrison helps businesses develop smart and sustainable systems for managing their data and streamlining operations. She was a semifinalist in the 2016 World Excel Championships.

## “Exploring teacher burnout is critical because teachers deserve better.”

— **Mary Cate Komoski MS'17, PhD'20**

Check this out! **John Kromer MS'10, MA'11** was named a fellow of the Special Libraries Association in recognition of his years of service to the field. Kromer is the associate university librarian for research and

engagement at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark, New Jersey. He's previously served as a chemistry librarian at Miami University, a physical sciences librarian at Brown University, and STEM division head of Arizona State University Library.

**Kim Baily '11** is back in the States after serving as the director of food and beverage of the USA Pavilion at the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan. Baily is the cofounder of Lucky Elephant Solutions, a hospitality design and consulting studio in Tampa.

**Katherine Robiadek MA'13, PhD'19** has completed her third and final year of executive leadership as president emeritus of the National Capital Area Political Science Association, an organization that fosters collaboration among academic and applied political scientists in and around Washington, DC. Robiadek began her presidency in 2023, the same year she joined Xavier University in Cincinnati as an assistant professor of political science.

If teachers are in it for the kids, then **Mary Cate Komoski MS'17, PhD'20** is in it for the teachers. An assistant professor of human development and family science at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina, Komoski was recently awarded a grant from the Belk Foundation to fund a longitudinal study on how undergraduate institutions can better prepare aspiring teachers to navigate the emotional demands of the field and avoid burnout. “Exploring teacher burnout is critical because teachers deserve better,” Komoski said. “They're underpaid, overworked, and tasked with one of the most important jobs in our society.”

Beloved and bygone Paul's Book Store (see “Farewell to Paul's Book Store,” Summer 2025) gets another chapter with Madison bibliophile **August McGinnity-Wake '17**. One

of many former Paul's patrons mourning its closure, he purchased the business's remaining literary criticism/biography and hardcover fiction collections, which he now sells both in person and online under the name “Augie's Books.” The books — about 2,000 of them — are housed on the original Paul's shelves, complete with their hand-lettered section signs.

Alliance Industrial Company has named **Cory Welper '18** as managing director of its new Midwest division. He'll oversee the development, investment, and construction of e-commerce warehouses and distribution spaces in the greater Chicago area and other Midwest markets. Welper comes to the role from Bridge Industrial, where he most recently served as vice president of investments.

**Saivya Chauhan '19** is dominating Indonesia's delivery scene with Blitz Electric Mobility. Founded during Chauhan's senior year in the UW's Department of Mechanical Engineering, Blitz combines an AI-driven platform with a fleet of electric-vehicle couriers to execute efficient and environmentally friendly deliveries. Chauhan was named among *Forbes Asia's* 2025 “30 under 30: Consumer Enterprise and Technology.”

## 20s

Congratulations to **Kaylee Ebner '22**, who received her master of public health degree from Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Her master's thesis focused on enhanced laboratory reporting, outpatient influenza-like illness, and influenza surveillance in Tennessee. She joined the Tennessee Department of Health as an epidemiologist in May.

**Amanda Chastan '25** of Reedsburg, Wisconsin, traveled to North Macedonia in September 2025 to begin her work as a community development promoter with the Peace Corps.

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**OBITUARIES**  
Brief death notices for Wisconsin Alumni Association (WAA) members and friends appear in *Badger Insider*, WAA's magazine for its members. You may submit full-length obituaries for online posting at [uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit](http://uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit).

The UW was ranked number one among large colleges and universities for producing Peace Corps volunteers in 2025.

**Matthew Paul '25** turned a convenient pandemic pastime into a booming business with Pin Hunters Golf Co. Founded in 2022, the company started out producing custom golf towels for local golf courses before landing an order with Scheels in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Pin Hunters has since expanded to 27 Scheels locations nationwide, launched new product lines in hats and other golf accessories, become the official towel brand of national golf sales agency the Catapult Group, and exhibited at the 2025 PGA Show.



When Big Joe Forklifts' intern-turned-engineer **Zach Skelton '25** discovered an operating Big Joe from the 1960s in the basement of the UW's College of Engineering, he saw an opportunity to celebrate both institutions. The Madison-based equipment company donated a brand-new Big Joe, complete with cardinal-and-white coloring and the school's crest, to the College of Engineering, where it will serve both instructional and operational purposes. The 1960s model was relocated to the company's Madison headquarters as a reminder of the longevity of their equipment. Skelton is a new-product development engineer with Big Joe.

