

Caring for campus: UW-River Falls staff member honored with award from Regents

Kathleen Hunzer lauded for starting food pantry, other efforts to help students

June 5, 2023 - Ask anyone on the University of Wisconsin-River Falls campus about Kathleen Hunzer, and the response is instantaneous and consistent: She cares deeply about students and works hard to help them in as many ways as she can.

Hunzer's sense of caring for students, and her willingness to take action to help them, has earned her not only respect across campus but an Academic Staff Excellence Award from the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents. She is one of three recipients of the honor announced earlier today.



The Board of Regents will honor this year's award recipients at its next meeting in Milwaukee on Friday, June 9. The award recognizes exceptional service to the university and is the UW System's highest recognition bestowed on members of its academic staff.

"I was shocked," Hunzer, director of the UWRF Honors Program, Chancellor's Scholars and Falcon Scholars and a first-generation college student, said of learning she was being recognized with the award. "Being nominated by peers who are also committed to student success is an honor. It is really exciting."

In their nomination letters, Hunzer's colleagues praised her for her dedication to students and her taking actions that benefit them. Throughout her two decades at UWRF, they said, Hunzer has worked tirelessly to improve students' lives, improving the campus community in the process.

Hunzer has diligently advocated for underrepresented students, they said, and has helped them obtain countless opportunities through higher education.

"To that end, she has gone above and beyond in establishing programs which help students overcome life's challenges on the path to academic and, ultimately, career and life success," said Rick Foy, assistant chancellor for University Advancement.

Alicia Reinke-Tuthill, director of the UWRF Disability Resource Center, credited Hunzer for her creative, collaborative approach and her commitment to enacting programs that make a positive difference in students' lives. For example, Hunzer combined with the Disability Resource Center and students to offer a student-led support group on campus and connected students with the university's Autism Society.

"Kathleen has committed her professional career to promoting equity and inclusion in all areas of her work," Reinke-Tuthill

said.

Hunzer's efforts on behalf of students are many. Among them is her work to launch Freddy's Pantry which provides food and other essentials such as personal care products to students who can't otherwise access them. Hunzer manages the pantry's budget and schedules, trains and supervises student volunteers, and partners with the local Hunger Prevention Council to align the pantry's services and connect with other agencies.



UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, left, addresses members of the Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities June 8 during a hearing about a proposed change to the tuition reciprocity agreement between Wisconsin and Minnesota. UWRF photo.

Chancellor speaks in support of change to Wisconsin-Minnesota tuition reciprocity agreement

June 8, 2023 – University of Wisconsin-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo testified in Madison Thursday, June 8, in support of changing the state's tuition reciprocity agreement with Minnesota, saying the legislation would enable Wisconsin universities to pay for enhanced student learning opportunities.

Calling the current tuition reciprocity funding system “outdated,” Gallo told members of the Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities that proposed legislation, Assembly Bill 140, that would allow UW System campuses to retain additional reciprocity tuition paid by Minnesota students is necessary to better serve students from both states. Wisconsin and Minnesota have had a tuition reciprocity agreement dating to the 1970s.

Currently, UW-River Falls and other UW System schools that enroll Minnesota students do not retain the higher tuition that those students pay. Instead, part of that money is returned to Minnesota, while the rest is deposited in the general fund of the state budget and is not used for higher education purposes.

“That is revenue that could have been reinvested in UWRF, meeting student demands and filling regional employer needs,” Gallo told the committee.

In 2021-22, 43% of UW-River Falls students were from Minnesota. Had rules of the proposed tuition reciprocity bill been in place, it would have meant an additional \$4.3 million in revenue that year for UWRF.

“That revenue would allow us to offer more innovative, high-quality programming for our students, add advisers and support student success, and increase hands-on collaboration opportunities with local employers,” Gallo said.

UW System schools are of vital importance to the regions where they are located, Gallo said, and they are training students to fill current workforce and talent needs in Wisconsin’s economy. With its proximity to the Twin Cities and construction to begin soon on a new Science and Technology Innovation Center, UW-River Falls is in a strong position to boost the regional economy, she said.

“But we will only be effective if we are able to fully capitalize on and reinvest the revenue we raise through the Minnesota-Wisconsin tuition reciprocity arrangement,” she said.

UWRF senior Mayala Keita, a food science major who grew up in Coon Rapids, Minn., testified that she chose to attend UWRF in large part because of its affordability. She said she was surprised to learn that not all the tuition she pays goes to UWRF.

Keita praised the education she has received at UWRF and said Assembly Bill 140 “is essential not only to provide those same (educational) benefits but expand on them, allowing for future classes to have an even better education than I received.”

Gallo thanked state lawmakers who represent River Falls – Rep. Shannon Zimmerman (R-River Falls), Rep. Warren Petryk (R-Eleva), Sen. Jeff Smith (D-Town of Brunswick) and Sen. Rob Stafsholt (R-New Richmond) – for supporting the tuition reciprocity bill. Zimmerman is lead author on the Assembly bill.

UW-River Falls enrolls more than 5,000 students, attracting primarily Wisconsin and Minnesota students in a variety of fields that are valuable to the economic growth of western Wisconsin.



Humane Handling Institute Program Manager Ashlynn Kirk listens to Brandon Clare, owner of JM Watkins meat processing plant in Plum City, discuss details of ensuring compliance with federal regulations. Kirk helped Clare individualize a humane handling plan for his plant. UWRF photo.

Meat-ing a need: UW-River Falls program trains animal processors

First-of-its-kind effort ensures humane animal treatment and regulations compliance

June 15, 2023 - Students working in the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Meat Processing Plant had done everything they were supposed to do, had taken every step needed to ensure that animals awaiting processing were as calm as possible. Then the unexpected happened during the processing of beef cattle in the spring.

A steer escaped its holding area after dislodging a gate and suddenly appeared in the processing area.

"It was a surprise for sure. That's the last thing you want to see in that situation," said Kurt Vogel, animal science associate professor who heads the UWRF Animal Welfare Lab and developed its Humane Handling Institute (HHI) program that was announced last year.

But rather than cause an uproar, the steer remained relatively calm, Vogel recounted. He credited students' similarly relaxed demeanors in the face of that challenge for the steer's peaceful state.

The students working at the plant that morning were the same team that had helped design the humane handling plan used

there. That same plan is a model for HHI training programs. A week earlier, with the guidance of HHI Program Manager Ashlynn Kirk, they put together a standard operating procedure that included just this sort of incident.

“At the time, they didn’t necessarily see such an event as reasonably likely to occur, but they were ready when it happened because they wrote the procedure,” Vogel said.

Dealing with such unexpected situations is sometimes part of the meat processing industry. To address such scenarios, Vogel and other UWRF team members have developed a first-of-its-kind training program that teaches meat processors how to handle the animals they butcher more humanely while also ensuring that operators are complying with regulations.

The program is aimed at providing high-level training to small meat processors who make up many of Wisconsin’s meat processors despite the fact that more than 80% of meat processing nationally is done by four large processing companies. Small processors often lack the staff to specialize in humane slaughter and regulations compliance, and the HHI training is designed to provide them with that knowledge.

“Our plan is to help every small and very small slaughter establishment in Wisconsin to build and install a humane handling program that specifically fits their operation first,” Vogel said, noting that many larger processors already have humane handling plans in place. “As we get further along with Wisconsin establishments, we plan to open our workshop offerings to out-of-state establishments promptly.”

The HHI training was first rolled out in April, when a team of meat processors from Viroqua-based Nordik Meats became the initial group to undergo the two-day training session. Four meat processors from small processing plants in west-central Wisconsin attended another session May 17-18.

The training sessions are meant to not only inform participants about how they can handle animals more humanely as part of processing them, but as a test run of sorts for the training curriculum, Vogel said.

“We want this to be a meaningful training, the kind where people come and feel like they’ve really learned something important,” Vogel said during a break from helping meat processors devise plans individualized to their processing sites. “What we’ve tried to do is turn this into something that is interactive. And we’ve created an atmosphere where we discuss real-life situations that these processors face and help them come up with solutions.”

Focus on humane animal treatment

HHI was formed in October 2022, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP) Meat Talent Development Program. HHI offers training in humane livestock handling, stunning of animals and proper equipment maintenance.

Participants who complete the HHI training receive certification. The aim of the training, Vogel said, is to offer meat industry employees knowledge and skills that will address key regulatory issues and strengthen consumer trust in meat processing facilities.

Those were among the topics Vogel and Kirk discussed with meat processors taking part in the May training session. They spoke about the need for humane handling training to meet compliance with processing standards as well as growing demand by the public that increasingly is interested in where its food comes from.

“The public is driving big business to head in this direction, to treat animals more humanely,” said Brandon Clare, who owns and operates the JM Watkins meat processing plant in Plum City. “It’s certainly the right thing to do. And it’s something that people care about a lot these days.”

Vance Lautsbaugh, production manager at Crescent Meats in Cadott, a business his father Wayne owns, said the humane treatment of animals that will be butchered is an important topic with many people.

“Our customers ask us how do we prove that we treat our animals well, that we abide by all of the regulations,” Lautsbaugh said. “It’s the way it is now, and it’s a good thing. It’s bettering us as a company and as a society.”

Public pressure to treat animals being slaughtered more humanely is certainly a force behind the formation of HHI, Vogel said. Ensuring that animals are treated as humanely as possible during meat processing “is an issue that a lot more people seem to care about,” he said.

HHI training also informs meat processors about the rules and regulations they must comply with to operate their facilities and avoid regulatory fines. Keeping current on numerous rules can seem overwhelming at times, Clare and other meat processors participating in the training said.

At various points during the training session, Vogel discussed specific regulations that processors are responsible for. For instance, he described how animals that will be slaughtered must be fed if they’re in pens at a processing site for more than 24 hours. They must have water available all the time, however, or processors face being issued a violation or suspension by regulators.

“This is one of those that gets you in trouble, and it doesn’t have to,” Vogel told the group. “You’ve got to make sure the animals have water available, and that it’s in a container that they’re not going to demolish.”

Training fills a big need

Meat processors attending the session praised the information that Vogel and Kirk provided. Such knowledge is especially important, they said, as DATCP is providing funding to expand the number of meat processors across Wisconsin. Such expansion is needed to reduce waiting times to butcher animals that sometimes exceed one year.

“Without something like this, a lot of us smaller processors are really scratching in the dark as to how to implement these HHI practices in their workplaces,” said Michael Rossi, who works at Crescent Meats. “The bottom line is the safety and humane treatment of animals, regardless of the size of your plant.”

The course taught by Vogel and Kirk also outlines a detailed, professional process, Rossi and his meat processor colleagues said. Processing plants may have been abiding by regulations and treating animals humanely previously, but through HHI

certification, they now have a way to document that.

“This gives us a way to say that we are a humane, ethical place of integrity,” Rossi said.

Another benefit of the HHI training, meat processors said, is the ability to customize meat processing practices and regulations to their individual processing sites. They spent part of the training working with Vogel and Kirk to do that work.

“No two establishments are the same, and we want to make a robust humane handling plan both attainable and sustainable over time,” Kirk said.

Clare worked with Kirk, asking her how to best address issues given the layout of his small processing plant.

“Having this be a customizable plan is a big deal. This is tailored toward small plants like us,” Clare said, “and that is really helpful.”

Throughout the training, Vogel and Kirk engaged in conversation with Rossi, Lautsbaugh, Clare and Clare’s son Jordan. They addressed numerous situations that can arise during meat processing and discussed what is required in specific instances to abide by regulations safely and legally.

“There is a lot of ambiguity out there about what the government anticipates from us, and having training like this where we can ask how certain situations are going to play out and what we have to do, it’s really helpful,” Rossi said. “Hopefully as many meat processors take this training as possible, so we can make sure the industry is as safe and humane as it can be across the board.”



Mark Klapatch-Mathias, coordinator of the UWRF Sustainability Office, shows a toy to student Amber Rappl as they sort items donated as part of the Don't Throw It, Donate It! project. UWRF photo.

Moving toward sustainability: Campus effort benefits the environment and people in need

June 7, 2023 - An annual waste reduction effort at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls is getting items that would be otherwise destined for a landfill to people who need them.

Volunteers working with the Don't Throw It, Donate It! program collected more than 4,500 donated items as students moved out of their residence halls at the end of the academic year, according to organizers. The effort is coordinated by the Residence Life Department, the Sustainability Office and the Green Team student organization.

Total collections are up from previous years and are a sign that more students are aware of the importance of living in a sustainable manner, said Joan Mayen, who started Don't Throw It, Donate It! in 2006 with her husband Mike of the UWRF Building Maintenance Department.

"Awareness among students about this continues to grow," Mayen said. "Every year we continue to get more and more items donated."

Among this year's totals were 4,563 items donated, up from last year's 4,145 figure. This year, donations totaled 6,564 pounds, larger than 6,433 pounds last year.

Mark Klapatch-Mathias, coordinator of the Sustainability Office, praised UWRF students for caring about their community and

the environment.

“UWRF students once again proved their generosity by donating over 4,000 items this year instead of disposing of those items in dumpsters,” he said.

Items that students donate as they move out of the residence halls cover a wide range, from clothing to personal care to electronics to school supplies. Other donated items include common household materials, sporting good equipment and furniture. Nonperishable food items also are donated.

“We get some of almost everything,” Mayen said.

Donated items are collected from designated drop-off sites in residence halls by a group of volunteers and taken to be sorted. They are then distributed to local nonprofits, who in turn make those items available to people who need them. Items were gathered and sorted at the conference room at South Forks Suite during May and were then distributed to the River Falls Community Food Pantry, Treasures of the Heart, Our Neighbors Place, the River Falls School District and Freddy’s Pantry (a food pantry at UWRF).

Donations to Our Neighbors’ Place through Don’t Throw It, Donate It! make a significant positive difference to that organization’s clients, said Shelly Smith, director of the River Falls nonprofit that provides shelter, housing services and other support to people who need it.

Donated clothing and items such as blankets, towels and sheets are used by the nonprofit’s thrift store, Smith said. Clients also appreciate the convenience food items donated, she said, as well as household items that are used by homeless families in the organization’s transitional housing units.

“Some of these items don’t seem like a big deal until you don’t have them,” Smith said. “It’s really amazing the amount of useful items that our clients have access to because of this great program at UW-River Falls.”

Labor of love

Brenda Irvin grabbed two sweaters from a large pile, carried them a short distance, then placed them near other clothing tops. She returned to the pile, grabbed more clothes and hauled them to their new pile.

“There is so much here,” a smiling Irvin said. “You feel like sorting it will take forever. But it is good to see that students have donated so much.”

Irvin, who recently retired from the Business and Finance Office, got involved with Don’t Throw It, Donate It! years ago and said she enjoys helping others and working with other volunteers. As she continued to sort items, she laughed as she came across threadbare clothing and a broken fan.

“There are lots of treasures in here,” a joking Irvin said.

Nearby, Klapatch-Mathias chuckled as he turned the handle of an old-time mixer after locating it amid a pile of donated items. “Look how old this is,” he said. “This is an antique.”

While Klapatch-Mathias, Irvin and other volunteers often laugh as they sift through donations, they are serious about the detailed sorting process. Separating clothing and the many other donated items not only helps volunteers know what has been collected but is important to the agencies who receive donated goods.

Smith said her agency lacks the manpower to separate the donated items, and she is thankful that UWRF volunteers offer donations in an already sorted easy-to-use manner.

“If we had to sort all of this ourselves, we would have to say ‘sorry, we can’t take it,’” Smith said. “That is key. They are giving us all this stuff in a very usable fashion.”

Making a difference

Don’t Throw It, Donate It! owes its beginning to a long-ago dumpster-diving trip and a sense of caring about the environment.

In spring 2005, Mayen’s oldest daughter, a high school student at the time, told them she was going dumpster diving in River Falls with some friends. Puzzled, the Mayens asked about the seemingly odd expedition. The daughter said the UWRF dumpsters were home to lots of new or gently used items that UWRF students had thrown out.

“I was like ‘What? What do you mean you’re going dumpster diving at the college,’” Mayen recalled. “Mike and I had our eyes opened, and we said we should do something about this.”

Mayen, who works as a financial specialist at UWRF, reached out to residence life staff to assess the situation and learn more about it. She and her husband then decided to begin the effort that recycles students’ throwaways into items others can use.

For a decade the couple hauled the donated items to their garage, where they sorted the materials before distributing them to local nonprofits. The effort eventually outgrew that site, and since 2016 it has been housed in various spaces at UWRF. As awareness about the program grew, so did the number of volunteers and organizations willing to be a part of it.

“It is so amazing to see what this has become,” Mayen said. “It has become such a collaborative effort, and that is exactly what it should be. There is so much good energy with it. Each spring when we do this, it’s my favorite time of year on campus.”

Smith also marvels at the program’s impact. Many River Falls residents who are struggling have better lives because of it, she said.

“It’s fantastic for the clients we work with,” Smith said. “It’s so heartening to see the positive difference this is making for people who really need the help.”



Amy Sabot, right, said her service dog, Mabel, a 6-year-old yellow lab, not only helps her perform a variety of physical tasks she can't do on her own but provides emotional support as well. Beginning in the fall, 10 service dogs will receive training at UW-River Falls as part of the Falcon FETCH program on campus. UWRF photo.

Paws for Service: UW-River Falls students to help train dogs to assist people

Falcon FETCH program scheduled to begin in the fall

June 1, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will be home to new four-legged learners when the next school year kicks off in the fall.

The Falcon Fostering Education and Training Canines in Housing, or FETCH, program will pair 10 dogs with 22 UW-River Falls students who have committed to help train the dogs as service animals.

Chris Hergenrader, an assistant professor of animal science at UW-River Falls who will oversee Falcon FETCH, said he is especially excited about the new program because it will benefit not only the dogs and the students who train them, but people who rely on service animals as well.

"We want to provide a hands-on, experiential learning opportunity for students in a way that helps them, the dogs and the greater community," Hergenrader said.

Falcon FETCH will be operated in coordination with Can Do Canines, a service dog training service based in New Hope, Minn. Can Do Canines has a strong track record working with other universities and has a high level of accreditation, Hergenrader said.

UW-River Falls started a separate service dog training program in 2016 called Assistance Dog Education Program and Training (ADEPT). That program was in conjunction with the Minnesota-based nonprofit Pawsitive Perspectives Assistance Dogs (PawPADs), but it is no longer affiliated with the university.

Some other universities, including the University of Minnesota, partner dogs with students to provide service dog training, but few have incorporated that effort into a living and learning community and actual courses focused on service dog training as will be the case at UWRF, Hergenrader said.

“As far as I know, our program is unique in the Midwest,” he said.

Service dogs at UWRF will undergo general training. After their time with their student trainers, the dogs will be returned to Can Do Canines where they will be trained to provide service in five areas: mobility assistance, autism assistance, seizure assistance, diabetes assistance and hearing assistance.

Most of the students who will work with dogs are animal science majors, although the program is open to any students, Hergenrader said.

Students will stay with their dogs in Stratton Hall, with much of the training taking place at the Lydecker Living Learning Center on campus. The companion animal program at UWRF was housed at Hagestad Hall but has been relocated to Lydecker because Hagestad is being torn down to make room for the new Science and Technology Innovation Center building.

“The new site will work well for us. It has a huge training space, which would have been hard for us to come up with,” Hergenrader said.

The dogs in the program will be between nine and 18 months old. They will be trained at UWRF for different lengths of time, depending on their age, Hergenrader said.

“The dogs must be mature enough to not cause problems in the dorm,” Hergenrader said. “We need this to be a partnership with Residence Life.”

Making a difference

The positive impact service dogs can have on people’s lives was evident during a May 19 visit to Meyer Middle School in River Falls by Can Do Canines trainers Pat and Dee Dee Heffernan and their 2-year-old standard poodle, Fawn, and Amy and Wade Sabot of Lakeland, Minn., and their 6-year-old yellow lab service dog, Mabel.

Amy has mobility challenges after a series of childhood medical maladies. Seemingly simple tasks such as bending over to

pick up items are anything but easy for her, and she often struggles to perform routine tasks. Her husband Wade worried about her safety when he was away from home.

Four-and-a-half years ago, Amy received Mabel. They quickly bonded. When Amy needs help picking up items or cleaning her house, Mabel is there to assist. When Amy lifts weights or swims as part of her physical therapy program, Mabel grabs weights, goggles, swim cap and kickboard in her mouth and gets them to her owner.

Mabel also supports Amy in other ways. The dog provides emotional support, brightening Amy's days when she is down and calming Amy's anxiety.

"My husband has noticed a big difference in me," Amy told an audience of middle school students, Mabel at her side. "I'm more independent, more confident. And I'm a lot more at ease talking to people now, talking to a group like this."

That type of relationship that benefits a dog and its owner is exactly what Can Do Canines trainers hope for when they link dogs with people who need them, said Pat Heffernan, who has volunteered with service dogs since 1992 and raised them since 2006. Service dogs undergo intense training, he said, and not all dogs are cut out for that kind of work.

Dogs can be trained to help people in many ways, he said, such as notifying a diabetic owner when their blood sugar is too low or high. Giving up the dogs after he has raised them is difficult, he said.

"It can be hard to give them up," he said. "But you know it is the right thing to do because you know that these animals will be helping people who need them."

'Make you feel good'

That sense of benefitting others is what drives Hergenrader to start a service dog training program at UWRF. After listening to Amy tell her story, he turned to an onlooker and said, "That's what a program like this is all about – helping dogs help people."

Working with service dogs will give students involved in Falcon FETCH valuable experience that they can use in various ways, he said.

"This is going to be a big challenge for students, spending so much time with these dogs," Hergenrader said. "It is a big responsibility, but it is also a big opportunity."

Hergenrader hopes to grow Falcon FETCH and further develop the program. He envisions it as one way to attract more students interested in companion animals to UWRF, providing them with a unique experience by incorporating the program into the curriculum. That curriculum will be aligned with certification for professional dog trainers.

Training service dogs won't just be a labor of love, Hergenrader said, but will have practical outcomes. Falcon FETCH students could use their experience for dog training, owning a boarding facility or as the foundation for becoming a veterinarian, he said.

Jobs related to animal behavior are on the rise, Hergenrader said, a fact that might be due in large part to people's affinity for them. That makes sense, given that scientific studies show that human's stress hormones like cortisol drop when they are around dogs and feel-good hormones such as oxytocin rise.

That law of science was evident when Mabel and Fawn were led through Meyer Middle School. As students and adults alike gathered around the dogs, their faces lit with smiles.

"You can feel the stress go down when a dog is around," Hergenrader said, smiling himself. "They just make you feel good."

UW-River Falls announces seven faculty fellowships funded by state-sponsored Dairy Innovation Hub

June 21, 2023. -- The College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls recently awarded seven faculty research fellowships to help increase dairy-related research capacity through the Dairy Innovation Hub initiative.

The selected faculty members will tackle research projects in the hub's four priority areas; stewarding land and water resources; enriching human health and nutrition; ensuring animal health and welfare; and growing farm business and communities.

Funded through a \$7.8 million per year investment by the state of Wisconsin, the hub harnesses research and development at UW-Madison, UW-Platteville and UW-River Falls campuses to keep Wisconsin's \$45.6 billion dairy community at the global forefront in producing nutritious dairy foods in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable manner. Since its launch in 2019, the hub has funded more than 160 projects across the three campuses. More information is at dairyinnovationhub.wisc.edu.

A faculty research fellowship is a temporary position for permanent faculty members to provide support for a specific research project and any ancillary costs — including ensuring that the faculty member has time to conduct research and support for existing teaching responsibilities.

The following UW-River Falls faculty fellows were selected for funding:

Bahareh Hassanpour, Plant and Earth Science Department

Hassanpour is an assistant professor in agricultural water management with research interests in remediation of non-point source pollution, water quality, nutrient cycling, and the fate and transport of contaminants. Her position is partially funded by the Dairy Innovation Hub. Hassanpour's project "Groundwater fluctuations-related nutrient cycling and stream water quality in agricultural headwater areas" aims to create a molecular-scale explanation of the transport and cycling of nutrients in soil and groundwater where manure is applied.

Veronica Justen, Plant and Earth Science Department

Justen is a crop science professor with research interests in plant breeding, field crop production, and enhancing diversified crop rotations with cover crops and hardy winter small grains. Justen's project "Optimizing forage cover crop systems for agronomic production and environmental stewardship" will evaluate the interactive effects of cover crop species, environmental factors, and agronomic management on the productivity of forage cover crop rotations in Northern climates.

Sylvia Kehoe, Animal and Food Science Department

Kehoe is a professor of dairy science and assistant chair of the department. She teaches courses on lactation and milk quality as well as animal welfare. Kehoe's project "Effects of using calf jackets on performance and health of purebred and crossbred dairy calves in different rearing environments" will evaluate the use of calf jackets for dairy calves and dairy x beef crossbred calves in both an indoor calf barn and outdoor hutch environment.

Natasha Rayne, Plant and Earth Science Department

Rayne is an associate professor of plant and earth science, specializing in soil science with an emphasis on soil fertility. Her research focuses on nutrient cycling and the improvement of soil health using manure. Rayne's project "Effect of in-field prairie strips on nutrient cycling and biodiversity in crop production systems: a preliminary study" will examine the soil nutrient contributions of planted prairie strips to crop production systems and changes in the soil nutrient status over time.

