

UWRF

A tradition of excellence

Physics

Newsletter



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Summer 2026

Physics Alumni Return to See SciTech

It has been a busy year in the UWRF Physics department. Throughout the Fall semester, in addition to all the normal business of classes, a lot of time was spent packing boxes. Then, with the fantastic help of the UWRF Facilities team (particularly the custodial crew), we moved across campus from Centennial Science Hall to the new SciTech building in December and January. Unpacking and settling in continues through the present day, but that didn't stop us from hosting a party in our new home.



Part of the audience of physics alumni awaiting the Friday evening presentation. The large number of attendees required the use of the North Hall Auditorium for the group events.

On March 27-28 (just days before the building's grand opening), over 100 UWRF physics alumni, plus emeriti faculty, some family and friends, returned to campus for a two-day reunion and to see the new SciTech building. Events during the reunion included tours of the new building, tours of former Physics spaces in North and South Halls, 'Nerd' Olympics, Planetarium shows, presentations on Cosmic ray research, observing with the telescopes, and presentations by three alums. On Friday evening, Ashton Flinders (2005) spoke about some of his work at the Volcano Observatory in Hawaii. Saturday morning opened up with Carl Nelson (1987) and his son Cyrus giving everyone a taste of the demonstrations he does as Chief Scientist at the Imagination Station in Toledo, OH. The final scheduled event of the reunion was a talk by Lindsey Neby (2011) discussing the Audio engineering work she has done for a variety of companies,

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Remembering Prof. Wayne Sukow

Longtime Physics professor Wayne Sukow passed away last September at the age of 88. Sukow, a Wisconsin native, graduated from Wisconsin State College - River Falls in 1959 with degrees in Physics and Biology. He then left for Case Institute of Technology (now Case Western Reserve University), where he obtained a Master's degree in Low Energy Nuclear Physics. He and his wife, Carol, returned to River Falls in 1961, where Sukow became a member of the faculty. Over the next decade, he intermittently did more graduate work, completing a Ph.D. in Chemical Physics from Washington State University - Pullman in 1973.

Inspired by the Exploratorium in San Francisco, Sukow developed the UWRF Explorium, a large collection of physics demonstrations that could be taken out to schools in the area. A few of those apparatus are still in the department! Sukow served as department chair for several years as well.



Wayne Sukow ca 1983

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...Reunion

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including her current work at Amazon Lab126. All three presentations were highly interesting and entertaining.

As is usual for any reunion, the best parts involved reconnecting with old (some older than others!) friends and classmates. The one drawback to the large turnout and limited time was that we didn't have as much time to just catch up with people as we needed.