*Megan Provost '20 is probably wiping mud off her dogs' paws.*



## A Phenomenal Philanthropist

The generosity of the late Jerry Frautschi '56 helped transform UW–Madison and its home city.

**W. Jerome “Jerry” Frautschi '56**, who died in January, was a giant in a family of giants in terms of contributions to the UW and its surrounding community. After serving in the Navy during the Korean War, Frautschi returned to Madison and joined the family's printing business, Webcrafters, which he ran alongside his brother, John Frautschi, for 42 years. Jerry's father, Walter Frautschi 1924, had been prominent in UW and civic concerns, serving as president of the Wisconsin Alumni Association and as a leader for the Wisconsin Alumni Research Fund (WARF) for decades.

Jerry followed in his footsteps. Among Jerry's many gifts to the campus community, one of the most cherished is Frautschi Point — formerly Second Point on Lake Mendota — which he and John donated to the UW in the late 1980s. This 17-acre parcel, with 1,600 feet of shoreline, was preserved in its natural state, extending the Lakeshore Path and protecting a vital piece of Madison's landscape. In recent years, Jerry gave nearly \$17 million to the UW–Madison Lakeshore Nature Preserve to build the Frautschi Center, a visitor building at the entrance to Picnic Point that is slated to open later this year.

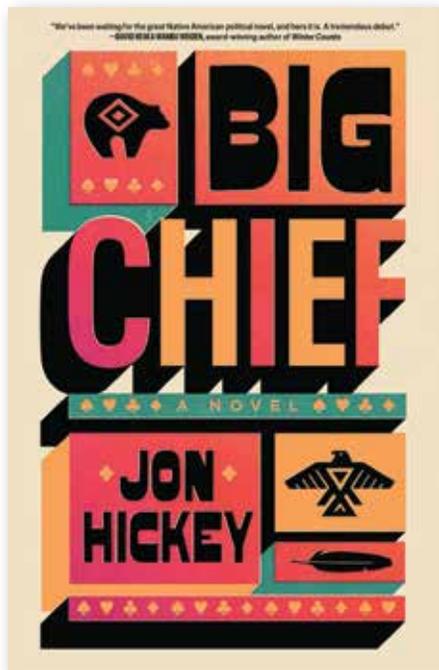
“Thanks to his vision and foresight, tens of thousands of Badgers and Madisonians have enjoyed the beauty of the iconic Lakeshore Nature Preserve, Picnic Point, and Frautschi Point,” says UW–Madison chancellor Jennifer Mnookin. “Many more will soon experience the Frautschi Center when it opens as a brand-new front door to these cherished spaces.”

Jerry Frautschi's most transformative contribution came in 1998, when he gave a landmark \$205 million to build Madison's Overture Center for the Arts. Designed by renowned architect César Pelli, the Overture Center spans an entire city block and includes a 2,100-seat concert hall, a restored 1927 theater, a theater-in-the-round, and the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (see “State Street, That Great Street,” page 24).

Frautschi continued to invest in the UW's future. A generous contribution helped create Alumni Park, which opened in fall 2017. This celebratory space shares the story of what it means to be a Badger through inspiring sculptures, inscriptions, statues, and a striking fountain. He was also an avid supporter of the Hamel Music Center, which opened in 2019.

Frautschi was joined in his philanthropy by his wife, **Pleasant Rowland**, founder of the American Girl brand. Their vision has left an indelible mark on Madison, enriching the lives of countless residents, students, and visitors.

**NICOLE HEIMAN**



Big Chief has been hailed as the “great Native American political novel.”

## Love, Loyalty, and Tribal Law

Political corruption and personal betrayal fan the flames of a heated election in Jon Hickey '04's debut novel, *Big Chief*.

Mitch Caddo never intended to practice law for the Passage Rouge Nation. But in **Jon Hickey '04's** debut novel, *Big Chief*, Mitch is the top adviser to sitting Passage Rouge president Mack Beck at the dawn of a heated election, and not even an Ivy League law degree can prepare him for the legal, ethical, and personal battles that lie ahead.

Before they headed up the Passage Rouge tribal government, Mack and Mitch were childhood friends: Mack, the lifelong reservation kid raised in an affluent home by his adoptive parents; Mitch, the mixed-race, white-passing son of a single mother who raised him on and off the “rez” until they were embraced by the Becks. When Mack's embattled presidency estranges him and Mitch from the Beck family, and as the impending election pushes Mack to abuses of power aimed at undercutting his opponent, Mitch must determine where his loyalties lie — and where, if anywhere, he truly belongs.