Susanne Wiesner, Plant and Earth Science Department

Wiesner is an assistant professor of environmental science. Her research interests include agricultural atmospheric science and climate resiliency, land-atmosphere interactions, remote sensing, and ecosystem management. Wiesner's position is funded by the Dairy Innovation Hub. Wiesner's project "Establishing a baseline greenhouse gas budget and climate resilience target for the Mann Valley Dairy Farm" intends to improve the monitoring and verification of greenhouse gas emissions at the Mann Valley Farm.

James White, Agricultural Economics Department

White is an associate professor of agricultural economics. He teaches a variety of courses in the department and has research interests in agricultural management, finance, and public policy. White's project "Rural economic development in Wisconsin: analysis of intergenerational mobility and community-centered case studies" will focus on rural Wisconsin communities and examine causes of economic decline and alternatives for generating positive economic growth with existing resources.

Bob Zeng, Agricultural Engineering Technology Department

Zeng is an assistant professor of agricultural engineering. He is a licensed professional engineer with expertise in the areas of machinery systems modeling, testing, automation, and numerical simulation. Zeng's project "Efficient manure land application through innovative tillage systems: feasibility and environmental impacts" will investigate the feasibility of integrating innovative tillage and liquid manure land application systems and evaluate the economic and environmental impacts.



Kaitlin Ramirez, leader of the UW-River Falls Fair Trade Committee, discusses information related to sustainability with an attendee of Earth Fest at the university on April 22. Such efforts have helped UWRF be designated as a fair trade university. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls receives national Fair Trade designation

Effort focused on education, implementing sustainability practices

June 13, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has received designation as a Fair Trade School, a recognition of the university's commitment to purchasing products from companies that empower farmers and workers while also protecting the environment.

The designation was announced June 13 by Fair Trade Campaigns, a coalition of organizations that recognizes municipalities, universities, K-12 schools and congregations across the U.S. for devising and implementing fair trade purchasing practices into their operations.

Mark Klapatch-Mathias, coordinator of the UWRF Sustainability Office, said receiving the fair trade designation shows the university's ongoing focus on implementing sustainability into campus operations and activities.

"Fair trade designation demonstrates UWRF's commitment to all aspects of sustainability, including social, environmental, and economic," he said. "This designation advances our progress on the sustainability goals identified in the Sustainable Campus Community Plan as well as the broader UWRF strategic plan."

To qualify for fair trade designation status, universities and other entities must document that they have met a series of goals

that demonstrate their commitment to fair trade and other sustainability practices. At UWRF, those goals included not only campus outreach and working with the campus food providers to make fair trade food products available, but also putting on multiple campus education events.

Certification requirements also include the development of a fair trade resolution and the adoption of such a resolution by the UWRF Student Government Association.

In addition, the designation required that UWRF develop a Fair Trade Committee to develop and lead a fair trade campaign. That group ensured completion of fair trade goals and continues to monitor progress. A senior environmental planning major Kaitlin Ramirez, of Round Lake, Ill., led the committee. She was joined on the committee by Klapatch-Mathias, adjunct faculty member and Sustainability Specialist Tovah Flygare, and students Amber Rappl, a senior biotechnology major from Mt. Calvary, and Chloe Elftman, a junior majoring in environmental planning from Brooklyn Park, Minn.

Among their efforts, committee members ensured that UWRF Dining, Chartwells and the Falcon Shop include a minimum of two fair trade products at each location.

To raise awareness about the importance of fair trade policies, students on the committee hosted numerous events, such as Fair Trade Finals at the Sustain Your Brain event, and at Earth Fest in April. Students also share information about fair trade and its importance through the UWRF sustainability social media accounts.

Ramirez said the process to receive fair trade designation provided a clear framework for her and Fair Trade Committee members to follow. The designation is important, she said, because it shows that UWRF is committed to fulfilling its sustainability commitment and is prioritizing the planet and its people.

Attaining fair trade designation wasn't easy, she said, but "the Fair Trade Campaigns team provided excellent support throughout the process, and we are thankful for them doing this important work."

Rappl said the committee's work shows an increasing awareness about the importance of acting related to fair trade and other sustainability measures.

"I am excited UWRF has received this designation because it demonstrates that we care about people, including their work conditions and wages as well as the environment," Rappl said.

Klapatch-Mathias praised the work of Fair Trade Committee members, saying numerous parts of campus came together to work toward a greater commitment to sustainability.

"This designation is only possible thanks to the efforts of many individuals and departments across campus," he said, singling out Ramirez for her work leading the effort.

UWRF is among about 280 active institutions in the U.S. that have attained fair trade designation through Fair Trade Campaigns. The program in America US is an outgrowth of similar work in Europe toward increasing demand for fair trade and ethically produced products to be incorporated into institutional purchasing decisions.



UW-River Falls to reinstate baseball, add men's soccer as varsity sports

Additions are part of the university's effort to attract and retain students

June 1, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will reintroduce baseball and add men's soccer as varsity sports beginning in the 2024-25 school year, part of the university's plan to attract and retain more students on campus.

The university's strategic enrollment management plan prioritizes the addition of sports as a way to recruit more students. Universities across Wisconsin are attempting to maintain enrollment amid a relatively low student population and financial challenges.

Students have many choices regarding where they attend college, and the addition of the two varsity sports gives them more reasons to choose UWRF, Chancellor Maria Gallo said.

"Men's soccer and baseball will attract prospective students who are passionate about these sports, and that may influence their decision to choose UWRF over other universities," Gallo said. "And as we know, students involved in sports strongly connect to the university and are more likely to stay engaged, thereby increasing retention. It is a win-win."

UWRF Athletic Director Crystal Lanning said adding baseball and men's soccer "are natural next steps" for Falcons athletics. Those programs will support the university's strategic enrollment goals by attracting new student-athletes, she said.

"Baseball has a long tradition at UWRF, and I am excited for the opportunity to bring Falcon baseball back to the River Falls

community,” Lanning said. “Additionally, men’s soccer has a strong base in the Twin Cities and Midwest region, and we are well positioned to build a highly competitive program.”

UWRF had a baseball team before it was discontinued in 2002. As a sign of interest in reviving the program, the university has been home to a club baseball team since 2017. Men’s soccer is a new varsity sport at UWRF.

UWRF will be the eighth school in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) to sponsor baseball and the fifth to sponsor men’s soccer. New head coaches for baseball and men’s soccer will be hired this summer, giving them a full year to recruit players and prepare for competition.

Adding sports teams to attract student-athletes has a track record of success in recent years at UWRF. The university added women’s lacrosse in 2017 and Esports in 2022. Both of those teams have brought additional students to campus, Lanning said.

For example, Esports will become a varsity sport in the fall, and the program has nearly doubled its 20-member team goal for its inaugural season. The Esports club grew from five members to more than 100 during the 2022-23 school year.

For more information, contact the UWRF Athletic Department at 715-425-3900 or athletics@uwrf.edu.



UW-River Falls students, from left, Rafael Larosiliere, Anna Euerle, Kate Petersen, Yihong Deng, and Ashley Gruman won first place in a national contest by developing a dairy-based product aimed at helping ease people's anxiety. The group won the Dairy Management Inc. New Product Competition and received the award in Chicago. Contributed photo.

Getting to the root of stress: UW-River Falls students win national award

July 20, 2023 – A team of University of Wisconsin-River Falls students has turned a challenging project into a first-place national award by developing a dairy-based product aimed at helping ease people's anxiety.

Students Yihong Deng, Ashley Gruman, Rafael Larosiliere, Kate Petersen and Anna Euerle won the honor as part of the Dairy Management Inc. New Product Competition that challenged students to come up with innovative items that would bring people a sense of calm. The UWRF team received its award July 17 at the Institute of Food Technologists annual meeting and trade show in Chicago.

In addition to winning the contest, team members will split the \$8,000 first place award.

The competition was open to undergraduate and graduate students from across the U.S., making UWRF students' accomplishment especially impressive, said Grace Lewis, assistant professor of animal and food science at UWRF who led the student team. Many other teams were comprised of graduate students; UWRF's team was undergrads.

"This team of students worked tirelessly to develop this product, and they had to overcome many, many technical difficulties along the way," Lewis said. "In the end, this product is delicious, healthy, commercially viable, and very novel."

The competition called for participating teams to develop a new product that is at least 51% dairy, is a good source of protein, and provides a sense of calm to people ingesting it. The UWRF student team devised a product called RootCurd, a ginger-based, sweetened dairy pudding that contains 20 grams of protein per serving.

RootCurd is 89% dairy and comes from a traditional Chinese recipe. It contains ginger, which gives the product a slightly spicy flavor, and lavender, which helps reduce physical and mental stress. Idaho Milk Products donated ingredients for developing RootCurd, and Karalyn Littlefield, a lecturer in the UWRF Animal and Food Science Department, contributed ideas for the product.

Student award winners said they're proud of their accomplishment and the fact they were able to come up with a high-quality food with calming properties that can benefit people. Devising RootCurd to comply with competition rules provided multiple challenges, they said, and overcoming them is gratifying. The students are interested in seeing if they can move forward with commercializing RootCurd.

A feeling of disbelief flooded the UWRF student team when they were announced as winners, a sense soon replaced by accomplishment and pride. The win made all the late nights and work devising about 40 different versions of RootCurd worth it, said Petersen, of Clear Lake, who graduated with a food science and technology degree in May and now works in research, development and application for food company Kerry Group.

"After the initial shock set in, I was filled with pride for our team," Petersen said. "We had put in lots of hard work and many late nights so finding out we had won made it all worth it."

Like her teammates, Gruman didn't expect to take top honors in the contest. But the skills they learn at UWRF gave them the ability to overcome challenges and finish with a great result while learning multiple skills along the way, according to Gruman, a junior food science and technology major from Fredonia.

"Leaning on our coursework in food science, we developed a very particular process for RootCurd," she said. "This allowed us to maintain the perfect texture with ensuring food safety was a top priority."

Deng, a senior food science major from Zhangzhou, China, said "it was a rewarding moment" when she and her teammates were announced as contest winners, especially given all the work students did developing RootCurd. She is familiar with the desert and is proud that students were able to create viable RootCurd that met contest requirements.

"Trying to refine the product with an original recipe from China, a dessert I like and am familiar with, to create a high-protein, clean-label, stackable product is a good practice to apply our food science knowledge to," she said.

Euerle, a senior food science major from Litchfield, Minn., and Larosiliere, who graduated in May as a food science major and is from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, said the win is especially gratifying given repeated challenges with the RootCurd and the fact that UWRF hadn't previously competed in the event.

"We felt like the underdogs," Euerle said. "A lot of the other schools had competed before, and their teams were made up of graduate students. When it was announced (that UWRF had won), I truly was honored."



Owen Olson, a Hudson High school graduate who will attend the Boston Conservatory of Music this fall, teaches music he wrote to students who are participating in the free musical “Lucette” set for August 3-5 at UW-River Falls. UWRF photo.

Musical at UW-River Falls strives to do more with less

Actors play multiple roles in production that offers new perspective on Paul Bunyan, environment

July 21, 2023 – Performers in the musical “Lucette” will have plenty of opportunities to stretch their acting and singing abilities when it is staged at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls August 3-5.

The free production is an original work written by Hudson resident, author, and adjunct UWRF writing and literature instructor Marybeth Lorbiecki. It is written from the perspective of Lucette, the girlfriend of the mythical lumberjack Paul Bunyan and is based on Lorbiecki’s picture book “Bunyan’s Sweetheart.”

The musical is planned for 20 actors but is performed by about half that many plus Lorbiecki, meaning most performers play multiple characters. That shortfall isn’t a math error but is instead purposeful.

“Everyone is doing double duty, including me,” Lorbiecki laughed, noting she plays three roles in the musical. “This is a play that is still being developed, and it is a learning experience for all of us.”

The musical is set for 7 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 3, and Friday, Aug. 4. The Saturday, Aug. 5, showing is at 10:30 a.m. All performances are in the Blanche Davis Theatre in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building, 420 Cascade Ave., River Falls. The performances are free, but attendees are encouraged to make a goodwill offering to support the actors and musicians.

Besides Lorbiecki, the cast is composed of UW-River Falls first-year student Mary Rother, a UWRF stage and screen arts major from Hudson, and Hudson High School students Lauren Kromrey, AJ Lentz, Nicolas Soriano Murcia, Makayla Groer, Rylie Martineau, Chloie Schuh, Stella Burt and Sherman Holmstadt. UWRF students Sam Lewandowski, of Hudson, who graduated in May with a psychology degree; and Devon Sundt, a stage and screen arts major from Osceola who graduated in May, are stage managers and board operators.

Those performing music for the production include Ben Weaver, Carter Close, Carissa Lewandowski, Jimmy Quiney, Shloke Jani, Cameron Waldal, Carl Vilwock and Laurel Bostrom. Owen Olson, a Hudson High school graduate who will attend the Boston Conservatory of Music this fall, wrote and is teaching the music for the production.

The production that attendees will see won't be fully formed, Lorbiecki said, but is instead a stage testing workshop. Actors and actresses, including Lorbiecki, will wear little in terms of costumes, and stage props and setting will be less than normal. Those viewing the performance, however, will see the full story, she said. While the script is likely to be edited following the musical's performance at UWRF, the plot is fully developed.

The production offers opportunities for audience interaction, an aspect that lends not only heightened interest but also provides meaningful feedback that will help shape its final version, said Kathy Welch, lecturer in the UWRF Music, Stage and Screen Arts Department.

"In this particular performance, the audience is our final collaborator," Welch said.

Welch and Lorbiecki said it has been enjoyable to watch Olson work with students teaching them the original music he is conducting for the musical. They also have been impressed with cast members' ability to adapt to performing multiple roles and learning on the fly. Lessons learned during the showing of the musical at UWRF will help shape future performances, including one in Edinburgh, Scotland, next year.

Participating students said the musical provides them with opportunities to push themselves into new roles and learn to take risks. Along the way they are learning self-confidence, they said.

Rother, the UWRF student actor, acknowledged she was "really freaked out" when she found out that she and others would learn multiple roles and new music on a tight timeline. But actors and musicians have come together well, she said.

"We've had the opportunity to try out different roles and learn more about singing and acting," Rother said. "To watch all of this come together feels really good."

Lorbiecki and Welch agree. While teaching an evolving story and putting it to music in a compressed time frame can be a challenge, it also has been fun, they said. The production includes lessons to contemplate, they said.

"We're hoping that through this, people will think about why our environment matters, why trees matter, and why the way we treat each other is important," Lorbiecki said. "Those are important issues for all of us."



A worker helps finish moving a new pasteurizer into the dairy pilot plant at UW-River Falls. The new equipment is a key part of the remodeled Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence that could open as soon as this fall. UWRF photo.

Rebuilding the UW-River Falls dairy pilot plant one piece at a time

Arrival of new pasteurizer latest sign that on-campus dairy plant is getting closer to completion

July 19, 2023 - Two forklifts slowly lowered a large, shiny metallic piece of equipment from a semi-truck trailer onto a dolly below before several workers pushed and pulled the item into a room in the Agricultural Science building at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The equipment – a high temperature, short-time pasteurizer – will serve as the heartbeat of the university’s much anticipated dairy pilot plant, a renovation project 10 years in the making that dairy industry leaders view as an education model for current and future employees in that sector. The plant was renamed the **Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence** in November in honor of the Wuethrich Family Foundation and Grassland Dairy Products, Inc. of Greenwood having donated \$1 million toward the plant.

As Michelle Farner watched the pasteurizer be unloaded and moved, she was grateful for its arrival. The equipment that was transported to UWRF on June 30 and is key to the dairy pilot plant’s modernized operations has been in the works for the past five years, and Farner – director of dairy production at UWRF – and others have eagerly anticipated its appearance.

“This is huge, not only for our university but for the dairy industry and for Wisconsin,” Farner said shortly before a recent presentation about the dairy pilot plant to the River Falls Rotary Club. “This is what really will make our whole plant go.”

For a variety of reasons, obtaining the pasteurizer has taken much longer than originally anticipated, Farner said. As it was unloaded and then moved to its location in the dairy pilot plant, she said she felt a sense of gratification.

"This has been a long time coming," Farner said, "and it's a relief to have it here."

To serve as a location where students take part in cutting-edge, hands-on learning and training in dairy production, the dairy pilot plant required significant modernization, including needing a new pasteurizer, Farner said.

Pasteurization of milk involves heating it, thereby killing off potentially harmful bacteria and making milk safe to consume. The old pasteurizer could process about 1,100 pounds of milk an hour; the new one will do 5,000 pounds in the same amount of time. That increased processing speed will allow the dairy pilot plant to double the number of students working there, to as many as 30 at a time.

"That old equipment simply wasn't functioning the way we needed it to," Farner said of the previous campus dairy plant that was discontinued five years ago. "We needed to remake that entire plant. It has taken time, but that is what we have done."

Brianna Crotteau, of Cameron, who graduated in May with a degree in agricultural business now works as dairy pilot plant project coordinator and said the new pasteurizer and revamped dairy plant will enhance student learning. Because of the ongoing dairy plant renovation during her time at UWRF, Crotteau was not able to work with a modern pasteurizer when she was a student. But she is grateful others will have that opportunity.

"I am very excited that upcoming students at our university will be able to utilize and learn from this piece of equipment," she said.

UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo said the new dairy pilot plant will provide hands-on learning opportunities for students that will allow them to gain skills necessary to work in the dairy industry of today and tomorrow. Training those students receive will in turn bolster Wisconsin's dairy sector.

"The dairy pilot plant will play a key role in Wisconsin as it will allow us to provide industry employees with high-level training that will allow them to fill jobs in this vital part of our state's dairy economy," Gallo said.

The pasteurizer is the most recent piece of equipment that is part of the overhauled plant. A decade ago, Wisconsin dairy industry partners and state and UWRF officials decided to remake the plant. Since then, nearly two dozen organizations have donated \$5.2 million of the dairy plant's nearly \$9 million cost, with the remainder of funding coming from state dollars.

That high degree of private funding is unusual for a UW System project, Farner said, and shows that dairy businesses are invested in making the plant a success. Companies hope to connect with well-trained prospective employees through the university's dairy science and food science programs.

"The dairy industry has been so supportive of this project getting done," Farner said.

Final work is being done on the 6,000 square-foot dairy plant, which Farner said she hopes is up and running this fall. After more meetings, fundraising and overcoming obstacles than she cares to recall, she eagerly anticipates students being able to learn in the state-of-the art facility.

“It is gratifying to think about the high-quality educational opportunities we will be able to provide our students that they have not had access to before,” Farner said. “We will be helping our students and the dairy industry in this state – that is what our university does.”



Three events set for Summer Concert Series at UW-River Falls

Trent Romans Band, Kids From Wisconsin, St. Croix Valley Community Band scheduled to perform

July 6, 2023 – Musical performances ranging from the blues to Kids From Wisconsin to a community band are part of the Summer Concert Series in Melvin Wall Amphitheatre at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The concert series is a longstanding summer tradition at UWRF and events are free and open to the public.

The series kicks off with a performance by the Trent Romans Band at 7 p.m. Tuesday, July 18. The Twin Cities-based band is headed by blues guitarist Trent Romans, who began performing at age 13. In case of rain, the performance will move to the Falcon's Nest in the University Center.

On Friday, July 28, at 7 p.m., the Kids from Wisconsin will perform in the amphitheatre. This year's "Star Struck" show will focus on such famous award shows as the Grammys, the Oscars and the Tonys that honor top artistic performers. This year, Kids From Wisconsin and Feeding America-Wisconsin have partnered on a Forward Together from Stage to Table campaign and ask you to bring a non-perishable food item to the Friday show. All food contributions will go to the River Falls Food Pantry. Rain site is Hunt Arena in the Falcon Center, 185 Emogene Nelson Ave., River Falls.

The series concludes with a performance by the St. Croix Valley Community Band at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 1. The band, made up of members from River Falls and the Twin Cities, performs a variety of music ranging from symphonic arrangements and marches to classical works and big band numbers. Rain site is Abbott Concert Hall in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building,

420 E. Cascade Ave., River Falls.

Grilled food, ice cream and beverages will be available in the amphitheatre. Parking is free in designated parking spaces only.

Sponsors of the series include the UWRF Alumni Association, UWRF Career Services, the River Falls Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau, and River Falls Municipal Utilities. For more information, call 715-425-4747.



UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo receives a gold-level Family Friendly Workplace Award Thursday from Mark Tyler, left, founder of Family Friendly Workplaces, and Neil Kline, right, executive director of the organization. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls named a Family Friendly Workplace

University earns highest certification level for family-supporting benefits

July 27, 2023 – The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has been certified as a gold-level Family Friendly Workplace, the highest distinction given by an organization that recognizes employers that account for the needs of workers and their families.

Woodville-based Family Friendly Workplaces announced today that it has recognized UWRF as an employer that offers its employees a high level of family-related benefits. The certification recognizes the commitment of UWRF to provide a workplace that strongly supports the needs of employees and their families.

“At UWRF, we value our employees and therefore strive to create a positive campus culture that helps them balance their work and family lives,” Chancellor Maria Gallo said. “Doing so is not only the right thing to promote wellbeing, but it also helps in attracting and retaining employees.”

To be certified, Family Friendly Workplaces reviewed UWRF’s Human Resources’ policies and practices, awarding points for those that support families and children. The rankings cover a wide range of topics, such as health care, time off, flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs and others.

As part of the certification process, employers complete the application by self-scoring their organization for each of the criteria. Once the employer submits its application, a Family Friendly Workplaces representative reviews that data and assigns the appropriate certification level.

Mesa Carlsen, event coordinator at UWRF, knows firsthand the value of the university's employee benefits. Last year, when she gave birth to her daughter Olive, Carlsen was able to take the first three months after her baby was born off work to spend time with her. Now Olive is enrolled at the UWRF Child Center, just a few blocks from Carlsen's office.

"Having her just down the street from me has been a big positive," Carlsen said. "I can walk to see her if I need to."

UWRF focuses on employee and student health and wellbeing and provides classes related to wellness in a broad range of areas, said Heather Flock, fitness and wellness coordinator at UWRF. Addressing mental health and wellness plays a vital role in retaining employees and students, she said, noting that offerings such as yoga, relaxation, and sleep techniques training have been added on campus.

"These classes have been a great addition to our employee wellness initiative and are showing great results," Flock said. "We are excited to continue our efforts in creating a positive culture at UWRF."

Family Friendly Workplaces strives to address western Wisconsin's workforce shortage and to strengthen western Wisconsin families by certifying businesses as family friendly and encouraging the adoption of practices that benefit families. The willingness of workplaces to provide employees with benefits is more important than ever amid an ongoing worker shortage, said Neil Kline, executive director of Family Friendly Workplaces.

"We are proud to recognize UWRF for their robust family-supporting benefits," Kline said. "Employers, both public and private, are facing a challenging labor force environment. We hope UWRF's certification sets an example for how an organization can not only be competitive in the marketplace, but also support children and families through their benefits."

UWRF is among 30 employers in western and northwestern Wisconsin that offer market-leading benefits to their employees and who are committed to supporting children and families, Kline said.

To learn more about Family Friendly Workplaces and its certification program, visit www.familyfriendlyworkplaces.org.

Faculty selected for Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars Program

Duo among 24 in UW System chosen for program that focuses on teaching, research

River Falls, Wis. – Two University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty have been selected as Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars.

Christopher Holtkamp, assistant professor of environmental planning, and Erik Kline, assistant professor of English, are among 24 University of Wisconsin System faculty chosen for the honor. UW System officials announced the winners July 14.

Holtkamp, Kline and others chosen to participate in the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars Program applied last fall. Those selected were chosen by a committee of their peers on the campus where they teach.

This year's participants come from the System's 11 comprehensive universities and UW-Milwaukee. Faculty recognized as Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars must demonstrate high-level teaching and have a curiosity about student learning. The year-long program finishes with a research presentation at the annual Spring Conference on Teaching and Learning in Madison.

Cyndi Kernahan, UWRF professor of psychological sciences and director of the UWRF Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, praised Holtkamp and Kline for their commitment to educating students. Participating in the program will enable Holtkamp, Kline and other participants to boost their research and teaching skills.

"This program is transformative," Kernahan said. "It helps people go from 'what am I teaching' to 'what are my students learning,' which is a different question. It ends up creating a better experience for students, which is really our end goal."



Kernahan knows firsthand about the benefits of Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars. In 2001-02, during her second year of teaching at UWRF, she was chosen to participate in the program. She subsequently served as Wisconsin Teachers & Scholars co-director for UW System for six years and remains active with the program.

"It really taught me how to do research with my teaching and students in a way I didn't learn as a graduate student," Kernahan said. "It allowed me to do my scholarship much more coordinated with my teaching, which is a big deal at a teaching institution like ours."



Through Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars, UW faculty and teaching academic staff collaborate with other teachers from different areas of study across the UW System. Participants discuss influential literature and take part in systematic research focused on improving student learning.

Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars is one of three signature programs offered by the UW System's Office of Professional and Instructional Development (OPID). OPID supports UW System's 13 Centers for Teaching and Learning to foster a culture of teaching and learning excellence.

Photo #1: Erik Kline, UWRF assistant professor of English

Photo #2: Christopher Holtkamp, UWRF assistant professor of environmental planning

UW-River Falls grad wins prestigious Bush Fellowship honor

His work helps students find success through nontraditional learning approach

July 27, 2023 - Growing up in St. Paul, Alexander Leonard was a smart child who did well academically despite facing challenges as a Black child among classmates who were mostly white.

