OnWisconsin

FOR UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON ALUMNI AND FRIENDS SUMMER 2026

After Owen

A child's death.
A mother's mission.
A UW lab's inspiration.


20
CCM
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CCM

Vision

With a joyful jump, members of the Badger women's hockey team celebrate their second consecutive national championship (and ninth total) after beating Ohio State 3–2 in University Park, Pennsylvania. It's the fourth straight year the schools met in the final game.

Photo by Taylor Wolfram '24

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OnWisconsin

The 2021 volleyball championship is among the greatest Badger title runs. See page 32.

JULIA KOSTOPOULOS

DEPARTMENTS

OnCampus

OnAlumni

How does it feel to row a boat across the Pacific Ocean? See page 40.

WORLD'S TOUGHEST ROW. DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP

FEATURES

XIAOMENG SHEN

Hoofers beckons to outdoor adventurers. See page 56.

Cover
Amanda Shaker '04 lost her six-year-old son to brain cancer. Their experience inspired UW researchers.

Communications

State Street Memories

To my dismay, in "State Street, That Great Street" [Spring 2026 *On Wisconsin*], there was no mention of the Pub or the Varsity Bar (a.k.a. "the Var Bar"), both of which thrived on lower State Street for a long time. Although I am admittedly older than dirt, there are quite a few of us ancient grads from the early '60s still doddering around — and I can assure you that those two watering holes are as fondly remembered as major facets of our UW experiences.

Marilyn Taylor '64
Madison

I had many fun State Street experiences shopping, dining, and drinking during the crazy '60s and '70s (especially Saturday pregame beers on a window stool at the Pub). Once, the Orpheum Theater offered two free tickets to a James Brown concert for the best reason someone would deserve to see the show in 10 words or less. My submission: "My girlfriend will dump me if I don't get tickets." One year after attending that great show, my James Brown date became my first wife. We even got our wedding rings at Goodman's Jewelers on State Street.

Doug Lindquist '72, MBA'73
Fullerton, California

One year, [when the Badger basketball team had an unexpected win against Ohio State], we all raced down to the Pub to celebrate. There were two things at the Pub that would get you kicked out: dancing on the tables and "accidentally" dropping your beer mug on the floor.

So, I'm dancing on one of the tables, when the bouncer (future Governor of Wisconsin Tommy Thompson '63, JD'66) grabs me to kick me out. At that point, our fraternity president yells: "If Feldman goes, we all go," and along with everyone else in the Pub, drops his glass beer mug, which crashes on the floor. Then everyone heads for the door as fast as they can. Fast forward about 25 years to when Governor Thompson hosted a reception at his mansion for industry folks to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the American Dairy Association. When it was my turn in the reception line, he grabbed my hand tightly and said: "I know you from someplace!" So he and I spent the rest of the reception retelling the story, and the governor graciously took us on a tour of the mansion.

Martin Feldman '64
Delray Beach, Florida

I am not sure how it is possible, but lately, each issue of *On Wisconsin* seems better than the last. I loved "State Street, That Great Street." The article mentions that most students think of the corner of Lake and State as the beginning of the trip down State Street. That may be true for students of the past 50 years, but those prior to 1972 remember that the Kollege Klub, since relocated, sat where Memorial Library is today at 714 State Street. I guarantee that back in the day, it began there.

Thomas Straka '72, MS'73
Pendleton, South Carolina

Your State Street article brought back many memories. Another eatery my wife (Janice Carlson Donner '66) and I can't forget is the Plaza Tavern on North Henry Street, just a half block off State Street. In 1964, they began selling the Plazaburger with their secret sauce. We've tried to replicate that sauce for years without success. Each week, we would bring them a shopping bag of empty Coke bottles, using the deposit refund as a down payment on Plazaburgers.

We met as freshmen in the early '60s working at the Elm Drive dining hall. This summer, we will celebrate our 62nd wedding anniversary.

Jack Donner '65, MBA'66
Boerne, Texas; Mercer, Wisconsin

We want to hear from you! Please email your letters to 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.

Thoughts on Lost Traditions

I loved "The UW's Lost Traditions" in your Spring 2026 issue. However, I would like to point out an error of omission. One of the great traditions was Haresfoot, the all-male acting club. I was in one of its last productions, *Li'l Abner,* in 1962. The show was unforgettable, if only for Daisy Mae's five o'clock shadow. I played the leader of the mad scientists who were set on turning the men of Dogpatch into automatons.

Dean Kaul '66
Appleton, Wisconsin

I was disheartened that "The UW's Lost Traditions" focused primarily on the white student experience (only mentioning BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] traditions in one small paragraph) and avoided discussing painful histories associated with these traditions.

For some years, Black and Jewish students could not attend prom. The Engineer's St. Patrick feud floats often included racially and religiously insensitive themes. Further, an arguably more sustained tradition was the Engineer's Minstrel, an annual blackface performance. The carnival and circus often included racist and ableist "side shows." Women did carve out their own traditions, because many campus spaces and clubs were segregated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And while there was discussion of "How seniors said good-bye," there was no mention of the Pipe of Peace ceremony — the largest campus tradition for over 50 years — performed by seniors cosplaying indigeneity.

I understand that [the alumni magazine] is looking to highlight the best of UW–Madison and that talking about discrimination is uncomfortable. But obscuring difficult histories with nostalgia does a disservice to the past and to our alumni.

There was an educational

opportunity missed. There are many traditions we've lost — and some we needed to lose because they intentionally excluded members of our community.
Kacie Lucchini Butcher
Director of the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History
UW–Madison

[RE: "The UW's Lost Traditions"]: During my years as a UW student, I never had the opportunity to give a skyrocket cheer for a professor. But one of the favorite memories of my father, Jack Vinson '32, was joining his classmates in a *Sss ... Boom ...Ah!* for Professor William "Wild Bill" Kiekhofer at the end of class. He would be thrilled to know this tradition is part of the rich history of the UW. And so, as a very proud graduate of UW–Madison, I am adding my voice in one last *Sss ... Boom ... Ah!* to my father and all those who cheered William Kiekhofer.
Jane Vinson-Kafura '70
Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin

[The Spring 2026 *On Wisconsin* was] another excellent, informative issue. I was especially interested in "The UW's Lost Traditions." My father was an electrical engineering student at the UW in the late 1930s. He told me a few stories about the annual St. Patrick's Day rivalry meetings between law and engineering students. I still have the shillelagh he carried for protection in 1938.
Ross Marquardt '71, MA'73
Bellingham, Washington

A Transformative Article

Wow. What an inspiring article ["Healing the World, Block by Block," Spring 2026]. It led me on an exciting search for related information, which took me to the site for the Center for Health Disparities Research, ChatGPT, and the Exposome Project. The term *exposome* somehow escaped my education, but now I've got it. Thanks for a transformative article.
Bruce Larson '73
Leicester, North Carolina

A Growing Sport

The article about the LaBahn Arena ["The Home for Women's Hockey," Spring 2026 Destination] brought back memories of the early days of the UW men's hockey team. I remember one game where [the players] got into a huge scuffle behind one of the nets. The back end of the net was lifted up, twisting out one of the net locator pins and breaking a pothole-sized hole in the ice. The arena was quiet as everyone watched the officials piecing the ice back into the hole and repositioning the net locator pin. When maintenance staff brought out a watering can and sprinkled water over the hole, someone in the bleachers yelled, "It isn't going to grow."
Paul Hardzinski '69
Oregon City, Oregon

To the Best of Our Knowledge

Kudos to Anne Strainchamps and Steve Paulson for making 35 years fly by [Bygone, "The UW's Radio Masterpiece," Spring 2026]. It should be noted that the show was the brainchild of Wisconsin Public Radio's Jack Mitchell, who was director of radio when *To the Best of Our Knowledge* began.
Paul Abramson
Madison

Charmed by Tour

I was delighted to read your article about campus tour guides ["What I Saw on the Campus Tour," Winter 2025], especially because I suspect the author (Jessica Steinhoff '01) may have been my tour guide years ago. If so, I'm grateful for the chance, decades later, to say thank you.

I remember immediately liking Jessica's Wisconsin accent, still novel to me then. On the walking tour, as we stood outside Chadbourne Hall, a student a few floors up mooned us. My dad, without missing a beat, said, "Welcome to Madison." Despite the cold and gray weather, I was already charmed.

I still think fondly of that campus tour — of learning about Madison's antiwar history, watching rowers on the lake at dusk, the coziness of the Memorial Union, and the distinctive sense of humor and delight that makes Madison what it is. Thank you for reminding me of a visit that changed the course of my life in the most wonderful way.
Susan Refice '02
Brooklyn, New York

Correction

The Spring 2026 *On Wisconsin* Contribution column stated that the Frautschi Center, a visitor building at the entrance to Picnic Point, would be completed in late 2026. The article should have stated that construction is scheduled to begin in late 2026.

Online


JEFF MILLER

FOREVER STATE STREET

Our Spring 2026 issue visited old haunts and new favorites on State Street, UW–Madison's legendary campus corridor. The article spurred an outpouring of letters (see a sampling on page 6), many of which passionately advocated for places we didn't have space to mention. For more recollections, search our website for "State Street, That Great Street: Letters."
Visit us at onwisconsin.uwalumni.com.

CELEBRATING 165 YEARS OF CONNECTING ALUMNI

Rooted in tradition yet focused on moving forward. This is our legacy and our future. Since 1861, we've been here for alumni – celebrating cherished memories, inspiring support for life-changing achievements, and always keeping the UW community informed and connected. And just like the alumni we serve, we will proudly continue to *Badger On!*

WISCONSIN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

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OnWisconsin

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Tamplin has faced roadblocks with federal research funding.

JEFF MILLER

After Tragedy, Hope

A UW researcher works to redeem a young boy's death.

John Allen's cover story, "The Two Owens," traces a poignant connection. Owen Petrzelka is a child who died from a rare brain cancer, and Owen Tamplin is a UW–Madison researcher trying to ensure that the boy's death was not in vain. I predict that you'll be inspired by Tamplin's efforts to better understand the terrible disease called diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma.

I also predict that you'll be disheartened by the roadblocks Tamplin has faced with federal research funding. Changing policies have threatened his grants, cut him off from key research partners, and caused uncertainty in his lab. "It makes it very difficult to plan, to recruit people," Tamplin says.

In 2025, the university saw a 17 percent decline in federal research funding. Over the same period, 145 federal grants were terminated or subject to stop-work orders, with $27 million in lost funding. Since then, however, we've seen progress. Legal challenges have helped reinstate some of the grants, and some of the major proposed cuts to federally funded programs have been stemmed. Our Summer issue shows UW researchers charging ahead, with breakthroughs in medicine, astronomy, agriculture, and artificial intelligence, among other fields.

In "The Two Owens," Owen Petrzelka's mother pleads for "something meaningful" to come from his death. With an assist from UW research, hopefully it still can.

DEAN ROBBINS

OnCampus

News from UW–Madison

ALTHEA DOTZOUR

A Path Forward for UW–Madison

Campus embraces its future with a new strategic framework.

Last year, UW–Madison began a collaborative, cross-campus process to envision its future through the creation of a new strategic framework. The goal was to create a framing document that could identify clear shared priorities, position UW–Madison as a leader in addressing the challenges and opportunities of our time, and define the university's mission for the years ahead.

The strategic framework is grounded in the Wisconsin Idea — the notion that the university's teaching, research, and service should extend far beyond the boundaries of campus — and guided by the Badger Way.

If the Wisconsin Idea is the UW's "why," the Badger Way is its "how." It describes how the university approaches its work: with curiosity, humility, integrity, tenacity, civility, and a touch of playfulness. It also expresses the commitments that individuals make to one another in community: practicing civility; embracing complexity; fostering connection; and supporting all Badgers as they learn, grow, and pursue excellence.

Together, the Wisconsin Idea and the Badger Way are foundational to the framework and its four strategic priorities: delivering unrivaled educational experiences to prepare students for their future; discovering, creating, and innovating to change lives; convening and collaborating for the public good; and cultivating a culture of excellence to ensure a resilient future.

The framework is, by design, not a plan. It is intentionally high level, allowing the UW to adapt, evolve, and remain resilient in the face of change. The work of bringing the framework fully to life will happen through school, college, and division strategic plans; campuswide initiatives; and collaboration among students, staff, faculty, alumni, and partners.

The strategic framework came together with help from the Visioning Committee, a group of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and campus partners who helped shape a vision defined by the collective aspirations and needs of UW–Madison now and into the future. This group helped lead more than 40 community conversations, gathering input from many faculty, staff, and students on draft concepts that reflected UW–Madison's strengths and opportunities.

Visit strategicframework.wisc.edu to learn more about the strategic framework as UW–Madison embraces its future.

ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Wilcots, who's been part of the UW campus since 1995, steps in as interim chancellor.

NEW UW LEADERSHIP

On May 17, **Eric Wilcots** became UW–Madison's interim chancellor. He succeeds **Jennifer Mnookin,** who left to become president of Columbia University.

Wilcots has served as the dean of the UW's College of Letters & Science since 2020. He's been part of the UW–Madison campus since 1995, when he started as a lecturer in the astronomy department before joining the faculty a year later.

In another key leadership change, **John Zumbrunnen** has been named UW–Madison's provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs. The provost is the university's chief academic officer and second-ranking official, supporting its teaching, research, and outreach mission.

Zumbrunnen had served as interim provost since last June, following Charles Isbell Jr.'s departure to become chancellor of the University of Illinois–Urbana–Champaign. Over the past 18 years, Zumbrunnen has held a variety of academic and administrative leadership positions at UW–Madison.

"I am excited to continue the valuable work of the Wisconsin Idea, which will guide me not only as a foundational value, but as a perennial challenge to create a positive impact in the world through excellence in research, education, and service," he says.

NEW AEROSPACE MAJOR HELPS BADGERS EXCEL

Badger engineers are cleared for takeoff: a new aerospace engineering major will launch at the start of the fall 2026 semester in the UW's College of Engineering.

Darryl Thelen, the John Bollinger Chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, expects 150 to 200 students a year to pursue the major. Currently, students can select an aerospace engineering option within the engineering mechanics major — a factor that's driven enrollment growth in the major over the past six years.

"We're excited to formally launch an aerospace program that builds upon our department's expertise in a growing field with an expanding footprint in our state," says Thelen. "This is a logical response to enthusiastic interest from students."

Aerospace engineers work in careers ranging from space exploration technology to aircraft systems to national defense. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the field is projected to experience rapid growth over the next decade, and more than 200 Wisconsin companies have ties to the industry, according to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

"This launches a new era of space in Wisconsin, supporting the growth of our space manufacturing infrastructure and job creation," says **Devesh Ranjan MS'05, PhD'07,** Grainger Dean of the College of Engineering.

The new program will be the first aerospace engineering degree recognized by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology in the state of Wisconsin.

"I'm extremely grateful to all of the individuals who have and continue to put in hard work for the aerospace engineering major at UW–Madison," says **Finley Moss x'28,** an engineering mechanics student who will change her major to aerospace engineering in the fall. "It shows a real commitment to listening to students and investing in the future of engineering."

TOM ZIEMER '07

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR LEAVES FOR THE BIG TEN

In April, **Chris McIntosh '04, MS'19** resigned as UW–Madison's director of athletics to become the Big Ten Conference's first deputy commissioner for strategy.

McIntosh served five years as director and has been a UW athletics administrator since 2014. He played offensive tackle on the Badger football squad and served as captain for consecutive Rose Bowl–winning teams before entering the NFL.

"It is bittersweet to leave the University of Wisconsin, a place that has had such a profound impact on me as a student and as an administrator," McIntosh said.

During McIntosh's tenure as director of athletics, Badger teams won several conference and national titles. The overall student-athlete graduation success rate is 91 percent.

"While helping to establish a strong foundation for success in all sports moving forward, Chris has always represented our institution with high character, professionalism, and Badger pride," said former Chancellor **Jennifer Mnookin.** "We should all be pleased that he will bring this integrity and commitment to his new position as he will play an instrumental role in the future of the Big Ten Conference and thus in the future of Wisconsin athletics."

Marcus Sedberry, who had been the UW's deputy athletic director, general manager, and chief operating officer, stepped in as interim director of athletics. Sedberry joined the Badgers in 2022 after senior-level experience in the SEC, Big 12, and NFL. The search for a new director of athletics will begin under Interim Chancellor **Eric Wilcots.**

BRYCE RICHTER

Badgers vs. Badgers for the Gold

An Olympics watch party or a Badgers watch party? The answer was both for the Union South crowd who saw the U.S. women's hockey team defeat Canada in the gold medal game in February. Throughout, the TV broadcast cut to this watch party at the Sett, where fans cheered for the 11 Badgers representing both countries — including **Hilary Knight '12,** who scored the dramatic game-tying goal for Team USA.

PEXELS

A Safer Way to Monitor Vital Signs

A new system from UW researchers uses radar to avoid physical contact.

UW–Madison computer scientists are pioneering a new approach to health monitoring: using radar to measure breathing and heart rate without physical contact to the patient. Their system could pave the way for safer, more comfortable care in settings ranging from neonatal units to in-home recovery.

When you think about monitoring heart and breathing rates, you likely picture a wearable device — a wristband, chest strap, or sticky patch connected to a maze of wires. But what if monitoring your breathing or heart rate didn't require contact at all?

For UW–Madison computer sciences professor **Suman Banerjee,** that prospect is a near possibility. In collaboration with researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology and with support from the National Science Foundation, his team is developing a system — called MEDUSA — that uses radar to monitor vital signs without touching patients at all.

Banerjee has long been interested in ways that contactless technology can support health care. "In the neonatal intensive care unit, the very devices that monitor fragile infants can also cause skin abrasions, introduce infection risks, or become tangled," he notes. For adults, wearables can be uncomfortable or even inaccurate when poorly fitted.

Contactless sensing offers an appealing alternative. Because radar waves can detect small chest movements, they are able to infer vital signs such as breathing and heart rate without attaching anything to the body.

Existing radar systems struggle to detect vital signs outside of controlled lab settings because people naturally move around, turn away from the sensor, and change their posture throughout the day.

MEDUSA overcomes this problem by placing several radar units throughout a room, creating a multiview system that detects vital signs even when some sensors lose line of sight. Custom hardware combined with tightly integrated software separates vital signs from other movements. The result is a system that works in real-life patient settings.

The long-term goal is to make radar hardware more compact.

"We've shown that this distributed approach works," Banerjee says. "Now we want to make it feasible for environments like the neonatal intensive care unit."

EMMA FRANKHAM MA'15, PHD'19

LAUREN MONTELBANO

It's not your grandfather's menu at the Wisconsin Union. The "campus living room" recently partnered with its first chef-in-residence, Lauren Montelbano, to develop more creative, plant-based items. Head on down to the Rathskeller to sample a vegan black bean burger with cilantro slaw and ancho-agave sauce.

BRYCE RICHTER

The Intercollegiate Broadcasting System has named UW–Madison's WSUM as the nation's best college radio station. Tune in at wsum.org to hear student broadcasting at its finest.

The new Badger Tech Foundry will train graduate students and postdoctoral researchers to launch multiple companies over the course of their careers. "There are 150 steps between wanting to launch a company and actually doing it," says Devesh Ranjan MS'05, PhD'07, dean of the College of Engineering. "The Badger Tech Foundry exists to bridge that gap."

Top Classes

Chem, econ, music, psych — here's what Badgers take year after year.

If you want to be a Badger, then come along to enrollment and sign up for these classes. Over the last 15 years, they're the ones that the most UW–Madison students have taken — or, in the case of Organic Chemistry, the one that UW–Madison students have taken the most times. (Keep trying — you'll improve that F to a D eventually.) We looked at academic planning data from 2011 to 2025, and what we found was a lot of consistency. Most of these courses have been in or near the UW's top 10 every year. The number one class overall is Music in Performance, with nearly 46,000 students cumulatively in those 15 years. Its most popular individual year was 2019–20, when some 4,252 students enrolled.