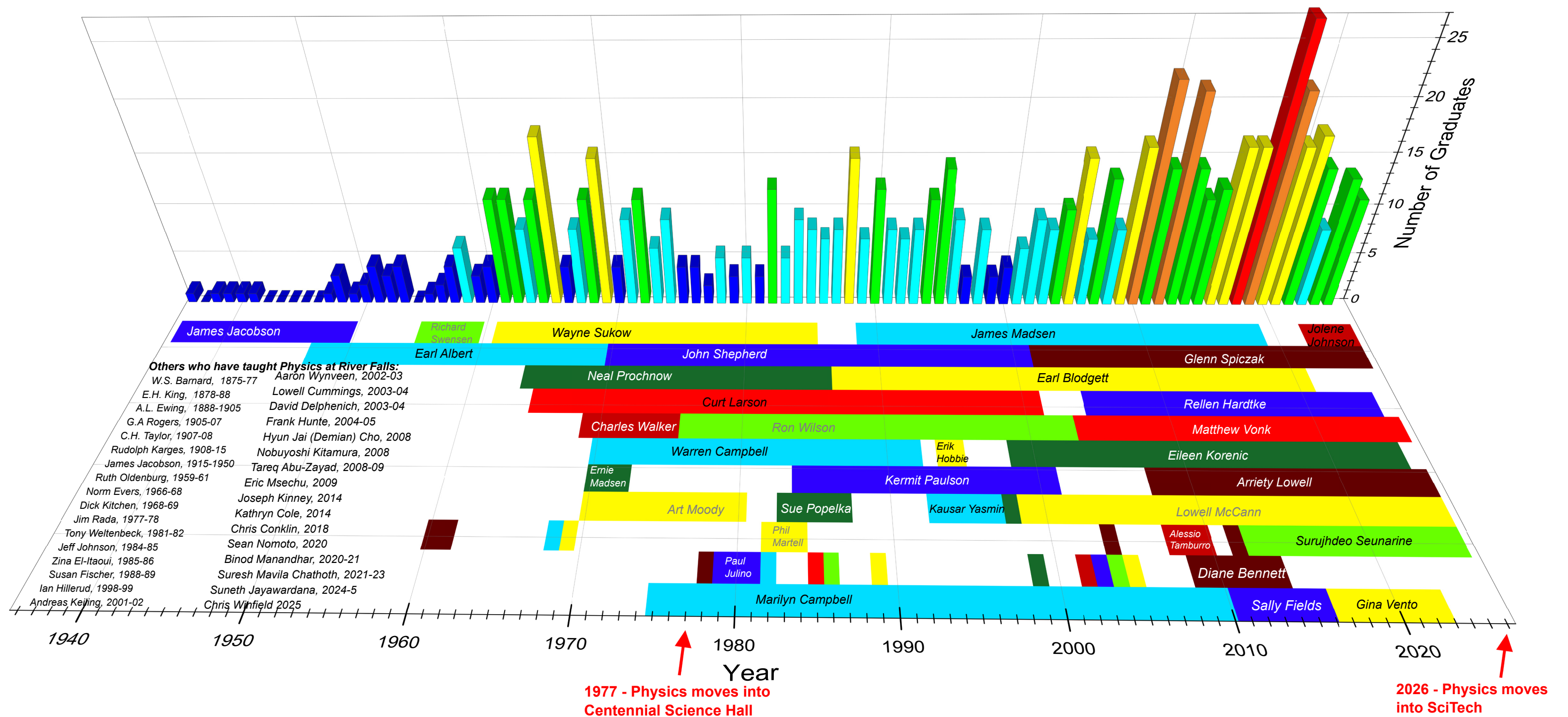
If you were unable to attend this reunion, we highly encourage you to stop by to visit when you can. We can at least show you around the new spaces.

This page, clockwise from top left: Kelly McFarland('15), Angela Coe('16), Tori Wahlquist('16). Mitch Ahlswede('19), Lars Poppy('18). Lindsey Neby('11). Many attendees in the hallway. Eileen Korenic and Dominick Bolden('18). Katelyn Schramke('12), Nick Iverson('11), and Matthew Blodgett('09). Chris Nielsen('86), Carl Nelson('87), and Gary Holm('88). Grace Zeit('19), Roman Alvarado('19), William Gagliardi('19), Joseph Wananda('20) and Bilal Asif('20). Don Gettinger('69, '71), Russ Hanson('69), Craig Foster('68), Chuck Stirrat('68), and John Louks('68).

Facing page, spiraling clockwise from top left: Ashton Flinders('05). Joe Halfen('05), Doug and Sarah (Ubbelohde)Craig('80). Caren Prochnow, Bev Shepherd, and Curt Larson('60). Jason Malisheski('12), Mandy Lundgren('07), Earl Blodgett('80), and Mike Sykora('07). Abby Lemon('12), Alesha Radke('13), Andi Steck('12), Charlotte Evans('13), and Wes Barnes('13). Riley and Samantha (Pedek) Troyer('18). Dan Hagstrom('00) and Phil Borawski('98). Emmanuel Banjo('22) and Suruj Seunarine. Matt Weiman('24), John Weicherding('20), Tori Gehling('25) and Monica and Jeff Crowder('88). Joe Fredericks('11), Jimmy Allen('11), Luke Riveness('11), Dustin Clark('11), and David Schick('12). Katelyn Schramke assists Carl Nelson during the demo show. Greg Zwadlo('72) and Reg Ronnigen('69). Aaron Lemmer('10), Matthew Blodgett('09), Ann Deml('08), and Charlotte Evans('13). Melissa Ludack('03), Joe Ott('03), and Arriety Lowell('04). Anthony Landberg('05), Dylan Miller('16) and Nate Larson.