Leonard, a 2017 graduate of the school counseling master's degree program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, uses his experiences overcoming struggles to help students who struggle in school do the same. His work on that front at Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis has been so effective that Leonard recently was named a 2023 Bush Fellowship recipient.



Leonard is co-founder of the innovative and acclaimed Community Connected Academy at Patrick Henry High School. Students who are part of that program have experienced remarkable success, with 99% of them graduating. The majority of students in the academy are Black.

"I wanted to be able to provide support to students like me," Leonard said when asked what prompted him to start Community Connected Academy with a colleague. "So many people helped me along the way, and I wanted to pay it forward and help young people."

Leonard is one of 24 Bush Fellowship recipients chosen from nearly 500 applicants from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. He and others honored with the award receive up to \$100,000 to pay for 24 months of study to build leadership skills. The fellowships are granted by the St. Paul-based Bush Foundation.

Community Connected Academy is open to all students, Leonard said, and focuses on those who desire a different learning model because they struggle in traditional settings. The program helps students build confidence in themselves and overcome difficulties, fear and self-doubt.

The effort initially served about 50 juniors each school year; it now includes more than 100 juniors and seniors annually.

"The goal is to get students doing hands-on learning and having a voice in their learning," Leonard said, noting his students explore career options and learn other skills as part of Community Connected Academy. "Our whole thing is 'Let's get you out and see if you really have an interest in that (profession).'"

Leonard's selection as a Bush Fellowship recipient marks the second consecutive year that a UWRF graduate has earned that prestigious honor. Kaltun Abdikarani, also a graduate of the masters in school counseling program, received the honor in 2022.

Professor Mark Gillen in the School Counseling Program at UWRF, who taught Leonard and has done presentations with him about Community Connected Academy, invites Leonard back to campus to speak with UWRF counseling program students.

“Alex has such passion for students who are underrepresented in school, students who are struggling,” Gillen said. “He is one of the best advocates for change that I have ever worked with.”

Having two Bush Fellowship recipients in consecutive years from the UWRF school counseling program is a point of pride that showcases the program’s quality, Gillen said.

“This is a pretty big deal for us,” he said. “You have more than 400 applicants, and to have one of our students win that honor two years in a row, it’s amazing.”

Prior to attending UWRF, Leonard was working as dean of students at Patrick Henry High School. His colleagues urged him to become a school counselor, and the school counseling program at UWRF allowed him to earn his master’s degree while continuing to work. He praised the education he received at UWRF.

“They do a really good job of preparing us to get out into the field to be ready to work with students,” Leonard said. “I learned that counselors can show up and reach kids in a lot of different ways. That is something I take with me today.”

Despite his success helping at-risk students find success, Leonard is leaving his high school counselor job. He will spend his time as a Bush Fellow, studying ways to keep Black and Brown teachers in their profession, and he plans his future employment in that area. Doing so will involve helping those educators address long-term impacts of racial trauma and finding ways to heal past damage and build resilience, he said. That work is key to helping give Black and Brown students educators they can better relate to.

“The work I want to do is to help Black and Brown educators find a way to heal the racialized trauma that is a part of them,” Leonard said. “I want to help them find a better way to deal with that. Doing that work could be one good way to help retain those staff members. It’s something I really want to do.”

UW-River Falls officials testify in support of Farm and Industry Short Course funding

Bill would fund transition of farm training program to UW-River Falls

July 28, 2023 - Leadership from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) joined several agriculture industry representatives at the state Capitol yesterday to testify in favor of funding for the transition of a longtime agricultural training program to UW-River Falls.

The Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC), begun at UW-Madison in 1885 and taught there in a residential format until two years ago, provides vital training to the state's agricultural workforce outside of a traditional degree program. UWRF has already agreed to host the short course this fall, but is hoping for the success of a bipartisan bill that would provide \$372,980 during the next two years to help offset initial operational and instructional costs.

Thursday's Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism public hearing on the bill was a first step in the process. The bill has also been introduced in the Assembly and is being referred to the Committee on Colleges and Universities.

Michael Orth, CAFES dean, and Steve Kelm, chair of the Animal and Food Science Department and director of the short course, testified on behalf of the bill at the hearing, noting how the program will help address workforce shortages in agriculture.

"UW-River Falls is well positioned in the UW System to offer the type of world-class, hands-on, faculty-supported learning experience that the next generation of farm and ag business owners and operators want and need," Orth said. "They also need the network of professional relationships and friendships they can develop by living and learning on campus with their four-year student peers."

Over a dozen dairy industry and farming stakeholders – including representatives from the Farm Bureau Federation of Wisconsin, Dairy Business Association, Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association and the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection – also testified or registered support for the short course. Those testifying in person all said they back its return to a residential format at UW-River Falls. The program will develop more educated workers and provide important networking opportunities, they said.

The 16-week short course is designed for high school graduates who are interested in dairy farming or working in industries involved with dairy cattle care and management. Courses in the program will begin October 25 and run through March 15, and students will earn up to 20 credits. Most courses will be taught at UWRF, but students will have opportunities to interact with dairy experts at UW-Madison and UW-Platteville, building on the successful research partnership of the Dairy Innovation Hub.

Enrollment in the first cohort will be limited to 24 students who will live together as part of the campus community in UWRF residence halls. Applications are still being accepted. For more information, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/academics/fisc>.

Ayres honored with 2023 Distinguished Teaching Award

Aug. 24, 2023 - Psychology Professor Melanie Ayres was recently honored with the 2023 Distinguished Teaching Award at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Established in 1965, the award is the highest campus honor a faculty member can receive. Awardees are nominated by current and former students and selected by the Distinguished Teaching Award Committee.

Ayres, a professor in the Psychological Sciences Department, came to UWRF from the University of California-Santa Cruz in 2008. She coordinated the UWRF Women's, Gender and Sexualities Studies interdisciplinary program from 2015-23 and currently serves as department chair.

Ayres was formally presented with the award by UWRF Provost David Travis during the university's fall Opening Meeting. A plaque of her likeness will be added to the wall of Distinguished Teachers in the Wyman Education Building. She will also deliver an address at the fall commencement in December.

Ayres has been praised for her compassionate, collaborative and creative approach to teaching and her ability to utilize multiple methods and tools to engage, educate and inspire students.

"I loved the variety of learning in this class," a student wrote. "No day was the same. We learned about different topics in different ways, including both small and large group discussions, lectures, documentaries, activities, and guest speakers, etc."

"Part of being an effective teacher," wrote Ayres recently, "is being a good facilitator. I facilitate learning by using a multi-method approach to teaching. In contrast to the 'banking' methods of education, which views students as containers that teachers 'fill' with knowledge, my approach is to create a space in which the students and I are co-creators of knowledge."

"Besides," she said, "doing the same lecture for 15 years is not of interest to me!"

She is interested, rather, in encouraging collaboration and active learning, and creating a safe space for students to share and ask questions.

This approach has an added benefit, she said: "Hearing their questions every time I teach a class keeps the content fresh and continues to spark my own curiosity, which fuels me as a teacher."

Ayres said that forming connections – to the content and her students – is key to successful instruction. "It's the thing that matters most," she said.



Student nominators took notice of her ability to connect in the classroom. One shared that Ayres is “personable and easily approachable, which in turn makes asking questions and voicing concerns easier. I always felt listened to and understood no matter if we were talking about an assignment or continuing a class discussion.”

Another nominator wrote that Ayres provides “constant compassion and support” and always cultivates a “very welcoming and inclusive class environment in which students feel safe to ask questions and express concerns.”

Giselle Nuñez, a 2023 UWRF alum and current graduate student at Kansas State University, wrote that she particularly appreciated the research expertise that Ayres has shared with students, both individually and in the classroom.

“If it were not for her support in research and career advising, I do not think I would have pursued further education,” Nuñez wrote. “She helped me find my passion for research!”

Cyndi Kernahan, psychology professor and director of the UWRF Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, said the advanced research methods course which Ayres teaches and was responsible for revamping, has allowed more students to gain high level research experience. Many of those students have had the opportunity to present their work to outside audiences including attendees at the annual Midwestern Psychological Association Conference.

Kernahan also recognized Ayres as the department’s first faculty member to “really teach online with an emphasis on great pedagogy, paving the way for the rest of us.”

Ayres holds a Ph.D. and master’s degree in developmental psychology from the University of California-Santa Cruz. She earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Oregon.

She has conducted research examining girls’ and women’s experiences of and responses to sexism, gender differences in men’s and women’s communication, and parent-child conversations about ethnic and gender discrimination.

In 2019, Ayres received the 2019 Keith G. Wurtz Award for Teaching Excellence which recognizes outstanding and innovative teachers who have made exceptional contributions to the university and to the community.



UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, right, in red, testifies Wednesday before the Wisconsin Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue in favor of a proposed bill that would allow UW System schools to retain a portion of reciprocity funding that currently is sent to the general fund of the state budget. Contributed photo.

Chancellor Gallo advocates for changing the Wisconsin-Minnesota tuition reciprocity agreement

Aug. 24, 2023 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo and other UW System school leaders advocated before a Wisconsin Senate committee Wednesday for changing the current Wisconsin-Minnesota reciprocity mechanism so Wisconsin schools can retain the full share of tuition revenue their Minnesota students pay.

Gallo was joined in making in-person testimony in favor of Senate Bill 161 by UW-Stout Chancellor Katherine Frank and UW-Madison Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Rob Cramer. Several other UW campuses also submitted written testimony and registered in favor of the legislation. In June, Gallo and others also testified before the Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities in support of the companion bill, Assembly Bill 140.

Currently, UW-River Falls and other UW System schools that enroll Minnesota students do not retain the higher tuition that those students pay. Instead, part of that money is returned to Minnesota, while the rest is deposited in the general fund of the state budget and is not used for higher education purposes.

Last academic year, 43% of UW-River Falls students were from Minnesota. Allowing UW-River Falls to retain the portion of reciprocity money it sends to the state would have meant additional revenue is critical for campuses like UWRF to reinvest locally, so they can continue to attract students from Minnesota and connect them with Wisconsin employers through

internships and other student success programs.

Under the existing reciprocity agreement, “We lost over \$4.3 million in earned revenue because of the current, outdated reciprocity mechanism,” Gallo said. “That is revenue that could have been reinvested in UWRF, meeting student demands and filling regional employer needs.”

Changing reciprocity funding now is especially important, Gallo said, given the Minnesota Legislature’s adoption of North Star Promise, a tuition guarantee program for eligible low-income students that is designed to keep more Minnesota students in that state to attend college. That program will take effect in fall 2024.

“We believe our program offerings will still attract some of those North Star Promise-eligible students to attend our university, but our Minnesota enrollment will shrink,” Gallo said. “Therefore, campuses like UW-River Falls will absolutely need the additional revenue made available with passage of this bill to be competitive.”

The additional revenue from tuition reciprocity dollars would allow UWRF to offer more innovative, high-quality programming for Wisconsin and Minnesota students alike, Gallo said.

Added funds also would boost hands-on collaboration opportunities with local employers, she said.

Mayala Keita, a UWRF senior from Coon Rapids, Minn., majoring in food science and technology, submitted written testimony to the committee advocating for the proposed bill. Keita and other Minnesota students were surprised to realize that the campus educating them was not retaining all of the tuition that they were paying. She agrees that the tuition she pays needs to be reinvested in programming at UWRF that benefitted her and would support all students, such the help she received to land an internship with a Wisconsin employer last summer.

Gallo thanked state lawmakers who represent River Falls – Rep. Shannon Zimmerman, Rep. Warren Petryk, Sen. Jeff Smith and Sen. Rob Stafsholt – for supporting the tuition reciprocity bill. Stafsholt is lead author on the Senate bill, and Zimmerman is lead on the Assembly bill.

UWRF Financial Aid Director Robert Bode also testified before the Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue expressing support for Senate Bill 380 on behalf of the Wisconsin Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. That bipartisan bill would modernize Wisconsin grants and other financial aid for higher education. Gallo also registered in favor of the legislation.

Coleman Wasik honored for her water-related research, collaboration with students

Professor is first recipient of the University Excellence Award in Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activities

Aug. 24, 2023 - During her decade as an associate professor of environmental science at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, Jill Coleman Wasik has been knee deep – sometimes literally – in all sorts of water-related research.

Her projects have covered a wide array of water topics, from using a novel technique to identify microplastics in the Kinnickinnic River, to investigating regional surface and groundwater quality, to projects that address the social and human dimensions of water quality and land management.

Much of her work has involved UWRF students for whom Coleman Wasik has created high-quality research opportunities that lead to important contributions to water quality in northwest Wisconsin.

For those efforts and others, Coleman Wasik has been awarded the 2023 University Excellence Award in Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activities, an honor being given for the first time this year. The award was announced at the fall Opening Meeting that kicks off the 2023-24 academic year.

“Throughout her 10 years at UWRF, Jill’s research contributions and productivity have been exemplary,” Holly Dolliver, geology and soil science professor and chair of the Plant and Earth Science Department, wrote in a letter nominating Coleman Wasik. “The breadth and depth of [her] projects are extremely impressive.”

Foremost among Coleman Wasik’s work is teaching students. Coleman Wasik has served as mentor for 21 undergraduate research projects in addition to service as a member of the Undergraduate, Scholarly, and Creative Activities (URSCA) Council. She often incorporates undergraduate research into coursework and works to ensure opportunities for students to present and publish their research at conferences across the state and country.

Coleman Wasik said she focuses on meeting students where they are in terms of their research skills and building on them. She seeks to challenge students, whether they are new to research or have previously accomplished high-level work.

“For some [students] that means repeating a well-known study on a small scale on campus,” Coleman Wasik said. “For others it is designing a rigorous, regional project that results in publication.”



Teaching students that they can do high-quality research on projects that can positively impact the environment is among the joys Coleman Wasik takes in her work.

“Most of us don’t see ourselves as researchers, but really it only takes some curiosity and a question about the world around you,” she said.

Through her research, Coleman Wasik has linked UWRF to partners and collaborators with the aim of improving water quality. She is well known in western Wisconsin for her work to monitor and preserve waterways. She works effectively with the regional farmer-led organization Western Wisconsin Conservation Council (WWCC) to help understand the impacts of agriculture on local waters. She has successfully built relationships with conservation professionals, farmers, and landowners to gain a scientific understanding of issues and opportunities.

“Jill often serves as a bridge connecting groups and individuals together in synergistic ways,” Dolliver said.

Coleman Wasik’s research, and that of her students, directly benefits the Kinnickinnic Watershed, the St. Croix River Valley and other areas. She has successfully obtained more than \$903,000 in funding from numerous sources, including the United States Department of Agriculture, Dairy Innovation Hub, Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin, and WWCC to support her research efforts.

She has authored numerous scientific articles and has presented her work at several conferences. Coleman Wasik also has been a moderator and panelist at various scientific events. She is a member of the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin (FCW) Steering Committee and leads the FCW effort at UWRF.

In addition, Coleman Wasik guides other campus faculty through the process of securing grant funding to support freshwater research opportunities, helping UWRF make available high-quality freshwater science programs.

“Jill has worked hard to encourage participation from a range of disciplines on our campus and is very supportive in guiding faculty through the process and advocating for their projects,” Dolliver said. “Her work benefits this university and its students in so many ways.”

Graham named recipient of University Excellence Award in Service

First-time honor recognizes extra efforts to assist students

Aug. 24, 2023 - Whether serving on multiple committees and on the Faculty Senate or spending extra time advising students, James Graham views service activities not as additional tasks but as an extension of his role as an agricultural education professor at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Graham's dedication to not only his job but to multiple other activities that benefit UWRF and its students hasn't gone unnoticed. He has been selected as the recipient of the University Excellence Award in Service, an honor being bestowed for the first time this year. The award was announced at the fall Opening Meeting that kicks off the 2023-24 academic year.



"I have never considered my service activities as 'extra,' but an extension of my role as a professor in agricultural education," Graham wrote in an application letter for the award.

In addition to committee and Faculty Senate work and chair of his department, Graham has attended many agriculture-related conferences and other events at which he promotes UWRF to prospective students and others. Such efforts help recruit students and inform others about the educational offerings available at UWRF.

Colleague and Horticulture Professor David Zlesak praised Graham for his work on committees in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES).

Graham "is routinely sought out for the wise and thoughtful perspectives he brings. Dr. Graham has a rich service record to the university through chairing and serving on many university-level committees," Zlesak said.

Working with students once they are on campus is another of Graham's focuses. Conversations with students include academic matters and schedules but often also involve career discussions and life matters, he said. Oftentimes, Graham finds himself advising not only students assigned to him and others pursuing an agriculture degree but the broader student population.

"Student advising to me has been more than academic, but in assisting in the professional and personal growth of all the students I interact with," he said.

Graham's connections to students don't end once those students graduate from UWRF. He said he enjoys working with graduates, helping them with everything from career advice to designing workshops.

“Those close connections made here at UWRF have enhanced my ability to consistently offer my expertise and experience to our young professionals,” Graham said.

Graham is also called upon by various groups and organizations to help them conduct meetings in an official manner. Recently, the Wisconsin Cooperatives Association contacted Graham seeking information about proper parliamentary procedure to run meetings.

In many ways, Graham is the embodiment of service to UWRF, Zlesak said.

“This award is designed to honor faculty that provide exceptional service and support to all spheres within their influence – their department, college, university, community, and discipline,” Zlesak said. “For decades, service with excellence, thoughtfulness, kindness, and inclusivity in all these spheres is a hallmark of Dr. Graham.”

Juneau named 2023 Adviser of the Year

Aug. 24, 2023 - Kevyn Juneau, associate professor of conservation and environmental science, has been named Adviser of the Year at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Established in 2000, the annual award recognizes excellence in advising undergraduates. Nominations are made by current students and alumni and reviewed by the Faculty Senate Advising Committee, which makes the final selection.

Juneau, of River Falls, will be formally presented the award by UWRF Provost David Travis during the university's fall Opening Meeting.

Juneau joined the university's Plant and Earth Science Department in 2016 and currently teaches classes in forestry and environmental sciences. In addition to advising some 50 students each year, he pursues research in invasive plant ecology and management.



Juneau became interested in the natural world while wandering the Adirondacks near his childhood home of Mooers, N.Y., just minutes from the Canadian border. The first in his family to attend college, Juneau enrolled at State University of New York-Plattsburgh as a TV and radio production major. Growing up watching Steve Irwin and the Kratt brothers on TV, he had a dream to edit and produce entertaining nature-based programs in exotic locales around the world.

On the advice of friends and mentors, he switched majors during his sophomore year and graduated with a degree in biology with minors in English and psychology. He then pursued his master's degree in entomology and nematology (the study of nematodes – a diverse group of worm-like animals) at University of Florida, and a Ph.D. in forest science at Michigan Technological University.

Juneau said he wouldn't be where he is today without the teachers and mentors who guided him along his academic path. He said he is especially grateful to his high school biology teacher, Ed Kaufman, whose "passion and enthusiasm for the natural world were contagious" and to Ken Adams, his undergraduate mentor and research adviser, whose "unparalleled knowledge of the natural world [is something] I strive to achieve every day."

Holly Dolliver, professor and chair of the Plant and Earth Science Department, agreed that Juneau "was fortunate to have great mentors throughout his professional career," and, she continued, "he has worked hard to be an impactful teacher and mentor for his students."

Multiple award nominators commented on his friendliness, compassion, content and resource knowledge, connections, and

advocacy.

One nominator, who entered the program after “a long hiatus from college life,” wrote that Juneau “takes time to listen to your career goals and really sets your path to be a clear and timely trajectory to graduation.”

Another wrote that he “has been there for me through every panic about classes. He supports me and tells me that we will get through it together.” A third nominator found Juneau to be “super helpful in working through conflicts or any issues that arise.”

Alum Taylor Hill, who is completing her Ph.D. in the Integrative and Conservation Biology Department at University of Central Florida (UCF), said that when she first met Juneau as a sophomore, she revealed that she wanted to study coyote-wolf genetics.

“He said, ‘the sky’s the limit,’” she recalls.

“Since that moment,” she said, “Kevyn has been a supportive adviser, advocate, friend, and mentor along my circuitous journey from UW-River Falls to UCF. He is the mentor that I want to become for my future students. I owe all my success to Kevyn.”

“Advising is a holistic process, and one that goes beyond registering for classes,” said Juneau. “Advising is something that everyone on campus participates in – custodians, program associates, administrators, faculty, staff. Everyone who works at UWRF is an adviser and is integral to student success.”

A major contributor to Juneau’s ability to be a compassionate and effective adviser is his attentiveness to diversity, inclusivity and belonging. He said it was his Ph.D. adviser, Catherine Tarasoff, who “enlightened me and drove me to a better advocate, professionally and personally, for those who are marginalized.”

This commitment is born out in various and fundamental ways both on and off campus.

On campus, Juneau served as both member and chair of the Diversity and Inclusivity Committee. Nationally, Juneau is a member of the Society of American Foresters Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, which is working to make the profession more inclusive as well as helping to “decolonize” forestry training. He is also an active participant in the Wisconsin Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice Community of Practice for conservation professionals.

Since 2017 (with a two-year hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic), Juneau has led a group of students to Andros Island in the Bahamas to help the local Bahamian Forestry Unit assist with tropical restoration projects. Juneau designed the program, called the Tropical Restoration Experience, so that it was not cost-prohibitive and actively recruited low-income, first-generation students with limited experience traveling internationally.

“Not only is the experience intentionally inclusive,” said Juneau, “but the lessons learned during the experience broadens the minds of all participants, teaching them not only about cultural and ecological diversity but also about the importance of doing good in a place with different needs, perspectives, and resources.”

Nominators also recognized Juneau’s willingness to use his professional resources and connections to make new opportunities available to students. By listening to students needs and noticing patterns of job placement and student

interest, he was instrumental in revising the conservation degree to focus more on ecological restoration.

This allowed the program to be aligned with the Society for Ecological Restoration's standards and recognized as one of only 11 programs in the world with this focus. Now, UWRF students who graduate from the program are qualified for professional certification.

Beyond his academic responsibilities, Juneau is active in the area's conservation and sustainability community, serving on the board of the Kinnikinnic River Land Trust and City of River Falls' Urban Forest Advisory Committee.



Jill Coleman Wasik, associate professor of environmental science who leads the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin effort at UW-River Falls, explains measuring water in the soil to students on May 25 at the university-operated Mann Valley Farm. UW-River Falls is receiving \$155,441 in state funding to conduct additional student research on water. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls among recipients of Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin funding

Projects support student training and research efforts to monitor, improve water quality

Aug. 16, 2023 - River Falls, Wis. – The Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin has awarded \$155,441 to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for five water quality projects which the university is either leading or a partner in.

That funding is part of nearly \$4.3 million allocated in the 2023-25 state budget for 22 efforts that increase research and training opportunities for high school and undergraduates and will address Wisconsin's biggest water challenges, officials announced today.

Faculty will work with students at UW-River Falls and other participating universities and high schools to study and monitor water quality, threats to water, and restoration of waterways. Among projects the funding will cover are those related to PFAS contamination and the adverse impact of agricultural runoff on waterways.

Jill Coleman Wasik, associate professor of environmental science who leads the Freshwater Collaborative effort at UW-River Falls, said the funding will support different types of student opportunities, from hands-on courses to field training to professional networking. The program allows the university to develop innovative ways to train students and prepare them for

working in water-related professions, she said.

“Water intersects all facets of life whether or not we notice it,” she said. “Having young professionals who bring a holistic understanding of water issues and potential solutions makes our Wisconsin communities stronger.”

David Travis, UWRF provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs, said dollars allocated to the university show the high-level water-related research being conducted by faculty and students.

“I’m pleased to see that once again UW-River Falls is a leader among the campuses in the UW System receiving Freshwater Collaborative grants,” Travis said of the grant funding. “The scope of projects and range of faculty involvement shows the multiple ways that UW-River Falls can contribute expertise to the freshwater challenges in Wisconsin.”

Funding will support expansion of summer research programs that allow students from Wisconsin and elsewhere in the U.S. to conduct freshwater studies at UW System campuses. Those dollars also make possible summer programs educating high school students about water industry careers, as well as university-led research projects that help communities and government agencies monitor water quality.

Numerous projects included in this year’s funding will address PFAS, “forever chemicals” used in everyday products that have been shown to cause significant health issues in humans and which have been identified at high levels in drinking water throughout Wisconsin. Projects involve collaboration between UW System universities, with faculty from numerous schools instructing students.

“The collaboration of our public universities to protect and preserve Wisconsin’s freshwater will pay dividends for every Wisconsinite for generations,” UW System President Jay Rothman said. “Using the resources and expertise we have at all our 13 universities leverages Wisconsin’s extraordinary higher education system. I am very proud of the work of our students, faculty, and staff on this important initiative.”

UWRF faculty involved in projects include Coleman Wasik; Bahareh Hassanpour, assistant professor of environmental science; and Kevin Thaisen, assistant professor of geology.

The projects UW-River Falls is receiving funding for, and funding amounts, include:

- Continuing the Work of the Data Analysis and Monitoring Crew, \$79,300. Students participate in a two-week, hands-on, field-based training experience in which they learn about river health and restoration. The DAM Crew is a public-private partnership that includes UW-River Falls, the City of River Falls, Interfluve Inc., the Kinni Corridor Collaborative and Trout Unlimited.
- From Field to Laboratory: Hands-on Techniques for Students in Water Sciences, \$41,737. This project is led by UW-River Falls and UW-Madison and focuses on hands-on laboratory and field techniques for studying freshwater.
- Freshwater Science Across the Curriculum: Linked Outreach and Advanced Educational Activities in Western Wisconsin, \$14,280. A collaborative effort including UW-River Falls, UW-Eau Claire, UW-Stout and UW-Oshkosh includes two freshwater science field courses in western Wisconsin: one targeting junior and senior high school students and the other an advanced course designed for upper-level college students.