JOHN ALLEN

DANIELLE LAWRY

2011

1.	Principles of Microeconomics	2,831
2.	Introduction to Psychology	2,655
3.	General Chemistry 1	2,463
4.	General Chemistry 2	2,017
5.	Nutrition Today	1,845
6.	Animal Biology	1,823

2015

1.	General Chemistry 1	2,901
2.	Introduction to Psychology	2,510
3.	Principles of Microeconomics	2,485
4.	General Chemistry 2	2,472
5.	Calc. — Functions of Several Variables	1,984
6.	Organic Chemistry 1	1,962

2018

1.	Music in Performance	4,061
2.	Introduction to Psychology	2,866
3.	General Chemsitry 1	2,851
4.	Principles of Microeconomics	2,642
5.	General Chemistry 2	2,365
6.	Calc. and Analytic Geometry 1	2,110

2021

1.	Music in Performance	4,210
2.	General Chemistry 1	3,055
3.	Introduction to Psychology	2,921
4.	Principles of Microeconomics	2,725
5.	Calc. and Analytic Geometry 1	2,494
6.	Intro to College Composition	2,315

2025

1.	Music in Performance	3,862
2.	General Chemistry 1	3,046
3.	Principles of Microeconomics	2,654
4.	Introduction to Psychology	2,625
5.	Introduction to College Comp.	2,436
6.	Calc. and Analytic Geometry 2	2,362

JAIME ESPINOZA

How Ads Suppress Voter Turnout

A UW study quantifies the effect of microtargeting.

Messages intended to suppress votes can be precisely delivered to particularly vulnerable and consequential groups of people via social media and keep millions of them from casting ballots. A new UW study is the first to quantify the effect of such microtargeting on voter turnout.

A team led by **Young Mie Kim,** UW–Madison professor of journalism and mass communication, recruited more than 10,000 people across the United States — a group representative of the country's voting population. They were asked to install an app that captured every ad they viewed for the six weeks leading up to the November election in 2016.

The study participants who saw the ads with vote-suppressing messages on Facebook were 1.9 percent less likely to vote in the election than people who did not see the ads.

The most common targeted message suggested an election boycott would send the strongest message to politicians. The ads' creators used Facebook's microtargeting advertising features to reach mostly nonwhite, voting-age people in hotly contested states in the presidential election. Those Facebook users received four times as many vote-suppressing ads as their white neighbors.

While a 1.9 percent shift in the behavior of some voters is small, the researchers say, so were the margins of victory in many states in 2016. Extrapolated across the country for the 2016 election, the effect of the ads may have kept about 4.7 million people from voting.

Congressional investigators showed that many of the ads the research team identified were purchased by the Internet Research Agency, a Russian digital disinformation operation. They used terms including "Martin Luther King Jr." and "African American Civil Rights Movement" to target nonwhite voters on Facebook and discourage them from voting.

None of the vote-suppressing ads were purchased by groups that had filed reports with the Federal Election Commission. Strengthening and enforcing federal regulations on disclosing the source of political messages could provide important context for targeted social media users.

"Voters should be able to understand who is trying to influence them, especially whether it is foreign influence," Kim says.

CHRIS BARNCARD

ALTHEA DOTZOUR

The UW is launching a Department of Biology within the College of Letters & Science, encompassing the integrative biology and botany departments; the Wisconsin State Herbarium; the Botany Garden and Greenhouse (above); and the UW Zoological Museum. According to botany professor Anne Pringle, the new department represents a "commitment to finding a better future for all life on Earth."

Badger men's hockey knocked off higher-ranked teams to reach the NCAA championship game, where they fell 2–1 in a heartbreaker to the Denver Pioneers. With the women's squad winning their own national championship (see pages 2–3), it was a thrilling spring for us fans of UW ice hockey.

BRYCE RICHTER

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has honored UW–Madison for its commitment to community engagement, citing public-service programs such as Bucky's Classroom (above). UW provost John Zumbrunnen says community engagement is "part of our mission of serving Wisconsin and the world."

COURTESY OF THE NELSON INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

How to Share the *Commons*

This Nelson Institute publication is an immersive, accessible experience.

Anyone who has taken an introductory environmental science course will be familiar with the concept of "the commons," the natural resources — air, water, land, wildlife — that are shared and stewarded by humans. The term derives from a 1968 essay titled "The Tragedy of the Commons," by ecologist Garrett Hardin, which posits that these unregulated resources are depleted by overuse. But at the UW, the *Commons* is a resource that thrives the more people use it.

The *Commons* is the flagship publication of the UW's Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies. Founded in 2002 under the name *In Common,* the publication has seen several iterations, from a biannual printed newsletter to a monthly digital magazine. Its latest version, launched in fall 2025, takes special care to reach every member of the UW's environmental community.

According to **Chelsea Rademacher '13,** communications manager at the Nelson Institute, the *Commons* team was already preparing to redesign the publication when the federal government released updated digital accessibility requirements in April 2024. These new guidelines became the core of the *Commons*' transformation from a digital flip-book to an immersive, multimedia experience.

The reimagined* Commons *takes special care to reach every member of UW–Madison's environmental community.

Each issue, delivered quarterly to email inboxes, features a striking cover that links to a curated, thematic home page. Each storytelling element is designed to create an equitable user experience when accessed with assistive technologies like screen readers and text-to-speech software.

"Offering everything with as much accessibility consideration as possible in order to reach the broadest community we can is really just the *Commons* living up to the Nelson Institute's identity," Rademacher says. "Access and equity are important to anyone who cares about the environment, because we all want to succeed together on this planet that we share."

MEGAN PROVOST '20

ILYA BOBO, ICECUBE/NSF

An Upgrade for IceCube

With some improvements beneath the ice, this Antarctic neutrino observatory should keep UW–Madison at the forefront of astronomy.

The IceCube Neutrino Observatory has received its first major upgrade since it came online 15 years ago, significantly boosting the observatory's scientific capabilities.

Located at the U.S. National Science Foundation's (NSF) Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, IceCube uses one cubic kilometer of Antarctic ice to detect ghostly particles called neutrinos that travel through outer space. The international scientific endeavor is led by scientists at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, with NSF providing its main source of support.

Because neutrinos rarely interact with matter, the nearly massless particles can provide a lens into otherwise obscure extreme cosmic environments. The upgrade will allow more precise measurements of neutrino properties, making IceCube the world's premier neutrino experiment.

"The successful deployment of the IceCube Upgrade project is a feat of U.S. engineering that demonstrates significant logistical capabilities in Antarctica," says Marion Dierickx, NSF program director for IceCube. "This upgrade will secure the nation's continued leadership in neutrino physics for years to come, paving the way for new cosmic discoveries."

IceCube uses more than 5,000 sensors to capture the faint light produced by neutrino interactions in the ice. The pristine quality of the Antarctic ice makes it an ideal medium for detecting this light. The IceCube Collaboration, with more than 450 scientists from around the world, then uses these light patterns to reconstruct the energy and direction of each detected neutrino to determine its origin.

Thanks to the upgrade, scientists will be able to better characterize the surrounding ice, leading to improved reconstruction of neutrinos and a reanalysis of 15 years of archived data. The upgrade will also improve scientists' ability to determine cosmic ray composition and measure neutrinos from galactic supernovae.

"The successful completion of the IceCube Upgrade relied on the critical support of the South Pole station and Antarctic service contractors," says **Vivian O'Dell,** the upgrade's project director. "Their essential contributions allowed us to complete the entire installation in one drilling season despite extreme weather conditions and logistical constraints, for which I am deeply grateful."

ALISA KING-KLEMPERER '12

PEXELS

NEW AGING RESEARCH CENTER

A new research center at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health will focus on understanding how metabolic changes associated with aging influence health and cause disease.

The National Institute on Aging has recognized the school's strength in aging research through a competitive grant awarded for the Wisconsin Nathan Shock Center of Excellence in the Basic Biology of Aging.

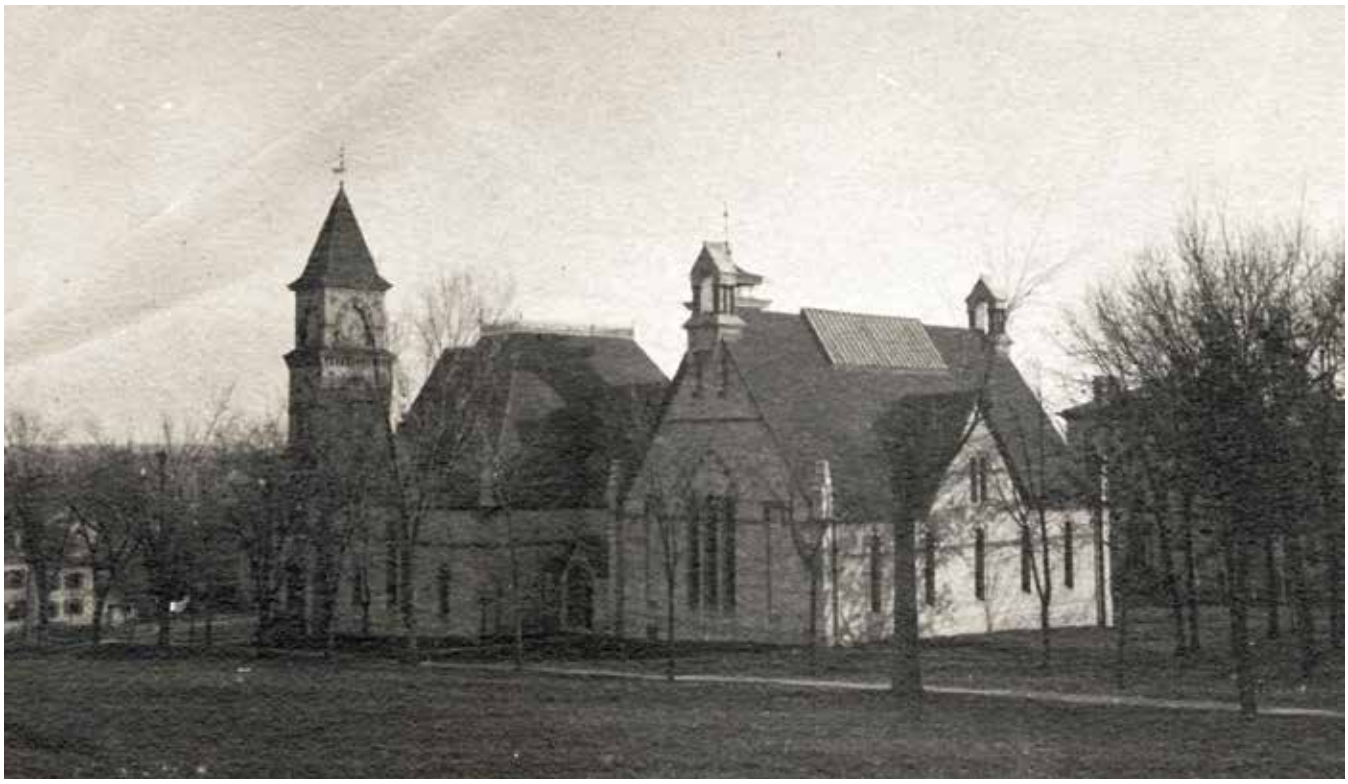
Researchers will study how aging broadly affects biochemical reactions that provide energy to cells, and how metabolic dysfunction contributes to conditions such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and neurodegenerative conditions like Parkinson's disease. Aging is a significant risk factor for all of these chronic ailments.

The National Institutes of Health and UW–Madison are investing $6.3 million in the center to foster cross-campus collaboration on the biology of aging. Wisconsin joins seven other Nathan Shock Centers.

Rozalyn Anderson, professor of medicine, will lead the center, with codirectors **John Denu '88,** professor of biomolecular chemistry, and **Dudley Lamming,** professor of medicine.

The center will bring together more than 40 researchers from across the UW–Madison campus. "It is a virtual center spread across the entire campus, a gathering of minds rather than a building of rooms," says Anderson. "We're looking forward to being the hub that attracts more people into aging research."

ANDREW HELLPAP



UW ARCHIVES

The Iconic Campus Clock

Since the 19th century, Music Hall's tower has kept the UW running on time.

It's hard to believe now, with smartphones in our pockets and smartwatches on our wrists, that UW students once relied on the Music Hall clock tower at the foot of Bascom Hill to make it to class on time.

In 1922, the *Daily Cardinal* offered this bit of service journalism: "It is poor policy ... for a student to set his watch by looking at the hands of the tower clock, for he is below, looking up, and the perspective is such that he cannot get the exact time."

Instead, UW students keyed their watch to the chimes of the clock tower's bell, which marked the top of an hour — "always within 20 seconds of being correct."

But even those students had the new luxury of wristwatches. When Music Hall was built in 1878, the 100-foot-high clock tower became one of the only places on campus to reference the official time. The clock featured four faces, with dials six feet in diameter and brass-studded Roman numerals.

To tell time, the clock tower looked to the sun and stars — or rather, to the Washburn Observatory. UW astronomers took celestial readings to calibrate the observatory's master timepieces. Then, according to the book *Chasing the Stars,* they used what was likely the city's first telephone line to listen in on the tower clock's rhythms and note corrections. Shortly after, the observatory installed an electrical system that delivered signals regulating the Music Hall clock.

Originally, the clock's mechanism used a 1,000-pound weight that would fall to the ground every eight days. At that point, a pair of herculean workers would spend an hour-plus cranking it up 50 feet to keep the clock ticking.

When this photo was taken around 1890, the clock's mechanism used a 1,000-pound weight that fell to the ground every eight days.

The clock was made automatic with electrical winding in 1933.

Music Hall was first called Assembly Hall and later Library Hall for its original functions — seating the whole student body in a large auditorium and housing the main book collection. It soon became home to the new School of Music and was officially renamed in 1910. Music Hall served as the school's headquarters until 1969, after which it was largely left to the University Opera and the urban planning department.

Earlier this year, the UW announced it would use a lead gift from Herb Kohl Philanthropies to renovate Music Hall into the future home of the La Follette School of Public Affairs and rename the building after the late senator (see page 19). The updates will modernize the interior while keeping the iconic exterior intact — including the clock tower. So, tomorrow's students will still have no excuses for being late to class.

PRESTON SCHMITT '14

COURTESY UW–MADISON (2)

La Follette's New Home

A $30 million gift from Herb Kohl Philanthropies will renovate Music Hall to house the La Follette School.

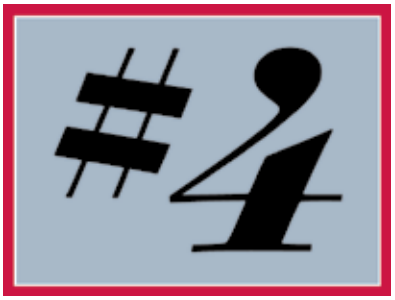
Herb Kohl Philanthropies announced a pledge to support the La Follette School of Public Affairs with a historic $30 million lead private gift. The gift will aid programming and renovations to UW–Madison's Music Hall, which will serve as La Follette's future home under the new name of Herb Kohl Hall.

The move comes as La Follette undergoes rapid expansion. In fall 2026, the school will introduce an undergraduate major that is expected to enroll as many as 400 students within five years. The late **Herb Kohl '56** was dedicated to his alma mater, supported education across the state, and spent decades advancing public policy. The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents approved the name change on February 6, 2026.

"We are so incredibly grateful to Herb Kohl Philanthropies for this historic gift," says **Susan Yackee,** the La Follette School's director. "I can't think of a better way to honor [Kohl] than by naming one of the most beautiful, historic, and recognizable buildings on campus after him."

The updates (above) will modernize the interior of the building while its 146-year-old exterior will remain intact. The changes will return the structure, originally called Assembly Hall, to its roots as UW–Madison's first campus building dedicated to large gatherings. Herb Kohl Hall is expected to open in 2029.

TOMMY JAIME



In *Time* magazine's ranking of the world's 500 most influential higher education institutions, UW–Madison placed an impressive 23rd overall and 10th among public universities. Among U.S. publics, the UW ranked fourth. "The ranking places emphasis on the extent to which students achieve extraordinary success," *Time* said.

"I believe that this university can rise to the challenges before it with strength and resilience, safeguarding its mission while staying open to growth and change."

—Former UW–Madison chancellor **Jennifer Mnookin,** who departed in May to lead Columbia University

GRADS MOVE ONWARD AND UPWARD

According to a UW survey, 90 percent of respondents who earned a bachelor's degree from UW–Madison in 2024–25 are now employed, engaged in entrepreneurship, serving in the military, contributing through volunteer organizations, or pursuing continuing education. And 91 percent of survey respondents said the university prepared them for that next step in their career path.

Katie Cervenka '25 is employed as a communications and development associate for Wisconsin's Driftless Area Land Conservancy and was quickly able to put her degree in life sciences communication and wildlife ecology to work.

"Beyond academics, a close-knit community and career development within my college helped me build confidence early in my career," Cervenka says. "Internships, networking opportunities, and leadership roles gave me the experience and mentorship to step into the professional world with purpose."

The survey, known as the First Destination Survey, found that recent graduates took jobs in 46 states as well as 36 countries outside the U.S., with a median full-time salary of $73,000.

More than a quarter of 2024–25 graduates who responded to the survey had plans to continue their education, with law, business, and computer sciences noted as the top three fields.

The graduates' success reflects both their hard work and the university's commitment to preparing students with the skills they need beyond their undergraduate education. Thanks to UW–Madison's many career service offices and close partnerships with industry, the university is nationally recognized for preparing students for their next chapter after graduation.

GAYLE WORLAND

RACHEL ROBEY

Bend-It-Like-Beckham Bots

Teaching robots to play soccer helps train them for useful jobs.

To **Josiah Hanna,** a researcher in robotics and artificial intelligence, the world is like soccer: it's dynamic, it's fast paced, and there's too much going on to process everything at once. That's what makes the popular game the ideal forum for training his intelligent robots of the future — droids capable of reasoning, decision-making, and bending it like Beckham.

In Hanna's lab, one of the more popular undergraduate research projects is participating in a team that competes annually at RoboCup, a robot soccer tournament that brings international researchers together to promote research. At its founding in 1997, RoboCup pledged a formidable goal: create soccer-playing robots capable of beating the World Cup champions by 2050. It's been an effective driver for public interest in robotics.

"Games are one of the first things humans learn to do. They're where we first develop skills that will serve us for the rest of our lives," says Hanna, an assistant professor of computer sciences in the university's forthcoming College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence, launching July 1. Plenty of intelligent animals learn through play, from human children to orca calves to fledgling crows. Hanna's lab borrows this approach for training intelligent *non*life, hypothesizing that teaching robots to play soccer is a gateway to teaching them other things. "As we push the boundaries of artificial intelligence, it makes sense to use games as a test bed."

Hanna says that robots have the potential to aid humanity by filling positions in industries where there aren't enough people to take on all the open jobs. Researchers refer to the "Three *D*'s of Robotics" to encompass the kinds of work that robots are best suited for: dull, dirty, and dangerous.

First the robots beat the World Cup champions, Hanna says, and then they revolutionize disaster response and rescue operations. Or fight wildfires. Or any number of scenarios in which the "robot is faced with uncertainty about the true state of the world and must make decisions quickly."

In the meantime, robot-soccer fantasy league, anyone?

RACHEL ROBEY

On the Putting Edge of Greatness

Golfer Izzi Stricker x'28 is determined to dominate on the green — it's in her blood.

For Badger golfer **Izzi Stricker x'28,** it's all about drive.

"I'm competitive, and winning is very rewarding when you put a lot of work into it," she says. "Golf is such a mental sport. You have to work on your mental game as well as your physical game."

Stricker comes from a family of Badger golfers. Her mother, **Nicki '91,** golfed for UW–Madison, as did her uncle **Mario Tiziani '92** and her sister **Bobbi '21,** who both golf professionally today. And she's cheered on by her father, elite pro golfer Steve Stricker.

"There's a lot of family history," Stricker says. "It's shaped who I am and how much I appreciate golf, and it's made me love it so much more."

But it's Stricker's grandfather, former Badger men's and women's golf head coach **Dennis Tiziani,** whom she looks up to the most.

"My grandpa played on tour way back when, and he brought golf into his career as a teacher," she says. "I think that's super cool. He made an impact on the game by coaching."

Now, Stricker is making a name for herself in the sport. She was named the 2025 Wisconsin State Golf Association Amateur Golfer of the Year. She also won the 2025 Wisconsin Women's Amateur Championship and the 2025 Wisconsin Women's Match Play Championship.

Stricker may be collecting individual honors, but when it comes to being a Badger golfer, she says her teammates have been an important part of her time at the UW.