UWRF Physics Timeline



A graphical display of the progression of the UWRF Physics Department through the years. The vertical axis shows the number of graduates with degrees in physics in each year, and the horizontal plane shows the staff in the department during each year.

We Hear That....

Norm Millis (1963) passed away in February 2025. After graduating from Wisconsin State College-River Falls, he studied at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. He then had a long career in nuclear energy and retired in 2000 from Constellation Energy Group. An avid car enthusiast, he spent his free time in his “Taj Garage” with his classic car collection.

Don Gettinger (BS 1969, MST 1971) was recently elected to the St. Croix Valley Sports Hall of Fame. At Stillwater High School, he coached girls basketball for 30 seasons, volleyball for 25 seasons, girls golf for 20 seasons, and has been officiating volleyball and basketball for the past 25 years.

Andy Wilcox (1985) is CEO of Xetex, a company that produces high-performing energy recovery ventilation and air handling systems.

Mike Lewandowski (1989) retired from 3M in September 2025 after more than 28 years as a corporate health physicist. He remains active in the field by currently serving as President of the Health Physics Society for the 2025-2027 term. He is also a member of the UWRF Foundation Board of Directors.

Matt Miller (1991) is now a Special Test Equipment Manager at Northrup Grumman Armament Systems.

Dave Hansen (1993) is now Director of Research and Development at Integrity Orthopaedics.

Arriety Lowell (2003) was selected as the 2026 UWRF University Excellence Award in Service recipient.

Ryan Sjoberg (2020) is now a Principal Production Engineer at Northrop Grumman.

Brent Harris (2025) works at BPS Fabrication in Osceola, WI.



*Life in SciTech.
Left: Advanced Lab students use the new Optics and Photonics room during the first week of classes. Right: Ryan Schneider works on a research project under the guidance of alum Dylan Miller of Medtronic.*

...Sukow

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His interest in science education continued to grow, leading him to become involved with the National Science Foundation (NSF). That work became a new career for him in the late 1980's, as he left UWRF to work full time as a Program Officer at NSF in what would become the Directorate for Education & Human Resources. While there, he helped nurture the early work of what would become the Physics Education Research community. He also worked with the Office of Polar Programs to begin sending high school teachers to Antarctica as members of research programs so that the teachers could help inspire more students to pursue science.

Sukow retired from NSF in 2004, and kept active in his hobby of rock-hunting, something he had done since he was a child. He was president of the Eastern Federation of Mineralogical and Lapidary Societies, and continued to grow his collection.



Wayne Sukow in the Centennial Science Hall Seminar room.

2026-2027 Physics Scholarship Recipients

Students who have been awarded Physics scholarships for the 2026-2027 academic year include:

- *Earl Albert Scholarship:*

Haylie Rasmussen
Ryan Schneider
Oliver Jaroslawski

- *Curt and Dee Larson Scholarships:*

Weston Schult
Teagan Gazdzik

- *Henry Tranmal Scholarship:*

Angelo Mitrou

- *Warren and Anna Campbell Scholarship:*

Michael Langford

- *Dr. Michael J. Wiskerchen Memorial Scholarships:*

Peter Bendel
Tristan Perkins

- *Physics Alumni Scholarships:*

Paxton Bush	Peyton Kirchner
Jonathan Tabora	Jordan Fyksen
Jai Kalvik	Pablo Orellana
Raidyn Bilotta	Maddie Lehrer
Gracyn Knowles	

In addition, incoming students were offered scholarships that are funded by donations from *Physics alumni*:

Sam Phillips and Cutler Hassig

While UWRF continues to provide an excellent education at a relatively low cost, these scholarships are still critical for our students.

Anyone interested in making a donation to any of the scholarship funds listed above, or initiating a new scholarship, can contact either the UWRF Foundation office or Glenn Spiczak (Glenn.Spiczak@uwrf.edu).