- Continuation and Expansion of the Red Cedar Watershed Monitoring Project, \$11,400. Participants in this project study the causes of toxic algae blooms that are present in the watershed and monitor the effectiveness of existing efforts to reduce algae, with the hope of informing future management of the waterway. The effort involves UW-River Falls, UW-Stout, UW-Eau Claire, UW-Oshkosh and the Dunn County Land and Water Conservation District.
- Water, Health, and Habitat Interactions, \$8,724. UW-Milwaukee will lead a collaboration with UW-River Falls and four other UW campuses to implement three intensive hands-on courses that will provide undergraduates throughout the UW System with an affordable opportunity to conduct research and field work on Lake Michigan.

For more information about the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin and grant descriptions for funded projects in 2023-25, visit <https://freshwater.wisconsin.edu/freshwater-collaborative-funded-projects-2023/>.



UW-

River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo addresses attendees of the university's Opening Meeting Monday. Wendy Stocker/UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls committed to student success despite challenges

UWRF is a 'powerful force for public good' that benefits the region and beyond

Aug. 28, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls is committed to improving the world through its ardent commitment to educating students despite challenges facing higher education, Chancellor Maria Gallo told attendees of the university's Opening Meeting Monday.

"I want to assure you that UWRF remains unwavering in its commitment to the success of every single student that is a Falcon and to being a community of inclusion, caring, and belonging as stated in our core values, and in our Soaring to New Heights strategic plan," Gallo told more than 500 employees attending the meeting marking the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year.

Among struggles UWRF and other UW schools face are budget shortfalls. The Wisconsin Joint Committee on Finance cut the UW System budget by \$32 million. The 13 four-year UW System universities have a combined structural deficit of about \$60 million; that figure at UWRF is about \$2.9 million.

Adding to budget woes, Gallo said, is the fact that the Minnesota Legislature approved the North Star Promise Scholarship, a tuition guarantee program for eligible low-income students that is designed to keep more Minnesota students in that state to attend college. That program will take effect in fall 2024. Last academic year, 43% of UW-River Falls students were from Minnesota.

Despite those challenges, UW-River Falls has many opportunities, Gallo said. Among them is the \$117 million Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech). Construction has begun on the facility that is scheduled to open in 2026. That building will provide students with state-of-the-art research opportunities and increased collaboration with businesses, creating direct pipelines for students to employers while bolstering the regional economy.

“UWRF makes a huge difference to individuals, to River Falls, to our state and far beyond,” Gallo said. “We are a powerful force for public good and that is why we garner a great deal of attention and focus. Our mission truly is a noble one and we will carry it out.”

While UWRF faces financial challenges, they are not as severe as those of some other UW System schools, Gallo said. The university is forming a University Budget Advisory Committee that will work to address its budget gap, she said. Adding to good news, the chancellor said, is a trend of larger incoming classes at UWRF.

“We will successfully work through our challenges and embrace the numerous opportunities that we have to become even better with an eye on an exciting future,” Gallo said. “And I am fully confident that we will get there – we are Falcons. We have educated thousands of students over our nearly 150 years, and we will educate thousands more.”

During the meeting, recipients of the 2023 faculty excellence awards were announced and recognized, along with UW-River Falls employees for their years of service. Award recipients include: Distinguished Teaching Award, Melanie Ayres; Adviser of the Year, Kevyn Juneau; University Excellence Award in Research, Scholarly and Creative Activities, Jill Coleman Wasik; and, University Excellence Award in Service, James Graham. Other award recipients recognized included the UW-River Falls Upward Bound Program, which garnered a Board of Regents Diversity Award; and UW-River Falls faculty member Kathleen Hunzer, who received a Regents Academic Staff Excellence Award.



UWRF senior Amber Rappl explains how she and other students who work in the campus Sustainability Office create plastic bricks as part of recycling efforts. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls continues to build on sustainability efforts

Earth-friendly practices are being added to student learning plans

Aug. 4, 2023 - From partnering with others to start Earth Fest, an event that focuses on an environmentally friendly approach, to collecting and donating items that students get rid of at the end of the academic year to nonprofits, the Sustainability Office at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls is making it cool to do more with less impact on the earth.

The Sustainability Office has started numerous other initiatives in recent years, such as a bee hotel to promote pollinators and the implementation of No Mow May. The organization has been recognized with numerous awards and validations, most recently its certification in June as a national Fair Trade School, a recognition of the university's commitment to buying products from companies that empower farmers and workers while protecting the environment.

As concerns about the earth's climate garner headlines around the world, the Sustainability Office and UWRF faculty are working to make sustainability a larger part of campus life. In May they held one of an ongoing series of workshops designed to infuse sustainability concepts into university curriculum.

Mark Klapatch-Mathias, UWRF sustainability coordinator, supports faculty by helping find ways to include sustainability in courses across disciplines. Educating students on sustainability challenges from a variety of viewpoints will help ensure that actions can become more mainstream.

"Making sustainability a larger part of what is taught in the classroom is the next step toward our campus playing a greater role in practicing sustainable activities and becoming a greater voice in that arena," Klapatch-Mathias said. "This is one way we can really get more people to think about sustainability in a bigger picture way."

That approach was evident at a meeting earlier this summer of UWRF faculty and staff discussing how sustainability can be implemented in different ways into student learning. People representing different areas of study worked to find ways to include sustainable methods into lesson plans, a practice in place since 2012.

"In this meeting, you have people from social work, music education, agricultural economics, social work, sustainability and other areas of study," said Shawyn Domyancich-Lee, assistant professor of social work and chair of UWRF's Sustainable Justice Program who will become a UWRF Sustainability Fellow. "You might ask 'How does sustainability fit into all of these things?' It fits into all of them."

Grace Coggio, communication studies program director, who has served as a Sustainability Fellow at UWRF, said integrating sustainability into coursework at UWRF will increase awareness of practices that need to become more commonplace.

"Sustainability is no longer a luxury," Coggio said. "It is having a growing impact on all of our lives, and we need to make addressing it as much a part of our everyday lives as we can."

UWRF has a strong history related to sustainability. The topic received lots of attention in the early 2000s and in 2007, a sustainability work group was formed on campus in conjunction with the St. Croix Institute for Sustainable Development.

In following years, for a variety of reasons, including budget cuts, the sustainability focus dropped off, Coggio and others said. Efforts to revive that movement gained steam in recent years as climate change has a growing impact and received a shot in the arm when Maria Gallo was hired as UWRF chancellor in 2021.

Klapatch-Mathias remembers Gallo standing out from other applicants for the chancellor position because of her strong advocacy for sustainability. Coggio and Domyancich-Lee said sustainability gained more attention after Gallo made it part of the university's strategic plan. The chancellor has continued to speak about the importance of sustainability.

"UWRF is a center of knowledge and innovation and as such, educating our students on sustainability helps our students develop skills to meet the societal and environmental challenges we face," Gallo said. "Additionally, as a key partner in our community, engaging in sustainable practices highlights us as a leader and resource to foster positive change that benefits both the university and the city of River Falls."

Klapatch-Mathias, Coggio and others said sustainability has been a growing focus on campus in recent years, and they feel that mirrors a trend nationally and around the world, especially as climate change becomes increasingly apparent. The growing interest among students to adopt sustainable practices is a driving force on campus, said Tovah Flygare, administrative specialist in the Sustainability Office and adjunct faculty member teaching sustainability concepts in multiple disciplines.

"It is really invigorating to see the energy behind this," Flygare said. "A lot of us faculty are really inspired by the interest in this topic by our students."

Klapatch-Mathias agrees that students are advocating for increasing sustainability actions. Making such practices are part of

everyday life on campus is one way to attract students, he said.

“If colleges and universities really want to have that competitive advantage and attract students, they need to focus on sustainability,” he said. “Students tell us time and time again that they want it.”

Senior Amber Rappl echoed that idea. Rappl, a biotechnology major from Mount Calvary who works in the Sustainability Office, strongly supports implementing sustainability into student learning and said having sustainability listed as one of the UWRF’s core values was “a huge win” that has furthered dialogue about the topic.

“I have so much hope for the new generation related to sustainability,” Rappl said. “I think they are going to drive a lot of what happens with sustainability. It’s our university’s role to help people channel that energy in a productive way, and I am seeing more and more of that.”



Artist Mos Rude, a May UWRF graduate, paints a base layer Tuesday at the intersection of Main and Division streets in River Falls in a collaborative street painting project in partnership with the City of River Falls. The project is designed to make the busy intersection safer and more attractive. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls graduate oversees collaborative art project

'Paint the Pavement' effort improves safety, scenery at busy River Falls intersection

Aug. 23, 2023 - During their time as an art student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, Moz Rude drove past the intersection of Main and Division streets in River Falls each school day on the commute to and from Hudson.

On Tuesday, Rude, who graduated from UWRF in May with a bachelor's degree in art, helped transform that intersection into a site that is more attractive and safer. Rude partnered with River Falls city officials on a project intended to beautify the busy intersection while reducing the chances of traffic accidents.

"Every day when I went to UW-River Falls I would drive by this spot," Rude said shortly after rolling a base layer of blue paint onto a stretch of Division Street that would subsequently be covered with brightly colored painted flowers. "I know this is a busy intersection, and it feels good to be a part of making this space not only more safe, but more beautiful too."

The "Paint the Pavement" project is funded by a \$10,000 AARP Community Challenge Grant and is the result of the City's Bike and Pedestrian Plan, which the City Council unanimously adopted on March 28. The plan was one of three city planning documents updated as part of Focus River Falls, an 18-month effort that included updating the city's comprehensive plan and outdoor recreation plan.

During development of those plans, residents identified the Main-Division intersection as an area of significant safety concern. Many said drivers travel through the right turn lane too quickly when turning there and sometimes don't notice pedestrians and cyclists.

To address that concern, city officials decided to install temporary bollards – tall plastic orange barriers – at the intersection and to create a visible barrier between a bike lane and along part of a crosswalk. Rather than apply traditional high-visibility striping on the street's surface to accomplish that task, they decided to make the site more attractive while also improving safety.

The city sought and obtained the AARP grant, then reached out to UWRF Assistant Art Professor Hannah Freeman, who in turn connected with Rude about the project. Rude, who lives in St. Paul, was chosen from a group who applied to oversee the street art project. Rude researched wildflowers that grow in the region and decided to showcase Jacob's Ladder.

"This city and area are known for their natural beauty, and I wanted to represent that in this project," Rude said.

Rude also liked the collaborative nature of the project. Instead of creating the artwork alone, Rude was joined by a couple dozen others throughout the day. Volunteer artists helping Rude included city workers, UW-River Falls employees and community members. They endured searing heat as they painted; the temperature neared 100 degrees and the heat index was even higher.

"Wow, it's really getting hot down here," Wesley Kisting, dean of the UWRF College of Arts and Sciences, said as he painted a green stem and leaves on the hot street surface. "It's hard to apply the paint as it's thickening quickly in this heat."

Despite the hot temperature, Kisting said he enjoyed taking part in the project. Making the intersection not only safer but more attractive "is another example of the value that art adds to a community," he said.



Ellen Massey, management analyst for the Community Development Department for the City of River Falls, said the city decided to try the street mural as a different way to make the intersection safer yet more attractive. The city may incorporate public art in future projects, she said.

"City officials are interested in placemaking projects like this that benefit River Falls," she said.

Nearby, friends Lilly Shipp, 15, and Kjersten Richter, 15, chatted with each other as they applied paint to leaf outlines. They discussed the value of public art and said they're happy to play a role in making the intersection more visually appealing.

"This is a really beautiful city, and it feels like we should do more to highlight that," Shipp said.

That sentiment is music to Rude's ears. As they finished outlining more leaves in chalk, Rude discussed their affinity for River Falls and for collaborative art projects.

"Not only are people getting to enjoy this space now, but they get to be a part of creating it," Rude said. "That is one of the best parts of public art – to get people engaged in it, and in the process, to feel more a part of the community where they

live.”

Photo inset: UW-River Falls College of Arts and Sciences Dean Wesley Kisting, right, and Sam Burns, an employee with the River Falls Planning Department, apply paint Tuesday to street art as part of the “Paint the Pavement” project at the intersection of Main and Division streets in River Falls. UWRF photo.



UWRF students head to class on the first day of the 2022-23 academic year. UWRF file photo

UW-River Falls named to The Princeton Review's 2024 list of best colleges

High-quality, affordable education and welcoming campus listed as attributes

Aug. 18, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has been named to The Princeton Review's annual "[Best Regional Colleges](#)" list for 2024.

UW-River Falls is among 630 colleges in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, South, Southwest, West and international regions named to The Princeton Review's "2024 Best Colleges: Region by Region" list, which was released on August 15. The website lists those colleges as "academically outstanding and worth consideration in your college search." The Princeton Review is a leading education services company in the U.S.

UW-River Falls is among 150 colleges on the list in the Midwest region and is one of four in Wisconsin to be chosen for the list. The others in Wisconsin are UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee and UW-Eau Claire.

UW-River Falls is also one of only five public institutions among the 24 named to the list in Wisconsin and Minnesota. UWRF has appeared on the list consistently in past years.

The list is based on feedback from current students about the colleges they attend and their experiences.

"I'm pleased that UW-River Falls continues to get increased recognition for being an affordable, high-quality institution of

learning," UWRF Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs David Travis said. "It's most noteworthy that these rankings are heavily based on student perceptions of the quality and affordability of the education they receive."

According to The Princeton Review website, students said they were attracted to the UWRF campus because of its "quality education at an affordable [price tag]." Students noted many available opportunities such as internships, student teaching and study abroad experiences that help students land jobs once they graduate.

They also praised the supportive atmosphere among faculty and fellow students who want "to help students achieve success." Others pointed to the small class sizes that allow students to feel more involved in the classroom as an advantage.

"They are available often and answer questions in a timely manner which helps ease a lot of stress," one student said of UW-River Falls professors. "I have had nothing but a great experience so far."

Students said they enjoy the numerous athletic events on campus and many intramural sports team offerings. They spoke favorably about the "great hiking and kayaking areas surrounding River Falls, especially with the state parks nearby."

'Columbinus' to be presented at UW-River Falls Sept. 28-30

Sept. 18, 2023 - Stage and Screen Productions at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will present a free staged reading of "Columbinus" September 28-30 at 7:30 p.m. in the Blanche Davis Theatre in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building.

"Columbinus," the award-winning 2005 docudrama written by Stephen Karam and PJ Paparelli in collaboration with the United States Theatre Project, was sparked by the April 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., one of the first highly publicized mass school shootings in the U.S. This powerful and eye-opening play, which will be performed as a staged reading with theatrical elements, illuminates the realities of adolescent culture and gun violence by exploring the events surrounding this school shooting and many others. In the nearly 25 years since Columbine, over 375 fatal school shootings have occurred and have led to desperate calls for action, including tighter gun laws, better mental health screening, and funding school safety programs.

"Columbinus" includes excerpts from discussions with parents, survivors, and community leaders in Littleton as well as diaries and home video footage to reveal what it refers to as "the dark recesses of contemporary American adolescence." A post-show discussion will follow each performance.

The performances are free and open to the public. Doors open at 7 p.m.

The cast:

Ashley Gardner	Freak/Eric Harris
Ryan Bartley	Loner/Dylan Klebold
Ramie Johnson	AP
Samuel Sherr-Nelson	Jock
Salem Grabau	Prep
Jackson Dang	Faith
Lauren Lindstrom	Perfect
Bennett Armstrong	Rebel

Trigger Warning: This play contains sensitive material that is intended for mature audiences. This material includes content that touches on the following topics: death or dying, gun violence, blood, emotional distress and individual and community trauma.



A 2021 Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo participant races her horse around a barrel during the event. This year's event is September 8 and 9. UWRF photo.

Annual Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo is Sept. 8-9

September 1, 2023 – The 58th annual Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo is slated for Friday and Saturday, Sept. 8-9, at the outdoor rodeo arena at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Campus Farm located at 1475 S. Wasson Lane in River Falls. The public is invited to attend.

Friday's performance begins at 7 p.m., while Saturday's performances are set for 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Rodeo attendees will have the opportunity to view numerous events, ranging from saddle bronc riding to calf roping and barrel racing. The UWRF Rodeo Club will compete in the event, along with other collegiate teams that are members of the Great Plains region of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA). The event typically attracts about 300 participants.

Tickets are available at the gate (cash only) or online at <https://www.uwfrdeodeo.com/buy-tickets>. Ticket prices are \$20/adults, \$15/UWRF students and \$10/children ages 5-12. Children age 4 and under are free. Military veterans receive a \$5 discount.

Food is available for purchase at the concession stand and onsite parking will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Falcon Frontier Days Rodeo has been occurring annually since 1964, except for its cancellation in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. This year's rodeo is the first event of the fall season for the Great Plains region.

For more information about the rodeo, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/ANFS/FalconFrontierDaysRodeo.cfm> or call the UWRF Animal and Food Science Department at 715-425-3704.



UW-River Falls marching band members perform during the Sept. 2 football game at David Smith Stadium at Ramer Field. UWRF restarted its marching band program this fall after it was discontinued in 1990. UWRF photo.

Banding together: UW-River Falls revives its marching band program

Members focus on excitement for fans, building traditions, having fun

Sept. 28, 2023 - Horns blare and drums pound amid loud, boisterous music filling David Smith Stadium at Ramer Field as several thousand fans enthusiastically dance and clap along to the sounds of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls marching band.

Thirty-three years after a UW-River Falls marching band had last performed at a university event, and just six days after beginning practice together, the 52 students comprising this year's marching band performed together for the first time during the Falcons vs. Mary Hardin-Baylor home game Sept. 2.

The conditions weren't perfect. Because the band was so new, it performed an abbreviated show. Instead of traditional band uniforms, band members wore T-shirts and shorts, a concession to a game-time temperature that hovered near 100 degrees.

But band leader and music Professor Tom Barnett was pleased with his band's performance. As the band made its way through another song and the audience cheered, he felt a moment of joyful satisfaction.

"Wow, we're really doing this," Barnett thought as he smiled. "We're having fun playing music, and people are enjoying it. We have a marching band again."

Marching band members enjoyed the experience too. Leading up to their first performance, some acknowledged concerns about how this new band would perform after so little time together. But once they began playing in front of fans, they said their fears melted away as the audience cheered them on.

"We felt this big wave of energy from the fans," said Jamison Gallmeier, a freshman baritone player from Baldwin who is double majoring in music education and psychology. "We felt really supported by them. It was a great time."

Building a band

Building a marching band again at UW-River Falls was a long, winding process. Since the band was eliminated in 1990 as part of financial cutbacks, the idea of resurrecting it popped up periodically. But restarting it often seemed like a daunting task.

Barnett traces his thoughts about reviving a marching band to a conversation 10 years ago, when he and a friend were discussing music programs and "then all of a sudden I was talking about why we should bring back a marching band at UW-River Falls," Barnett recalled. "Then I thought 'Who in the heck is going to do that?' and I realized it would have to be me."

Momentum for a marching band continued to increase in subsequent years as the school's pep band was revived and became a bigger force. Students began to ask Barnett about having a marching band.

The marching band took another step closer to reality in 2018 when Barnett spent time working with the UW-Eau Claire marching band, of which his oldest son was a member. Barnett worked with UW-Eau Claire marching band instructors, studying how they built the successful band that is among the largest college marching bands in the nation.

Barnett approached UWRF administration about reinstating a marching band and received positive feedback. He next connected with Assistant Chancellor for University Advancement Richard Foy, and the duo worked up a fundraising plan.

UWRF alum Patricia Stone, who was a marching band member in the 1970s, and her husband David were key backers. After meeting with Barnett and hearing his plans for a marching band, they donated \$100,000 to the effort, money used to buy musical instruments and create an improved storage space for them. The Stones and other donors, many of them UWRF marching band alums, subsequently contributed another \$75,000. The university provided additional funding, a sign of its commitment to having a marching band once again.

Bringing back the UWRF marching band required collaboration between multiple entities, Foy said, noting the importance of the Stones' initial gift.

"Combine donor generosity, the university's commitment to the program and Director Tom Barnett's passionate leadership, and the return of the marching band became a reality," Foy said.

After years of wondering whether funding would be available to support a marching band, Barnett said he was overwhelmed at the show of support by the Stones, UWRF and others.

“Seeing people come together and support this idea was so amazing,” he recalled. “That was the point when I was finally like ‘Okay, this is really going to happen.’”

Growing together

When marching band members convened for their first practice at UWRF on Aug. 27, they didn’t know what to expect. They came from many different backgrounds and had varied marching band experience. Many of them are not majoring in music. And, as they would quickly learn, they were building a band from scratch.

Barnett and about 10 section leaders spent the two days before band camp devising the specific terminology and protocol they would use to direct the band.

From their bandmates to the formations to the terminology they used, band practice was different in many ways from what students had known previously. Band members spent full days under a searing hot sun, trying their best to combine their disparate musical experiences into a cohesive marching unit that played and moved as one.

“Each student came from a different school and they did things differently,” said Regan Triplett, a junior tenor saxophone player from Chisago City, Minn., double majoring in animal science-equine management and animal science-companion animal management. “Being told to change what you know can be hard to wrap your head around. Those first days were challenging for sure.”

Gallmeier remembers band camp as “really long, hot days” during which band members worked bit by bit to come together as a unit.

“Band camp was rigorous for sure,” Gallmeier said. “But the more we spent time together, the more we came together as a band. There was a lot of bonding going on.”

Barnett sensed his band coming together as the week of band camp progressed. Long days marching were interspersed with fun events such as a group movie night and kayaking on the Kinnickinnic River to help band members connect. Those events also were meant to impart an important message: have fun.

“I want these students to work hard and take this band experience seriously,” Barnett said. “But in the end, I want them to have fun being in this band. I want them to enjoy it.”

‘A second family’

Four weeks after its first practice, band members were out on the field again. As a late afternoon became evening, band members worked on their spacing, steps and music, paying attention to details.

Standing before his band, Barnett studied sheets of paper detailing his band’s formations and movements. Then the group walked off their steps, one by one, counting in unison. Barnett noted where a couple of students were out of formation, made adjustments, and they marched again. And again.

“I don’t know. I still think those are too big of steps. Look where you wind up,” Barnett told one student. He paused for a moment, then said to the group “OK, let’s do it again.”

Band members listened and periodically made suggestions. Then they marked off their steps and played, the sounds of the song “Sweet Caroline” sounding across the practice field.

Drum major Dafney Yates, a freshman from Merrill majoring in agricultural education, listened as Barnett gave instructions. As practice continued, she thought back to the struggles of band camp and how band members had bonded quickly. She reflected on how grateful she is to be able to continue her marching band career.

“Marching band has always been a second family for me, and I love being able to learn a new marching show every year,” Yates said. “I am so grateful and excited that the Marching Falcons are back this year and I got to help start a program and create traditions that will be around for years to come.”

Triplett had heard plenty about the marching band during her time at UWRF, but she didn’t believe it would be formed until after she graduated. A marching band enthusiast in high school, she figured her marching band career was over.

Now, as she and her bandmates prepare for their Sept. 30 marching band performance at the UWRF Homecoming game, she is overjoyed to be a marching band member again. She and other band members said the band has grown closer with time.

“I can’t tell you how good it feels to be in a marching band again,” she said during a practice break. “To be a part of this at the start is so cool. I hope we can make this marching band a tradition and that we continue to have fun with it.”



UW-River Falls dance team members perform during the 2022 Homecoming Parade. This year's Homecoming events at UW-River Falls take place September 25-October 1, with the Homecoming Parade on Saturday, Sept. 30. UWRF file photo.

Homecoming week celebrated Sept. 25-Oct. 1

Sept. 14, 2023 - The public is invited to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls to celebrate in Homecoming festivities featuring a wide range of activities throughout the week of September 25 to October 1. Traditional and new events will bring together students, families, alums and the River Falls community.

"Homecoming is more than just coming back to campus," Alumni Relations Officer Pedro Renta said. "It's about where your journey started, reconnecting with friends and retelling stories with so much laughter. It's a great weekend to celebrate being a Falcon!"

Featured events include:

Home-Cooked Homecoming Meal, Monday, Sept. 25, 5:30-7 p.m., Pete's Creek patio, University Center. Professor Jake's Bean Soup is a Homecoming tradition. The Homecoming kickoff event is free and open to the public. It is hosted by UWRF Greek Life.

Homecoming Volleyball Game, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 7 p.m., Page Arena at Falcon Center. UW-River Falls vs. UW-Stout.

St. Croix River Boat Cruise, Thursday, Sept. 28, 3:30 p.m. boarding time, 4-6:30 p.m. boat cruise and meal, St. Croix River Boat and Packet Cruise, 525 S. Main St., Stillwater, Minn. Cost is \$43 per person. Reservations must be made by Friday, Sept. 22, [here](#).

Alumni and Friends Coffee, Saturday, Sept. 30, 9:30 a.m. at Ostness Park, N. 2nd St. and E. Elm St., River Falls. This event at a new location this year offers the opportunity to meet fellow Falcons and network over a cup of coffee.

Homecoming Parade, Saturday, Sept. 30, 10 a.m. downtown River Falls. Join others in celebrating UWRF at the parade's new location along 2nd Street to enjoy this longstanding Homecoming tradition!