"I love having a team and how we all come together," she says. "We're all trying to compete for the same thing, and we all are competitive. But we do a great job of putting that aside off the golf course."

For Stricker, improving every day and working hard is always top of mind. She's determined to win.

"I just want to become the best player I can be. I want to learn every day," she says. "Golf has taught me so much — to stick with it, to give yourself grace, to not let it define you."

BLAKE MCCOY MA'23

PHOTO BY TAYLOR WOLFRAM '24

For Stricker, golf is a mental sport. "I want to learn every day," she says.

Legal Representation with a Heart

Erin Barbato '02 provides crucial learning experiences at the UW's Immigrant Justice Center.

The Immigrant Justice Center at UW Law School offers free legal services for immigrants and abundant learning opportunities for students who dream of careers in immigration law. Founded in 2012, it's one of 15 clinics that give UW law students hands-on experience with real people, helping them understand the roles and responsibilities of a practicing attorney.

Director **Erin Barbato '02** currently has her hands full, given recent changes to immigration policy. As battles play out in Congress and the courts, the center is trying to provide trustworthy information and representation to people caught up in detention, deportation, and family separation.

Politics aside, Barbato and her students come to know their clients as human beings who deserve due process. She gets emotional when discussing their struggles, and she does her best to assure them that "they're not alone in this world."

What are some of the services you provide for the immigrant community?
Before the Immigrant Justice Center started, there were no nonprofits providing legal services to the immigrants held at Wisconsin's Dodge County Detention Center. We offer pro bono services for people in deportation or removal proceedings. Most of the cases we take are for people applying for asylum because they can't return to their home country for fear of persecution.

We also have programs for unaccompanied children and survivors of international human trafficking as well as broader audiences who want to understand the rights of immigrants and community members. The goal is to provide as much trusted legal information as possible and to provide representation when we have the capacity to do so.

What's unique about the Immigrant Justice Center?
We're the only immigration legal clinic in a state that's considered a legal desert for immigration attorneys and resources. So we provide critical opportunities for students to learn how to practice immigration law while also serving the community in Wisconsin. We offer information to people who otherwise would be all alone and face deportation without any legal representation. That makes a huge difference, because if someone who's detained is represented by an attorney, they're three times more likely to receive protection from deportation.

What kinds of law students are attracted to the Immigrant Justice Center?
Every year, we have more than a hundred students who apply for our 10 spots. So there's a huge desire to learn how to practice immigration law. Many want a career that has a direct impact on human lives. They're all highly intelligent, engaged, compassionate students, which is a dream come true for me. Every year, I see them making a true difference and learning about the power of their law degree. Graduates are extremely competitive in the field because of the level of experience they receive while they're in the clinic.

How have recent changes to immigration policy affected the center's work?
We're seeing changes on an almost daily basis, and we're constantly trying to figure out how new policies are affecting our representation. We've seen clients deported without due process. We have a few clients who received asylum from Afghanistan, and they should be eligible to apply for their green cards at this point. But they're in limbo.

How have the students responded?
It's been hard for students to see what our clients are facing. They're people we learn to care for. We know their stories, and to see them face even more struggles is really difficult. But the students are grateful for the opportunity to support the people we serve. All we can do is continue to provide ethical and caring representation. We find a lot of meaning in that.

What is a fair way to deport people when that's necessary?
We have ways to ensure due process in deportation proceedings, but right now, many people are being deported without the opportunity to present their case in front of an immigration judge and have a fair and full trial. I believe we need universal representation so everyone facing deportation would have an immigration law attorney

Barbato helps students make a true difference and learn about the power of their law degree.

with them. And this is especially true for children who are forced to represent themselves in front of an immigration judge while fighting a government-trained attorney.

In your view, what should U.S. immigration policy look like?

I don't have an answer to what it should look like, because these decisions need to be made by our country. Congress has to consider our priorities and make any changes to the laws. But I do think we should all work together to find a way to treat people with humanity and to recognize that we are stronger with humane processes and policies.

Interview by Dean Robbins
Photo by Althea Dotzour

THE TWO OWENS

The death of a six-year-old inspired a UW researcher to investigate a rare brain cancer. New government policies create confusion and uncertainty, which threaten that work.

BY JOHN ALLEN

PHOTOS BY JEFF MILLER

At age six, Owen Petrzelka (opposite) died of a brain cancer called DIPG. His mother, Amanda Shaker, had his signature tattooed on her right hand. On her left arm, she has a message he told her to give his oncologists: "Tell them I am happy."

Fair warning: this is not a happy story. If you keep reading, you'll learn about a young boy's death, a rare and incurable disease, tortuous bureaucracy, and political interference. This is a story about grief and frustration and anger.

But if this isn't a happy story, neither is it a hopeless story. The boy's mother is tenacious, her friends are resourceful, and at the UW, there are clever and determined scientists working to see that it all leads, eventually, to something meaningful.

This is a story about smart people and tragedy, about a cancer called diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, or DIPG, and how science slowly works to help us understand things that terrify us so that we can confront them. And it's about what America risks when its government impedes research.

This is the story of Owen Petrzelka and Owen Tamplin.

Doctors prescribed steroids for Petrzelka, which caused his weight to double. Shaker and her husband, Adam, did their best to make memories during Owen's final months.

The First Owen

In March 2020, Owen Petrzelka was doing what just about all five-year-olds did that month, when COVID-19 shut down schools and workplaces: he was driving his parents to distraction. Owen was jumping up and down on the furniture in his family's home in Oak Park, Illinois. He was obsessed with ninjas, and in Owen's understanding, ninjas never touch the floor. He was bouncing and yelling, and then there was a crash.

"He was jumping from couch to couch and then hit his head on a table," says Owen's mother, Amanda Shaker '04. Owen was dizzy, which was no surprise. Shaker's husband, Adam Petrzelka, took Owen to urgent care, where a doctor looked at the bump on his head and then sent him home, saying he'd be fine.

But over the following weeks, Owen wasn't fine. "He was acting a little bit weird," Shaker says. "He started crawling up the stairs, and we thought he was just being silly. But then he started running into walls."

Owen's parents set up a virtual checkup, and his doctor suggested an MRI — not an easy thing to get in spring 2020, with hospitals concerned about the spread of COVID. He'd have to wait until August.

On Easter Sunday, April 12, Owen got on his scooter and traveled two blocks from his parents' house to his grandparents'. The following Tuesday, he couldn't stand up. Shaker called Lurie Children's Hospital and got him in for an MRI right away. The pediatric neurologist suspected Owen had the aftereffects of a concussion or at worst, a blood clot from his fall.

The MRI revealed something much worse: Owen wasn't struggling because he'd fallen in March. He'd fallen in March because he had a brain tumor.

"The neurologist told me to call my husband and have him come, which was breaking the COVID rules," Shaker says. "And then he told me it was DIPG, which is just about the worst diagnosis you can get."

Every word abbreviated in DIPG is scary. *Glioma* means a cancer of the brain or central nervous system. *Pontine* means that the cancer is centered in the pons, the brainstem. *Intrinsic* indicates the cancer originated within the brainstem, where surgery would be extremely dangerous, and *diffuse* means that it doesn't have a well-defined tumor that could be removed even if you decided to risk surgery.

"DIPG is a very aggressive brain cancer," says Raheel Ahmed, a pediatric neurosurgeon at American Family Children's Hospital. "And unfortunately, it's uniformly fatal. The outcome for treatment is dismal."

Uniformly fatal: the only treatment for DIPG is radiation, and it merely delays the inevitable. Almost all DIPG patients are dead within nine to 15 months of diagnosis. Dismal: the median age of DIPG patients is between six and seven years old.

Owen's case was atypical in that his disease arrived earlier and proceeded more rapidly. Nothing seemed to help. He went through 30 rounds of radiation, and then doctors tried six rounds of chemo, but his symptoms persisted. "Every time he had an MRI," says Shaker, "we could see that his tumors

were shrinking. It was all medically working, but DIPG is diffuse, meaning it spreads throughout the brain, and it intermixes with healthy tissue. The cancer was still affecting him."

Doctors prescribed steroids, but Owen didn't improve. Still, the steroids had an effect — they made him so hungry that his weight doubled from 48 to 96 pounds.

"He was just ravenous," says Shaker. "He would wake up in the middle of the night screaming for food. It was really, really terrible."

Owen's doctors told Shaker that all she could do was to try to make memories. But COVID had shut everything down. "Museums are closed, parks are closed," says Shaker. "Where am I supposed to make memories?"

Owen's family rented beach houses in Michigan and in Wisconsin where he could look at the water. Friends and cousins came to visit and play Nintendo. And in October 2020, five and a half months after his diagnosis, Owen Petrzelka died.

But that was not the end of Owen's story. Shaker refused to let it end there. "Something meaningful has to come out of this," she says, "or else the universe is just too awful."

After Owen's death, Shaker began working to raise awareness of DIPG and support for research.

The Second Owen

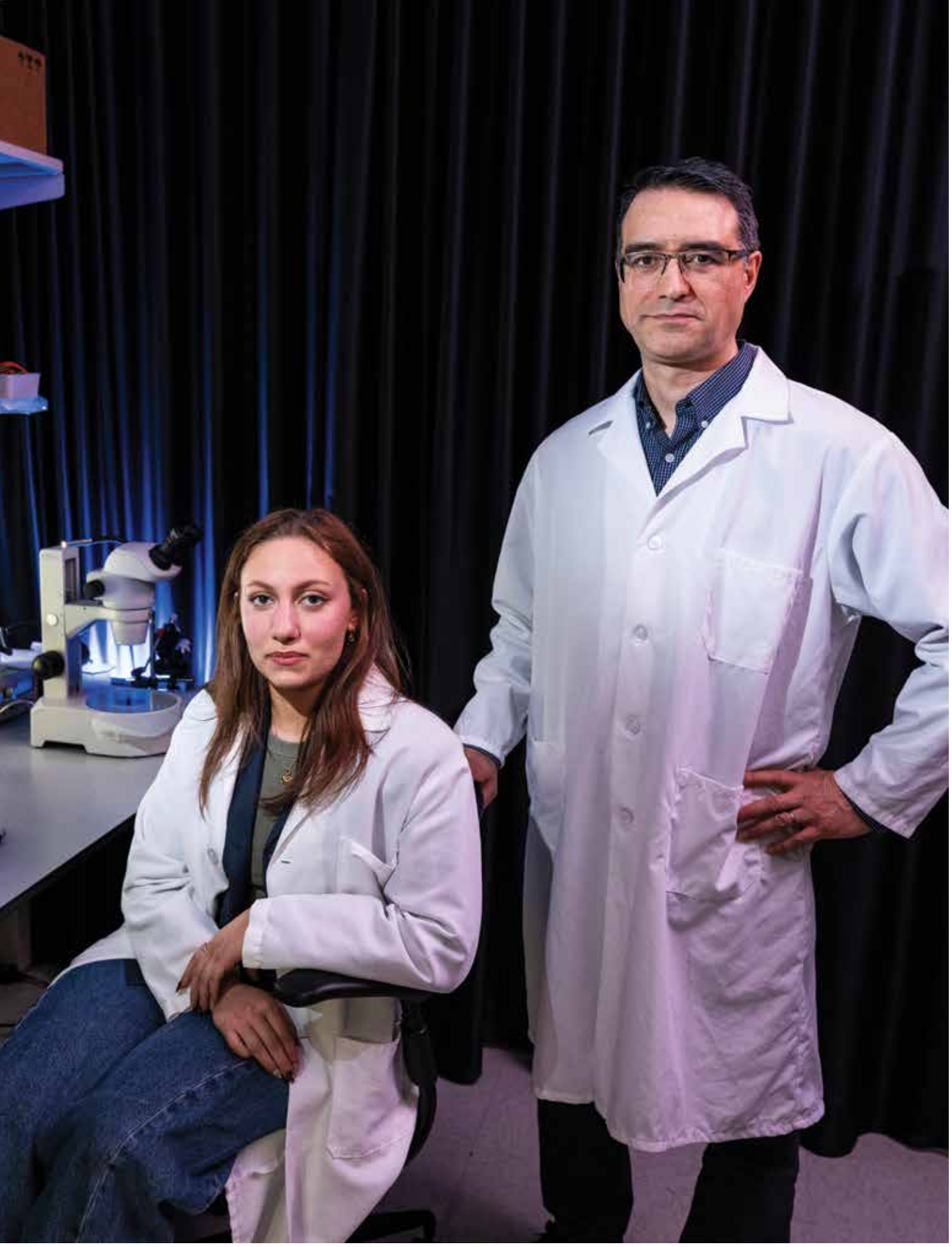
Shaker had studied journalism at UW–Madison, and she works in public relations. She knows how to get attention, how to network, and how to mobilize. So she went to work.

She connected with the ChadTough Defeat DIPG Foundation, a Michigan-based organization. She organized an annual five-kilometer race, the Run Tough for Team Owen, to raise money in her neighborhood. All this caught the attention of Owen Tamplin, a former Oak Park resident who had just moved to Madison to take a position on the UW faculty.

When Tamplin lived in Illinois, his daughter was a preschool classmate of Owen's. He knew Shaker a little, and he felt inspired by her determination. He believed he could make something meaningful come from Owen's death.

Tamplin has a research lab at UW–Madison, which means that he not only manages a lab, but he also manages grant applications, and he manages frustration.

Tamplin is not a physician — he studies cell and regenerative biology. Prior to March 2020, he'd been working at the University of Illinois–Chicago, but an opportunity to conduct research at one of the world's



leading stem-cell institutions drew him north.

"I hadn't worked in cancers before," Tamplin says. "I'm not a doctor. I'm not a neurobiologist. I'd never heard of DIPG before."

Tamplin's research to this point had studied blood stem cells using zebra fish as a model organism. But in former positions, he knew people who'd used zebra fish as a model organism to study melanoma, and he thought maybe he could do the same thing for DIPG. So when he began assembling a lab at UW–Madison, he did so with DIPG in mind.

"His lab is just amazing," says Shaker. "It's really incredible, the work his team is doing. It's very cool."

To be clear: the Tamplin lab is not curing DIPG, or even investigating a treatment. But its work could be instrumental to those who will eventually investigate treatments and cures.

Owen Petrzelka's death inspired Owen Tamplin to focus his lab's work on DIPG. Alice Alhaj Kadour is one of his students.

"The first thing that everyone talked about was, especially in the States, people have had grants frozen. It creates uncertainty."

DIPG is not only uniformly fatal, it's also rare. Between 150 and 300 cases are discovered in the United States in a year, according to the DIPG Resource Network, meaning that it occurs in less than one in a million people. Scientists who want to investigate DIPG have very few patients to look at. That most of those patients are young children, and most are dead in less than a year, only makes it harder for anyone to conduct studies.

Tamplin's cool idea is to use zebra fish as living models for DIPG researchers to work with. Using human oncogene DNA, he and his team induce brain tumors in embryonic zebra fish. They can then observe the development of tumors because a fertilized zebra fish egg is transparent, and the animal will remain transparent through its juvenile stage.

"In order to better understand DIPG," says Ahmed, "we need access to tissue. The genetic changes that [Tamplin] can produce in the zebra fish are similar to some of the genetic and molecular changes that we see in human patients who have DIPG."

A model like this might show how the cancer develops, opening the possibility of a test to discover it early. It might help researchers discover why DIPG develops in some people and not in others — do the disease's victims, for instance, have tumor-suppressing genes that fail to activate?

So Tamplin collected all the pieces he needed to study zebra fish as a DIPG model. He had a facility in the UW's Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research. He added Ahmed as a consultant to give expertise on neurosurgery and oncology, and he hired undergraduate and graduate assistants to help with the work. He connected with leading researchers at other universities to join forces as co-principal investigators, including Bruce Appel at Children's Hospital Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Carl Koschmann at University of Michigan Health, Claudia Kleinman at McGill University in Montreal, and Richard White at Britain's University of Oxford. He began seeking grants to fund the effort.

And, in 2025, his frustrations began to grow.

Grants

The new administration under President Donald Trump began to raise concerns about funding that U.S. researchers shared with foreign faculty. A policy announced on May 1, 2025, stated that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) "will not issue awards to domestic or foreign entities (new, renewal or non-competing continuation), that include a subaward to a foreign entity. Additionally, NIH will no longer accept prior approval requests to add a new foreign component or subaward to an ongoing project."

White at Oxford and Kleinman at McGill might be among the best researchers in the world, but from a federal grant standpoint, they were now problematic.

"The program officer from NIH contacted us and said, no more," says Tamplin. "The NIH is not going to give any more foreign subawards. No more NIH money will leave the U.S. If you don't remove the foreign subawards, the group in Canada, they're going to pull the whole thing."

The NIH policy was modified in July and again in September, keeping Tamplin in a state of confusion about how or whether his research would be funded. His experience is hardly unusual. Last year, he went to a meeting of the American Society of Hematology in Orlando, Florida — a gathering of 30,000 researchers, clinicians, and pharmaceutical companies — and the chief topic of conversation was the set of new barriers that the NIH had created for grant applications.

"The first thing that everyone talked about was, especially in the States, people have had grants frozen. It creates uncertainty, and that's one of the biggest challenges we face. It makes it very difficult to plan, to recruit people. When we start an animal study, we have to think about being able to maintain the animals for years."

Maintain: there are about a dozen researchers on campus who work with zebra fish, and the university has nearly 10,000 adult fish. To supply specimens to those several labs, the UW has to make sure that its more than 500 fish tanks are cleaned, its fish fed, the dead animals removed.

Tamplin's team is chiefly interested in spawning zebra fish embryos in which to inject human oncogenes. The work requires speed: within 45 minutes of fertilization, those egg cells will begin to divide, and because Tamplin's team is doing genetic work, they need to intercept the eggs before division.

Tamplin's lab is working to make zebra fish a model for DIPG studies. Alhaj Kadour sits at the microscope station, where members of the lab examine fish embryos.

Within 10 minutes of fertilization, they begin injecting each egg with bits of human DNA that will, they believe, create the sort of glial cells that develop DIPG.

Zebra fish are not only transparent in their early stages; they also develop rapidly for vertebrate animals. What would take a few days in mice, or a few weeks in a human embryo, happens in hours for zebra fish. Tamplin's lab might inject 500 eggs in a morning, and by the next day, those fish have developed into a juvenile stage, "with a little head and spinal cord and a nervous system that's already patterned," according to Tamplin.

In addition to paying for its share of the UW's fish-breeding tanks, Tamplin's lab requires a considerable amount of equipment: computers, refrigerators, microscopes, petri dishes, needles, cleaning equipment, and more. All of this is expensive, and to ensure that his lab can pay its way, Tamplin has sought not just federal grants but also private dollars. A foundation called Alex's Lemonade Stand, which supports childhood cancer research, has helped with funding.

But no private organization can match the amount of money that the federal government has provided, nor do private entities give the sort of nonfinancial support that NIH traditionally has offered. Because NIH employs thousands of top scientists, its staff can help researchers understand what kind of work is being done in their field of study. They can help researchers refine their goals so that they'll have a better chance of earning a grant and a better chance of conducting valuable research.

"What we're told to do is, if you see an announcement for a grant or funding opportunity, contact the program officer," says Tamplin. "Contact the person who works in the NIH who administers those grants and get them on the phone, talk to them, email them, try to understand if your grant application fits into their priority. You want to make sure you have a high chance of being funded. Being new to the field, I reached out to this program officer, and she was fantastic. I sent her some preliminary documents, and she was very enthusiastic. Sent me tons of feedback. She was excellent."

But changes in the last year have not only reduced the amount of money federal science agencies have. They have also eroded expertise. Prior to 2025, the NIH grant system was hardly simple, but it was relatively clear. Decisions about funding were made by panels of scientists, both bench and clinical. But a presidential order announced in August 2025 expanded the NIH's grant panels to include a senior political appointee. The appointee's decision can override the scientists "to ensure [the grants] are consistent with agency priorities and the national interest."

Political interference, as well as conflict between the Trump administration and the NIH, has led many NIH staffers to leave. In 2025, the heads of 13 of NIH's 27 centers and institutes left, resulting in a loss of almost half its senior leadership. More than 1,100 other employees have left or been laid off, about triple the number from the previous year. In March 2025, Tamplin's program officer announced she was retiring early, citing challenges with the Trump administration's directives.