“Hickey's depiction of the reality of reservation life eschews stereotypes and caricatures in favor of complex, multifaceted people,” writes Sarah McEachern for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. “*Big Chief* understands the unique double consciousness of what it means to be Native American.”

Hickey based the fictional Passage Rouge Nation on real Anishinaabe tribes of Minnesota and Wisconsin, particularly the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, of which he is a member. *Big Chief* was named a Most Anticipated Book of 2025 by the *Washington Post*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, and it was featured in the 2025 Wisconsin Book Festival.

“We've been waiting for the great Native American political novel, and here it is,” writes author David Heska Wanbli Weiden, calling *Big Chief* a “tremendous debut.”



## *The Architecture of the Playing Field: Shaping Space in Sport*

**RICHARD CLEARY '75, MA'77**

Some sports — like baseball, football, soccer, and tennis — are played in clearly delineated spaces where markings are imbued with meaning. Others, like snowboarding and parkour, are mastered by pushing boundaries or eschewing them entirely. By analyzing how athletes, officials, and spectators experience these complex environments, Cleary reveals the social significance in the unique spatial relationships of sport.



## *The Last Spirits of Manhattan*

**JOHN MCDERMOTT '89**

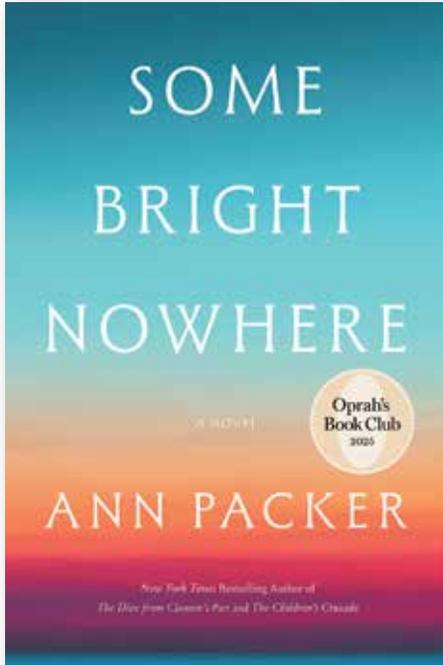
In 1956, director Alfred Hitchcock throws a star-studded soiree in a crumbling mansion on Manhattan's Upper East Side. While the host delights in the venue's haunted history, Carolyn Banks knows the resident spirits are more than just movie magic. As ghosts begin to mingle and meddle with guests, Carolyn is left to grapple with family secrets that won't stay buried in this debut novel, which is based on a true story.



## *Powwow Bound: A Menominee Homecoming*

**JENNIFER GAUTHIER '98 AND JUSTIN EAGLE GAUTHIER '14**

In this video game from PBS Wisconsin and Nebraska Public Media, players help a member of the Menominee Nation and her family prepare for the annual Menominee Nation Contest Powwow. The game features authentic representations of Menominee culture, thanks in part to Jennifer Gauthier, appliqué design artist and cultural adviser on women's traditional dance, and Justin Eagle Gauthier, writer and narrative adviser.



Submit your book news at [uwalumni.com/go/bookshelf](http://uwalumni.com/go/bookshelf) and visit [goodreads.com/wisalumni](http://goodreads.com/wisalumni) to find more works by Badger alumni and faculty.

Some Bright Nowhere was the Oprah's Book Club selection in November 2025.

## Till Death Do Us Part

Ann Packer's *Some Bright Nowhere* asks just how much we're willing to do for those we love.

As a devoted husband and caretaker, Eliot can't imagine leaving Claire's side during her final days with terminal cancer. But when those final days are upon them, Eliot's absence is Claire's only request. In *Some Bright Nowhere*, **Ann Packer** explores questions of love, devotion, and death through a couple whose long-shared path diverges as they approach the end.

In a conversation with the *New York Times*, Packer revealed that, after years of struggling with unfinished projects, she wrote the first draft of *Some Bright Nowhere* in just four months. She was inspired by an anecdote she'd heard nearly two decades earlier about a woman whose friends provided her end-of-life care when her husband wasn't up to the task. The book's title comes from a line in Christian Wiman's poem "Night's Thousand Shadows," which also makes an appearance in Packer's story.