Homecoming Football Game, Saturday, Sept. 30, 1 p.m., David Smith Stadium at Ramer Field. UW-River Falls vs. UW-Platteville.

Athletics Hall of Fame Banquet, Saturday, Sept. 30, 6 p.m., Riverview Ballroom, University Center. Join others in honoring the newest Falcon inductees into the UWRF Athletics Hall of Fame. Registration is required at <https://events.idonate.com/halloffame2023>.

Homecoming Concert, Sunday, Oct. 1, 2 p.m., Abbott Concert Hall, Kleinpell Fine Arts building. Featuring symphony band, choir and alumni choir members. Admission is \$8/adult, \$5/seniors and \$2/students.

A complete list of Homecoming events is available at <https://students.uwrf.edu/student-involvement/homecoming>. For more information, call Alumni Relations at 715-425-3505.



All three of the colleges at UW-River Falls have a new dean this academic year. From left, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Wesley Kisting; Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) Michael Orth; and Dean of the College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH) Muhammad Chishty. Pat Deninger/UWRF photo.

Joining forces: Three new deans start school year together at UW-River Falls

New leaders see unusual occurrence as an opportunity to develop innovative programs

Sept. 7, 2023 – As a new academic year begins, all three colleges at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls have a new dean, a rarity that those leaders see as an opportunity to create innovative programs that will serve students in a fast-changing world.

Michael Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES); Muhammad Chishty, dean of the newly established College of Education, Business and Allied Health (CEBAH); and Wesley Kisting, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), each began working at UW-River Falls this summer.

University officials said they are uncertain when, if ever, UW-River Falls has had the deans of all its colleges begin work at the same time. In recent years, the university had four colleges before the College of Business and Economics (CBE) and the College of Education and Professional Studies (CEPS) merged into CEBAH on July 1.

"It is certainly rare for a campus to have all deans start at the same time," Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs David Travis said. "You almost never hear of that happening."

The three deans come from decidedly different backgrounds. Orth has been at large universities, having worked as a faculty member at Texas Tech University and Michigan State University after attending the UW-Madison and the University of Iowa as a student. Chishty studied political science at Williams College and finance at Georgia State University and has worked at large regional comprehensive state universities as well as mid-sized private institutions, most recently serving as dean of the college of business at Fort Hays State University in Kansas. Kisting earned his bachelor's and doctoral degrees in English and writing in the Midwest before becoming a professor and administrator at Augusta University in Georgia, an institution that underwent significant changes to its mission and student profile.

Despite their differing histories, the trio said they quickly hit it off upon meeting each other. During a recent interview, the three deans laughed and joked, discussing everything from trucks to their childhoods to target shooting.

"We do come from different backgrounds, but we quickly learned that we like spending time together," Orth said. "We formed this bond right away."

Kisting and Orth connected with each other via LinkedIn and subsequently met at a River Falls Fighting Fish baseball game. They then met up with Chishty and now make it a point to meet often.

"This was a big reason why I wanted to come here, that there were these two other deans who were new too, people I could collaborate with," Kisting said.

Chishty, Kisting and Orth gather regularly, get-togethers they said help them generate ideas and connect possible changes beyond their respective colleges and across campus. They hope those sessions will lead to big-picture initiatives that will enhance student learning and enable faculty to teach most effectively.

Overcoming challenges

Since they arrived on campus earlier this summer, the trio said they have been impressed by the friendly, can-do spirit of campus and faculty's commitment to fostering student learning. They have spent time learning about the university and its strong traditions.

However, the three deans said they know that they will need to devise new ideas for delivering education, and that they face challenges amid a lack of financial resources. UW-River Falls and higher education institutions in Wisconsin and across the country are experiencing declining enrollment and the concurrent lack of funding that comes with reduced student numbers.

"We see it as an opportunity to collaborate," Chishty said of difficulties in higher education. "All three of us can work together to create interdisciplinary programs to benefit this university. We see a lot of threats on the horizon, so obviously we have to make changes in what we offer."

The deans have been meeting with faculty and will do so more to discuss ideas about possible changes to curriculum delivery. Given enrollment concerns, they are considering ways to offer classes differently, potentially making greater use of

flexible scheduling and online learning. Many of those good ideas will come from faculty, they said.

"I'm telling everyone to start thinking about what we can do differently to try to engage more students," Chishty said, noting those efforts should include finding ways to engage learners 30 and older.

Kisting agreed that UW-River Falls, like other universities, must find ways to attract more students and boost enrollment. He said the campus focus on student learning through collaboration with talented faculty provides a strong educational base that will be improved by new, interdisciplinary approaches.

"All three of us share an interest in innovation and looking at ways to think outside the box and come up with innovative ways to do things for our students," Kisting said. "I am here because all I see are opportunities for this campus."

An interdisciplinary approach to learning – getting students to see connections between different areas of study – will be key to educating students who will be able to solve the problems of tomorrow, Orth said.

"Life is much more complex now," he said. "Nowadays you're not just thinking about farming, but you're thinking about your impact on the environment and animal welfare and carbon credits and so much more. We need to get students to realize they can't only specialize one area to the exclusion of others. You have to offer them more breadth."

Close collaborations

While having new deans at each of UWRF's three colleges simultaneously could provide challenges, Chancellor Maria Gallo said that circumstance offers the right circumstances for innovation that will benefit the university and its students.

"Having three deans start at the same time offers a rare opportunity for close collaborations to develop from the very start," Gallo said. "This will result in more interdisciplinary offerings, leading to the expansion of forward-thinking programs that will tremendously benefit our students."

Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs David Travis said he is happy to see the new deans working so closely together to identify cross-college opportunities to move the campus forward.

"This allows fresh perspectives and newly formed working relationships to bring renewed energy and collaborative opportunities to campus," Travis said of the trio starting simultaneously.

The three deans said they are aware of the perils of pushing for too much change right away. They agree it's important to listen to faculty and get a better sense of the university's culture before altering too much.

"You can be the new sheriff in town, but you have to balance that with listening to people. We must make sure to listen to the people here," Orth said. "They are familiar with this campus, and they have a lot of good ideas."

The deans acknowledge that some changes may prove difficult. But moving forward may prove easier, they said, because

they are all new to their jobs at the same time.

“That’s one of the big benefits of having three deans come into this school at once,” Kisting said. “So often that kind of change is difficult because it is hard to get across the different silos. But with the three of us starting together, we don’t have as many of those silos in place.”

And as they encounter challenges and attempt new ideas and approaches, Chishty, Orth and Kisting will continue to rely on each other to determine how best to forge ahead – and sometimes for a much-needed laugh.

“Being here with these guys, it feels like just the right mix of skill sets and approaches to make a positive difference here,” Chishty said. “And the work is always easier when you are doing it with people who are your friends.”



UW-River Falls student Grace Johnson shows Copper, a dog she will help train to be an assistance animal, her open hand after feeding him a treat after Copper and other dogs were dropped off at UWRF Sept. 14. Johnson is one of 21 students who will work with 10 assistance dogs on campus as part of the new Falcon FETCH (Fostering Education Through Campus Hosting) program. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls students begin training assistance dogs

Program involves living with, caring for canines on campus

Sept. 21, 2023 - The 21 University of Wisconsin-River Falls students gathered outside the Lydecker Living Learning Center on Sept. 14 come from different places and have diverse future plans. They had gathered because of one commonality: their affinity for dogs.

In fact, these students like dogs so much that they're willing to live with the animals day and night for this academic year, part of a new program at UW-River Falls where students train their four-legged friends as assistance dogs that will later be paired with people who need them to help overcome disabilities or health issues.

"As soon as I heard this was available, I was going to do it," Grace Johnson, a junior from New Richmond majoring in animal science-companion animal management, said of participating in the Falcon FETCH (Fostering Education Through Campus Hosting) program that began at UWRF this semester. "When it comes to dogs, I like everything about them."

Students like Johnson are participating in Falcon FETCH, a partnership between UW-River Falls and Can Do Canines, an assistance dog training organization based in New Hope, Minn. Chris Hergenrader, assistant professor of animal science

who oversees Falcon FETCH, reached out to Can Do Canines about a year ago to see if creating an assistance dog training program on campus through them was possible.

"The driving force was to continue to develop the companion animal program and offer students hands-on experience while participating with a partner who makes a huge difference in the community," Hergenrader said of starting the program.

Students won't just be training dogs but will be learning from them as well. Student teams of two are paired with one dog which they will live with and care for on campus.

Students will stay with their dogs in Stratton Hall, with much of the training taking place at the Lydecker Living Learning Center. The dogs will spend this semester or longer at UWRF, then undergo more training through Can Do Canines before they are paired with a person in need of assistance.

Other universities, such as the University of Minnesota, partner dogs with students to provide service dog training, but few have incorporated that effort into a living and learning community with courses focused on service dog training as will be the case at UWRF, Hergenrader said.

"It is important that our students are able to have the opportunity to apply what they learn through opportunities such as this," he said. "It takes the students' learning to an entirely different level."

UW-River Falls started a separate service dog training program in 2016 called Assistance Dog Education Program and Training (ADEPT). That program was in conjunction with the Minnesota-based nonprofit Pawsitive Perspectives Assistance Dogs (PawPADs), but it is no longer affiliated with UWRF.

Love of dogs

Students' love of dogs was evident as they were paired with the animals they will help train and care for. Bella Saxton-Jenson and Jessica Keller, sophomores who are animal science-companion animal management majors, played with Pretzel, a female 15-month-old black Labrador who they will care for and train.

Saxton-Jenson, from Elk Mound, and Keller, from Waukesha, acknowledged that caring for Pretzel day and night will prove challenging at times. But knowing that Pretzel will one day help someone in need of assistance makes the commitment worth the work, they said.

"Even on our hard days, it's going to be worth it when you realize you're training a dog that is going to be helping people who really need it," Keller said.

Nearby, sophomores Chesney Eschbach, of Decatur, Ill., majoring in animal science-companion animal management, and Erika Richtsmeier, of Lino Lakes, Minn., majoring in social work, worked with their two-year-old golden Labrador, Copper. Along with their love of dogs, they said they're motivated to be part of Falcon FETCH because of the opportunity to train dogs to help others.

"It's amazing the ways that these dogs can help people," Richtsmeier said, "and I want to be a part of that."

Eschbach came to UW-River Falls specifically because of Falcon FETCH. Last year she attended junior college in Illinois and

came across a story about the dog-training program set to begin at UWRF. She messaged Hergenrader, who told her there was just one spot open for the course this fall. Eschbach took it.

"I just decided I want to be a part of this," she said. "It seems like the right fit for me."

It's not just the assistance dogs who will benefit from Falcon FETCH, Saxton-Jenson said. Students like her who will work with the animals will gain from the experience, she said.

"Dogs can really help with mental health," she said. "Who can be upset or sad when you're around a dog? They care about you no matter what. Even on your down days, they give you a reason to keep going."

'Doing a good thing'

Emily Hedenland, lead program trainer for Can Do Canines, said students and others who train assistance dogs are motivated by a desire to help the people. Trained assistance dogs can help with a variety of tasks, ranging from helping function with mobility issues to monitoring low blood sugar levels.

Students benefit from their companionship with the dogs they're training, Hedenland said, noting the animals "seem to have some mental health benefits for students." Students also gain valuable experience that will help them land jobs in the animal science world, she said.

"This experience is really something that will set these students apart on a resume," Hedenland said.

Johnson said she hopes to work one day as a dog trainer. While helping care for a dog in addition to attending classes could prove challenging, she said the way the program is organized will help students and their dogs succeed. She sees Falcon FETCH as "an amazing opportunity" for her and other participants to gain valuable experience.

"It makes me feel proud to be a part of this," Johnson said, "like I'm doing a good thing by helping other people succeed in life by training these dogs."

UW-River Falls hosting free Frances Cohler Coffee Concerts

Sept. 12, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has released the fall schedule for free Frances Cohler Coffee Concert Series that features a wide range of musical performances by university faculty as well as guest artists.

The series includes performances on flute, piano and violin as well as vocal concerts. Each concert takes place on Fridays at noon in Abbott Concert Hall in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building, 420 Cascade Ave., River Falls. Concerts are free and open to the public.

Concert series events for the fall semester include:

- Friday, Sept. 22 – Ji Young Lee and Horacio Nuguid, piano duo.
- Friday, Oct. 6 – Twin Cities Trio featuring Adam Kunezel on flute, Silver Ainomae on cello and Miryana Moteva on piano.
- Friday, Oct. 13 – Nordic Unrest featuring Oda Voltersvik on piano.
- Friday, Oct. 20 – The Music of Gregory Fritze, featuring Peter Sheppard Skaervard on violin.
- Friday, Nov. 3 – UW-River Falls Piano Festival, featuring Bill Eddins on piano.
- Friday, Dec. 1 – Jack Swanson, tenor.
- Friday, Dec. 15 – Barcelona Clarinet Quartet and Hannah Trondalen Hoyem, voice.

Coffee and cookies are served after concerts. For more information, contact series coordinator Kris Tjornehoj at 715-410-7416.



UW-River Falls students gather for an Academic Day presentation kicking off the academic year. UWRF is ranked as one of the top regional public universities in the U.S. News & World Report 2024 Best Colleges list. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls recognized for excellence by U.S. News & World Report

University improves its public and regional university rankings

Sept. 18, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has once again been named one of the best regional public universities in the Midwest by the U.S. News & World Report [2024 Best Colleges](#) ranking.

The acclaimed ranking lists UW-River Falls as the [No. 14-ranked](#) regional university among public schools in the Midwest in its 2024 Best Colleges list. The university also is ranked 60th among regional universities in the Midwest.

Those rankings are both improvements from the 2023 list, when UW-River Falls was deemed the [18th-best public school](#) in the Midwest and placed 75th among regional Midwestern universities.

Chancellor Maria Gallo said the high placement of UW-River Falls in U.S. News & World Report is indicative of the university's commitment to ensuring that students receive a quality education. Success educating students is borne out in the university's improvement in the rankings, she said.

"Our rise in the rankings further emphasizes what a quality education UWRF students receive at an affordable price point,"

Gallo said. "UWRF is an amazing value."

Its appearance on the Best Colleges list is a sign of the high-caliber instruction provided to UWRF students, Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs David Travis said. The accolades also are evidence of the knowledgeable, talented faculty at the university, he said.

"This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication that the faculty and staff at UW-River Falls put forth every day to ensure that our students have the best possible learning experience," Travis said.

The U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings are calculated using up to 19 measures of academic quality, with the intent of helping students and their families identify colleges that best fit their needs. The report evaluates 1,500 colleges and universities nationally.

UW-River Falls also scored well in the social mobility category, which measures success in enrolling and graduating students from all backgrounds with manageable debt and post-graduate success. The strong performance of UW-River Falls in that category shows the university's commitment to working closely with students to make sure they succeed, Travis said.

This year's rankings place a greater emphasis on social mobility and outcomes for graduating students, with more than 50% of scores now based on outcome measures.

The rankings highlight higher education institutions in a range of areas, from financial value to teaching to serving veterans' needs. They also assess quality in six academic disciplines: business, computer science, engineering, nursing – and for the first time this year, economics and psychology.



Attendees of last year's Powered by Electricity event at UW-River Falls try out and learn about an electric-powered tractor. This year's event at UW-River Falls is Saturday, Sept. 23. Contributed photo.

UW-River Falls to host Powered by Electricity event Sept. 23

Sessions will feature electric vehicles, tools, solar, battery discussions, and more

Sept. 13, 2023 - An upcoming free event at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will showcase the importance of moving toward more electric power as a way to boost sustainability efforts.

The third annual Powered by Electricity is Saturday, Sept. 23, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at North Hall, 410 S. 3rd St., River Falls. It will be both outside the building and in the North Hall Auditorium on second floor. Food will be available for purchase.

Electric vehicles (EVs) will be available to test drive, along with roundtable discussions at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. with electric vehicle owners. Attendees can learn more at electric cooperative information stations and can watch demonstrations of electric tools and equipment. Children's and family activities will also be offered. A session on residential solar and battery storage is scheduled for 11:15 a.m. in the auditorium.

"Events like Powered by Electricity help us prepare ourselves and our community for a more sustainable future," said Mark Klapatch-Mathias, coordinator of the UW-River Falls Sustainability Office.

The event is a partnership with UW-River Falls and the St. Croix Electric Cooperative, Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services, and Hope for Creation. It is part of National Drive Electric Week, a nationwide effort to raise awareness about the benefits of

electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.

Powered by Electricity is a great opportunity for people to learn about electric vehicles and tools, according to Rob Dooley, president and CEO of St. Croix Electric Cooperative. Electric-powered devices are becoming more common amid climate concerns and as the federal government has increased funding for electric initiatives.

"We often get questions about EVs and this offers an opportunity for attendees to test drive a variety of vehicles and see if an EV is right for them," Dooley said.

With rapidly changing technology in electrified transportation and equipment, the event offers an opportunity to learn about the latest trends and updates, said David Chavie, energy innovation and operational technology manager for Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services.

"It is important, especially for residents in rural areas, to have a resource for answering their questions about EV charging, taking advantage of new rebates, and how to navigate the increasing trend toward electrification in many aspects of modern life," Chavie said.

The Powered by Electricity event is another sign that sustainability is an important focus at UW-River Falls, Klapatch-Mathias said. Interest in the topic by students continues to drive sustainability initiatives on campus, he said.

"Sustainability is a core value at UWRF and partnering with other organizations to bring events like this to our campus and community demonstrates our ongoing commitment," Klapatch-Mathias said.

For more information about the event, call 715-425-4333 or email sustainability@uwrf.edu.



UW-River Falls will host the UW System Board of Regents October 5-6. Regents and other UW System officials will learn about UWRF students and programming as well as conduct meetings during their visit. South Hall/UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls to host UW System Board of Regents Oct. 5-6

Visit offers opportunity to showcase university programs, explain needs

Sept. 20, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls will host the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents (BOR) October 5-6, offering the regents and other UW System officials the opportunity to learn about the high-quality programs and education UW-River Falls students receive.

The 18 members of the Board of Regents, UW System campus chancellors and other system officials will attend a series of meetings and other events at UW-River Falls during their visit. UWRF last hosted a BOR meeting in 2014.

Visitors will hear about UWRF's commitment to providing cutting-edge learning in agriculture and other science programs as well as its other signature programs such as business, education and the arts. UW-River Falls officials will showcase unique programs like the Montessori doctoral program, the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence and the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) on which construction has started with a projected opening date in 2026.

UWRF officials will also discuss such topics as how nearly four of every 10 students are the first in their family to attend a four-year university and the extra attention UWRF puts toward those students to help them succeed.

"Having the Board of Regents meet on the UWRF campus provides a significant opportunity to highlight the impactful work

our faculty, staff and students do, as well as gives the regents first-hand knowledge of our programs and facilities to help them make informed decisions which affect the future of the university,” Chancellor Maria Gallo said.

Gallo will make a presentation to the BOR that will highlight innovative programs at UWRF. It will include UWRF faculty explaining those programs and how they help students succeed and play a role in strengthening the regional and state economy.

The BOR are responsible for the policies that govern the UW System, helping with systemwide planning and budgeting and setting the standards to ensure that UW campuses can pursue their educational mission. The BOR typically meets eight times a year, with approximately half of the meetings hosted by one of the 13 UW System campuses in an effort to learn more about the programs they provide to students and the challenges they face. During their time at UWRF, the regents will conduct their regular standing committee and full board business meetings and will also be invited to participate in planned social events showcasing UWRF programs and students.

“We are excited to host the Board of Regents here at UWRF,” Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration David Ruhland said. “The board plays an absolutely critical role in the success of our students, campus, community and the entire state. We look forward to sharing our unique strengths with this esteemed group of leaders.”

The meetings are open for people to attend to learn what is happening within the UW System, and how it impacts UW-River Falls. Meals and receptions are by invitation only. Agendas for each meeting will be available at <https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/meetingmaterials/> prior to October 4.



UW-

River Falls student Madeline Nelson, center, shares her thoughts with Minnesota Public Radio host Kerri Miller during an event at the university Tuesday titled “What it Takes to Educate a Nimble & Knowledgeable Rural Workforce: Stories & Solutions,” part of the ongoing Rural Voice series. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls viewed as key to helping build regional rural workforce

Role of education discussed during Minnesota Public Radio event at university

Sept. 27, 2023 - Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, Olivia Jester felt lost among the masses. Then, before her freshman year of high school, her family relocated to the significantly smaller community of Spooner in northwest Wisconsin.

In a new location that seemingly had less to offer, Jester found more. She connected with fellow students and teachers and became involved with the Upward Bound program that led to her becoming a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

“In Ohio, I just kind of fell through the cracks,” said Jester, now a UW-River Falls senior double majoring in communication studies and psychology. “I was just another kid in my school class of 500. When I came to Spooner, people noticed me. Every teacher was like ‘Hey, it’s the new girl. Are you good? Can I help you?’”

Given that experience, Jester said she hopes to live in a smaller, rural community after earning her college degree. She isn’t alone.

Many students and others attending a Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) Rural Voice event at UW-River Falls Tuesday hosted by MPR personality Kerri Miller said they would prefer to live in less-populated places as opposed to urban locations where many people typically live because of greater job availability. The event, titled "What it Takes to Educate a Nimble & Knowledgeable Rural Workforce: Stories & Solutions," is part of the ongoing Rural Voice series.

After decades of populations across the U.S. shifting toward urban areas, a growing number of Americans are stating a preference for living in less-populated regions. That trend is due in part to the growth of remote employment possibilities in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

For an urban-to-rural population shift to happen on a large scale, rural areas will have to increase capacity in sectors such as housing and broadband capacity and will need educated employees to grow the rural workforce, speakers at Tuesday's event said. Universities such as UW-River Falls that are located in rural regions are poised to play a key role in building that workforce, they said.

The challenges facing rural communities are complex, and the hands-on, experiential learning opportunities that UW-River Falls offers students prepare them to address those issues, said Michael Orth, dean of the UWRF College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences.

"It used to be that you milked cows on the farm," Orth said. "Now you milk the cows, but you also worry about the welfare of the animals. You worry about the environmental impact of your farm. You have to take all of that into account. Things are a lot more complex."

Other event speakers said higher education must expand the traditional learning model to reach more potential learners. Approaches to doing so should include such actions as modifying existing degrees, creating certificate programs and increasing online learning opportunities, said Muhammad Chishty, dean of the UWRF College of Education, Business and Allied Health.

"We have to rethink the education model, what we deliver and how we deliver it," Chishty said. "The education landscape is changing, and employers care more about skill sets than degrees."

Many jobs that educators traditionally have viewed as being in urban locations also are possible in rural ones, especially with economic shifts that are occurring since the pandemic, said Jennifer Willis-Rivera, chair of the UWRF Communication and Media Studies Department. Those changes enable a growing number of people to live in rural places and have jobs that traditionally have required employees to live in larger cities. She cited one UWRF grad who works for social media giant Meta and lives in the small northwest Wisconsin community of Luck.

"A lot of the jobs that we prepare our students for, you can find them in inner cities, but you can also find them in rural communities," Willis-Rivera said. "We find ways to help students be able to contribute to their communities in ways that they haven't thought of before."

Speakers discussed the role businesses can play in building rural communities by partnering with education institutions. UWRF Chancellor Maria Gallo said such relationships between business and higher education are growing and can offer students enhanced educational opportunities while boosting rural economies.

“Businesses are becoming true partners in education and there is more integration,” Gallo said, noting businesses will work with students and faculty as part of the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) scheduled to open at UWRF in 2026.

Key to building the rural workforce is connecting students to the kinds of education they want, Gallo said.

“The important thing is that people have pathways to get the kind of education that they need,” she said. “We won’t have to be place bound but will be able to live in the environment we want to live in.”

Jester hopes that is the case. After graduation, she hopes to live in a small-size community and provide counseling there.

“Counseling is a big need, especially in rural areas,” she said, “and I feel like I can make a big, positive difference in a community like that.”



These UW-River Falls students were among about 100 Falcon Move Crew members who unloaded fellow students' belongings during move-in day on campus Saturday. More than 2,000 students moved into residence halls over the weekend. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls welcomes students for start of school year

Move in, Academic Day mark the beginning of another semester

Sept. 5, 2023 - Hundreds of University of Wisconsin-River Falls first-year students kicked off their academic careers at the university on Tuesday during an event that was both celebratory and informative.

Students gathered at the Melvin Wall Amphitheatre on campus for Academic Day, an event intended to commemorate the beginning of their college careers and help connect them to their academic programs and faculty. After meeting with professors and fellow classmates, they then attended an event intended to familiarize them with campus clubs and organizations. Wednesday is the first day of classes for fall semester.

During the gathering at the amphitheatre, Chancellor Maria Gallo told students that their time at UWRF will be life changing in multiple ways. She urged students to help each other feel accepted on campus and to be themselves.

"True belonging demands that you be who you are, presenting as your authentic self and being valued as that unique individual. That's being a Falcon," Gallo said.

While beginning college is an exciting time, it also presents challenges, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs David Travis said. Getting to know classmates and professors will help find success, he told students.

"There will be challenges. When that happens, find a way to get some help. That will be critical to you finding ways to be successful," Travis said, noting programs through which students can find assistance.

Move-in weekend on campus offered students opportunities to connect with others. About 100 were part of Falcon Move Crew, a volunteer moving crew that unloaded students' clothing and other items and helped them move into their residence hall homes during an unusually warm day in which the temperature approached 100 degrees. A total of 2,135 students will live in 10 UWRF residence halls this semester.