Still, Tamplin persists in his efforts. He's adjusted his applications to keep most of his grants alive. And he's been willing to talk about the obstacles he's faced and their effects on his research, believing that people will see its importance.

"I'm a biologist and not a clinician," he says, "but basic biology and clinical, translational research can converge. And most people can probably get behind pediatric cancer research."

Alice

While Tamplin scrambles to maintain funding for his lab so that he can add a little more to our understanding of DIPG, the cancer continues killing several hundred children in America every year, as well as hundreds more around the globe. That would be frustrating enough. But the current federal funding restrictions go beyond a single lab and a single line of research. They have an effect, for example, on people like Alice Alhaj Kadour '23, PhDx'27.

Alhaj Kadour is one of four graduate students

who work in Tamplin's lab, along with five undergraduates and a research intern. On mornings when she's at the lab, Alhaj Kadour can be found crouched over a bench, eyes on a microscope, glass capillary needle in hand, lining up hundreds of fish embryos, injecting them with fatal illness. It is not, she admits, the most exciting task, but she loves it.

Injecting may be tedious, but being part of Tamplin's studies could be a boost to Alhaj Kadour's career. She has already presented at conferences, including an International Zebrafish Society gathering that took place on campus. At the UW's Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine Center conference, she took third place for best poster. She's also presented in Boston, and her name will show up on the papers that the lab submits for publication.

"The U.S. can be a very charged environment. Even though there's a lot of money for research here, a lot of times your personal life gets affected and you're put under a lot of stress, and I've seen what stress can do to people. I just don't want that for my life."

For someone at the outset of an academic career, Alhaj Kadour is building a good résumé. But her work's purpose is also important to her. She came to the UW to study medicine so that she could treat cancer patients — her grandfather died of cancer. She left medicine for the lab because the more she studied, the more she felt she could have a bigger impact if she focused on research instead of clinical care.

"I was working as a [certified nursing assistant] from high school to try and get some experience in the medical field," she says. "I really liked being there and taking care of people, but I wanted to do more. There were so many times when all we could do was just make people comfortable, and I wanted to be behind the scenes trying to find ways to help these people, even if it's a few generations later."

To support medical research at UW–Madison, see wiscmedicine.org.

Alhaj Kadour is like many of the bright minds that the UW tries to attract. She grew up in Wisconsin and initially wanted to study close to home, at UW–Oshkosh, but moved to Madison because it offered greater academic opportunity and challenge. UW–Madison gave her research opportunities when she was an undergrad, and now she's part of an international network of scientists trying to explore previously unimagined ideas to address a previously unsolvable problem.

So far, she hasn't been much involved in Tamplin's back-and-forth with the NIH. "I hear about it, and the research can get affected by it, but mostly that's just Owen's thing," she says. "We've been very lucky so far. Owen's good at getting funding in these difficult times. He says, 'You guys don't need to worry about this. I'll worry about this.' But it's been affecting him a lot."

Although Alhaj Kadour hasn't yet had to deal directly with the NIH's new funding challenges, she will eventually, as she advances toward her PhD. And even now they're affecting her. She may be several years away from completing her degree, but she's already thinking about where her career will take her. And her initial hope is that it will take her out of the United States.

"I would like to do a postdoc in Canada or Europe," she says. "As we've seen recently, the U.S. can be a very charged environment. Even though there's a lot of money for research here, a lot of times your personal life gets affected and you're put under a lot of stress, and I've seen what stress can do to people. I just don't want that for my life."

Stress: the funding issues Tamplin faces reflect an American political environment that is increasingly isolationist. Alhaj Kadour was born in Syria. Tamplin was born in Canada. Ahmed came to the UW from Pakistan. Like many universities, UW–Madison takes pride in its ability to attract the world's best brains and get them to work together. The American research enterprise leads the world not only due to its superior funding but also because so many top scientists come here.

"NIH is the biggest cancer-funding body in the world," says Tamplin. "Or it was. And I come from Canada, and there's great research in Canada, but everyone comes to the States because of this critical mass [of science talent]."

People like Alhaj Kadour are the future of that enterprise. Now she's thinking of leaving for better conditions elsewhere. If enough young scientists like her decide that America isn't a welcoming place, it would erode the U.S. dominance in science, and it would diminish America's ability to solve problems like DIPG.

"The salaries are usually better in the U.S. overall than in Europe and Canada," says Tamplin, "[but] I think people look at the States and wonder if the great opportunities here will continue. Researchers from other countries still talk about how opportunities in their home countries are limited. That said, I think we are going to lose talent from the U.S. because of the political environment."

The story of the two Owens isn't a happy one, but it needn't be a hopeless one. Hope is a choice — the one Tamplin, Alhaj Kadour, Ahmed, and their colleagues make as they try to bring something meaningful from Owen Petrzelka's death. Because turning away from that work means accepting that the universe is just too awful. ●

John Allen is associate publisher of On Wisconsin.

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Revisit some of the most memorable national title runs in Badger sports history.

BY PRESTON SCHMITT '14

TOM LYNN/UW ATHLETICS

A peak moment: volleyball's Anna Smrek (left) and Grace Loberg.

What does it feel like to win a national championship?

Just ask a Badger.

"It's a peak moment, one of the best of my life," says Sydney Hilley '20, MS'22, who helped lead UW–Madison to its first volleyball title in 2021. "It was so rewarding to see how happy everyone was, looking at the faces of my teammates crying, knowing how many years of work — our whole lives — led up to that."

When the women's hockey team won its record ninth national championship in March, it became the 35th UW team to culminate their season with an NCAA title. These championship teams span nine varsity sports and range from underdogs to dynasties. Each is immortalized in Badger sports lore.

So let's relive some of the exceptionally dramatic championship runs — and feel what it's like when the buzzer hits zero.

THE STORYBOOK ENDING

Volleyball — December 18, 2021

UW volleyball had long been knocking on the door of a national championship. The Badgers reached the regional finals of the NCAA tournament 11 times between 1997 and 2020. Four of those times they advanced to the national semifinal and thrice to the title match. But on each run, they fell agonizingly short of the ultimate prize.

By 2021, the UW program coached by Kelly Sheffield had already secured a place among the elite of college volleyball for its consistent success in a stacked Big Ten conference. But the pressure to deliver on the program's championship promise had reached an all-time high. With every passing point in every passing tournament — including near-title runs in 2019 and 2020 — you could practically feel an entire fan base holding its collective breath.

And then, a special group of super seniors finally blew the championship door down.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic shortened the 2020 season, the NCAA granted an extra year of playing eligibility. For the 2021 Badgers, that meant the unlikely return of the most dynamic duo in college volleyball: Dana Rettke '21, the towering 6′8″ middle blocker and former Big Ten Athlete of the Year (and, spoiler alert: eventual National Player of the Year), and Sydney Hilley, the ever-steady and reigning Big Ten Setter of the Year. Hilley and Rettke weren't just inseparable on the court. They also lived together during all five years of college.

"She was my best friend — still is my best friend," Hilley says.

Rounding out the super seniors were outside hitter Grace Loberg '21 and defensive specialists Giorgia Civita MS'22 and Lauren Barnes '21, MS'22.

None of them had to return to Madison for a fifth college season. There were pro offers. But they had a job to finish.

"This was our last chance to finally go and do it," Hilley says of winning the championship, "and we knew what it was going to take because we had been close before. We had played together for so long. We loved each other so much. We had the ultimate trust and confidence in each other."

The fourth-ranked Badgers entered the NCAA tournament on a high after winning the Big Ten championship for a third consecutive year. They swept through the first four rounds of the tournament, with heavy-hitting help from young stars Anna Smrek '24, Jade Demps x'24, Devyn Robinson '24, MS'25, and Julia Orzol '24. At the semifinal in Columbus, Ohio, they outlasted top-ranked and previously undefeated Louisville in a five-set thriller.

Next up: Nebraska — and what would become the longest championship match in college volleyball history.

At first, it felt like déjà vu. The UW dropped the first set 22–25. Then Nebraska raced to a 13–7 lead in the second. Lesser teams might have crumbled, but the Badgers got back into the set with a 4–0 run. From there, it was a prolonged back-and-forth fight, with the UW fending off four set points — including at 28–29. That's when Rettke took matters into her own hands, finishing off the set with a kill and back-to-back solo blocks against all-American Lauren Stivrins.

"Even if the other team knew that's where the ball was going, it didn't matter — she was that good," Hilley says. "It gave me a lot of confidence to set the ball from anywhere and find her."

The grueling match continued, featuring two of the best defenses in the nation. The Badgers controlled the net and set a championship record with 24 blocks, including 13 from Rettke. Barnes blanketed the back row with a match-high 31 digs.

The UW squeaked out the third set 25–23; Nebraska the fourth by the same score. And then the Badgers stormed out to a 7–0 lead in the decisive fifth set. At match point, with the UW leading 14–11, a Nebraska hitter smashed the ball out of bounds. The Badgers began to celebrate their big moment at midcourt. But

ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Thirty-five UW–Madison teams have won NCAA titles.

Nebraska challenged the play. After a long review, the refs ruled that the ball had brushed the tip of a Badger finger on the block attempt.

The UW players couldn't believe the call (and still don't, Hilley confirms), but the veteran squad quickly regained its composure.

And then, because it had to be, it was Hilley to Rettke — a back set into a violent spike down the line — for the championship point. The team, including Coach Sheffield, broke into tears of relief and joy. The super seniors had finally brought the elusive title home.

"It was the perfect storybook ending," Hilley says.

THE PERFECT DEFENSE

Men's soccer — December 10, 1995

The story of the 1995 UW men's soccer championship starts with a budget crisis and ends with the most dominant defensive display in NCAA tournament history — five straight shutouts, even after an injury forced a backup goalie into his first real college action.

But if you think this is an underdog story, don't tell it to the 1995 team.

"We came into the year, legitimately, with the goal of reaching the College Cup," says Scott Lamphear '96, the Badgers' all-American defender and team MVP. "It almost looked like we hated each other, we were so intense in training."

In 1991, facing a $2 million budget deficit, the UW athletics department made the difficult decision to cut five sports. One of the few beneficiaries was the men's soccer program, which had previously been allotted two scholarships. Now it could offer the maximum of 10.

Coach Jim Launder made the most of that good fortune, recruiting Lamphear, midfielder Mike Gentile '97, and forward Travis Roy '97 — a touted trio from Michigan (the former two being high school teammates). This class would eventually lead the Badgers to glory as seniors.

UW soccer was building on a solid foundation. It had won the regular season conference title in 1991 to qualify for its first NCAA tournament in a decade. Then the scholarship-infused program advanced to the Sweet 16 in 1993, with a memorable win over top-seeded Indiana. The next year, the Badgers qualified for the tournament again but fell short to Southern Methodist University (SMU) in the first round.

With eight returning seniors and some postseason experience, the 1995 squad was as confident as it was determined. The UW's defense gave up just 11 goals in 25 games, including 17 shutouts. Most of those performances were with goalkeeper Todd Wilson '98 in net. But after the Badgers blanked Bowling Green to start the NCAA tournament, Wilson dislocated his elbow against William & Mary in the second round. They only had one other goalie on the roster: Jon Belskis '96.

The walk-on redshirt junior was a massive obstacle: 6′4″, 215 pounds. Yet in his four years at the UW, he had only seen the field twice and never even had to make a save. In fact, he had considered quitting the sport altogether.

But Belskis was brilliant when thrust into action. Leveraging his long limbs to snatch up balls, he didn't allow a goal in the overtime win against William & Mary — or for the rest of the tournament. It helped that he played behind a nearly impenetrable defense featuring both size and speed.

"When we got the ball, we kept it, and when we didn't, we were organized," says Lamphear. "We had amazing athletes who understood the game and worked as a unit. If you got by one of us, there would always be another one there waiting."

The Badgers got some revenge against SMU, smothering the Mustangs 2–0 to advance to the semifinals. To say they were the afterthought among the four teams heading to Richmond would be an understatement. There was local favorite Virginia, riding a 33-game winning streak and vying for its fifth consecutive title. There was Duke, featuring star freshman strikers who would soon stun Virginia. And there was Portland, with a coach who made history by leading both its men's and women's teams to the College Cup.

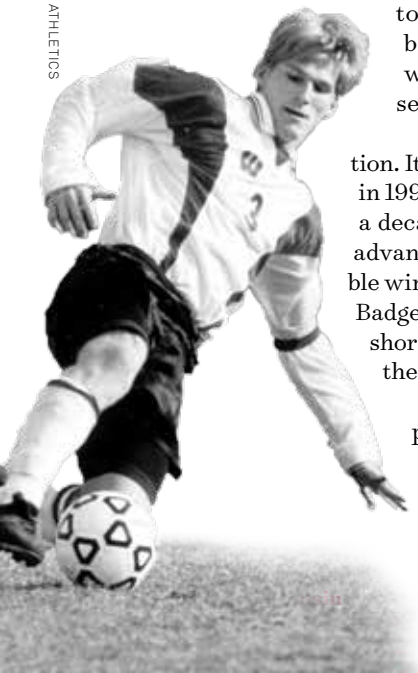
The Badgers came in with the reputation of a team that didn't give up many goals — but also didn't score many. Observing warm-ups for the semifinal against Portland, *Soccer America* magazine wrote: "One saw a clue to the Badgers' low output ... shots were flying everywhere but in the goal. One knocked down a walkway barrier and stunned an elderly usher."

Still, these Badgers were no timid offense. They aggressively controlled the ball against both Portland in the semifinal and Duke in the championship, combining to outshoot them 31–9.

Against Portland, the Badgers finally converted in the 64th minute when Lars Hansen '95 took a sliding goal-line pass from Gentile and tapped it into the net for the only goal of the game.

In the championship match, Hansen again tipped in an easy shot that had bounced off a Duke defender at the eight-minute mark. (Not a bad showing for the Norwegian forward who, according to Launder, literally walked on to the team after passing by a practice and asking if he could join.)

Matching Duke's breakneck pace, the Badgers broke through again in the 63rd minute. Junior defender Chad Cole x'97 kicked in a rebound for his first goal of the season.



Lamphear: "When we got the ball, we kept it."

UW ATHLETICS

"There was no chance we were losing the game after that shot. I said right after, we were no longer going for the win. We were going for the shutout," Lamphear says.

And that's what they did. The UW's feat of five consecutive shutouts in the NCAA tournament had never been done before and has never been repeated.

As Gentile told media after the game: "Don't call us a fluke. Don't call us a Cinderella team. This is a great team."

THE MIRACLE IN BOSTON

Men's hockey — March 17, 1973

In 1973, the UW needed a winner. The football program was mired in 10 straight losing seasons, while men's basketball was stuck in a long stretch of mediocrity. The Badgers' last national title dated to 1956 — and to a sport, college boxing, that no longer existed.

It was in this landscape that UW men's hockey emerged to make believers out of everyone at the Boston Garden in one wild weekend in March.

Hockey was still in its early adolescence on campus, restarting intercollegiate competition in 1963 after decades of dormancy. "Badger Bob" Johnson took over as coach in 1966. He turned the program into an immediate winner with his trademark positivity, eye for recruiting, and eagerness to innovate on the ice. By 1969, the Badgers had earned entry into the big leagues, the Western Collegiate Hockey Association. They officially arrived on the scene by reaching the national semifinals in 1970 and 1972.

The 1972–73 Badgers featured the return of tourney-tested vets — captain Tim Dool '73, Norm Cherrey '73, Max Bentley '75, and Jim Johnston '73 — plus an infusion of freshman talent. With hard-nosed senior leadership and a well-rounded scoring attack, the team powered through the regular season with a 24–9–1 record and squeaked by Minnesota and Notre Dame in the conference tournament to qualify for the four-team NCAA postseason.

But if the team had a weakness, it was the young and inexperienced defense. For much of the Badgers' national semifinal bout against Cornell in March 1973, it looked to be their doom. The higher-seeded Cornell scored within 40 seconds and then scored and scored and scored again, taking a commanding 4–0 lead early in the second period.

But the Badgers, channeling their coach's buoyant spirit, never gave up. Later in the second period, Cherrey capitalized on a power play, and freshman Dennis Olmstead x'76 flipped in a backhander to halve the score, 4–2.

Cornell's fifth goal seconds into the final period should have been the dagger. But the Badgers feverishly pressured the puck and answered with scores by Gary Winchester '77, MBA'84 and Johnston, closing the gap to 5–4 with three minutes to go. With under a minute remaining, Johnson pulled goalie Dick Perkins '79 in desperation. The extra attacker paid off in the form of the "Mad Stork," Dean Talafous x'75. With five seconds left, following a scramble by the net and Cornell's failed effort to clear the puck, Talafous gathered it on a short pass by Olmstead and flicked it toward the net. Goal!

Miraculously, this game was going to overtime. And there, after Cornell somehow failed to score on a two-man breakaway, Talafous tapped in a rebound to secure the unlikely 6–5 win.

"We just kept coming," says Steve Alley '77, MBA'82, a freshman forward whose final shot ricocheted to Talafous for the win. "[The Garden] didn't clean the ice before overtime, so we were playing on rough ice, and it was a perfect rebound."

UW ARCHIVES

The soccer team's feat of five consecutive shutouts in the NCAA tournament has never been repeated.

"I've seen comebacks," Coach Johnson said after the game, "but try and match that. What a combination of guts and drive."

The *Boston Globe* praised the scrappy upstart Badgers as "a squad named desire," and they showed it again in the title game against five-time champs Denver. (One sign in the crowd, riffing on a Boston sports joke: "Jesus saves, but Talafous scores on the rebound.")

The championship game couldn't quite match the theatrics of the previous night. But the Badgers carried over the momentum into a convincing all-around performance, downing top-ranked Denver 4–2. UW goalie Jim Makey '78 blocked 32 shots, while Talafous delivered the go-ahead goal again with a backhander by the net.

"He was in the right spot at the right time, twice," says Alley, who would go on to lead the UW's 1977 team, arguably the greatest in college hockey history, to a second NCAA title with a dramatic game-winner of his own.

Long-suffering Badger fans — who traveled by the thousands and never quieted, even with their team down 4–0 — celebrated long into the night in the streets of Boston.

It was, in Badger Bob's famous phrase, a great day for hockey.

The men's hockey team was dubbed "a squad named desire."

THE UNQUESTIONED DYNASTY

Women's hockey — March 23, 2025

"Who wants it?"

It's a phrase that will go down in Badger sports history.

In 2025, the Badger women's hockey team had found itself in a familiar place, the NCAA championship game, against a familiar foe, the Ohio State Buckeyes. Trailing nearly the entire contest, the UW was just awarded an improbable opportunity to tie the score with 18.9 seconds left. The Badgers had seemingly failed to capitalize on a desperate flurry of power-play shots, but Coach Mark Johnson '94 called for a challenge. The review exposed an Ohio State infraction for covering the puck. The Badgers were getting a penalty shot — a clean, one-on-one attempt at the goal.

And then Johnson asked the question, captured on national TV: "Who wants it?"

For a championship-defining decision, this was a remarkable show of faith and act of delegation. But who could argue with the tactics of the winningest coach in NCAA women's hockey history?

Johnson could have easily picked from his three Patty Kazmaier Award finalists for the penalty

UW ARCHIVES

Women's hockey teammates watch Simms take her dramatic penalty shot.

shot. And, yes, the best players in the country that season were all Badgers. Casey O'Brien '24, MS'25, who claimed the award in the end, led the country in points and assists while breaking school records. Laila Edwards '26 led the NCAA in goals and had just scored a hat trick against Minnesota in the semifinal. Caroline Harvey '26 posted the most points of any defender in the nation and in school history.

But the players unanimously selected junior forward Kirsten Simms x'27 for the equalizer attempt. She had earned her teammates' trust as a shootout savant in practice and a clutch scorer in games, having tallied 17 game-winning goals to that point in her college career — including the clincher in the 2023 championship.

"Everybody on the bench was like, 'Simms, you're taking it!' " she said after the game. "And I was like, 'Fine, I'll do it.' But I was so nervous. I couldn't think while I was going, just had to try to be confident with it."

So Simms took to the ice, all eyes fixed on her. She dribbled the puck down the length of the rink and then deked the Ohio State goalie nearly out of her skates, flicking the puck into the net and tying the game 3–3.

Three minutes into overtime, Simms played the hero again. She contorted her body and stick to catch the puck on a ricochet and slap it into the net. Goal!