"*Some Bright Nowhere* is an exquisite gem of a novel, shot through with luminous prose and profound insight into the human heart," writes author Tania James. "Trust me: you've never read a novel about marriage — about sacrifice and selfishness and soul-mending hope — quite like this one."

Packer was a 1988–89 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Fiction Fellow in the third cohort of the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. Her 2002 debut novel, *The Dive from Clausen's Pier*, takes place, in part, in Madison, and was adapted into a made-for-TV movie in 2005.

*Some Bright Nowhere* is Packer's first novel in a decade and was chosen by Oprah's Book Club in November 2025 as the program's 120th read.

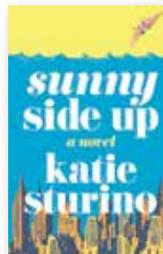
"This novel will mean something to everyone," writes the *Chicago Review of Books*. "Packer beautifully weaves the things we have all gone through in some capacity, the generational patterns that make us who we are."



## No Packers, No Life

CRAIG BENZINE '03

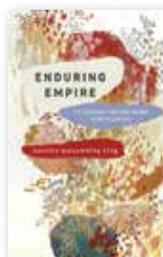
In this documentary directed by Benzine, a Wisconsinite visiting Japan on business stumbles upon the country's contingency of diehard Packer fans. They bond over their love of the team before traveling together to Lambeau Field for the authentic Green Bay Packer experience. This story about friendships forged across cultures and continents is sure to warm the hearts of sports fans and casual viewers alike.



## Sunny Side Up

KATIE STURINO '03

In her debut novel, social media influencer Sturino introduces readers to Sunny Greene, a recently divorced PR executive who's stressed over dressing her plus-size figure. Sunny channels the tenacity with which she built her successful career into the task of learning to love herself again as she navigates the complicated terrain of the dating scene, launches a plus-size swimwear line, and learns that you're never too lost to find yourself again.



## Enduring Empire: U.S. Statecraft and Race-Making in the Philippines

KATRINA QUISUMBING KING MS'13, PHD'18

Long after gaining independence from the United States in 1946, the Philippine islands continued to feel the United States' influence over its domestic and foreign affairs. By analyzing the rhetoric of U.S. state actors regarding citizenship and national identity, this book argues that the U.S. built a system of racial-imperial rule in the Philippines that continues to this day.

MEGAN PROVOST '20



TAYLOR WOLFRAM

## The Home for Women's Hockey

LaBahn Arena offers the perfect setting for one of the winningest programs in NCAA history.

It may not have the historical significance of Camp Randall Stadium or the name recognition of the neighboring Kohl Center, but LaBahn Arena gives Badger fans an equally compelling experience: a loud, intimate atmosphere and a whole lot of wins.

LaBahn Arena opened in 2012 as the second-ever facility built specifically for a college women's hockey team, following Ridder Arena in Minnesota. It's hard to argue with the results. As occupants of the arena, the UW women's hockey team has doubled its number of national championships from four to eight

— the most of any program in the country.

Connected to the Kohl Center by a tunnel, LaBahn is the much-smaller hockey venue, with seating for 2,273 fans compared to its neighbor's 15,000-plus. But what it lacks in capacity, it more than makes up for in viewing experience. There's no bad seat in the routinely sold-out house, with clear sight lines and the immersive feeling of being right on top of the action. Whether the crowd is roaring for a score or chanting "We want more!" the noise is as loud as you'll hear in any indoor arena.

In a sports era optimized for TV viewing, LaBahn reminds fans of the electricity of live action. And it's wise to arrive early, given the general admission seating.

LaBahn Arena, named for lead benefactors **Charles '49** and **Mary Ann LaBahn**, also hosts practices for the men's hockey team and locker rooms for swim-

ming and diving. It's proved a reliable and convenient facility for regular use by both hockey programs, which previously had to shuffle between the Kohl Center, the Shell, and private rinks for practices. (During the 2020–21 season with COVID-19 attendance restrictions, the men's team also played its games at LaBahn to save on the expenses associated with transitioning the Kohl Center from a basketball court to a hockey rink.)

And how's this for home-ice advantage? Upon winning the 2025 NCAA title, the women's hockey team led by legendary coach **Mark Johnson '94** boasted an all-time home record of 193–21–12 at LaBahn Arena.

As former UW goaltender and national champion **Kristen Campbell '20** once said: "I don't think there's a better place to play when you have fans like you do here."

**PRESTON SCHMITT '14**

*The routinely sold-out arena provides the immersive feeling of being right on top of the action.*

# Here For Every Rah-Rah.

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