Donning a tie-dye red-and-white moving crew T-shirt, Lauryn Hendzel joined others Saturday in hauling one item after another from a vehicle and piling it on the curb in front of Parker Hall. Moments later, the first-year student from Oconto majoring in the pre-veterinary program helped load some of those items into a container on wheels that parents wheeled into the residence hall.

"I decided to do this because I really want to meet people right off the bat," Hendzel said between helping unload vehicles. "It is hot out here, but it feels good to do this, to help other people out."

As he lugged other students' items, Isaac Paulson, a junior from Holmen double majoring in agricultural studies and agricultural business, recalled when he first arrived at UWRF, thoughts that prompted him to help on move-in day.

"I know that coming to campus at first and moving in can be a struggle," Paulson said. "I just want to do my part to help make it easier for others."

Despite the oppressive heat, move-in day went smoothly, said Liz Deninger, associate director of residence life. That was due not only to move-in helpers but because pre-planned drop-off times prevented too many students arriving at once and a subsequent unloading backlog, she said.

Move-in crew members were advised to take frequent breaks and stay hydrated. Campus buildings with available air conditioning, such as the University Center, Rodli Hall and the Falcon Center, were open to students as places to escape the heat.

"We're doing what we can to try to keep our students cool and make sure they are safe," Deninger said.

When first-year student Braelyn Beiler arrived on campus to move into her residence hall room, Beiler and her family were pleasantly surprised to be approached by UWRF women's basketball team members, who quickly hauled Beiler's belongings to her dorm room.

"I didn't expect that at all," said Beiler, a first-year student from Weston majoring in exercise sports science and who is a basketball team member. "It feels really good to see that group here and know that I have support here already."

Beiler's father, Jeremy, said he appreciated the help carrying his daughter's belongings to her new college home. Even more important, he said, is the sense of welcome.

"It can be tough to send your kid away to college," he said. "But with the support we've felt here already, I feel really good about having my daughter here."



UW-River Falls Dairy Science Professor Steve Kelm, left, speaks about cow posture and mobility with students Wednesday in a classroom at Mann Valley Farm. The students are enrolled in the first Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) agriculture education program being taught at UW-River Falls. The first day of the course was Wednesday. UWRF photo.

Dairy-focused Farm and Industry Short Course begins

University takes on program to help address agriculture workforce shortage

Oct. 26, 2023 - Nine students gathered around a cow, watching carefully and studying the animal's gait as the Holstein ambled past them.

Standing nearby, instructor Steve Kelm viewed the cow as well, noting such details as the sway of its back and how its weight was distributed on its hooves.

"You see how she's leaning this way?" Kelm asked the students Wednesday at Mann Valley Farm, operated by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. "What does that tell you about the condition of her feet?"

Kelm, chair of the UW-River Falls Animal and Food Science Department and a dairy science professor, and students were interacting during the first day of the much-anticipated Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) at the university. FISC had been taught at UW-Madison since 1885 until two years ago, when officials pulled the plug on the program because of a lack of demand. The course is designed to educate Wisconsin's agriculture workforce.

With support from the agriculture industry, UW-River Falls agreed the program was a good fit for the university, given its strong ag programs. Faculty in the university's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) designed a

program and worked to recruit students. They sought funding, some of which could come through a proposed bill currently before the state Legislature.

The 16-week short course is designed for high school graduates who are interested in dairy farming or working in jobs that involve dairy cattle and management. The short course began Wednesday and ends March 15. Students will earn up to 20 credits for their work. Seven of the nine students are living on campus, while the other two commute.

On Wednesday, students sat in a classroom learning about cow structure and mobility from Kelm. Then they headed to a dairy barn at Mann Valley Farm to see those topics firsthand. Using a mobility rating system, students studied cows and discussed with Kelm the best care for each animal to prevent it from becoming lame.

"She's got some tenderness in at least one foot, but we can get her help and prevent her from getting worse," student Joey Renn, 18, of Heartland, said of one cow.

After examining cows with differing degrees of walking difficulties, students returned to the classroom to learn more from Kelm. They took a mid-day break from studies, then resumed classwork for the afternoon.

Students participating in FISC said their first day of class went well and they were already learning valuable information. The combination of classroom learning and hands-on instruction at Mann Valley Farm is an effective teaching combination, they said.

FISC students acknowledged the difficulties related to dairy farming. Most grew up in farming families and they know all too well how dairy farms have been disappearing in record numbers from across Wisconsin in recent years. But they're determined to operate dairy farms of their own, despite challenges.

"I love the tradition of it," said Taylor Kolls, 34, of Ellsworth. "In Wisconsin's history, so many people were dairy farmers, and I feel like we're getting connected to our ancestors in some way by doing this. In Wisconsin, this is in our blood. It's who we are."

Kolls works weekends on a dairy farm in addition to his full-time job. He quit that job to participate in FISC and when he completes the course, he plans to work at the farm full time. Other FISC participants said they also plan to operate dairy farms, in large part because of their love for that way of life.

Kyle Menn's family is the sixth generation to farm the Monroe County land his ancestors settled in the mid-1800s. He didn't see himself attending college, but FISC will provide him and other participants with valuable knowledge to help them become better farmers in an increasingly competitive market, he said, noting his father and grandfather completed FISC.

"I was just going to stay home and figure it out," Menn, 20, of Norwalk, said of his farming education plans. "But I realized this program could really help me out."

Macy Johnson's parents aren't farmers. But the 19-year-old from Cushing became attached to the farming life through her involvement in 4-H and spending time on farms during her childhood.

"The uncertainty of farming can be hard, but I like the fact that no two days are the same," she said. "There is a comfort in that way of life. I couldn't imagine doing anything else."



UW-River Falls student Blake Zak performs at the Scholarship Recognition Event and Donor Social Oct 8. The event, organized by University Advancement, occurs annually and is designed to bring together scholarship donors and scholarship recipients

Finding his place: UW-River Falls student praises campus atmosphere for helping him find success

Oct. 31, 2023 - Blake Zak never intended to go to college, never intended to make his way to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

After graduating from high school in Hastings, Minn., Zak, a musician, was content to play music on weekends at bars and restaurants while working and leading worship services at his hometown Lutheran church.

"I didn't want to go to college. Not even a little," Zak said. "I told my parents I had no reason to go to college. I arrogantly thought that college was not for me."

However, Zak's parents urged him to attend college. He would be better for the experience, they said, and would learn much about life both in and outside of the classroom. Reluctantly, Zak agreed and moved into a UW-River Falls residence hall in August 2021.

That decision was a life changer for Zak, he told an audience gathered at the Scholarship Recognition Event and Donor Social Oct. 8 at UW-River Falls and organized by University Advancement. The scholarship recognition event occurs annually and is designed to bring together scholarship donors and scholarship recipients to learn about one another and

make tangible connections.

Zak, a senior majoring in communication studies, was the event's student guest speaker and music performer. The focus of his address was "finding my place" at UW-River Falls.

Zak's residence hall roommate was someone he knew from middle school, and the two became best friends. Zak met numerous other students who have become vital parts of his friends network and he has taken part in countless memorable experiences during his time at UW-River Falls. He credits not only his social interactions but his learning in the classroom with making him a more complete person who is more aware of the world around him.

Along the way, Zak made an even more important personal connection. He met a friend named Laine, and the two subsequently began dating. They plan to marry next year.

"Finding my place wasn't hard at UWRF because there is an honest hunger for healthy discussion, disagreement and learning," Zak said. "'I found my place' isn't about one student; it's about a campus culture, when you walk into the (University Center) where students always hold doors for each other. It's about the hockey team raising enough money for our favorite bagel chef, Barb, to make repairs to her house. UWRF fosters a culture of learning, kindness and positivity. It was easy to find my place here."

Enabling students to find their place at UW-River Falls doesn't happen by accident, Chancellor Maria Gallo said. Faculty and staff are committed to helping students link to academic and social opportunities that are key to their having success, she said.

"We not only welcome students at the start of every school year, we inform and celebrate them," Gallo said. "We help connect them to their academic programs and faculty, familiarize them with our clubs and organizations, and share campus resources available to them in challenging times."

Students also are encouraged to be their true selves, she said, and to be accepting of others who are different from them.

"True belonging demands that you present as your authentic self and be valued as a unique individual. That is being a Falcon," Gallo said.

Rick Foy, assistant chancellor for university Advancement, shared that while our personal experiences with UWRF are unique and individual, and our journeys in "finding our place" vary, we all share in and celebrate this place we call "home." A home that's been around now for nearly 150 years. Donors have made UWRF a secure and special home to countless students in countless ways, including scholarship support.

Scholarships play a vital role in UW-River Falls students' ability to attend school. UWRF students received nearly \$3.5 million in university scholarships and tuition waivers, and nearly \$1.2 million in donor-funded Foundation scholarships awarded to 613 students. Eleven new scholarships were created between October 2022 and October 2023, four of them endowed.

Seventy-two percent of UWRF students receive some type of financial aid, and 63% borrow money to be able to afford school. Scholarship funding enables students to take on less student debt, and for many, scholarships are life changing.

More than two years after enrolling at UW-River Falls, Zak considers the university his "place forever." He recalls the many

experiences that have helped forge his character and his life outlook and is thankful for all the support he receives that has made his college career possible. He plans to attend graduate school at UWRF for school counseling after he graduates in May and hopes to one day work with high school students.

"It is where I met my best buddy, a group of amazing friends who taught me a lot about life and opened my mind ... and most importantly, my future wife. UWRF is home," he said.

Health and nutrition topics of Oct. 18 event at UW-River Falls

Presentation part of Walker D. and Helen Bryant Wyman Visiting Professorship Series

Oct. 4, 2023 - Acclaimed author and professor of nutrition and health Marion Nestle will discuss public perceptions of diets and health at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls on Wednesday, Oct. 18.

Nestle's presentation is from 5-6:30 p.m. in the Kinnickinnic Theater on the third floor of the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave. Her discussion will also cover new information related to ultra-processed foods, U.S. dietary guidelines, and the EAT-Lancet recommended diet for planetary health.

Refreshments will be provided at the event, which is free to attend. Prior to Nestle's presentation to the public, she will host a discussion session with UWRF students.

Nestle's presentation is part of the Walker D. and Helen Bryant Wyman Visiting Professorship Series which enables the College of Arts and Sciences to bring relevant speakers to campus.

Nestle is the emerita Paulette Goddard Professor in the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University, where she also is a professor of sociology. She also is a visiting professor in the Cornell Division of Nutritional Sciences.

For more information, call Rachael Buckallew at 715-425-4719.

Nature access to be discussed at UW-River Falls event

Partnership between UWRF, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust seeks to boost opportunities

Oct. 4, 2023 - The ability of natural surroundings to boost human health is gaining increased attention, and two upcoming events co-sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Sustainability Office will focus on nature's health benefits and the fact that some groups have more access to the outdoors than others.

The Sustainability Office has partnered with the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust (KRLT) to sponsor events intended to prompt discussion about ties between nature and health, how health equity is not equal, and how that access can be improved.

UW-River Falls will host "Outdoors for All! A Community Conversation About Nature, Health and Equity" from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 18, in the Riverview Ballroom in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., and online. The event is free, but registration is required.

A two-day workshop, "All People: Creating and Managing Universally Accessible Trails Workshop," is Oct. 19-20 at the St. Croix Valley Business and Innovation Center, 1091 Sutherland Ave., River Falls. The cost is \$50 per person and is not available online. Attendees will participate in a process to design and construct pedestrian trails that are usable by everyone.

Registration for both events is at www.kinniriver.org/outdoors-for-all/ or by calling KRLT at 715-425-5738. Registration for both events closes Oct. 12.



KRLT, the UWRF Sustainability Office, and Sustainability Faculty Fellows agreed during the summer to work collaboratively to host the events. Mark Klapatch-Mathias, Sustainability Office coordinator, said topics discussed at those events are an example of sustainability's important impact on communities.

Health benefits for humans by engaging with the natural world are well documented. However, many populations lack access to nature because of socioeconomic barriers, disabilities, age, race, and a wide variety of safety concerns.

"These events are pivotal in understanding the barriers that exist to experience nature for any and all stakeholders," Klapatch-Mathias said. "The process of learning these barriers and identifying solutions will result in tangible solutions for our community and could serve as a model for other communities striving for equitable access to nature."

Last year KRLT proposed building an accessible trail at Kelly Creek Preserve north of River Falls. However, the organization decided to delay that project while it reached out to marginalized groups to better understand barriers those groups face in accessing natural areas like the trail.

"KRLT wants to listen over the next several months to hear interests and needs and then design trails and outdoors experiences to make sure green spaces can be accessible by all," said Steve Leonard, KRLT executive director. "Our goal is

to understand where those outdoor spaces are in the St. Croix Watershed for marginalized communities and help promote them. Plus, learn what has worked and what needs improvement.”

Feedback taken at the two events will help in future trails and natural spaces, making them more accessible to people who may not be able to use them otherwise, Leonard said. He said he hopes those events are just the beginning of a series of listening sessions across the St. Croix region and Twin Cities metro at which people offer input so that future natural areas can be used by everyone.

“The more people we get involved, the more creative our solutions to accessing green spaces so everyone can build a personal connection with nature will be,” Leonard said.

For more information, email Klapatch-Mathias at mark.klapatch@uwrf.edu or email Leonard at steve@kinniriver.org.

Photo: UW-River Falls first-year student Hollis Davis from River Falls picks coneflower seeds Tuesday as part of an activity organized by the university’s Sustainability Office. UWRF is co-sponsoring two upcoming events at which access to natural areas will be discussed. UWRF photo.

Ojibwe activism in northern Wisconsin is focus of Edward N. Peterson Lecture Series event Nov. 7

Oct. 19, 2023 - Katrina Phillips, associate professor of history at Macalester College, will present a free public lecture “‘The Land is the Only Thing’: Tracing the History of Ojibwe Activism in Northern Wisconsin,” on Tuesday, Nov. 7, at 4:30 p.m. in the Kinnickinnic Theater in the University Center at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

A reception begins at 4 p.m., with a Q&A session following the talk. The lecture is part of the Edward N. Peterson Lecture Series.



Phillips, an enrolled member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, is the author of several books including “Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and Performances of Native American History” which won the Theatre Library Association Book Awards 2021 George Freedley Memorial Award.

The lecture will focus on the Red Cliff Reservation in the northernmost part of Wisconsin along the south shore of Gichigami, or what Ojibwe people call Lake Superior. Like Native nations across what’s now the United States, Ojibwe people have advocated for their lands, their livelihoods, and their sovereignty for centuries. As Phillips talk explores, this advocacy included opposition to the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Phillips’ maternal grandmother Margaret Pascale spoke against the park in a Congressional committee hearing in 1969, stating that “The land is the only thing we can associate our

heritage with.”

The talk will trace the growth of tribal activism, environmentalism, and tourism endeavors in Northern Wisconsin, illuminating how shifting federal policies have affected the Ojibwe in Wisconsin – and how the Ojibwe have responded, paying particular attention to the historic and contemporary contestations surrounding the Ojibwe fight for political, cultural, and economic sovereignty.

The Peterson Lecture Series honors Edward N. Peterson, a history professor at UW-River Falls from 1954 until his death in 2005. It addresses issues that were the focus of Peterson’s academic life and are still relevant today: war and peace, abuses and limits of power, the struggle for democracy in the twentieth century. The series is funded by an endowment made possible by donations from students, alumni, faculty and other supporters.

Find more information at <https://www.uwrf.edu/HIST/Events/PetersonLectureSeries/Index.cfm>.

Scandinavian pianist to present concerts at UW-River Falls

Oct. 3, 2023 - The St. Croix Valley Symphony Orchestra (SCVSO) presents Scandinavian pianist Oda Voltersvik from Thursday-Sunday, Oct. 12-15, in concerts and events at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Voltersvik currently resides in Bergen, Norway, and will participate in a tour of the U.S., performing concerts throughout the Midwest.

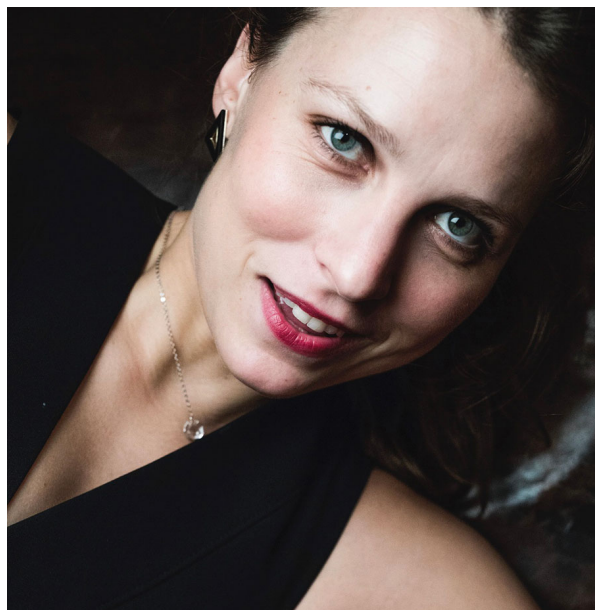
"It is such an honor to host internationally acclaimed pianist Oda Voltersvik as a guest soloist playing the Grieg Piano Concerto with the SCV Symphony Orchestra," Director Kris Tjornehoj said.

Voltersvik's residency kicks off with a solo performance "Nordic Unrest" for the Frances Cohler Coffee Concert Series on Friday, Oct. 13, at noon in Abbott Concert Hall in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building on campus. This event is free and open to the public. Join us for coffee, cookies and conversation following the concert. A masterclass for pianists and musicians will begin at 2 p.m. where Voltersvik will share information regarding her journey at home and abroad.

On Saturday, Oct. 14, at 7 p.m., "An Evening of Norwegian Music" will take place at Trinity Lutheran Church in Stillwater, Minn. The Trinity Lutheran Choir with director Clark Weyrauch will perform, in addition to the SCVSO with director Tjornehoj, organist Carol Carver and guest artist Voltersvik. A free will offering will be taken at this event, followed by a champagne reception in the lobby following the concert.

On Sunday, Oct. 15, at 3 p.m., Voltersvik will perform the Grieg Piano Concerto, mvt. 1, with the SCVSO in Abbott Concert Hall at UWRF. Other selections include "Jupiter" from the Planets by Gustav Holst, American Salute by Morton Gould, Fiddler on the Roof selections, arr. by Felton Rapley, and Wedding Day at Troldhaugen op. 65, no. 6 by Edvard Grieg. The University Community Chorus led by director Deborah Fristad will also be a part of this program. Tickets available at the door: \$8/adults, \$5/seniors, \$2/students.

For more information, call Tjornehoj at 715-410-7416.





Cari Redington, right, administrator of the Wisconsin Department of Revenue Research and Policy Division, speaks about workforce issues Tuesday at UW-River Falls as John Koskinen, center, chief economist with the Department of Revenue, and Emily Kovach-Erickson, left, with the River Falls Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau, listen. The three were speakers at The Workforce Summit: Western Wisconsin's Labor Market Future. UWRF photo.

Speakers at UW-River Falls discuss economic challenges

Creative, diligent approaches needed to address worker shortage, other issues

Oct. 31, 2023 - The economy in western Wisconsin has rebounded well from the downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic, but solutions must be devised to address such challenges as an ongoing worker shortage and affordable housing for the region to continue to prosper financially, speakers said Tuesday at a workforce summit at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The St. Croix Valley is doing well economically, speakers said, as many businesses have bounced back from the pandemic. That success is visible in numerous ways, from strong new business startups to the fact that St. Croix County is the second-fastest growing county in Wisconsin, trailing only Dane County.

However, sustaining that growth could prove challenging amid fast-changing factors that include artificial intelligence, said Brent Orrell, senior fellow at American Enterprise Institute and a keynote speaker at The Workforce Summit: Western Wisconsin's Labor Market Future. Doing so will require creative approaches and an ability to change quickly, Orrell told attendees, co-sponsored by Family Friendly Workplaces and the River Falls Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau.

Given current economic challenges, "We have to be thinking all of the time about how to adapt," Orrell said. "How do we, in

the face of change, become a more resilient economy?”

Doing so will require a multifaceted approach, Orrell said, and will require people being open to learning new skills. Developing interpersonal skills also will be necessary, he said.

“Retraining is going to be a part of life,” he said.

Summit speakers described how businesses are taking creative approaches to retain and attract employees amid an ongoing worker shortage. Some said they are offering enhanced benefits to help with childcare and healthcare expenses. Others said they are part of discussions with local governments and others to determine how to create more affordable housing for employees. Still others described the importance of addressing workers’ mental health.

Working to find solutions to those issues and others is anything but easy, said Abby Klatt, human resource director at OEM Fabricators, a custom metal fabrication company in Woodville. But attempting to do so is part of overcoming challenges facing workers and employers, she said.

“Healthcare is difficult. Daycare is tough,” she said. “We have to be willing to make changes, to take feedback and say ‘how can we do this better?’”

Mike Orth, dean of the UWRF College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, said taking steps to address a worker shortage is vital, especially in rural areas that have been losing population to urban sites.

“Finding ways to attract people to this region and provide them with what they need to keep them here will be an important part of continuing to build our economy,” he said.

The summit offers attendees an opportunity to not only learn from others about workplace challenges they face but to discuss potential solutions, said Neil Kline, executive director of Family Friendly Workplaces, an organization that works to address western Wisconsin’s workforce shortage and strengthen the region’s families. Such issues as a lack of affordable housing and childcare are “significant challenges” that will require ongoing efforts to address, he said.

“We have recovered from the pandemic in many ways,” Kline said. “But we have workforce issues to deal with that are not going to go away, and we need to decide what we are going to do about them. Hopefully today served as a means of getting us closer to having some of those answers.”

Stage and Screen Productions to present 'Night of the Living Dead'

Oct. 10, 2023 - Stage and Screen Productions at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will present "Night of the Living Dead" October 25-28 at 7:30 p.m. in the Blanche Davis Theatre in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building.

A group of strangers hole up in an abandoned farmhouse while ghoulish victims of mysterious rays from outer space lumber menacingly about the countryside. UWRF's "Night of the Living Dead" is an immersive experience where audience members will travel with sinister characters through eerie scenes on their way to enjoy a stage adaptation of the classic horror film.

This production of "Night of the Living Dead" has been adapted from the 1968 George A. Romero/John Russo film by UWRF student Xander Lyndon-Racho. It is directed by Kathy Welch.

Tickets are \$10/adults, \$8/seniors (60 and up), and \$5/those under 18 and UWRF students. Purchase tickets online at <https://marketplace.uwrf.edu/collections/theatre-productions-2023-24> or in person at the Box Office in the lobby of Kleinpell Fine Arts. The Box Office is open weekdays from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. beginning Oct. 18, and it also open at 6:30 on show nights. Call the Box Office at 715-425-3114 for more information.

Cast:

Barbara: Mary Rother, of Hudson

Johnny: Jesse Ahlgren, of Prescott

Ben: RJ Forga, of Rosemount, Minn.

Tom: Vinny Lamantia, of West Chicago, Ill.

Judy: Holly Zimmerman, of Antigo

Helen: Olivia Denninger, of Maple Grove, Minn.

Harold: Ryan Bartley, of New Berlin

Karen: Fern Shaw, of St. Paul, Minn.

Stoudemire: Ash Gardner, of St. Germain

Intern: Adrienne Quinlan, of Watertown Mayer, Minn.

Radio Station Manager: Lucy Curtis, of Amery

Radio Station Employee: Collin Simone, of St. Paul, Minn.

Cemetery Ghoul 1: Dan Lawton, of Hudson

Cemetery Ghoul 2: Eve Grabau, of Spring Valley, Minn.

Cemetery Ghoul 3: Brandi Weiland, of Zumbrota, Minn.

National Guard Sergeant: Cody Goetz, of Plymouth, Minn.

National Guard Corporal: Holly Barkla, of River Falls

National Guard Specialist: Sam Sherr-Nelson, of Stillwater, Minn.

Agent: Michael Kerr, of River Falls

Fighting Ghouls:

Allison Claesges, of Eau Claire

Hannah Korpi, of Cottage Grove, Minn.

Ramla Maani, of Rochester, Minn.

Cypher Mazzitello, of St. Paul, Minn.

Atmospheric Ghouls:

Jaylee Ely, of St. Clair, Minn.

Shiloh Wold, of Shakopee, Minn.

Liam Powers, of River Falls



UW-River Falls officials and agriculture business leaders celebrate the grand opening Friday of the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence, a \$9 million facility that will provide students and dairy employees high-tech, hands-on training opportunities. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls celebrates opening of remodeled campus dairy plant

Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence will boost student learning, business opportunities

Oct. 20, 2023 - During a celebratory ribbon cutting and with each tour of the rebuilt Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls on Friday, Michelle Farner felt emotions welling inside her.

Gratitude. Accomplishment. Relief.

Emotions were to be expected after Farner, director of dairy production at UW-River Falls, had poured her heart and soul into revitalizing the dairy pilot plant for the past 11 years. Finally, after many meetings, delays, unanticipated expenses and fundraising efforts, Friday's grand opening ceremony marked the plant's official reopening.

Five years after the plant was shut down due to outdated machinery, the remodeled 6,000 square-foot, \$9 million plant in the Agricultural Science Building houses rows of shiny new equipment. The equipment will serve as a hub for students and dairy industry employees to engage in high-tech, hands-on learning making dairy products. The dairy plant was renamed for the Wuethrich Family Foundation and Grassland Dairy Products, Inc., of Greenwood, after \$1 million in donations helped make

the plant a reality.