The Badgers had won their eighth national championship, the most of any program in the country (followed by their ninth this year). Even sweeter that it happened at Ridder Arena in Minnesota, home of the archrival Gophers.

Harvey, who scored in the second period to close the deficit to 3–2, confidently predicted the unlikely turn of events in a sideline interview before the final period.

"We're definitely a third-period team," she said. "We have the comeback in us."

And so they did. The championship marked the 38th win of the season, making this special squad — with just one loss and two ties on the season — the winningest in school history. And it solidified the UW's claim as the most dominant dynasty in women's college hockey. No questions asked. ●

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

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP U

The UW has won 35 NCAA team championships. It's no surprise that women's hockey leads the way with nine titles — a feat all the more impressive when you consider it wasn't a sanctioned NCAA sport until 2000.

Perhaps more surprising is that boxing has contributed almost as many titles to the total. The UW was once a boxing powerhouse, regularly selling out the Field House for big bouts and earning eight national titles from 1939 to 1956. It was the tragic death of UW boxer Charlie Mohr x'60 that led the NCAA to decommission the sport in 1960.

The men's and women's cross country teams have also consistently kept pace with the competition, combining for eight national championships since the '80s.

The following list includes only national championships sponsored by the NCAA. The UW's rowing programs have combined for an additional 18 national titles.

Still not impressed by all these achievements? Then turn your attention to solo competition. The UW boasts 229 individual NCAA titles, which include record-setting performances in swimming, indoor and outdoor track, cross country, rowing, and wrestling. Badger excellence, it seems, has no athletic bounds.

- Women's Hockey (9): 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2019, 2021, 2023, 2025, 2026
- Boxing (8): 1939, 1942, 1943, 1947, 1948, 1952, 1954, 1956
- Men's Cross Country (6): 1982, 1983, 1985, 1988, 2005, 2011
- Men's Hockey (6): 1973, 1977, 1981, 1983, 1990, 2006
- Women's Cross Country (2): 1984, 1985
- Women's Volleyball (1): 2021
- Men's Indoor Track (1): 2007
- Men's Soccer (1): 1995
- Men's Basketball (1): 1941

— *P. S.*

ALTHEA DOTZOUR

This is one of the only public policy classes in the country to directly address the political divide.

"JUST TALK TO EACH OTHER"

At a time of intense polarization, a unique public policy course at UW–Madison encourages conversation and compromise.

BY ELISE MAHON
PHOTO BY JEFF MILLER

It's immediately clear that this is an important day for the 30 students in public affairs professor Amber Wichowsky MA'06, PhD'10's class. Most students sit in a ring of desks with a small group of their peers seated in the middle, ready to face off. To a newcomer, the students at the center of this makeshift arena look like they're primed for a heated argument, with laptops open and notes at the ready.

But then, Wichowsky's voice cuts through the tension. "Remember," she says, "this is not a debate."

Addressing polarization and the breakdown of civil discourse in America has been a focus for the UW's La Follette School of Public Affairs. Advancing Public Policy in a Divided America is one of the only public policy classes in the country to directly address the political divide and is a foundational course for the school's new undergraduate major. It's also a key example of the work the university seeks to expand as part of the Wisconsin Exchange, an initiative to advance pluralism on campus.

"We have to understand where people are coming from," Wichowsky says. "We're not going to know that if we don't try to get to know one another."

That's a big reason the course was designed around discussion rather than lectures. It's also why students' seats change every class, so they are regularly talking to different classmates and hearing different opinions.

"Students really embrace having good discussion in the classroom," Wichowsky says. "It's practicing the civic skills that we know our students will take throughout their time here at UW–Madison and then into their careers."

"Facts from Both Sides"

Back in the classroom, the students aren't preparing to prove their points or outwit their classmates. Instead, they launch into a respectful, structured conversation from different sides of a hot-button issue: the effect of artificial intelligence on the job market. After each side presents, the listeners reiterate what they heard from their peers.

"Okay, now that you've heard facts from both sides, you can drop your assigned point of view," Wichowsky instructs the class. "Just talk to each other. What do you really think should be done?"

The exercise compels students to think through who and what is left out when a solution only considers one perspective. It's a good way to start answering the question: How can America advance public policy when the country is so polarized?

As the semester begins, Wichowsky sets the scene of how polarization became so pervasive in American politics and society. Students then learn about the science and psychology of how we form opinions. Wichowsky explains that understanding how personal experiences inform opinions opens the door to understanding how those opinions may be able to change.

This idea prompted Bella Sciara '26, a biochemistry major, to incorporate new skills into her own advocacy work beyond the classroom. As a childhood cancer survivor, Sciara has a personal interest in advocating for legislators to continue investing in cancer research. Rather than focusing on her own points in conversations, she hopes to invite others to reflect on their experiences, creating common ground they can build from together.

"It's interesting to see how different people's backgrounds and what they've experienced have influenced how they see the world," Sciara says.

Students then learn to do nonpartisan research that acknowledges biases, makes evidence-supported arguments, engages counterarguments, and starts to acknowledge tradeoffs. That's where the structured discussions come in.

"There are conservatives in class, liberals, centrists, and because it's so discussion based, everyone's bringing up their own point," says Drew Stacey x'28, who's majoring in history and educational policy. "You might propose an idea, and a classmate says, 'That sounds great, but what about this?' It might seem like gridlock, but I think that's one of the great parts of democracy. We're in a room talking to figure it out, and we have to compromise."

"No One's Judging Anyone"

Ishaan Srivastava x'28, a political science major, is used to having political conversations about controversial topics. In his home state of Illinois, Srivastava hosts a political news show where he interviews candidates from up and down the ballot in the hopes of spurring younger Americans to engage more with politics.

Still, walking into a room full of 29 strangers to discuss controversial topics was nerve-racking at first.

"From day one, Professor Wichowsky made sure that it's a very safe, open environment," Srivastava says. "We have lively discussions, but no one's judging anyone for the opinions they have. Everyone is there to listen to each other and have those discussions and grow."

Wichowsky has been pleasantly surprised by how eager students are to learn from one another.

"We are all coming from our individual perspectives and experiences," she says. "But if we can share a little bit about that with one another, you find areas of common ground. We humanize each other." ●

Elise Mahon is a communicator in UW–Madison's Department of Biology.

What It Feels Like To ...

Step into the shoes of UW alumni who've had extraordinary experiences.

BY JESSICA STEINHOFF '01

Here at *On Wisconsin*, we often highlight experiences that many UW alums have in common, from dancing to "Jump Around" at Camp Randall Stadium to devouring Babcock Dairy ice cream on the Memorial Union Terrace. But what about experiences just a few of us have been lucky enough to have, the kind that change lives, test limits, attract a national spotlight, and shape history? We asked a handful of Badgers to take us inside these moments so we can all understand what it feels like to ...

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP

Launch an ice cream company with Snoop Dogg

***Sam Rockwell** '10, **Justin Samuels** '10, **Jeremy Reich** '10, and **Maya Warren** PhD'15*

Snoop Dogg first found fame as a rapper but has since branched out. In 2023, he teamed up with several Badgers to launch an ice cream brand, Dr. Bombay.

Dr. Bombay is part of Happi Co., a multimillion-dollar company that uses partnerships with celebrities to bring new frozen-food brands to supermarkets. It's helmed by Chief Executive Officer Sam Rockwell, Chief Operating Officer Justin Samuels, and Chief Strategy Officer Jeremy Reich, who became friends as UW freshmen and then became business partners after graduating.

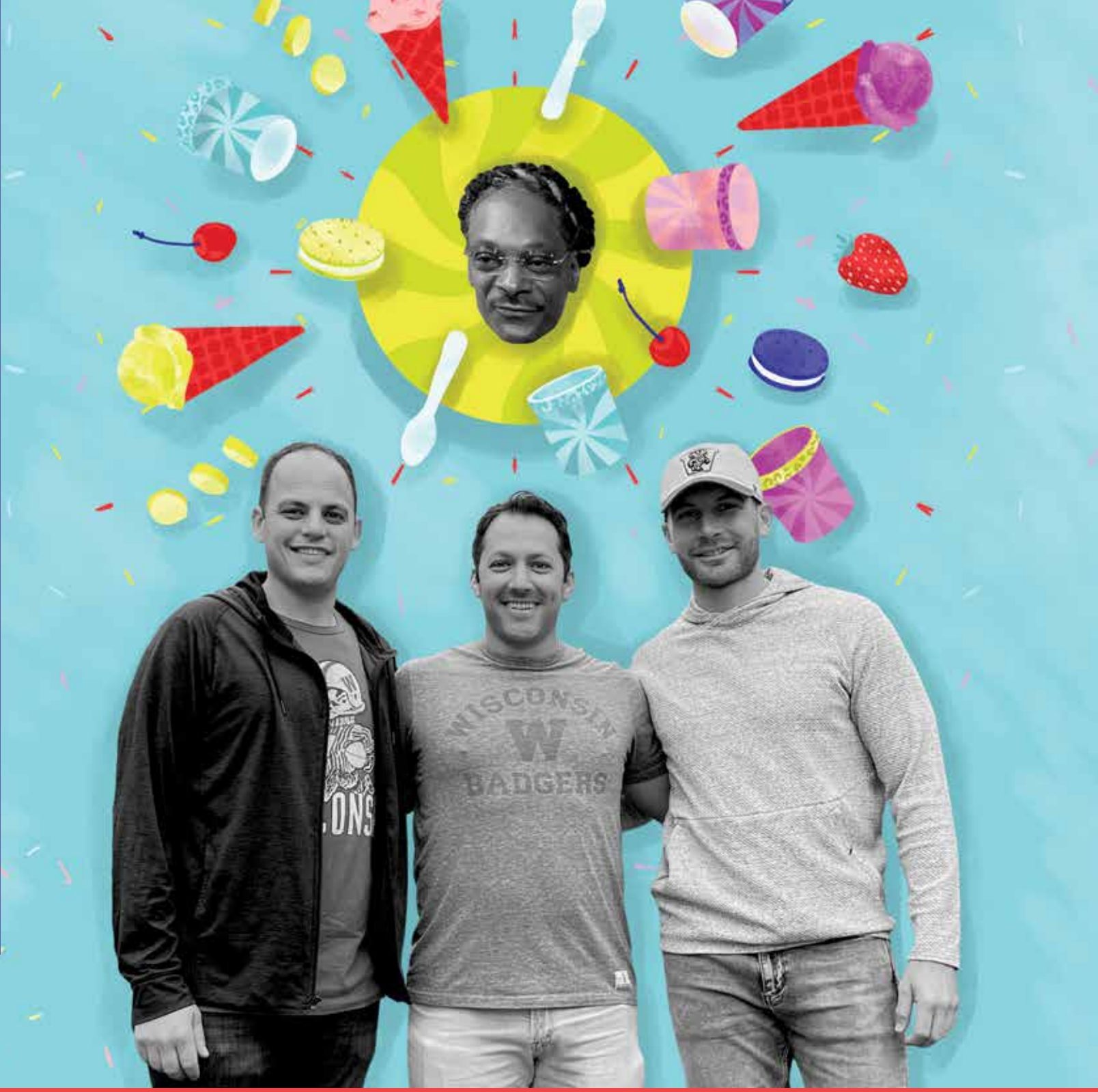
Snoop has enviable business acumen, but his focus on customer satisfaction is what sets him apart. As Samuels puts it: "He's always asking what the people want."

Of course, working with someone as famous as Snoop Dogg comes with challenges. The Happi crew's first meeting with the star was a whirlwind. Rockwell, Samuels, and Reich had to get themselves to his Los Angeles compound in a matter of hours.

"We went into the kitchen, where about 30 of Snoop's people were gathered, and started tasting things together. Snoop would dance when he liked something," Rockwell recalls.

After everyone settled in, Rockwell asked Snoop a provocative question: "Do you make your own business decisions?"

He said yes. Rockwell replied, "That's music to my ears," knowing that partnering directly with Snoop would be the key to success.



The risky move paid off. Happi Co. won Snoop's respect.

"I realized there are a lot of people trying to influence celebrities and knew that he takes pride in leading his own business endeavors," Rockwell explains.

Dr. Bombay welcomed another Badger into the fold in 2024: Dr. Maya Warren, a food scientist who specializes in ice cream. She leads product formulation and flavor innovation for the company. As she explains, "I create happiness in a pint, from the idea for an ice cream to the physical product you're about to eat."

This often means working with Snoop, whom she finds inspirational.

"He's such a creator, whether it's lyrics or flavor ideas," Warren says. "Hip-hop blends many different lifestyles, so he's a natural at making ice cream, which is about blending different textures and tastes."

Happiness in a pint: Warren (at left), Samuels, Reich, and Rockwell blend textures and tastes with Snoop Dogg (above).

LEFT: PHOTO OF MAYA WARREN BY DISNEY/JEFF NEIRA; ABOVE: PHOTOS COURTESY OF HAPPI CO.

Create history-making dresses for the Oscars

***Paige Skenandore** '22*

Paige Skenandore knows a thing or two about making history. The School of Human Ecology alum helped create two dresses for Lily Gladstone, the first Native American nominated for the Best Actress Academy Award. These gorgeous garments were worn at the ceremony and after-party, featured in a *Vogue* article, and displayed at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

The gowns emerged from a collaboration between Gucci and Joe Big Mountain of Ironhorse Quillwork. Big Mountain recruited Skenandore and a few other artists skilled at Native quillwork techniques to decorate them.

"Being surrounded by other Haudenosaunee artists was super fun," Skenandore says.

In addition to finding their groove as teammates, the artists learned how to adapt their quilling styles for the project. Every artist's creations needed to look similar so they'd mesh when placed on the dresses.

"We spent a week and a half at an Airbnb, creating pieces from sunrise to sunset," Skenandore says. "It was a lot of labor, but watching us go from nothing to this incredible finished product was magical."

Working with porcupine quills can be especially challenging. They're oily and often have tufts of fur attached to them. And they're sharp. Skenandore estimates that she got poked 500 times while working on Gladstone's dresses.

The gown Gladstone wore to the Oscars ceremony contained smoked deer hide, silver beads, and flowers composed of quilled petals. Working alongside seamstresses in Gucci's Los Angeles offices, Skenandore took on one of the project's most important roles.

"I prepped all of the quills being used to make the petals. What this looks like is taking about 50,000 quills of different shapes and sizes, all dyed blue, and sorting them into piles based on their thickness because you need a specific thickness for the technique we were using."

Skenandore felt honored to represent her Oneida community on the national stage. The experience has also helped her see herself in a new light.

"I never saw myself as a full-time artist," she says, "so this has opened up my sense of who I am and what I want to be."

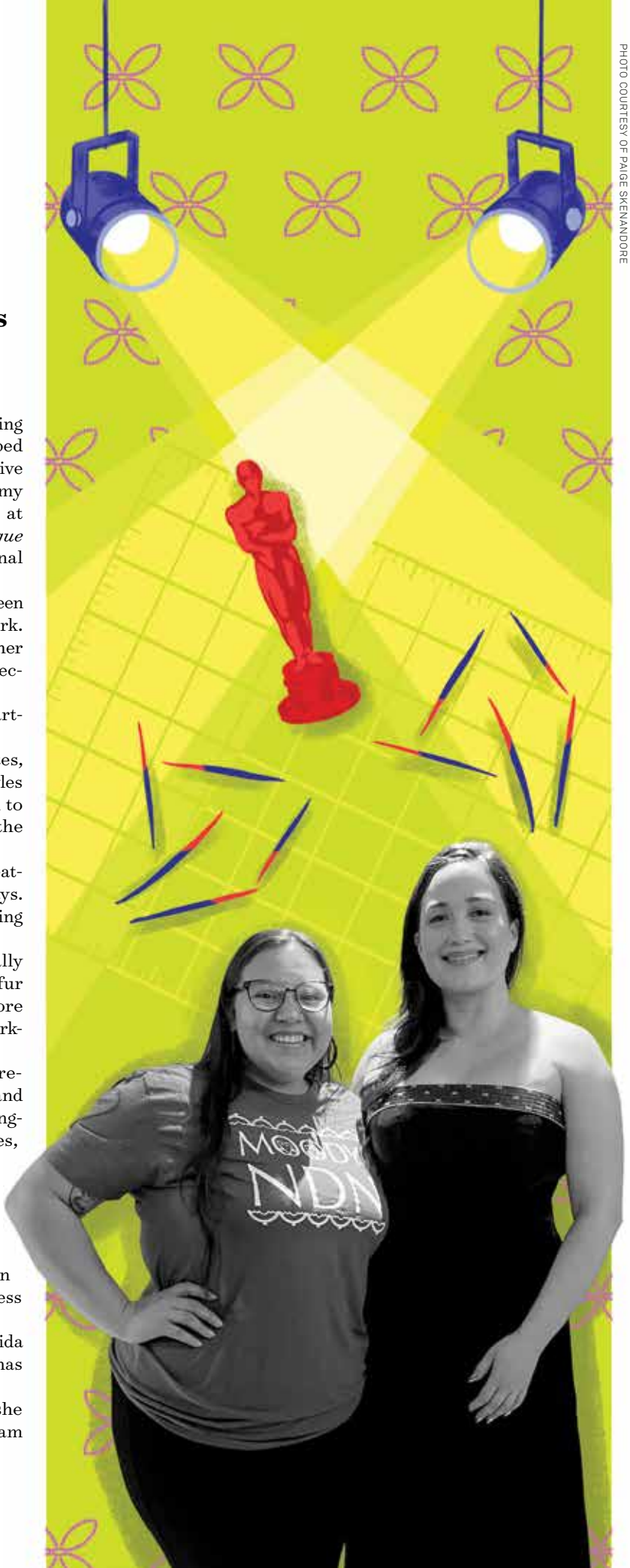


PHOTO COURTESY OF PAIGE SKENANDORE

ACKERMAN + GRUBER

Host an HGTV show with your sister

Lindsey Uselding *'02 and* ***Kirsten Meehan*** *'04*

A camera zooms in on a gaping hole in the side of a house. The owner shakes his head, distressed, but laughs when Kirsten Meehan announces, "You can see into your house!"

Finding humor in crises is priceless. Meehan learned this early on at Ungerman, a company that restores Minneapolis-area homes following fires, floods, and other disasters. She began working there during summer breaks in college and is now its vice president.

Seconds later, an off-camera voice explains how a car "jumped the curb, took out the front-porch post, and slammed into the living room wall." That voice belongs to Lindsey Uselding, Meehan's sister and Ungerman's CEO. This isn't a typical damage assessment. It's a hook for *Renovation 911,* which premiered on HGTV in 2023 and is now airing on HBO Max.

The siblings' relationship brings *Renovation 911* to life. Meehan, a communication arts major and the show's design specialist, leads with her desire to help clients feel better. Uselding, a Wisconsin School of Business alum who identifies as a team-focused analytical thinker, handles the financial side of Ungerman. Both are seasoned performers thanks to their time on the UW Dance Team, but their closeness isn't an act.

"We shared a room from elementary school through high school, which created an incredible bond, and we ran on the same relay team in high school track," Uselding explains.

Meehan sees the relay as a metaphor for the way they work together: "It's never 'I'm going to crush Kirsten' or 'I must beat Lindsey.' Instead, it's 'Let's help each other get to the finish line.' "

Sisterly teamwork vibes aren't all that Meehan and Uselding felt when filming *Renovation 911.* There were tough emotions as well, especially when helping clients navigate shock and loss in the public eye.

Meehan points to an episode about a fire that scorched two little boys' bedrooms.

"One was a big soccer fan, and the other was really into Legos. Finding charred jerseys and melted plastic in their rooms hit me hard."

Though witnessing this scene was sobering, it paved a path to joy. Lego donated several sets of their signature product, and the Minnesota United FC soccer team made personalized jerseys for the family.

"That episode was about making sure that the house felt like home when the boys returned," Uselding says.

Teamwork vibes: Meehan (left) and Uselding pave a path to joy. Opposite page: Gladstone (right) with Skenandore, who felt proud to represent her Oneida community on the national stage.

Run a refugee camp in the Middle East

Greg Sitter *PharmD'12*

Being a pharmacist doesn't always mean filling prescriptions at a drugstore. For Greg Sitter, it's a vehicle for exploring the world and helping its most vulnerable residents.