Student Projects

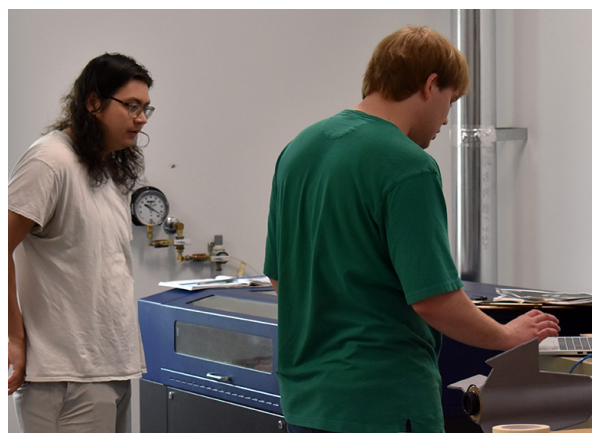
As we started to adjust to the new spaces in the SciTech building, students working on projects both got to use some new equipment as well as flummox their instructors by asking simple things like: “Where is the oscilloscope we used last semester?” Often, the answer was: “In a box.... someplace.” The students persevered, however, and several projects were completed this year.

Abdulkarim Hussein designed and built a quadcopter drone with an eye toward making it an inexpensive package-delivery system. He designed and 3d printed nearly the entire body of the copter himself, and assembled the electronics to control the motors as well.

In Advanced Lab, Haylie Rasmussen and Jai Kalvik learned x-ray diffraction techniques while working alongside Ryan Schneider who created a software interface to control dental x-ray detectors to improve the x-ray diffraction system.

Jon Tabora and Sam Sackett were hoping to use the new metal-cutting fiber laser system, but it was not installed in time, so they pivoted to examine the cutting performance of our existing CO₂ laser system under different operating conditions.

Brook Mcclaird, Michael Langford, and Peter Bendel used a new turbomolecular vacuum pump to create an operating electron beam system using thermionic emission.



Counterclockwise from lower left: Haylie Rasmussen and Jai Kalvik set up an x-ray diffraction experiment. Brook Mcclaird, Peter Bendel, and Michael Langford make measurements of the current of their electron beam as they vary the filament temperature and the accelerating voltage. Jon Tabora and Sam Sackett run a test to directly measure the laser power of the laser cutter.

Duane Hall Recognized with UWRF Lifetime Achievement Award

In May 2026, UWRF Physics alum Duane Hall was given the UWRF Lifetime Achievement Award. This award recognizes UWRF alumni who have demonstrated service and leadership over a significant period of time and who continue to be involved with UWRF.

Hall, a 1962 physics and mathematics graduate, left River Falls to obtain a Masters degree in physics from Vanderbilt University with the support of a fellowship from the Atomic Energy Commission, which was encouraging students to pursue careers in nuclear physics. After finishing his degree, Hall worked first at an experimental nuclear reactor built in Elk River, MN, which operated for 4 years. He then moved to Buffalo, NY to work at the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation for a few years, before returning to Minnesota to work for the 3M corporation. There, he was manager of the ionizing radiation group and became heavily involved in the Health Physics community. Hall helped introduce many UWRF students to the field of Health Physics, including working with Prof. Neal Prochnow to arrange student visits to facilities. Hall also served as a member of the UWRF Foundation Board of Directors, helping guide the nonprofit that supports the mission of UWRF.



Curt Larson, Duane Hall, and Mike Lewandowski at the May 2026 ceremony for the Lifetime Achievement Award.

The support of our alumni and friends is critical to the success of the UWRF Physics department. This takes the form of visits with our current students to discuss career paths, helping students prepare for and find internships, advocating for students to pursue physics at the high school and college levels, and even financial support.

If you want to help out, please contact Lowell McCann at 715-425-4417, Lowell.McCann@uwrf.edu

Some options for your financial support include:

- Physics Foundation Account
- SPIE/UWRF Summer Optics Research awards
- John and Beverly Shepherd Scholarship
- Curt and Dee Larson Scholarship
- Earl G. Albert Memorial Scholarship
- Warren and Anna Campbell Endowed Scholarship
- Dr. Michael Wiskerchen Memorial Scholarship
- Dr. Henry Tranmal Scholarship – Physics
- Physics Alumni Scholarship

UWRF Rocketeers Place First in Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium Competition



From left: Raidyn Bilotta, Sam Sackett, Jon Tabora, Peter Bendel, Evan Sander, Brook McLaird, Mauricio Cuevas, and Ian Vanveen

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