Surrounded by UWRF officials, politicians, agriculture industry supporters and other well-wishers at the ceremony, Farner said it's difficult for her to describe how much seeing the facility near completion means to her.

"This is truly a momentous occasion for so many people, especially me," she said. "It's positively amazing to finally see the equipment that I have spent so much time researching, working with vendors on, and fundraising for actually be installed and operational."

During Friday's ceremony, speakers praised the diligent effort of Farner and others to make the dairy plant a reality. Their unwavering commitment to seeing the project through was necessary to help overcome challenges along the way, speakers said. They also discussed how the dairy plant will be a high-tech training site for students and others in the dairy industry.

"She was the champion of this project," John Umhoefer, executive director of the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, said of Farner. "Her perseverance and conviction are the only reason we're standing here today."

Final adjustments are being made to dairy plant equipment and the plant is expected to begin operating in November, when milk from UWRF-operated Mann Valley Farm will be processed at the plant.

Trevor Wuethrich, president of Grassland Dairy Products, Inc., said the work of UW-River Falls and others to get the revamped plant up and running signifies their commitment to Wisconsin's dairy industry.

"We don't consider (the \$1 million contribution) a gift at all. We see it as an investment," he said, noting many of his company's employees are UWRF graduates.

Mike Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES), described how the remodeled plant will enable dairy industry personnel to be on campus to interact with students and utilize its state-of-the-art equipment.

"This plant will create unique opportunities for faculty, staff and students to interact with industry leaders, which will be beneficial for all and great for the state of Wisconsin," Orth said.

Dale Gallenberg worked as the CAFES dean during the formation and building of the remodeled dairy plant and was heavily involved with making the facility a reality before retiring last year. The dairy plant will improve students' education while boosting the state's dairy sector, he said.

"It's very gratifying to see this transformative and visionary renovation come to completion," Gallenberg said. "An updated and expanded facility will significantly increase opportunities for UWRF students to gain valuable knowledge and hands-on experience as well as assist one of Wisconsin's major industries with top-end, job-ready talent."

Agriculture businesses were key backers of ensuring that the remodeled dairy plant was completed, even when challenges like the coronavirus pandemic, supply issues and unexpected costs occurred, Farner said. That support is borne out in numbers: nearly two dozen organizations – many of them ag-related businesses – contributed \$5.2 million of the project's \$9 million cost, with the state paying the remainder.

Jim Mildbrand, a colleague of Farner's who grew up in and worked in the dairy industry, felt compelled to be part of the

fundraising effort. The benefits of an upgraded plant to students and the dairy industry are many, he said, noting that Wisconsin counts on UWRF to provide training necessary to help the sector thrive.

“This newly renovated dairy plant, with state-of-the-art equipment, will ensure that UW-River Falls continues to be there for the dairy industry of the Midwest,” he said. “I am deeply gratified to see this dream come true.”

So is Farner. Shortly after the grand opening event, she reflected on the first meeting 11 years ago about rebuilding the dairy plant and the challenges and successes since then. She eagerly anticipates the restart of the plant and the resulting student learning opportunities and advancements for the dairy industry.

“This amazing facility will bring full circle what students are learning in the classroom to life,” she said. “Knowing now that will happen feels so good.”



From left, UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman, and River Falls business owners and UWRF alums Kristi and Jeff Cernohous participate in a groundbreaking ceremony Monday for the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) building under construction at the university. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls celebrates potential of SciTech building

Collaborations were key to making the project a reality, speakers say

Oct. 24, 2023 - As supporters of the largest building project in the history of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls gathered on campus Monday for a ceremony celebrating the construction of the \$117 million structure, the roar of nearby construction was evidence that work on the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) has already begun.

UW-River Falls officials, faculty and staff were joined by local and state government politicians, Universities of Wisconsin officials, business owners and others to applaud building at the site that began in late summer after Hagestad Hall was torn down. They told an audience that SciTech will be transformational to students and the regional economy and is only possible because of numerous strong partnerships necessary to overcome challenges since SciTech planning began in 2015.

"You were tireless proponents for this project, and in so many meaningful ways you ignited the power of collaboration," Gallo told the audience. "So many of you have been there ready, willing and able to invest in a facility and vision which will not only impact our campus but the entire community and region."

Referencing the sound of construction behind him, Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman said SciTech will address critical needs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) instruction to address industry needs.

The celebration of SciTech marks a “historic day” at UW-River Falls, he said.

“SciTech demonstrates the power of collaboration with industry and business, further opening the doors to internships and career opportunities in Wisconsin’s fastest-growing region,” Rothman said, noting the proximity of UW-River Falls to the Twin Cities. “This didn’t just happen. It took all of you.”

Other speakers also noted the enhanced learning opportunities that will take place once SciTech opens, scheduled for January 2026. A range of student majors will learn through hands-on, high-impact experiences in biology, chemistry, physics, psychological sciences and other science programs in the building.

SciTech and its state-of-the-art equipment will foster research opportunities and prompt new areas of study and majors, speakers touting the much-anticipated project said. The project also will enable more partnerships between UW-River Falls and businesses that will improve existing business operations and create new ones while directly linking students to internships and job opportunities, thereby growing the region’s economy.

The ability to conduct research in a high-tech, collaborative environment working with businesses will have a significant positive impact on student learning, said Erin Jacobsen, a senior chemistry major from Stacy, Minn. Working in SciTech, where students from different scientific disciplines will be near each other, will enhance learning, she said.

“Working in an industrial setting, I’ve seen how important those connections are, and how vital they were to me getting my projects done,” she said.

Turning the idea of SciTech into reality took years of effort and required many partners collaborating. Jeff Cernohous recalled first discussing SciTech with former UWRF Chancellor Dean Van Galen and envisioning the project as more than a building. He and his wife Kristi, both UW-River Falls alums, donated the first \$1 million of the \$5 million that UW-River Falls must raise to add to the \$111.73 million the state approved toward the project.

“How can we use it to attract and train a workforce to help build the region ... to bring academia and industry together,” Jeff Cernohous said. “I can’t tell you how pleased we are today to see the progress.”

The partnership between UW-River Falls and state lawmakers was key to getting SciTech to the finish line. Rep. Shannon Zimmerman (R-River Falls) recalled first hearing about SciTech in 2016 and the challenges of convincing others in state government to make the project a priority.

SciTech nearly didn’t garner approval at the committee level because of a numerical discrepancy, Zimmerman said. However, UW-River Falls officials were adamant about the need for the science building and how it would expand the regional economy. They continued to work closely with Zimmerman and other state lawmakers, and ultimately SciTech received state funding.

“Projects like this are never assured,” he said. “But people just kept working on this one, kept partnering, and eventually we got it through.”

Once SciTech is finished and open, work must continue to link faculty, students and businesses and create innovative programming that leads to improved student opportunities, Cernohous said. Gallo said she looks forward to the day SciTech opens and instruction there begins.

“That is why this project is really so exciting,” she said. “It’s about what this building will mean in terms of enhanced opportunities for our students and how we can use this to benefit our entire region and state.”

To learn more about SciTech, or to donate to the project, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/university-advancement/support-scitech>.



Michelle Farner, director of dairy production at UW-River Falls, left, explains the function of a piece of equipment that is part of the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at UWRF during an Oct. 4 tour of the facility with UW System officials. UWRF photo.

Dairy plant re-opening set for Oct. 20

Remodeled facility will serve as high-tech training site for the dairy industry

Oct. 10, 2023. – The grand opening for the much anticipated Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, a project that has been a decade in the making, will happen on Friday, Oct. 20.

Wisconsin agricultural leaders and University of Wisconsin System officials see the newly remodeled 6,000 square-foot dairy pilot plant – renamed for the Wuethrich Family Foundation and Grassland Dairy Products, Inc. after a \$1 million donation to the plant – as a site where students and others will receive high-level, hands-on training to work in the dairy industry.

Officials with UW-River Falls, UW System, the agriculture industry and others will celebrate the remodeled dairy pilot plant beginning at 11 a.m. at the dairy plant in the Agricultural Science building on campus. A ribbon cutting is scheduled for 11:30 a.m., followed by tours of the facility and a reception beginning at noon.

The public is invited to the event. To register, visit <https://events.idonate.com/grandopening>.

“This facility will enable high-quality learning that will allow our students and employees in the dairy industry to learn using the most up-to-date technology,” said Michelle Farner, director of dairy production at UW-River Falls. “It is exciting to think that we will be helping our students and the dairy industry in this state.”

Five years ago, UW-River Falls halted its dairy pilot plant because its equipment had become outdated. Plans had started previously to remodel the plant, and UW-River Falls has received strong backing and funding from the agriculture industry and others to make the new facility a reality.

Nearly two dozen organizations have donated \$5.2 million toward the dairy plant, with state funding picking up the remainder of the nearly \$9 million total cost. That high amount of private funding is unusual for a building project in Wisconsin's university system, and it shows that the dairy industry is invested in making the plant a success, Farner said.

Last week UW System Board of Regents and other UW System officials toured the plant. Final work is being completed on the plant where students and dairy industry employees will soon be training.

"That will be the exciting part, when our students and others can start working in this space," Farner said.



Brandt Berghuis, assistant professor of crop science at UW-River Falls, right, speaks Tuesday at Northwood Technical College in New Richmond about the benefits of the Wisconsin Fast Forward Grant program that provides funding for internships for students early in their academic careers. Listening are, left to right, Ryan Edwards from WinField United, Dave Juen of MAC Contractors, and UWRF students Ethan Meissner, August Roach and Megan Culpitt. Photo by Michael Mosher.

UW-River Falls faculty, students join business to support reinstating Fast Forward funding

State-funded program leads to successful outcomes for students and companies, advocates say

Oct. 18, 2023 - Faculty and students at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls joined agriculture industry members Tuesday to advocate for the continuation of a state-funded program that provides valuable internships that benefit students and businesses.

Brandt Berghuis, assistant professor of crop science at UW-River Falls who helps oversee the Wisconsin Fast Forward Grant program, told attendees of a Winning With Wisconsin event at Northwood Technical College in New Richmond that the program provided students and regional businesses with multiple opportunities.

In April, Gov. Tony Evers announced that the UW System had been awarded \$1.1 million in Wisconsin Fast Forward Grant funding, including \$244,426 to UW-River Falls. UW-Stout and UW-Milwaukee also received program funding. However, funding for the program was discontinued when it was not included as part of the 2023-25 state budget approved by state

lawmakers earlier this year.

“At the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, we really do have some of the best students, and it is amazing to see what they can do with opportunities like this,” Berghuis said. “We have had great success working with our students and industry partners. If funding allows, I hope we can continue to create these impactful experiences for our students.”

Others speaking on behalf of the internships provided by Fast Forward Grant funding included UWRF Crop Science Professor Veronica Justen; Dave Juen with Menomonie-based MAC Contractors; UWRF students August Roach, a sophomore agriculture business major from Faribault, Minn.; Megan Culpitt, a junior crop and soil science major from Norwalk; and Ethan Meissner, a junior engineering technology major from Marshfield; and others. Students spoke about how the internships help them learn effectively while linking them to future job opportunities.

Officials with another regional business that provided internships for UW-River Falls, WinField United, also spoke at Tuesday’s event about the importance of continuing funding for the Fast Forward program. WinField United has a history of partnering with UW-River Falls and earlier this month received a [UW System Regents Business Partnership Award](#).

Fast Forward grants at UW-River Falls enabled 15 students to participate in internships at eight businesses during the summer and fall. Students typically do internships during their junior or senior years, but Fast Forward-funded internships were focused on internships for first- and second-year students, enabling them to obtain valuable hands-on experience early in their academic careers.

In addition to providing internships, Fast Forward grants developed additional links with businesses that can lead to future job opportunities for students, Berghuis said.

Holly Dolliver, soil science and geology professor, headed the Fast Forward Grant program at UWRF. She said the grants provided not only high-level student internships but created opportunities for participating businesses to conduct valuable research that can improve their products. Program funding also enabled UW-River Falls to expand its connections with regional companies, she said. She praised businesses, particularly WinField United, for their work with students.

“This funding provided an opportunity to expand opportunities and create unique internship experiences in areas [Winfield United] has not previously focused on, including business development and new technologies,” she said. “In addition, the funding encouraged them to hire students in program areas outside of what has been typical, increasing the potential pipeline of students.”



Employees with the construction company Market & Johnson continue to work on constructing the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) at UW-River Falls. Work on the \$117 million project, the largest in the university's history, began during the summer and is expected to open to students in 2026. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls groundbreaking to celebrate construction of SciTech building

Largest project in university's history scheduled to open in 2026

Oct. 10, 2023 - When University of Wisconsin-River Falls officials join others in a groundbreaking ceremony on Monday, Oct. 23, to commemorate construction underway on the university's Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech), the occasion will mark more than the celebration of a building.

That's because SciTech isn't just any building.

The much anticipated \$117 million building is the largest project in UW-River Falls history and has been years in the making. The SciTech groundbreaking is scheduled for 3:30 p.m. at the corner of E. Cascade Avenue and S. 3rd Street, River Falls. The public is invited to the event.

SciTech will be home to students from a wide range of majors who will learn through hands-on, high-impact experiences in biology, chemistry, physics and psychological sciences. The project will create partnerships between UW-River Falls and businesses, thereby providing students with valuable research opportunities and jobs while growing the economy.

“SciTech will have a tremendous, positive impact for our campus and for the St. Croix Valley,” Chancellor Maria Gallo said. “It will provide our students and faculty with numerous opportunities to engage with businesses to grow the economy of our region and the state.”

The state of Wisconsin has funded \$111.73 million for the SciTech project, and the university is raising the remaining \$5 million. Construction on SciTech began during the summer and the building is projected to open to students in 2026.

SciTech involved significant planning and had to receive the approval of the state Building Commission last year for construction to begin. The project is possible because of numerous partnerships and the decision by UW-River Falls and regional businesses to address a growing demand for science and technology-related jobs, said Richard Foy, assistant chancellor for university advancement.

“SciTech is a shining example of the power of collaboration,” Foy said. “The success of the project has been the result of the efforts of university leadership, legislators, donors, alumni and corporate and business partners.”

To learn more about SciTech, or to donate to the project, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/university-advancement/support-scitech>.



UWRF Dairy Science Professor Sylvia Kehoe, center, speaks with a group of visitors from the central Asian nation of Kazakhstan at Mann Valley Farm Monday. The university hosted the visiting Kazakhstan residents to help them learn how to effectively operate dairy farms. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls hosts Kazakhstan visitors seeking to boost their dairy sector

Group's trip to UWRF, Wisconsin could lead to future opportunities

Oct. 3, 2023 - Sylvia Kehoe scanned the faces in front of her, faces from another nation, then greeted them “hello” in their native language, Russian.

The 15 residents from the central Asian country of Kazakhstan responded to Kehoe, a dairy science professor at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, in unison with the same phrase: “Zdravstvuyte.” Then, as their tour of the university-operated Mann Valley Farm began, they asked questions about dairy farming, the reason they had traveled halfway around the world to visit UW-River Falls on Monday.

The group, made up of mostly farm owners and a couple of government officials, is seeking to learn all it can about dairy operations in Wisconsin. Their visit to UW-River Falls is the first of numerous stops at locations in the state during this week that will include time at the World Dairy Expo in Madison.

Kazakhstan government officials want to boost the dairy industry and milk processing capacity in that nation. Domestic dairy production fulfills just 25% of the nation's milk needs, and country leaders hope to produce and process more of their own

milk and rely less on foreign producers.

To accomplish that goal, the nation needs to not only increase the number of cows it milks but must learn how to operate its dairy operations more efficiently, the delegation of Kazakhstan visitors said. Visiting Wisconsin – long known as America's Dairyland – and UWRF, with its reputation as a leading university in agriculture, made sense for group members, said Gerardo Quaassdorff with the Livestock Exporters Association that is helping coordinate the group's visit.

"These farmers need to see firsthand how to run a dairy operation effectively and how to do that in a way that they can be profitable," Quaassdorff said.

Mann Valley Farm served as a site where they could experience such a farm in person. Group members were eager to learn and had plenty of questions for Kehoe as she led them through the dairy cow portion of the farm. Kehoe fielded queries about everything from cow feed to bedding to medications to cleaning the barn.

Throughout her discussions – many of which required a translator – with group members, Kehoe stressed the need to provide quality living conditions for cows.

"Make sure your cows have access to plenty of clean water to drink, especially after they are milked," she told the group. "And calves, they should have water from day one."

After the visit to Mann Valley Farm, group members went to UWRF, where they talked with Animal and Food Science Assistant Professor Grace Lewis about various aspects of dairy farming, such as product trends, proper milk testing and storage, and pasteurization.

Yeltay Yertailakov milks about 200 cows on his farm in Kazakhstan, and he recently imported 60 cows to add to his herd. He said he plans to expand his dairy operation, but he and other farmers need to learn more about American farms so they can more effectively grow Kazakhstan's dairy industry.

Yertailakov and other group members got to see technology in action in the form of an ultrasound exam of a pregnant cow. The calf inside the cow was visible on a screen that Yertailakov and others gathered around.

"We need to learn about your technology and learn from your expertise in the dairy business," he said, "so that we can grow dairy in our country."

Developing Kazakhstan's dairy industry could help not only that nation but Wisconsin businesses as well, said Jennifer Lu, an economic development consultant with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Kazakhstan farmers and agribusiness companies could seek Wisconsin producers for everything from barn equipment to genetics as they grow their dairy sector, she said.

"We want them to look to us here in Wisconsin as they build the dairy industry in their country," Lu said. "The relationships we're forming today and this week could go a long way toward that."

As Lu walked among the Kazakhstan group touring Mann Valley Farm, listening as they talked with Kehoe, she noted the value they were gaining from their visit.

“They are so eager to learn about how we operate dairy farms here in Wisconsin,” Lu said. “This partnership with UW-River Falls is the perfect way for them to do that.”



Steve Kelm, chair of the UW-River Falls Animal and Food Science Department, testifies in support of a bill before state lawmakers that would provide \$372,980 in funding during the next two years to help offset costs for starting the Farm and Industry Short Course at UWRF.

UW-River Falls official testifies in support of Farm and Industry Short Course funding

Money would help university offset costs to transition program

Oct. 4, 2023 – A leader of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) testified today in favor of funding for transitioning a longtime agriculture training program to the university, saying the program will provide a much-needed boost to the state's rural workforce.

Animal and Food Science Professor Steve Kelm, chair of the UWRF Animal and Food Science Department, testified in support of a bill at the state Capitol in Madison before the Committee on Colleges and Universities that would provide \$372,980 during the next two years to help offset costs for starting the Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) at UW-River Falls.

FISC was started at UW-Madison in 1885 and was taught there until two years ago, when it was discontinued. With the backing of the agriculture industry, UW-River Falls agreed to host the program beginning this fall that provides training to Wisconsin's agriculture workforce.

Wisconsin is experiencing a workforce shortage in the agriculture industry, Kelm told the committee, and today's farms and agriculture businesses need workers trained in modern technologies taught by faculty familiar with those changes.

“UW-River Falls is well positioned in the UW System to offer the type of world-class, hands-on, faculty-supported learning experience that the next generation of farm and ag business owners and operators want and need,” Kelm said. “We are extremely grateful that this legislation has been introduced to provide critical funding to support our operational and instructional costs.”

Wednesday’s hearing marks another step in the process regarding the bipartisan legislation to provide UW-River Falls with FISC-related funding. The bill must still be approved by the Assembly and Senate before UW-River Falls would receive those dollars.

More than a dozen dairy industry and agriculture stakeholders have testified previously in support of the bill. The program will develop better-educated workers who will help fill needs in the agricultural workforce, they said.

The 16-week short course is designed for high school graduates who are interested in dairy farming or working in industries involved with dairy cattle and management. Courses in the program are scheduled to begin Oct. 25 and run through March 15 and students will earn up to 20 credits.

FISC will focus on dairy farming, Kelm said, specifically the fundamentals of managing cows and calves. Nutrition, dairy techniques and record keeping are among other topics that will be taught, he said.

Most courses will be taught at UW-River Falls, but students will have opportunities to interact with dairy experts at UW-Madison and UW-Platteville, building on the successful research partnership of the Dairy Innovation Hub.

Enrollment for the first group of FISC students to be at UW-River Falls will be limited to 24 students who will live together on campus. For more information, visit <https://www.uwrf.edu/academics/fisc>.



UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo presents to the UW System Board of Regents Thursday in the University Center as UWRF hosted their October meeting. Gallo told Regents UW-River Falls is poised to lead a future that combines student learning and building the regional and state economy. Sam Silver photo.

UW-River Falls positioned to be university of the future, chancellor tells Regents

Focus on students, affordability, proximity to Twin Cities key to future growth

Oct. 5, 2023 - Founded in 1874 as a site to educate teachers, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls is poised to lead a future that combines student learning and building the regional and state economy, Chancellor Maria Gallo told the UW System Board of Regents Thursday in the University Center on campus.

During her presentation to Regents, Gallo said UWRF's commitment to students, its relative affordability, its strong outcomes in student success and its proximity to the Twin Cities position the university as a leader in growing jobs and the jobs sector.

Numerous publications list UW-River Falls as among the most affordable universities in the Midwest, she said. Publications such as the U.S. News & World Report and The Princeton Review's Annual Best Colleges list rank UWRF as among the best public universities in the Midwest.

Likewise, survey results show that 99.3% of UWRF graduates are either employed or in graduate school, with 86% in a job related to their major. Most graduates remain in the Midwest, and their average starting salary is \$53,000.

“Students at UW-River Falls get a small, private school experience at a public school price,” Gallo told Regents. “It is clear that our price point, plus our student career success rate, translates into an astounding value of a UW-River Falls education.”

The high-level education UW-River Falls students receive is visible while they are in school, Gallo said. She cited how students regularly win national awards over much larger and Ivy League schools. For example, students from the university's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) garnered multiple first-place awards at national competitions last spring, and another group of students placed first nationally by creating a dairy-based food that not only tastes good but eases people's anxiety. Similarly, student journalists won numerous statewide awards last spring.

Gallo praised UW-River Falls faculty for their commitment to student learning and said the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence, where students, faculty and businesses will collaborate to produce dairy products, and the Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) scheduled to open in 2026 represent opportunities for even more hands-on learning opportunities that will involve businesses and grow the regional and state economy.

As examples of faculty creating high-impact, innovative programs, Gallo cited Kateri Carver, director of UWRF's Montessori Studies Program, who oversees the nation's only doctoral Montessori program; Kurt Vogel, animal science associate professor who oversees the nation's only Humane Handling Institute that trains meat processors to butcher animals humanely; and Karl Peterson, chemistry professor and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, who described the SciTech building and business partnerships with the university.

Those facilities will further a national trend of universities and businesses working more closely together to spur innovation and boost the economy, the chancellor said. Being close to Minneapolis-St. Paul, and with nearly half of its students from Minnesota, UW-River Falls is geographically positioned to attract and retain students while adding to the workforce and increasing economic development, she said.

“It is not only the students that we want in our area,” Gallo said. “We want the businesses here too, so that the university can build significantly deeper relationships with them to retrain and upskill their workers, as well as have them work with our faculty to innovate in our University Business Collaboration Center within SciTech and invest in our technologies and academic and co-curricular programs.”

By partnering with businesses, UW-River Falls students and faculty will continue to innovate and boost the region and state in numerous ways, Gallo said. On Wednesday, one of those partnerships was highlighted when WinField United, the crop products and consulting division of Land O'Lakes, Inc, received a UW System Regents Business Partnership Award.

UW System President Jay Rothman praised the partnership, saying such collaborations “are so absolutely vital to our being able to help our students and to help the state of Wisconsin.” Continuing to train students in ways that will drive future job creation such as those described by Gallo is key to advancing Wisconsin, Rothman told Regents.

“Our employers need these kinds of skills to grow Wisconsin. They tell us that,” Rothman said. “That is the direction we are heading in, and it will continue to make our state a better place.”

UW-River Falls to host author's discussion of challenges boys and men face

Richard Reeves' book notes problem, seeks to find solutions

Oct. 25, 2023 - Richard Reeves, best-selling author and president of the American Institute for Boys and Men, will discuss problems faced by males and will advocate for effective solutions during a Wednesday, Nov. 15, visit to the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Reeves will discuss his 2022 book "Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why It Matters and What to Do About it," at 7 p.m. in the Riverview Ballroom in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. The event is sponsored by the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership.



The event is free and open to the public; however, registration is encouraged. To register, visit https://uwrf.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0kWyHx9IfUvA5Su. Upon registration, information will be provided for livestream access for those who wish to attend the event virtually, along with the event location and parking information for people attending in person.

Reeves' latest book seeks to address why the modern male is struggling and presents strategies to combat that problem. In "Of Boys and Men," he details how changes in the education system, the economy, societal views of masculinity and fatherhood have combined to create an environment in which a growing number of boys and men perform poorer than girls and women academically and in other areas.

The book was described by The New York Times as a "landmark" work and was named a book of the year by The Economist and The New Yorker.

Women/girls historically have faced unequal treatment compared to their male counterparts. Advancements in women's rights have occurred in recent decades, and society must ensure that both sexes have success concurrently, UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo said.

"It is important to note that discussing men's and boy's struggles does not reduce the continued need to address obstacles that women and girls face," Gallo said. "As a university, we are seeking to provide a better understanding of these complex issues so that solutions are found."