Sitter has served as director of pharmacy for the relief organization International SOS on two different occasions. The first assignment was at an 18,000-person refugee camp in New Jersey from 2021 to 2022. The second took him to a camp for Afghan refugees in Qatar from 2023 to 2024.

"When I arrived, it was basically an empty airplane hangar. I had a chair and a lockbox, that's it," he recalls. "And by the time the project wrapped, we had an entire web-based electronic health records system."

Sitter built workflows from the ground up, many of which are now used at camps across the globe. As a world traveler who'd visited every continent, he knew he was resourceful, but this experience required a new level of creativity.

"I managed all pharmacy operations, from establishing standardized prescription protocols to overseeing staffing and developing an inventory tracking system to maintain sufficient medication levels," he explains.

The initial weeks were grueling. A full night of rest wasn't possible, and Sitter had to adjust to the region's blistering temperatures.

He and his team, a motley crew of health care professionals from around the globe, also needed to navigate challenges they rarely encountered at home. For instance, most of the camp's 4,200 refugees have low levels of literacy, so they can't always read instructions on pill bottles.

"Many health care workers where these refugees are from use dashes and circles to communicate this information, so I started doing that, too," Sitter says. "Dashes represent the number of pills, and circles around the dashes represent the number of times per day a pill should be taken."

Sitter learned a great deal about himself while serving refugees.

"From a personal perspective, I enjoyed the adventure and the new challenges," he says. "From a humanity perspective, I felt honored to help people who've gotten the worst shake imaginable in life."

WORLD'S TOUGHEST ROW

Row a boat across the Pacific Ocean

Taylan Stulting *PhDx'28*

Google "ocean rowing" and you'll find tales of friendly dolphins and soul-warming sunrises. Though treats like these do come along, they're just a sliver of the experience, which also tends to include freeze-dried food and some of the gnarliest blisters known to humankind. Emotional trials may be the hardest part of the journey, according to Taylan Stulting, a doctoral student in the UW's Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work who rowed across the Pacific Ocean in the World's Toughest Row race of summer 2025.

"I experienced every human emotion during that race. Some of my highest highs were when I approached giant waves and felt like a little kid on a playground," says Stulting, who uses they/them pronouns. "There were also a lot of moments I felt homesick and isolated and angry and frustrated for a multitude of reasons."

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG SITTER

The takeaway? "I can have these terrible moments but find joy and have a good, meaningful experience overall."

Stulting also made history, becoming the world's first out transgender person to row across an ocean. Oar the Rainbow, the three-person team they captained, finished the 2,800-mile race from California to Hawaii in 38 days.

"We beat the world record for a trio by an hour," Stulting says. Plus, Stulting and teammates Courtney Farber and Julie Warren raised funds and awareness for two charity partners: Doctors without Borders and the LGBTQ advocacy organization Athlete Ally.

Supported by two seasoned coaches, plus friends, family, and Instagram followers, the rowers trained for three years, building their endurance, fine-tuning their collaboration, and learning how to address the many emergencies that can arise when a small boat meets big waves. They also figured out how to manage periods of solitary overnight rowing and survive on less than four hours of sleep.

"Training for this race showed me that I have a story worth telling," Stulting says.

Shape the future of a major American city

***Claire Zautke** MPA'19*

Saying that Claire Zautke loves her hometown is an understatement. The daughter of a Milwaukee firefighter, Zautke worked for the Milwaukee county executive office and served on the Milwaukee school board before attending the UW's La Follette School of Public Affairs so she could serve her city even better. In 2022, she landed her dream job: policy director for the office of Mayor Cavalier Johnson '09.

Zautke wears many hats to make the community a better place to live. One of her most important roles is helping the mayor turn intentions into meaningful actions.

"I help Mayor Johnson figure out his long-term, big-picture vision for the city, making sure it reflects his values and priorities and figuring out how to narrow it down into specific, actionable goals and projects," she says.

For example, many mayors take on an infrastructure project that doubles as a physical reminder of their legacy. With Zautke's guidance, Johnson has decided to make Milwaukee more accessible to bicyclists.

"Safe streets and cycling are part of his vision of a modern, forward-looking urban environment, so we're building a network of protected bike lanes that radiate out from downtown," Zautke says.

Then there are fires to put out. These aren't the kinds of blazes her dad extinguished, but they do require a rapid response. Case in point: when a local nonprofit assisting the city's lead-paint abatement efforts shut down, Zautke pulled together a team that figured out how to complete the work.

"It's pretty different from Capitol Hill," she says, "where it usually takes years to get things done." ●

Jessica Steinhoff '01 knows what it feels like to hike in Death Valley and explore the ghost towns nearby.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAIRE ZAUTKE

The UW Information School's Emilee Rader, left, and Rick Wash say that the human instinct for telling stories may be one of the best defenses against cyberscams.

Don't Click on That Link!

BY JESS MILLER MA'25
PHOTOS BY TAYLOR WOLFRAM '24

Scams are getting smarter, but two UW–Madison professors have tips for protecting yourself online.

We've all heard stories like these:

An email is going around that looks like it comes from your bank but is actually a scammer looking for access to your account to steal your information and your money. You make a purchase from an unfamiliar website that steals your credit card information.

Call it spamming, scamming, phishing, or fraud, these anecdotes — taken from a cybersecurity study authored by UW–Madison Information School (iSchool) professors Rick Wash and Emilee Rader '95 — all boil down to the same thing: cybercrime.

The basic techniques of modern cybercrime have changed little since the dawn of the internet: fool people into giving up access to their personal information and their money. But the complexity of these scams has spiked in recent years due to advances in technology.

The latest data from 2024 show that U.S. consumers reported 2.6 million cases of fraud to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) — about the same as 2023. But consumers lost $12.4 billion to these scams — an increase of 25 percent from the previous year.

It might be tempting to simply break with technology altogether. But if throwing out your computer and moving to an off-the-grid farm is not an option, there are ways to practice safe tech that, luckily, don't require an expert's understanding of cybersecurity.

According to Wash and Rader, the human instinct for telling stories may provide one of the strongest defenses against cyberscams.

The More Things Change …

Wash began his academic career some 20 years ago researching cryptography, or the making and breaking of secret codes. He discovered early on, he says, that "no matter how good the technology is, if people make bad decisions, then the technology can't help."

Today, Wash studies the human factors of cybersecurity because, he explains, "I think those are much more critical than a lot of the tech."

Technology has come a long way since Wash began researching cybercrime. But perhaps the biggest change, he says, is how much each individual is now asked to do to stay safe online.

No longer is a single password scribbled on a Post-It note sufficient to maintain your cybersafety. Recent studies have found that the average person has more than 150 passwords. Wash also cites developments like the need to set up two-factor authentication and install required software updates. Though these systems are designed to protect users — and Wash acknowledges that each new task isn't too taxing on its own — they also create many more instances where information may be leaked, lost, or stolen.

At the same time, emerging technologies are making cyberscams more complex, harder to spot, and easier for less tech-savvy scammers to pull off.

The typos and grammatical errors that were once the classic tell of the scam text or email? "AI has basically fixed all those," Wash says.

Many scams traditionally began with single messages designed to get targets to act fast, to click a link, or to provide information right away. Today, victims are just as likely to get caught up in personalized "conversations" with AI chatbots.

The interaction may start with a short, innocuous message, "something that just piques your interest," Wash says. "And after two or three responses, then they'll try to get you to do something that's potentially dangerous."

Today, scams can be easily scaled to target more people. There's currently a veritable industry that exists around cybercrime. And just about anyone can become a cybercriminal, not only the tech-savvy teenage boy in his parents' basement who was once cybercrime's usual suspect.

"There's a whole ecosystem of criminal actors who work together," Wash says. "They're contracting out different pieces of the scam to different parties. So they'll get their software from one place, a separate service that they can use to send lots of fraudulent text messages. There's another service they can use, once they have a bunch of credit card numbers, to turn those into money."

Yet as much as technology has evolved, scammers' basic techniques are more or less the same as ever.

The More They Stay the Same

You're likely familiar with the most common kinds of fraud reported to the Federal Trade Commission. In 2024, these were impostor scams — where fraudsters pretend to be someone you know or an official from a recognized institution like a bank or government agency — followed by online shopping and business and job opportunities. ("Join our professional team! Make up to $500 a day!") The channels these scammers use haven't changed much, either. Per the FTC, the three most common ways scammers contacted their targets in 2024 were emails, phone calls, and text messages.

It may come as no surprise, then, that Wash says across his decades of research, "the human stories we're hearing don't change much."

In 2012, when Wash and Rader were on the faculty at Michigan State, they coauthored a study on how "nonexpert" technology users made decisions about cybersecurity. They concluded that one of the most effective ways their subjects learned about cybersafety was through real-life cautionary tales shared by friends and family members or in the media.

The stories that Wash and Rader's subjects reported were memorable for being connected to a specific incident, as compared to, say, hypothetical scenarios in mandated cybersecurity training or jargon-filled expert advice. Many of the stories mirror today's most common scam attempts, "from emails impersonating banks," the study reads, "to more elaborate attempts by individuals chatting up unsuspecting users on Facebook or in online games."

The lessons gleaned from these stories correspond to traditional expert advice: don't talk to strangers online; choose a strong password and change passwords often; don't share personal information. In 2022, Rader and a new group of coauthors replicated the storytelling study. They found echoes of several of the same 10-year-old lessons.

Whether it's coaxing someone into divulging their bank account information or trying to get them to click a link in a text message claiming to be from a relative, some of the strongest obstacles to cybercrime are the same as they've ever been. While a scammer may have an easy time finding out your name, or where you work or even where you bank, it's harder for them to know if you're expecting a call or email from an old friend or a package in the mail. Ultimately, scammers don't know that much about you. Or do they?

Do You Know Where Your Data Are?

When Rader was a postdoctoral fellow at Northwestern University, a visiting friend was perplexed by the flashing blue lights that she saw all over town. They belonged to surveillance cameras installed by the Chicago Police Department to record potential crime in high-risk areas.

"Did someone have to give you notice about that?" Rader's friend asked. "Did you have to consent to being recorded?"

The interaction was a turning point for Rader. Since then, she has researched the human aspects of data privacy. The subject has become increasingly thorny as technology and systems for collecting

personal data have entered every aspect of our daily lives. In the UW class she teaches, Digital Footprints: Privacy and Technology, Rader explains that most of your interactions with technology, from telling Facebook your birthday to using Face ID on your iPhone, can contribute to a profile of you created from data.

Companies called data brokers combine that data, Rader says, "and feed it into models that can infer stuff about people that they didn't intend to disclose."

These brokers can then sell data to a wide range of customers, like advertisers, who use it to show you ads based on your activity. If you've ever been confronted with an ad on your social media feed for cat food just hours after visiting a pet adoption website, you can thank data brokers.

But the information can also serve more far-reaching purposes. Bounty hunters or private investigators, for example, can use brokered data to track down persons of interest. In worst-case scenarios, criminals may illegally purchase users' data to forge health records or reveal private addresses or other identifying information (a type of harassment known as doxing). But even data obtained legitimately can be cause for concern.

So what's a privacy-minded person to do?

Modern data-collecting infrastructure, Rader says, is so ubiquitous that it would be near impossible to turn invisible online. "How would we live without our cell phones?" she asks. In an age of datafication, a good start may just be thinking more critically about privacy — its value and its cost.

In Rader's class, she illustrates this principle using the example of the MagicBand, an electronic bracelet that guests at Disney parks can use as a hotel room key, admission ticket, payment method, and more. Rader explains that the product works in much the same way as a prisoner's ankle monitor, although the MagicBand uses a built-in RFID sensor, while ankle monitors typically use GPS.

Even though users can remove the MagicBand whenever they choose, they are still sacrificing some of their privacy in exchange for convenience. It's a reminder to be diligent about technology use, because information can be compromised even in a situation that seems harmless.

Thankfully, there are steps you can take to protect yourself (see sidebar). But if you do fall victim to a scam, Wash says it's important to share the news with others. "That's how we teach each other how to be safe online." ●

Jess Miller MA'25 is a Madison-based writer and communications manager.

6 TIPS TO STAY AHEAD OF SCAMMERS

Pay Attention
If you receive a message that looks like it's from someone you know, compare it to their previous messages. If they're making a request, ask yourself: Does this seem like something this person would normally ask? Trust your judgment. If something seems suspicious, it might be a scam.

Consider Context
When was the last time you heard about someone making big money from an investment that a stranger tipped them off to online? Even if you receive a message that seems legitimate, think about the format and the content. "Does UPS normally text you about things?" Wash asks. "They generally don't."

Read Privacy Policies
That long list of terms and conditions that many companies require you to sign off on contains crucial information about how they can use your data. Rader recommends consulting *Consumer Reports* for articles on what to look for in a privacy policy and what products offer strong privacy protection.

Know Your Rights
While privacy laws exist in the United States, they are limited in scope and often misunderstood by the public. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (or HIPAA), for instance, only protects official medical records — not typing symptoms into Google. Some states have their own, broader privacy laws, but others (including Wisconsin, as of now) do not.

Do Your Homework
Before creating an account, making a purchase, or sharing information online, find out more about the company you're dealing with. Rader recommends asking yourself, "Does this seem like a shady company? Do they have an actual commitment to protecting my data?" Make note, too, of stories about scams in the news. Stay informed so you don't fall victim to a similar attack.

Tell Someone
If, despite your best efforts, you fall for an online scam, tell someone. Wash and Rader's research confirms that stories shared by friends and family are one of the most effective ways for average people to learn about cybersafety.

— J. M.

The Upside of Online Relationships

UW professor Catalina Toma reveals the unexpected benefits of social media and dating apps.

BY MELANIE CONKLIN MA'93
PHOTOS BY ALTHEA DOTZOUR
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAIME ESPINOZA

Last fall, students filed into Vilas Hall for the first session of Online Communication and Personal Relationships, a class with the potential to improve their friendships and family relationships. There was even a chance it could help them meet the love of their lives while boosting their mental health and well-being, even though that is not what it's designed to do.

Toma has found that social media use can boost feelings of well-being.

Catalina Toma, the communication arts professor readying her slides at the front of the room, is not some kind of magician. Her field of expertise is the science of online communication — how people relate to one another when interacting via technology. The first day of class had mandatory in-person attendance, but this was a blended class, which means students can come to Vilas Hall or watch live on their devices, with added online components. That's a bit meta, Toma noted with a smile, as the topic is communication via computers.

Toma is internationally known as an expert in online communications in dating, technological interference in relationships, and the impact of social media on human well-being — topics that are a big draw for students. Given the relevance to students' lives, Toma has no trouble finding undergrads who want to be research assistants as she develops new classes and conducts research in her rapidly evolving field.

"Personal relationships are the number one determinant of our well-being and happiness," she told her class. And today, she said, such relationships are often inseparable from computer-mediated communication.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Our always-online world is often a source of criticism, so Toma's conclusions may surprise you.

New Ways of Human Interaction

Toma describes herself as a "media psychologist." She began this research in 2004 as a graduate student at Cornell University.

At that time, work on computer-mediated communication was new, and her job was studying such topics as impressions and deception.

Since then, technological communication has quickly evolved, and so has her research. While at Cornell, she witnessed the birth of Facebook, which at that time was limited to Ivy League campuses and consisted of creating a profile for friends to view. She witnessed the introduction of emoticons and "like" buttons. Each new platform or technology, she notes, affords new ways of human interaction.

"The study of computer-mediated communication has really ballooned, as it should, because it's now used in organizations. It's used by politicians. It affects societies and the democratic process. I have a tiny sliver of the pie that's really about human connection and human interaction."

Toma defines social media in the broadest sense of the term, encompassing such apps as Instagram and TikTok, but also emails, texts, online calls or meetings, and instant messaging — all the ways people interact socially via computers.

For Toma, the work has a personal angle, given her experiences emigrating from her native Romania to the United States.

Technology as a Lifeline

In 2000, at age 19, Toma left her home in Brasov, at the foot of the Transylvanian Alps, after receiving a scholarship to the University of Bridgeport. She felt rather overwhelmed by the experience of moving abroad, by herself, at such a young age.

"I was open to this issue of technologies, because my parents shipped me across the ocean as a freshman. I had never flown in a plane before. I hadn't traveled anywhere by myself. And I didn't know anybody."

Toma discovered the joys of emailing and instant messaging.

"That's what allowed me to stay connected to my family all the time and feel like I had emotional support as I was navigating my new life. My anchor was my family abroad, and so I came to technologies as a bit of a groupie, like, 'Oh my God, this thing is amazing.' "

To this day, Toma and her mother have a standing Saturday morning FaceTime date and talk for two or three hours, sometimes cooking meals together. "It's like she's in my house."

Her brother lives in France with her two nephews, a niece, and his wife. She stays in touch with them via computers too.

"When you have a spread of this nature," Toma says, "technology becomes a lifeline."

From a Person to a Profile

Growing up, Toma recalls her brother begging her to come outside and play, but she admits that "I usually stayed inside with my face in a book."

Becoming an English literature major at Bridgeport was a natural fit.

Toma's aha moment was realizing that what drew her to books was not the story or writing, but the character development — the psychology behind the characters.

After selecting psychology as a minor, she stumbled into her third area of study: communication, which she pursued in graduate school. "That's when I started to get exposed to the idea that communication is a fundamental vehicle for understanding people," says Toma. "That became my home."

Platforms change, technology advances, and Toma explores new angles. But she still asks similar questions: "How do we construct versions of ourselves online? How do we take a full, complicated person and make them into a profile to send to other online daters or to people on social media?"

Toma has a very light public social media footprint and jokes that she is mostly a lurker,

observing others. She hasn't personally spent much time exploring online dating. She met her partner, Wisconsin School of Business Professor Evan Polman, on campus.

"She is very much an intellectual who loves to hang out with her friends and talk about big ideas," says Haley Vlach, a UW professor of educational psychology and Toma's close friend for more than a decade. "I'm wowed by her intellect, and the first impression people get is of a very serious person. Yet as a friend, she's really warm and funny."

Toma, who in 2022 won a Distinguished Teaching Award, exudes enthusiasm about her students and classes. Mina Choi MS'12, PhD'18, who was Toma's first graduate advisee and is now a professor at Kyung Hee University in South Korea, says Toma met with her every week for an entire semester just to help her discover a suitable thesis topic. That mentoring relationship grew into an enduring "deep friendship and collegial partnership," says Choi.

"Catalina brings to her work a rare combination of intellectual rigor and genuine care for people. She communicates high standards in ways that are motivating rather than discouraging. What makes her stand out, though, is that alongside her scholarly excellence, she is approachable, empathetic, and incredibly supportive."

Toma is a yoga practitioner and casually sits in her office chair, shoes discarded and a leg crossed underneath her, for a lengthy conversation. Talking about her research, she displays a deep passion.

She is also known to delight in such reality TV shows as *Love Is Blind*, which she defends as pertinent to her research on the ins and outs of modern dating — a subject that is frequently on her mind.

Online Connections

Online dating was once looked down on as a "crutch for the desperate," Toma says, but in 2019, for the first time, more couples met each other online than through friends, the former most common introduction. Online has been ahead ever since.

Toma is often asked about online dating by reporters and sought out by corporations for consulting. She is the associate editor of *Computers in Human Behaviors,* a job she's also held with *Human Communication Research* and the *Journal of Media Psychology*.

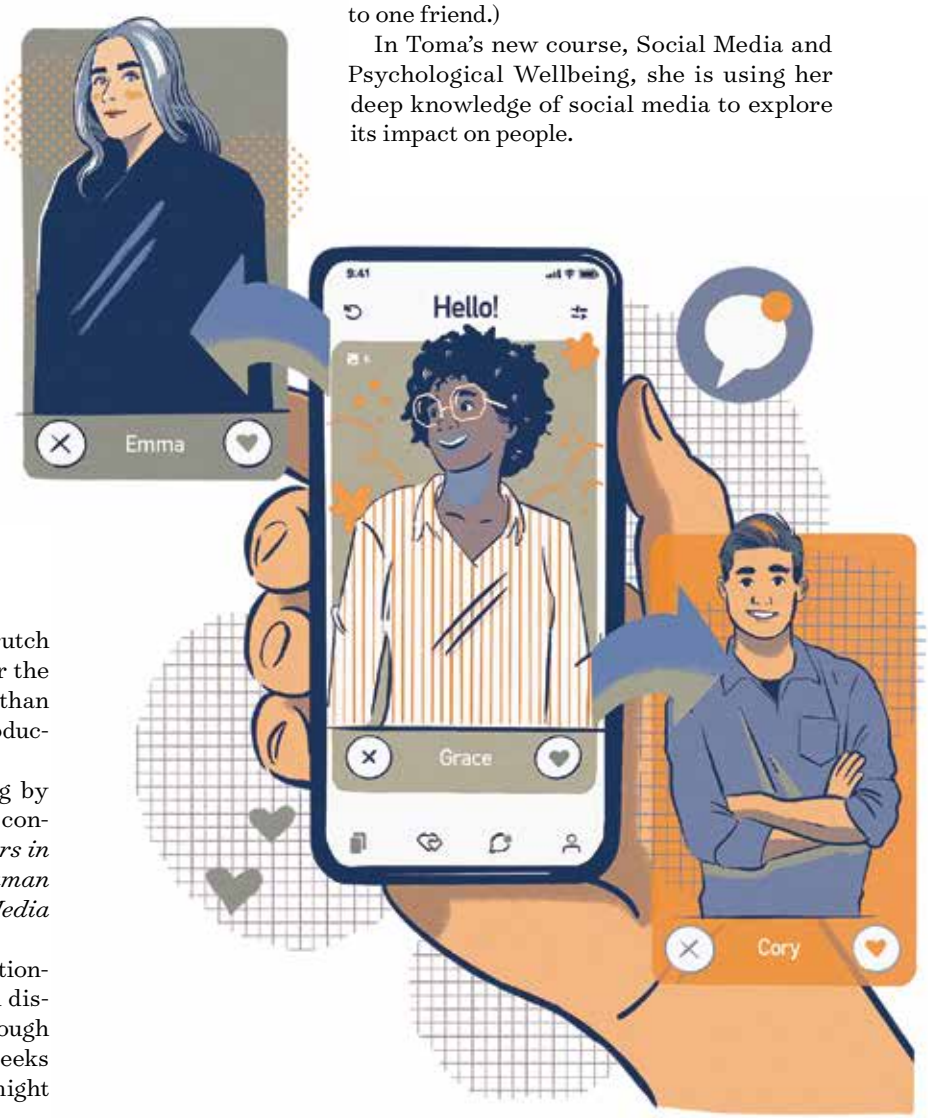
If you bemoan technology's impact on relationships or call it cold and impersonal, Toma will disagree. She thinks human bonding happens through technologically mediated communication and seeks to understand the ways in which technology might benefit relationships.

For example, she points out that when crafting a profile or sending out a query on a dating site such as Match.com, eharmony, or Hinge, people can take time pondering how to best represent themselves. They can craft thoughtful responses, an especially advantageous approach for introverts or those who have social anxiety about dating.

But online, people get away with being extremely deceitful, right? Not any more than in person, according to Toma. She has extensively researched deception and found that it is far more difficult to spot face-to-face than we think. Our chance of picking out a lie is just 54 percent, she says, "not much better than flipping a coin."

Online dating is a misnomer because people meet online but date in person. And Toma's research shows that technological connection is quite meaningful in maintaining a relationship. The texts, memes, or funny videos sent throughout a day make people feel connected and appreciated. (For Toma, that might be a snap of her cat Nigel, according to one friend.)

In Toma's new course, Social Media and Psychological Wellbeing, she is using her deep knowledge of social media to explore its impact on people.



Computer-Aided Relationships

Our relationships are central to well-being, Toma says, and very few close relationships exist anymore strictly outside of email, texts, messaging, or online platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. So well-being and social media are now "quite interconnected."

She's found that while people often focus on the harmful aspects of social media — particularly for teens — there are also ways in which social media use can boost feelings of well-being.

"There are very strong, entrenched beliefs people have about social media and well-being," says Toma. "But when you look at the data, the story becomes really messy and really complicated."

Those with depression or anxiety can use social media to combat loneliness and find community. What matters, says Toma, is how people in such situations utilize it.

Among the benefits of social media for personal well-being:

- Individuals with social anxiety can find asking someone out on a date online more comfortable than asking them in person.
- Older adults who experience loneliness can reignite old friendships, as Toma's father, in his 70s, recently did with pals from his younger years.
- Teens have displaced seniors as the loneliest group, and they also use social media to ease feelings of isolation.
- Constructing authentic social media profiles that showcase who we really are can be self-affirming.
- Going back and viewing your posted highlights on social media can cheer you up.
- People with traumatic brain injuries, those who struggle with words, or those who have trouble interpreting in-person actions find online communication easier.
- When children leave home for school, parental communication via technology can serve as a buffer to reduce stress.

- People experiencing distressing life or health situations can find others with similar problems and anonymously discuss topics they are embarrassed to broach with friends or family.

On the other hand, Toma does not sugarcoat the negative effects of technological communication, including cyberbullying, online deception, harmful social comparison, and "technoference," such as burying yourself in your phone during lunch with a friend.

Being more intentional about social media use can be helpful in mitigating its potential pitfalls.

For example, Toma points to research that shows it can be effective to take "micro breaks" from social media: cutting back on the time you spend online or temporarily avoiding certain apps. People can also remind themselves that online photos are merely a "glamorized glimpse" of a person's life, sometimes boosted with a photo filter.

A micro break she recommends for students who are stressed out by searching for jobs or internships is to avoid sites where acquaintances post about the great gig they were offered, to lessen the likelihood of harmful social comparisons.

Toma predicts her research will increasingly move into the realm of artificial intelligence,

Toma and her students discuss the connections between personal relationships and online communication.

particularly chatbots that provide information, conversation, or even romantic companionship.

An AI Helper

While there are extremes, such as people marrying their chatbots (go ahead and Google it), Toma is again interested in exploring the nuanced ways in which conversational chatbots may support or undermine users' well-being.

Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude, or ChatGPT can be a bit like a newspaper advice columnist, says Toma, but intensely personalized as they remember things you have told them in the past.

Toma has asked ChatGPT health and nutritional questions, mentioned that she's a vegetarian, and returned months later with a new question, getting the response: "Since you are a vegetarian … ."

"There's a lot of emerging research that I'm excited about on what's called chatbot sycophancy," says Toma. "The chatbot gives you what you want to hear and doesn't push back or challenge, and the intention is that users feel validated and understood."

She notes that this can backfire, especially for people with mental-health issues who need an interruption and reframing to alter their negative thoughts, particularly intentions of self-harm, rather than the affirmation a chatbot might offer. Such an intervention could come from a friend, a mental-health professional, or even a chatbot with guardrails in place.

While stressing the need for safeguards, Toma sees ways AI can boost well-being. Therapists are in short supply and cost-prohibitive for some people, so she plans to study AI's potential benefits in this area.

"These large-language modern tools can play a big part in how people get advice, how people connect, how people get well-being and mental-health support," she says. "I think AI is the next frontier as a helper, an assistant, and a way to augment our communication with other people." ●

Melanie Conklin MA'93 is a Wisconsin journalist and political communications director.

Online Dating Tips

Catalina Toma's extensive research into online dating has revealed how people can boost their chances of making a match in a virtual space. Here are some research-based tips.

Don't keep the relationship online too long. Transition relatively quickly to face-to-face contact to keep your imagination from running wild. Meeting someone in person can also help you avoid romantic scams.

Don't be "a kid in a candy store." Limit yourself to a few choices among the romantic partners you meet online.

Opt for paid sites, if feasible, which show potential dates you are invested in the process.

Customize your messages. Generic ones make people less likely to respond.

Longer, more detailed, and more thoughtful profiles are a signal you are invested.

By contrast, using AI to craft your profile shows that you are less invested.

Avoid lies, because when meeting face-to-face, those can instantly turn off a date. Liars may say less, use simpler words, or post fewer photographs so there's less chance of being exposed.

— *M. C.*

ADAM REMUS

BREE WARD-DEBAUCHE

SAHIL JOSHI

Hoofers is dedicated to making its activities accessible to people at all levels of experience — including no experience.

The Hoofers Effect

The UW org can turn anyone into an outdoor adventurer.

When you attend a university that sits on a lake, how could you not appreciate the outdoors?

Fortunately, since the 1930s, the Wisconsin Hoofers has taken advantage of UW–Madison's proximity to nature. While sailing on Lake Mendota remains the student-led organization's most recognizable and popular programming, Hoofers also offers membership to clubs that span every season and an enormous range of outdoor activities.

The Sailing Club organizes lessons, rentals, and races. The Outing Club guides wilderness excursions across the state and country, from canoeing and whitewater kayaking to backpacking and snowshoeing. The Mountaineering Club climbs the indoor rock wall of Union South, the bluffs of Devil's Lake State Park, and summits as far as Spain. The Riding Club saddles up for lessons and competitions on horseback. The Scuba Club dives underwater to explore local lakes and international waters. The Ski and Snowboard Club trains at Tyrol Basin in Mount Horeb, rides down mountains out west, and chases winter conditions all the way to Chile in the off months.

Wisconsin Hoofers is not only unique for these broad offerings but also for its mission to make outdoor adventure accessible to people at all levels of experience — including no experience — thanks to robust education and certification programs.

"At other universities, the riding club might be limited to folks who have been riding since they could walk. But here, we've had students who'd never even seen a horse before going on to learn, compete, and win nationals," says **Madeleine Carr,** communications specialist for the Wisconsin Union, which houses Hoofers.

More than 2,220 students, faculty, staff, and community members are active members of Hoofers. Joining a club requires a Wisconsin Union lifetime or annual membership (if not a student) and a separate fee that helps cover equipment.

Hoofers' popularity has prompted UW–Madison to propose a $2.7 million renovation of its boat storage and education facility by the Memorial Union shoreline. The project would use private funds and add equipment rental and storage space plus a rooftop event area.

Hoofers, it seems, is here to stay.

"Every year, people join the Mountaineering Club who are scared of heights, and then within a year, they're teaching others how to set anchors," says **Luke Waldhuetter '26,** president of the Hoofers Council. "Even for me, I had never been scuba diving before Hoofers, and now I love planning dive trips and relating to a whole other community. It's completely changed my life."

PRESTON SCHMITT '14

WISCONSIN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

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On Alumni

News from Home and Abroad

Cheers for Grandparents University

The program is celebrating 25 years of pint-size college prep and bonding.

ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Jeanne Nye and her granddaughter Charlotte Nye learned about DNA at a biotechnology class at the 2022 Grandparents University.

Grandparents University (GPU), the UW–Madison summer event that brings grandkids and their grandparents to campus to enjoy special classes together, was launched by the Wisconsin Alumni Association in 2001. Since then, more than 30 other schools have been inspired to start their own initiatives.

Children between the ages of seven and 14 visit campus with their grandparents or other adults, with many opting to stay in a residence hall. Attendees can register for "majors" in fields ranging from art and music to entomology, nursing, and veterinary science. They also participate in tours of campus destinations such as Camp Randall Stadium, the Geology Museum, and Babcock Dairy.

"We hear all the time from grandparents that kids decided on their college major based on a class they took during Grandparents University," says **Nathalie McFadden '14,** who manages the program.

Julie Underwood, a former dean of UW–Madison's School of Education, says that her grandkids plan their GPU majors a year in advance. "Kids opening up and learning about things that you would never have an opportunity to teach them — that's pretty special." One of her favorite moments was seeing the kids' faces light up when they got to dance with Bucky Badger at the GPU dance party.

Liz Philosophos Cooper '77, who attends GPU with her husband, **Scott Cooper '77,** and their grandchildren, says the program has lived up to their expectations tenfold. She enjoys experiencing something new through her grandchildren's eyes and says, "They're so excited — they talk about it all year round."

Scott adds that "the instructors do a marvelous job at getting involvement, bringing it down to the kids' level, and also making it interesting for us." The kids were thrilled to hear their names called at the graduation ceremony and to choose their own food in the cafeteria. He was also impressed to see how excited they got about the idea of actually attending college when they got older.

During the graduation ceremony, **Kate Prehn '09,** who played a key role in the program from 2010 to 2025, began a tradition of asking the children to thank their grandparents. "It is so magical to see them all turn at the same time with huge smiles on their faces, and they throw their arms around each other and high-five," she says. "It's just such a special moment. That's why we do this."

NIKI DENISON

Scan the QR code to see a video about Grandparents University.

30+

Number of universities and colleges that have started their own Grandparents University events after seeing UW–Madison's success

DAY AT THE CAPITOL

Nearly 150 UW–Madison advocates visited Washington, DC, in March to emphasize that federal support for university research is not an expense — it's an engine. They highlighted some of the university's most cutting-edge work, including projects focusing on quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and defense. The event also honored Mike Duffey '01, U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment. See uwalumni.com/uw-day for more information.

GIVING DAY RECORD

April's Day of the Badger raised a record $2.19 million-plus from more than 7,300 gifts. It also included a first-time donor match of $50,000, funded by **Mike '73** and **Mary Jensen.** The annual day of giving spans 1,848 minutes in a nod to the year of the university's founding and allows donors to give to the schools, colleges, departments, or campus causes they are most passionate about.

40s–60s

Before he passed away in April 2025, **Herb Snyder '48** of Sarasota, Florida, took a walk down memory lane that led all the way back to Madison. "Now nearing my 100th birthday, I think back to the first day I came to the University of Wisconsin. It is 1946. I am on the G.I. Bill and have taken the train from New York to Madison. ... The first thing I noticed were the Quonset huts spread all over the campus [that] were used as classrooms. The permanent school buildings could not hold the new student population which had arrived after the end of World War II. ... I found a small room in a rooming house, [and] it was five dollars a month, which left me $55 out of what my G.I. Bill provided to me. To supplement this amount, I got a job at the university cafeteria, where I worked each day for five hours. ... I also studied quite diligently and still have the letter from Dean **[Chester] Ruedisili '33, PhD'41** to my father which informed him that I had achieved a grade point average which granted me the privilege of being elected to the Phi Eta Sigma [honor society]." Thank you to Herb's wife, Helen Shaw, for sharing his fond memories with his fellow Badgers!

After nearly 60 years on the air, **Larry Meiller '67, MS'68, PhD'77** will retire from Wisconsin Public Radio on June 30. Meiller has been a radio host since 1967, when he filled in on a half-hour, midday agriculture spot. In 1978, that spot became *The Larry Meiller Show* and has grown to two hours that Meiller fills with expert guests and call-in questions on topics ranging from gardening, nature, and practical know-how to history and culture. The program is one of the most listened-to on Wisconsin airwaves. Meiller was inducted into the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in 2017. He is also a professor emeritus in the Department of Life Sciences Communication in the UW's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs appointed **Dianne Post '69, JD'78** as a commissioner in the Arizona Governor's Office of African American Affairs. She was also appointed to the Phoenix Public Library Board by Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego. Post is an attorney and legal director of the Secular Coalition for Arizona.

BOOK NEWS?
See page 64.

CLASS NOTES SUBMISSIONS
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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.

70s–80s

Don't try this one at home, kids: **Carey Segall '74, JD'81, MA'87** ran the 2025 Madison Marathon just 26 days after getting a new heart valve. He was the first and only man in the 75–79 age group and was the second-oldest finisher overall. "I wasn't racing," Segall told the *Wisconsin State Journal*. "I was just taking my time and enjoying trying to finish in six hours." Segall, a lifelong runner, has completed 80 marathons in 31 states.

After four decades portraying some of the most iconic women in theater, "Dame" **Sarah Day '80** retired from the core acting company at American Players Theatre (APT) in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Day made her APT debut in 1986 as Anne Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. She's since played roles ranging from Ophelia in *Hamlet* and the Stage Manager in *Our Town* to Joan Didion in the stage adaptation of *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Day is also a founding member of the Madison-based Forward Theater Company and a fellow of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. Best wishes in your third act, Sarah!

Calvin Beyer '86 of Maple Valley, Washington, was elected to the National Academy of Construction for his contributions to mental health advocacy in the construction industry. Beyer is the senior director of SAFE Workplaces at the SAFE Project (Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic), a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing substance misuse and addiction. He also helped launch the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention and serves on the executive committee for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.

These friends rolled into their 60s in style! **Meg Cates '87, Becky Cole-Porter '87, Susan Ells '87, Susie Fish '87,** Sara Mallatt, **Jennifer McCann '87,** and **Amy Thompson '87** (above) celebrated their 60th birthdays with a cycling trip through Piedmont, Italy, and the Italian Riviera. Cates wrote: "Four of us have known each other since kindergarten and went on to graduate from the University of Wisconsin–Madison together. The other three joined the group at Madison West High School and also became Badgers. All of us have been college roommates at times in our college careers. Only one of us isn't a UW alum, but she's a lifetime Madisonian and an honorary Badger now! We proudly wore our Wisconsin cycling jerseys throughout the trip and drew smiles and 'Go, Badgers!' cheers across Italy. ... It was a joyful celebration of friendship, adventure, and our enduring connection to UW–Madison." Thank you for sharing this memorable trip with us!

COURTESY OF GOODIE BAG

Tasty, Cheap, and Eco-Friendly

Briana Boehmer '02 cofounded Goodie Bag to help prevent food waste.

Who doesn't love a good surprise, especially when it comes in the form of affordable food? That's the concept behind Goodie Bag, an app that notifies users when a nearby shop or restaurant has surplus food it's willing to unload at a steep discount — say, $18 worth of pizza, pastries, or produce for $9. The model keeps food out of landfills, draws new customers to restaurants, and provides an affordable food option.

Briana Boehmer '02 — whose background was building tech-based businesses around health, wellness, and fitness — was smitten by the Goodie Bag concept when she first heard about it in 2023. "One of the things I loved about this opportunity was trying to create something that connected community with a well-being focus," she says.

Cofounders Luke Siegert and Eddy Connors (with Boehmer, center, in photo above) had developed the app to the viable product stage and secured funds to bring it to market, but they lacked the resources to pay themselves. Boehmer thought she could help. Soon after meeting the two, Boehmer quit her job as chief operations officer for a fitness tech company to sign on as the third cofounder and COO of Goodie Bag.

Her instincts paid off. Not only did she and her partners launch the app, but by mid-2024, they'd raised enough money to start paying themselves full salaries, and they've now grown to 10 employees. After starting out in Boulder, Colorado, they've expanded to Fort Collins, Denver, and Colorado Springs in their home state, as well as Charlotte, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; Madison; Milwaukee; and most recently, New York City. They also started a pilot project with UW–Madison to offer Goodie Bags at the Badger Markets at Union South and Memorial Union, and they're hoping to expand to other campus sites — and eventually, to other universities.

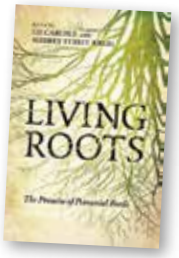
"I measure success by the feedback we're getting," Boehmer says. "We're on the right track when we're getting messages from businesses letting us know that their shops are staying open because they've been able to implement our services — and from customers saying that they're visiting places they would never have visited because they found them through Goodie Bag. I know this might sound cheesy, but it really is true we are changing things for the better.

"That sense of being a part of something bigger than yourself and contributing to your community — I learned that at Wisconsin."

JOHN ROSENGREN

90s

Colleen Tinch '91 of Chicago is the new senior vice president and head of marketing at wealth and insurance firm Lenox Advisors. Tinch joins Lenox from financial services company Mesirow, where she most recently served as managing director of strategic marketing and sales enablement for Mesirow's global investment management business. She previously held senior marketing positions at Northern Trust Asset Management and Invesco U.S.



Essays by **Laura Paine MA'92** of Columbus, Wisconsin, and **Keefe Keeley MS'14, PhD'21** of Madison were included in the 2026 anthology *Living Roots: The Promise of Perennial Foods*. The collection includes works from scientists, farmers, community leaders, and other experts offering insight on the climate- and food-friendly attributes of perennial crops and agriculture. Paine, an outreach specialist in the UW's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, contributed the piece "From Corn Belt to Pasture" in the book's "Grassland" section. Keeley, the executive director of the Savanna Institute, wrote "From the Fringe" in the book's "Forest" section.

The Hennepin County Bar Association presented **Mark Vyvan '94, JD'97** of Maple Grove, Minnesota, with its 2025 Excellence Award. Vyvan, a shareholder at the law firm Fredrikson & Byron, was recognized for his pro bono service and for improving access to justice.

This one's going on the coffee table, for sure: *Time* magazine included Badgers **Lynsey Addario '95** and **Hilary Knight '12** among its "100 Most Influential People of 2026." Addario, a Pulitzer

Prize–winning photojournalist, was featured among *Time*'s "Titans" for her coverage of conflict and humanitarian crises around the world. "You don't just look at Lynsey's photos," journalist Katie Couric wrote in Addario's *TIME100* profile. "You feel them — as if you are there. But you don't have to be, because she is, risking her life and making us care." Knight was among *Time*'s "Innovators" for her legendary hockey career and her fierce dedication to improving women's hockey for future generations. "That is what Hilary has always done," wrote activist and Nobel Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai in Knight's profile. "She shows up, she fights for what matters, and when the moment comes, she is ready."

Josh Fudge '98 was elected to the city council of Fort Collins, Colorado. He comes to the role with more than 20 years of experience in local government, most recently as director of performance, budget, and strategy at Larimer County in Colorado. Fudge previously served as a budget analyst and director in Waukesha and Milwaukee Counties in Wisconsin.

00s

The Association of Wisconsin School Administrators recognized **Elizabeth Streubel '01** as the 2025 Wisconsin Elementary Associate Principal of the Year. Streubel is an assistant principal at Wilson Elementary School in the Mequon-Thiensville School District.

Michael Anderson '05, MS'09, PhD'11 was studying physics and **Jie Liu '09, MS'11** was studying engineering when they found out they had chemistry. They met while working for different UW–Madison professors at the European Organization for Nuclear Research, or CERN, in Meyrin, Switzerland. Michael was a research

LILA ARYAN

How to Beat Phone Addiction

Two Badgers have created the Brick to eliminate digital distractions.

Longtime best friends **T. J. Driver '22** and **Zach Nasgowitz '21** (left and right in photo above) experienced a problem endemic to their generation: their smartphones ruled their lives. They couldn't escape the constant distractions — the apps, games, emails, and notifications all clamoring for their attention. Driver tried using a flip phone but found it too limiting and impractical, not allowing him to access information he needed. The built-in blockers on their iPhones were too easy to override. So the pair of engineers set out to create their own solution.

They didn't really know what they were doing, developing a new product and starting a business, but the computer sciences courses they took at UW–Madison taught them to dive in and figure out solutions without a road map. "You learn some amount of confidence in solving problems that is very applicable to entrepreneurship," Nasgowitz says.

The result of their efforts was the Brick, a small, square device (about half the size of a deck of cards) that you tap with your phone to block selected apps. You cannot access those apps until you tap the Brick with your phone again. The extra effort — or actually storing the Brick someplace separate from a work or study location — eliminates distractions.

The device solved their immediate problem, allowing them to focus, but they found it also delivered an ancillary benefit. Freed from distractions, they felt more present with friends and family or whatever task was before them. "It's so liberating," Driver says. "You don't have to fight off the temptation every time you pick up your phone because you've already made that decision. The temptation doesn't exist anymore because there's no way to get into the distracting apps."

Both alums are builders at heart, but Nasgowitz is more of a visionary. In the early days, he focused mostly on design and marketing while Driver, who is more detail-oriented, handled the engineering and operations.

They launched the Brick in 2023, selling it for $59 on Getbrick.app. The product has generated some media buzz, including in *New York* magazine, and the company is looking to add more employees to its Chicago office.

"We measure success by the number of people who benefit from the Brick," Driver says. "The people buying this are coming back to us and saying, 'This has improved my relationship with my phone and genuinely improved my life.' That has been very fulfilling."

JOHN ROSENGREN

assistant for physics professors **Sridhara Dasu** and **Wesley Smith,** while Jie was a research assistant for engineering professor **Mike Schulte '91.** "It was an exciting time to be working in those small CERN offices, contributing to the discovery of the Higgs boson," Michael says. Michael and Jie were married on November 11, 2011, and later had a daughter named Meyrin.

In 2016, **Teresa Dzieglewicz '05** helped found Mní Wičhóni Nakíčižiŋ Wóuŋspe, or the Defenders of the Water School, at the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ Camp for Water Protectors on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. She recounts her experiences as both an educator and an observer of a dynamic political movement in her debut poetry collection, *Something Small of How to See a River*. Pulitzer Prize–winning poet Tyehimba Jess calls the collection "honest, bracing news for the weary but unwavered" that chronicles "the struggle for sovereignty, dignity, and survival on the Standing Rock Reservation." Dzieglewicz is also a fellow of the Black Earth Institute, a community of artists and scholars focused on promoting the planet's health.

"None of these opportunities, nor achieving my dream role, would have been possible without the education and foundation I received at UW–Madison."
— Shannon Strader '14

Joel Spiess '07, MS'11 was appointed chief enrollment operations officer and executive director of student financial services at UW–Milwaukee. He oversees the leaders of five key departments, including the Student Financial Service Center. He also serves as principal adviser and divisional strategist to the associate vice chancellor for strategic enrollment management and student success. In his previous role as UW–Milwaukee's director of student scholarships, Spiess increased scholarship dollars by 50 percent, expanded the number of scholarship recipients by 33 percent, and supported consecutive first-year enrollment gains.

It's an encore in Baltimore for **Esther Schwarzbauer '08,** the new director of guest services at the Hippodrome Theatre and the M&T Bank Exchange at the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center. Schwarzbauer comes to the role from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, where she was an assistant theater manager.

10s

Henry Aschauer '10 recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of his Madison-based, fast-casual restaurant chain, Forage Kitchen. Aschauer founded Forage Kitchen with **Doug Hamaker '10** in 2015 and opened the first location on State Street. The chain has since grown to 10 stores across Wisconsin and Illinois and has expanded into beverage production and retail with Forage Kombucha.

Public relations firm Hailstone Communications welcomed **Kayla Blado '11** of Washington, DC, as its new executive vice president. Blado comes to the company from the National Labor Relations Board, where she most recently served as the director of congressional and public affairs under the Biden administration. She was previously the director of media relations for the Economic Policy Institute and president of the Nonprofit Professional Employees Union. Before joining Hailstone, Blado was a Fulbright Scholar focusing on labor communications at the European Trade Union Institute in Brussels, Belgium.

Law firm von Briesen & Roper welcomed **Matthew Van Keulen JD'11** and **Thor Jeppson '13, MS'19, MS'19** to its Madison office. Van Keulen is a shareholder in the firm's insurance coverage and risk management section. He is also an adjunct professor at UW Law School, where he teaches litigation and coaches the mock trial competition teams. He is a member of the Wisconsin Defense Counsel and the Defense Research Institute. Jeppson is a land use and development adviser working with the firm's real estate and government law groups. Prior to joining von Briesen, Jeppson was an urban and regional planner and traffic forecaster for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and, most recently, an assistant planner at the City of Monona.

Nicole Vele MS'11, JD'11 joined law and lobbying firm GrayRobinson as a shareholder in its Washington, DC, office. Vele is a distinguished veteran of the U.S. Air Force Judge Advocate General's Corps and previously worked at law firms Michael Best & Friedrich and Holland & Hart. In her new role, Vele will specialize in strategic guidance on government-contracting issues.

As a UW undergrad, **Shannon Strader '14** founded a nonprofit organization to support students with physical illnesses and worked in the regenerative biology lab at the Morgridge Institute for Research. Today, she's a physician in the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation department at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where she leads one of the country's first transition and lifespan clinics for adults with pediatric-onset disabilities. She is also completing a cellular therapy fellowship and

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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.**

conducting research on novel biomarkers among patients with neuromusculoskeletal disorders. "None of these opportunities, nor achieving my dream role, would have been possible without the education and foundation I received at UW–Madison," Strader says.

Is there anything more beautiful than a Badger wedding? **Tony Feller '19** and **Mara Matovich '19, MS'24** sent us a save-the-date for their March wedding along with a note that read, "We're so excited to play 'On, Wisconsin' at our wedding! If possible, we'd love our news shared in the [Class Notes] section of the *On Wisconsin* magazine!" Congratulations to the newlyweds!

20s

Alanna Goldman '20 of Washington, DC, is the founder of 5wins, a sports media company dedicated to the coverage of women's collegiate athletics. Goldman founded the platform in 2023 to offer more comprehensive storytelling about female college athletes. She and her company were profiled in *Forbes* in 2024. Before founding 5wins, Goldman was a federal communications consultant.

Kaitlynne Roling '20 of Seattle represented the U.S. at the 2025 World Beach Ultimate Championships in Portimão, Portugal. She competed in the mixed division and placed sixth with Team USA. Roling is a member of the Seattle Tempest, a professional Ultimate Frisbee team in the Western Ultimate League. She previously played club Ultimate Frisbee with the Boomtown Pandas, NOISE, and Heist in Madison, and with Seattle BFG. Roling is also a board member of the Milwaukee Monarchs, a professional women's team in the Premier Ultimate League.

Megan Provost '20 reminds you to drink some water and reapply your sunscreen.

Scholarship Supports Computer Science Badgers

The legacy of Arun Pancholia '23 lives on in students who embody his values.

COURTESY OF SUSHMETA PANCHOLIA

A scholarship launched in fall 2024 will aid students of the new College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence.

The **Arun Pancholia '23** Scholarship honors a much-loved Badger whose vibrant spirit and intellectual curiosity left a lasting impression on all who knew him. Pancholia's passion for math, music, cars, and helping others was matched only by his warmth and wit. His family's decision to create this commemorative fund ensures that his light continues to shine through the achievements of others and celebrates his enduring impact.

Each year, the UW selects four Arun Pancholia scholars who demonstrate financial need, with a preference for students who study entrepreneurship or mathematics and who have experienced living in India, the United Arab Emirates, Southeast Asia, or the United States.

"Arun had always wanted to start a nonprofit organization supporting education," says Pancholia's mother, Sushmeta. "Fulfilling our beloved Arun's dream of creating equal opportunities where possible was one of the main motivations behind this scholarship."

One of the four 2025 recipients is **Alysia Chou x'27,** a junior from Taiwan studying computer and data sciences with a certificate in business. Her work ranges from building a chatbot for Spectacle Health to analyzing nonprofit engagement data through Biokind Analytics.

"[This scholarship] motivates me to preserve Arun's legacy of kindness, excellence, and curiosity," Chou wrote to Pancholia's parents. "I will carry this gift with me as I work toward my goals, and I hope to one day pay it forward, just as you have done for me."

Another recipient, **Yashwanth Ranjan Singaravel x'26,** is a senior from Chennai, India, double majoring in computer and data sciences and mathematics. As a student technical trainer and software engineer, Singaravel leads workshops and develops AI-powered research tools.

"This scholarship encourages me to embody generosity and excellence," he says. "I am committed to carrying Arun's light forward."

Pancholia chose UW–Madison for its strong academic programs and vibrant campus life. Initially a biochemistry major, he became increasingly interested in data science during the pandemic, leading him to pursue a field that integrates several disciplines and drives meaningful innovation. Through this fund, Pancholia's family aims to inspire students to pursue their passions, overcome challenges, and make a positive impact.

"Donor gifts have the power to transform lives," Sushmeta says. "It's more than a donation — it's a legacy of opportunity, compassion, and achievement."

NICOLE HEIMAN

Thompson explores the evolution of friendship across space and time.

Growing Pains

Three friends reckon with their once-entangled lives in *Girls Our Age* by Phoebe Thompson MFA'24.

As undergrads at Hawthorne University, Lily, Ana, and Margot shared everything: clothes, mascara, secrets, lives. Now approaching 30 and strewn across the country, they and their lives couldn't look more different, and secrets are easier to keep. In her debut novel, *Girls Our Age,* **Phoebe Thompson MFA'24** explores the evolution of friendship across time and space.

To her friends, family, and fiancé, Lily has always been perfect. To Lily, perfection is a standard she must meet at all costs. With her wedding on the horizon and her schedule filling up with people to please, she struggles against old demons to maintain her fragile façade. Across the country, Ana tries desperately to feel at home in the dazzling apartment and private-school teaching job that mark the beginning of her and boyfriend Silas's life together. Meanwhile, Margot has her sights set on a big promotion when her unchecked ambition leads to a fall from grace that coincides with a personal reckoning. As Lily's wedding creates occasions for the three friends to reconvene, their disparate lives and the details they've kept from each other underscore friction where once there was ease.

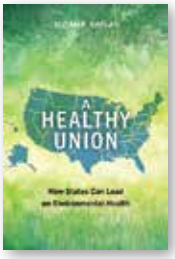
According to Thompson, the idea for the novel was born of her own experiences in her 20s reconnecting with college friends at weddings. "We had known each other for so long prior to meeting our significant others, and suddenly we were all spread out and our dynamics were changing," she says. "Now you all live in different places and have primary partners. Your friends are not your first priority anymore."

Goodreads listed *Girls Our Age* among its most-anticipated literary fiction for 2026. Thompson is the founder of the marketing consultancy Extra Cred.

100 Train Journeys of a Lifetime: The World's Ultimate Rides

EVERETT POTTER MA'76

This installment of National Geographic's 100 of a Lifetime series takes readers on the best railway adventures around the globe. The trips range from hours-long rides to weeklong excursions and take place everywhere from Cape Town, South Africa, to the Arctic Circle. The guide is complete with insights on passenger car accommodations, dining on the rail, notes on historic stations, and must-see stops along the routes. Potter is an award-winning journalist and travel writer.



A Healthy Union: How States Can Lead on Environmental Health

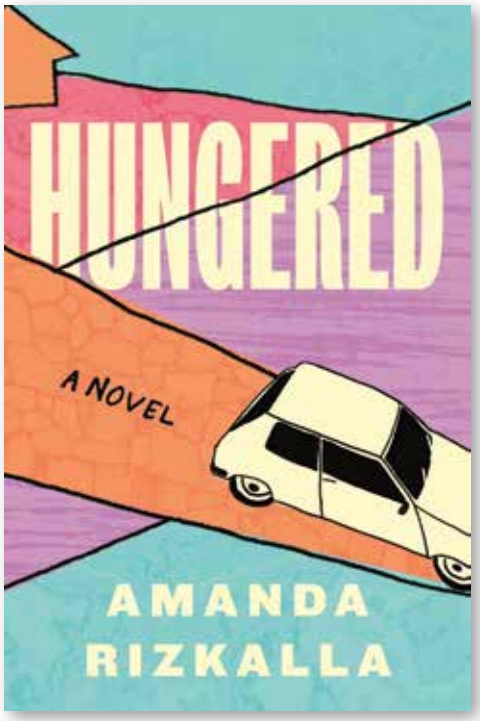
SUSAN KAPLAN JD'91

This book examines the erosion of environmental health protections at the federal level and highlights state-level policies from across the country, from reducing pesticide use in Texas to expanding environmental health education in New York. It identifies key elements of successful policies and best practices for elected officials and advocates seeking to improve the environmental health of their communities. Kaplan is an environmental health lawyer and professor at the University of Illinois–Chicago.

The Twits

PHIL JOHNSTON '94

This film adaptation of Roald Dahl's 1980 children's book tells the story of Mr. and Mrs. Twit, a despicable duo who exact meaty revenge on their town after the closure of their beloved theme park. Orphans Beesha and Busby team up with a family of Muggle-Wumps to save the day. Johnston wrote, directed, and produced the film and voices the character of Mr. Napkin.



Rizkalla's vignettes re-create the fragmented nature of childhood memory.

Submit your book news at **uwalumni.com/go/bookshelf** and visit **goodreads.com/wisalumni** to find more works by Badger alumni and faculty.

Searching for Home

Amanda Rizkalla MFA'23 documents a family's quest for stability through the eyes of an eldest daughter in *Hungered.*

In the tumult of adolescence, a child's home is often among their few constants. But for 12-year-old Sofia, "home" is as subject to change as her preteen friendships and pubescent feelings. In her debut novel, *Hungered,* **Amanda Rizkalla MFA'23** tells a coming-of-age story set amid economic insecurity, fractured family, and the perpetual pursuit of stability.

For the first 12 years of her life, Sofia's home was the house she shared with her parents and younger brother, Rafa. After her father's behavior and betrayal drive her mother to take the children and flee, Sofia's home is the backseat of their sedan, the library bathrooms where they wash up, the strip-mall parking lots in which they camp overnight, and the stretches of highway they travel in between. Through short, vignette-like chapters, readers witness the innocence of childhood, the familiar frustrations of adolescence, and the trials of homelessness compounded with the racism and classism faced by mother and daughter alike.

"I think the form of the vignette is really conducive to writing through the perspective of a 12-year-old because what makes it into each vignette matters just as much as what is left off the page," Rizkalla says of the book's unique format. "I wanted to enact the fractured and episodic nature of memory and attention when people are living through a moment of duress."

Author Shilpi Somaya Gowda calls *Hungered* a "heartrending debut" that "never romanticizes hardship, yet finds genuine beauty in small acts of grace and the irrepressible hope of childhood." Rizkalla was a Kemper-Knapp Fellow at the UW and the 2022–23 Hoffman-Halls Emerging Artist Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

Hemlock

MELISSA FALIVENO '06

In this Midwestern gothic tale, Sam is a recovering alcoholic living in Brooklyn, New York, with her cat and long-term boyfriend when she's called to her family's crumbling cabin in Wisconsin's Northwoods. As she returns to the place where her mother disappeared years earlier, Sam begins to disappear back into addiction, old ghosts, and the nightmares that lurk in the darkness of the forest.

Girlfriending

SUSANNA DANIEL

In what could also be titled "How to Heal Your Heart in 10 Dates," a middle-aged mother begins dating women after divorcing her husband and experiences two withering breakups in quick succession. Heartbroken but undeterred, the protagonist — not coincidentally, a writer and editor with the surname "Daniel" — vows to go out with 10 more women as part of her self-proclaimed "lesbian adolescence." Daniel was the 2001–02 Carl Djerassi Fiction Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing and is a cofounder of the Madison Writers' Studio.

Late to the Search Party

STEVEN ESPADA DAWSON

In his debut poetry collection, Dawson explores themes of addiction, belonging, grief, and the affection that endures in spite of anger and hardship through the lens of his half-immigrant, Mexican American family. His poems grapple with his absent father, his addict brother, and the impending loss of his ailing mother. Dawson was the 2022–23 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Fellow in Poetry at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing and is the current Madison Poet Laureate.

MEGAN PROVOST '20

ALTHEA DOTZOUR (3)

Next-Level Animal Care

Remodeled UW Vet Med spaces are a win for pets and people alike.

After outgrowing its space, the UW's School of Veterinary Medicine and its teaching hospital, UW Veterinary Care, celebrated the completion of a long-awaited addition in March. A new wing known as UW Vet Med North provides 150,000 more square feet, and renovations have also improved the original 35,000-square-foot UW Vet Med South building.

The new addition features amenities such as bird-safe glass on windows, a physical rehab suite, and state-of-the art labs and equipment to facilitate world-class research. Scientists at the school conduct 75 percent of the infectious disease research at UW–Madison.

The new space also has 15 additional private exam rooms, waiting areas specific to dogs and cats to reduce stress to animals, and designated areas for various levels of care, from isolation to critical to intermediate.

Other highlights include nine advanced operating theaters, enhanced imaging for both large and small animals, and intentional workspaces for students, faculty, and staff to collaborate and better manage cases.

While the original building was designed to accommodate about 12,000 clinical cases annually, UW Veterinary Care now has the capacity to handle more than 35,000 per year. It currently has nearly 30,000 cases, so there is room to grow.

The new Vet Med addition boasts expanded check-in, treatment, and study areas. It emphasizes natural lighting and many other perks for students, staff, and clients.

According to the school's dean, **Jon Levine,** "The completion of our building and renovation project is a vital investment in our mission to create the future of veterinary medicine right here at UW–Madison. From the rural and urban landscapes of Wisconsin to communities around the globe, the work that happens within these spaces helps improve health and well-being for animals, people, and the planet."

NIKI DENISON

More Wisconsin Than A 5th Quarter Singalong.

Over 90 years, we've seen a lot of Madison traditions— from swaying and singing to cheering and jumping. But our favorite? Helping. That's why we're here for every Badger™, for every stage of life, with scholarships and endowments, Rewards Checking with no monthly fees, and home loans with great rates. And that's a tradition we'll always carry on.

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