Reeves is a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. where he previously directed the Future of the Middle Class Initiative and the Center on Children and Families. He previously worked as director of strategy to the United Kingdom's Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg from 2010-12, and as principal policy advisor to the United Kingdom's minister for welfare reform. He also worked as director of the political think tank Demos and was social affairs editor at The Observer and economics correspondent for The Guardian.

In 2017, Politico named Reeves one of the top 50 thinkers in the U.S. His other books include “Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That is a Problem, and What to do About it;” and “John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand.”



Participants take part in a past Veterans Day event at UW-River Falls. This year's Veterans Day ceremony on campus is 11 a.m. to noon on Thursday, Nov. 9, in the University Center. UWRF file photo.

UW-River Falls to host Nov. 9 Veterans Day ceremony

Main speaker will discuss how horses help veterans, others heal from trauma

Oct. 24, 2023 - The importance of military service, and helping military veterans heal from trauma they have experienced, will be honored during a Thursday, Nov. 9, Veterans Day ceremony at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Campus and community members are invited to the ceremony supporting veterans and active duty military service members. The event, from 11 a.m. to noon, is sponsored by the university's Veterans Services Office in the Falcons Nest in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. The ceremony is free and the public is invited.

The event will feature a keynote address by Toni Mattson, co-owner and director of programs at [Trinity Equestrian Center](#) of Eau Claire. Trinity uses horses as a means of providing therapy to military veterans and others.

Recognizing military veterans is especially important given the sacrifices they make for their country, UWRF Veterans Coordinator Cheryl Grubb said.

"Our students have agreed to put their lives on the line to protect the freedoms that we enjoy, and they deserve to be recognized," Grubb said.

Chancellor Maria Gallo said she is proud of UWRF students who are serving in the military.

“This event is an opportunity to pay our respect to all of our military veterans who have given and continue to give so much of themselves to protect all of us,” Gallo said.

For more information, email veterans@uwrf.edu or call 715-425-3529.



WinField United was awarded the UW System Regents Business Partnership Award on Wednesday for its efforts to benefit UW-River Falls. From left, UW System President Jay Rothman; Vice President of Research and Development Operations, Diversified Field Crops and Forage Genetics International at Land O' Lakes, Inc. Glenda Gehl; UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo, and Board of Regents President Karen Walsh at the award presentation ceremony. Sam Silver photo.

WinField United recognized for its partnership with UW-River Falls

Company receives UW System Regents Business Partnership Award

Oct. 5, 2023 - WinField United was recognized with a UW System Regents Business Partnership Award on Wednesday for its close working partnership with the University of Wisconsin-River Falls that benefits the university's students and the St. Croix Valley.

The award was presented during a ceremony at the company's \$40 million, state-of-the-art WinField United Innovation Center in River Falls. WinField United, based in Arden Hills, Minn., is the crop products and consulting division of Land O'Lakes, Inc., and is one of America's premier agribusiness and food companies. The award is presented to businesses that make a significant positive impact on UW System universities.

WinField United and UW-River Falls partnered 33 years ago on a land rental agreement, a partnership that has evolved into much more in ensuing years. Through WinField United, UW-River Falls students have access to a strong internship program, collaborative research opportunities, and countless valuable hands-on learning opportunities.

Those opportunities lead not only to high-quality learning but oftentimes jobs for UWRF students. Many student interns are

subsequently hired as full-time employees at WinField United, as well as at Land O'Lakes and other affiliated companies. Today, more than 30 employees at WinField United are UW-River Falls alums.

"The partnerships that we have like this are so absolutely vital to our being able to help our students and to help the state of Wisconsin," UW System President Jay Rothman said during the award ceremony.

WinField United has a strong presence in River Falls, a fact solidified by the opening of the company's Innovation Center in 2017 in the city. UWRF faculty take their students to the facility for field trips, providing them with high-level learning opportunities.

Glenda Gehl, vice president of Research and Development Operations, Diversified Field Crops and Forage Genetics International at Land O' Lakes, Inc., praised the longstanding relationship between Winfield United and UW-River Falls.

"As a farmer-owned cooperative, we believe in the power of partnerships and the strength of working together for the common good," Gehl said. "For more than 30 years, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls has been a tremendous partner in supporting farmers and agriculture, and we look forward to continuing our work together into the future."

WinField United benefits UW-River Falls in other ways. The company has provided nearly \$40,000 in scholarship support and has funded activities of the university's student Crops and Soils Science Club.

This past summer, WinField United also partnered with UW-River Falls by hosting summer interns as part of the "Growing an Innovative and Diverse Agricultural Workforce in Western Wisconsin" project, funded through the Department of Workforce Development Fast Forward Grant to the UW System. Those opportunities provided first- and second-year students with valuable hands-on experience earlier in their academic careers than interns typically receive.

In addition, the partnership between UW-River Falls and WinField United benefits the greater community. WinField United brings economic development to this part of Wisconsin and the company's investments in infrastructure, job creation and media visibility have helped make River Falls a landmark of agricultural innovation in the Midwest.

"Our strong partnership with WinField United leads to amazing opportunities for our students, leads to jobs for many of our students, and helps build the economy of this region," UW-River Falls Chancellor Maria Gallo said.

The following are among the many collaborations between WinField United and UW-River Falls:

- WinField United staff and UW-River Falls faculty combine efforts on research plots for product development and field training for agronomy production specialists, agronomists, applicators and managers. Faculty and UW-Extension staff use data for classroom and outreach educational programs.
- WinField United has specialty farm equipment available for use by UW-River Falls, and the university provides equipment to the company.
- WinField United provides seeds and other plant materials for planting at the UW-River Falls-operated Mann Valley Farm and for use in the university's crop science program.
- WinField United provides support for maintenance of the Mann Valley Farm irrigation system, which in turn is available to irrigate research plots.

- UW-River Falls faculty member Joe Shakal worked with WinField United during the building and testing the company's high-tech wind tunnel to study pesticide movement. Student research was also conducted, including designing and 3D-printing wind guards for sprayer nozzles that were then tested in the wind tunnel.



Gage McClean-Coyer works refueling aircraft and maintaining fuel storage facilities in the United Arab Emirates during a deployment in 2012. McClean-Coyer served in the U.S. Air Force from 2010-13. Today McClean-Coyer attends UW-River Falls, where he is set to graduate with a master's degree in school counseling in December. Contributed photo.

A call to service: UW-River Falls veterans reflect on their time in the military

Military tenures helped prepare for life as students, afterward, veterans say

Nov. 8, 2023 - As Gage McClean-Coyer reflects on the meaning of Veterans Day, he is struck by a mix of emotions.

On Nov. 11 – Veterans Day – McClean-Coyer, who is set to graduate with a master's degree in school counseling from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in December, will recall the friends he served with in the U.S. Air Force, where he was an airman first class from 2010-13. He spent most of that time in Germany and the United Arab Emirates, driving a fuel truck, maintaining large fuel storage facilities and working in a fuels lab.

He will ponder difficult memories and experiences he wishes he could forget. He will reflect on the sacrifices of military members before and after him. And he will focus on his good fortune, the opportunity to go to college and experience life.

"I am reminded of my personal journey and sacrifice as well as my friends I served alongside," McClean-Coyer said.

"Veterans Day also reminds me of how lucky I am to have a life after the military."

McClean-Coyer, 33, of Eau Claire, is among 114 UWRF students who have served or are serving in the military. University

faculty and staff also are military veterans. As veterans, they bring a perspective to the classroom and workplace that influences how they approach school, their jobs and life. A public program to honor veterans is at 11 a.m. Thursday in the Falcon's Nest in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls.

Student, faculty and staff veterans said their experiences in the military have helped shape their lives more than they could have imagined. Josh Brauer has been in the U.S. Army Reserve as a cargo specialist for six years. A junior from Waukesha who is double majoring in journalism and political science, he said his military experience has altered his approach to life.



"Timeliness, respect and honesty are paramount in how I conduct myself on and off campus, which I attribute to the military," Brauer said. "My personal experiences during my service constantly shape my actions and the way I think."

Brauer's time in the service also has resulted in his not taking life for granted, he said, and has taught him to be grateful for all he has. His adjustment from military life to attending college was challenging, he said, and at times he felt distant from his college peers because he has had experiences they can't relate to.

However, Brauer said he found a sense of belonging through faculty and staff who helped him navigate difficulties and find his place at UW-River Falls. The university's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program helped Brauer befriend others on a similar path to his, he said.

"I've gained an immense source of gratitude for life as a student, and I walk to class every day thankful to be here and learn from my professors and peers," he said.

Joe Kmiec served in the U.S. Army and Minnesota Army National Guard where he was an artillery fire direction controller and a man portable air defense gunner from 1989-98. Today he heads the UWRF Information and Technology Department and said his time in the military prepared him for life in ways he was not aware of at the time.

He learned to work with an array of people from many different backgrounds, he said, and how to handle high-pressure situations while remaining calm. His military service also taught Kmiec organizational skills and how to be self-motivated, he said.

"Though none of my military jobs related directly to anything I do today, the skills I learned were transferable to any workplace and life in general," Kmiec said.

As veterans services coordinator at UW-River Falls, Cheryl Grubb recognizes the life experiences through military service that student veterans bring to campus. As she watches student veterans interact in a lounge in Rodli Hall that her office provides, Grubb said she is struck by the wealth of real-life knowledge they possess.

"Student veterans offer valuable and diverse perspectives, skills and talents to colleges and universities," Grubb said. "(They) can enhance classroom discussions with their unique background knowledge and



perspectives, developed through military and cross-cultural experience.”

Those experiences will be with Kmiech as he reflects on Veterans Day. He will think about not only the people he has served with, he said, but on those who are currently serving, and on veterans who have passed on. He also ponders the fact that because of the service of others, he can live how he wants to.

“To me that means ‘Live a life worth the freedoms that others have earned, and kept, for me,’” Kmiech said.

Brauer said he’s not seeking recognition on Veterans Day. Rather, he will spend the day thinking about veterans, including his father and grandfather, who served before him.



“No matter the time frame, no matter which era veterans come from, the nature of service does not change,” Brauer said. “Whether it’s the retelling of war stories or a simple ‘Happy Veterans Day,’ just taking a second to stop and reflect on service is a must for me on Veterans Day.”

McClean-Coyer deals with difficulties related to his military service. He said he has physical and mental ailments because of his time in the Air Force. He said military service can leave participants “scarred in different ways – mind, body and spirit-wise.”

However, he credits his service with building his confidence and work ethic, with creating friendships around the world, and with making him more resilient and better able to handle the rigors of school and ultimately graduate and work as a school counselor.

“I would most likely do it all over again,” McClean-Coyer said in reference to his military service. “The stories, friendship, and life experiences are so valuable.”

Photo Inset 1:

UW-River Falls junior Josh Brauer, back row, fourth from right, poses with members of his military team and civilians in Afghanistan he worked with while stationed in Kabul in 2021. Brauer, a cargo specialist in the U.S. Army Reserve, said his military service has broadened his life perspective and taught him gratitude. Contributed photo.

Photo Inset 2:

Joe Kmiech headshot.

Photo Inset 3:

Gage McClean-Coyer attends UW-River Falls, where he is set to graduate with a master’s degree in school counseling in December. He said he deals with physical and mental ailments due to his time in the U.S. Air Force but credits his military service with teaching him numerous life skills and making him more resilient. Contributed photo.



One-of-a-kind gifts made by UW-River Falls Art Department students, faculty, and alumni will be up for sale at the annual Art Department Scholarship Sale Nov. 29-Dec. 8 in Gallery 101 in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building on campus. Sale hours are 10 a.m.-7 p.m. (closed Dec. 3). File photo.

Art scholarship sale, silent auction, blow your own ornament events at UW-River Falls

Nov. 16, 2023 - Looking for one-of-a-kind gifts made by University of Wisconsin-River Falls Art Department students, faculty, and alumni? Join us for the annual Art Department Scholarship Sale Nov. 29-Dec. 8 in Gallery 101 in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building on campus. Sale hours are 10 a.m.-7 p.m. (closed Dec. 3).

In addition to the sale, this year's event includes a first ever silent auction with works donated by Art Department faculty and friends.

Also, back by popular demand, on Saturday, Dec. 2, blow your own glass ornament for \$25 per ornament from 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. in 163 Kleinpell Fine Arts.

All sale proceeds support UW-River Falls art students. Admission to the sale is free and the public is invited to attend.

For more information, contact Mike Helke at michael.helke@uwrf.edu or call 715-425-3266.

Commencement set for Dec. 16

Event to feature speeches by Distinguished Teacher, two graduating students

Nov. 30, 2023 - More than 300 students will receive their degrees from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls during the fall commencement ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 16, at 10 a.m. at Knowles Field House in the Falcon Center, 185 Emogene Nelson Ave.

A total of 305 students are set to graduate; 272 will receive bachelor's degrees and 33 will receive master's degrees.

Student graduates have not only invested time and money into obtaining their degrees, but they have often had to persevere through various challenges, said David Travis, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

"This day is meant to celebrate not only the talent these graduates have and the knowledge they have gained, but to recognize the dedication these students have shown to obtain their degrees," Travis said.

Students work hard and often overcome challenges to graduate, Chancellor Maria Gallo said. Graduation ceremonies serve as a time to recognize their accomplishments.



"Every graduate is a testament to the pursuit of excellence, the power of resilience, and the quest for knowledge," Gallo said. "Graduation is a time that fills me with joy and pride."

The event will feature speeches by two graduating students and Psychology Professor Melanie Ayres, the recipient of this year's Distinguished Teaching Award, the highest honor awarded to a UW-River Falls faculty member.

Ayres is known for her ability to connect with students and to help motivate them to challenge themselves in the classroom. She facilitates participatory learning in her classes, a teaching style that prompts students to take an active role in their education.

The student speakers are Cailyn Kuechle of South Haven, Minn., who is graduating with a bachelor's degree in marketing communications and Seth Howard of Oskaloosa, Iowa, who is graduating with a master's degree in business administration.

Kuechle is a standout in the classroom, as a track and cross-country runner, and as a performer in musical theater productions. She plans to continue her education at UW-River Falls by pursuing a master's degree in business administration.

Howard came to UW-River Falls in part to continue playing college football. An injury ended his career, but he persevered, becoming a graduate assistant coach for the football team, and after graduation, he plans to find a



job coaching football.

Commencement ceremonies will also be available via YouTube livestream at <https://www.uwrf.edu/commencement/>.

Headshots:

Melanie Ayres

Cailyn Kuechle

Seth Howard

Faculty member, graduate honored with Universities of Wisconsin awards

Duo recognized for their advocacy on behalf of others

Nov. 10, 2023 - A University of Wisconsin-River Falls faculty member and a recent graduate of the university have been recognized among their peers statewide for their advocacy on behalf of underrepresented populations.

Youngmi Kim, associate professor of agricultural engineering and engineering technology, is one of 13 people among Universities of Wisconsin universities to receive the Outstanding Women of Color in Education Award. Linnea Milner, of Columbus, Ohio, who graduated in May with a psychology degree is among 13 recipients of the Dr. P.B. Poorman Award for Outstanding Achievement on Behalf of LGBTQ+ People. She is currently studying for her master's degree in psychology at the University of Minnesota.



Award winners from each of the Universities of Wisconsin 13 four-year campuses were recognized Thursday during a ceremony in Madison.

Letters of support for Kim and Milner regarding their work on behalf of others noted their commitment to helping people and groups that are often overlooked along with their determination to enact positive change for others.

At UW-River Falls, Kim has helped advance engineering studies in numerous ways and has helped recruit science students. She also has advocated for students of color and worked to help them feel more included on campus.

As a person of color, Kim said she struggled when she began working at UWRF. But that sense of struggle transitioned to success as colleagues supported her, she said.

"This award represents my resiliency, persistence, and perhaps most significantly the invaluable support I have received from my colleagues," Kim said. "I feel deeply humbled and grateful to be the recipient of this honor."

While attending UW-River Falls, Milner was an outspoken advocate for various forms of social justice and worked to raise awareness of and support for the university's LGBTQ+ community. As a resident assistant on a gender inclusive floor of a residence hall, Milner supported fellow students and worked to combat issues of misgendering and homophobia.

She also sought to address instances of violence that LGBTQ+ people face and was involved with numerous efforts to improve student mental health, including leading Dan's Bandana project which raises awareness and support for suicide prevention efforts among the LGBTQ+ community.

The Dr. P.B. Poorman Award for Outstanding Achievement on Behalf of LGBTQ+



People honors the memory of UW-Whitewater faculty member Dr. Paula B. Poorman, who played an instrumental role in the foundation and development of LGBTQ+ inclusivity initiatives.

“Honorees are helping build a better experience for our students, faculty, and staff,” Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman said of the award recipients. “This award recognizes their achievements in creating a safer and inclusive climate at our universities.”



Photo 1: Youngmi Kim

Photo 2: Linnea Milner



Masquers to present 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' Dec. 6-9

Nov. 28, 2023 - The Masquers drama student organization at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls will present "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" Dec. 6-9 at 7:30 p.m. in the Blanche Davis Theatre in the Kleinpell Fine Arts building. Admission is free.

This dramatization of C.S. Lewis' classic work faithfully recreates the magic and mystery of Aslan, the great lion, his struggle with the White Witch, and the adventures of four children who inadvertently wander from an old wardrobe into the exciting, never-to-be-forgotten Narnia. The intense action features chases, duels and escapes as the witch is determined to keep Narnia in her possession and to end the reign of Aslan.

This production of "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" has been dramatized by Joseph Robinette from the story by C.S. Lewis and is directed by UWRF student Isabelle Hammond of St. Paul.

If questions, call the Box Office at 715-425-3114.

Cast:

Aslan: Lucy Curtis, of Amery

White Witch: Madison Miller, of Somerset

Lucy: Mary Rother, of Hudson

Edmund: Ash Gardner, of Saint Germain

Susan: Olivia Denninger, of Maple Grove, Minn.

Peter: Evan Gudmundsen, of St. Croix Falls

Mr. Beaver: Holly Zimmerman, of Antigo

Mrs. Beaver: Maggie Wallin, of Downing

Unicorn: Lauren Lindstrom, of Prior Lake, Minn.

Centaur: Allison Claesges, of Eau Claire

Tumnus: Holly W. Barkla, of Red Wing, Minn.

Fenris Ulf: Adrienne Quinlan, of Watertown-Mayer, Minn.

Dwarf: Sophie Hilo, of Rosemount, Minn.

Father Christmas: Michael Kerr, of River Falls

Elf: Rikki Jo Koplitz, of Birnamwood

White Stag: McKenna Delany, of Luck

Ensemble: Ella Johnson, of Fridley, Minn.; Chloe Skille, of Lakeville, Minn.; Bella Bovitz, of Cottage Grove, Minn.; Jax Dang, of Bloomington, Minn.; Ramie Johnson of Chatfield, Minn.



Richard Reeves, president of the American Institute for Boys and Men and a best-selling author, spoke Nov. 15 at UW-River Falls about the need to address the challenges boys and young men face in today's society. UWRF photo.

Speaker discusses need to address challenges boys, men face

Effort must overcome 'men versus women' mentality, Richard Reeves says

Nov. 16, 2023 - Improving outcomes for boys and men can occur simultaneously with continued and much-needed work to eliminate barriers that women face, a nationally renowned scholar and best-selling author told an audience at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Wednesday.

In fact, taking action regarding the declining performance of males while continuing to address historical societal inequalities for women is necessary for American society to thrive, said Richard Reeves, president of the newly-formed American Institute for Boys and Men and nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. Reeves discussed the findings of his 2022 book "Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why it Matters and What to do About it."

"The simple fact is our boys and young men are struggling," Reeves said. "Given the trends I see for (them) now, we need to get on with addressing this situation. Time is not on our side with this."

Discussing the needs of males amid a history of men having received advantages over women can be controversial, Reeves said. There is no doubt, he said, that females historically have and continue to receive unequal treatment in many areas when compared to their male counterparts, and more must be done to address those gaps.

However, statistics of all sorts show that boys and men have fallen behind their female counterparts in school and in the workplace, Reeves said. For instance, he said, most high-achieving students in K-12 schools are girls. The makeup of colleges and universities in America is about 60% women and 40% men, a reversal of those figures from the 1970s.

Likewise, while women's pay still trails that of men, wage growth for middle- and working-class females has risen far faster than that of men in recent decades.

"It can simultaneously be true that there is much more to do on behalf of women and girls, and that we need to do more to address the needs of boys and men who are struggling on a number of fronts," Reeves said. "It's not about women versus men, but that idea has made it difficult to even discuss these issues."

Reeves proposed numerous ways to try to reverse declining performance by boys and men. Many involve changes in the education system. Studies of all sorts reveal that males in K-12 and college struggle across the board compared to their female counterparts, he said.

For example, 10% more women now graduate from college than men. In K-12 schools, girls outperform boys in every category except for standardized tests, where they are about equal.

To improve males' educational outcomes, Reeves said K-12 schools must actively recruit more male teachers, especially at the elementary school level. Boys, especially those without fathers in their home, need positive male role models, he said.

Reeves also proposed delaying the age at which boys begin school, saying many aren't emotionally ready to begin classes by kindergarten. He called for other changes, such as increasing the number of technical high schools and apprenticeships as well as creating men's resource centers on college campuses.

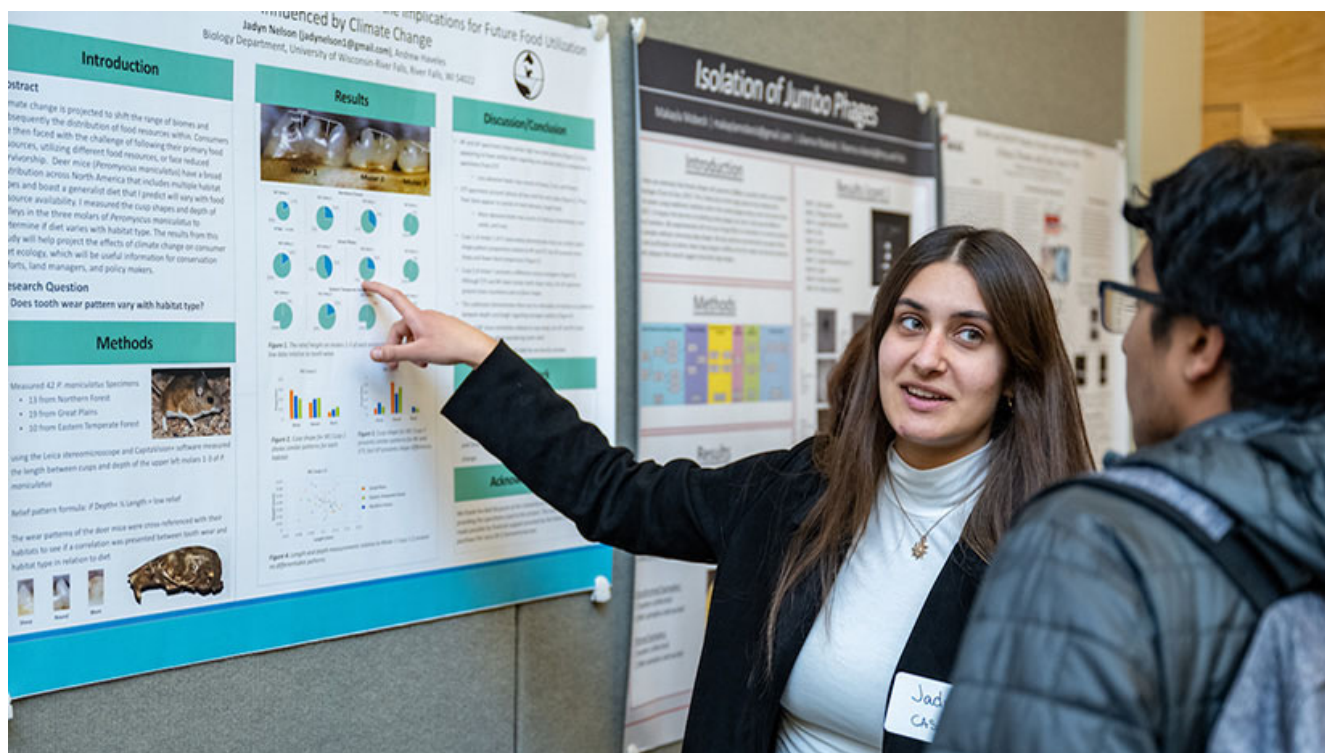
Reeves said he is motivated to illuminate the struggles of boys and men because he believes the topic hasn't received adequate attention. In addition to his role as leader of the American Institute for Boys and Men, Reeves previously worked as director of strategy to the United Kingdom's Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg from 2010-12, and as principal policy advisor to the United Kingdom's minister for welfare reform. He also worked as director of the political think tank Demos and was social affairs editor at The Observer and economics correspondent for The Guardian.

While much work remains to eliminate barriers for girls and women, Reeves' efforts point out the need to address challenges facing boys and men, Chancellor Maria Gallo said. The fact that nearly 60% of American colleges and universities are made up of women is notable, she said. At UW-River Falls, that figure is 65%.

"From these statistics, it is evident that women are dominating in academics," Gallo said. "We need to consider ways that we can help all of our students, including males, succeed."

Reeves fielded audience questions about how to improve the situations of boys and men. Answers are somewhat difficult to come by, he said, but improving outcomes for males will take a collaborative, sustained effort.

"We must find a way to make this not a zero-sum game and to rise together," Reeves said. "If we can try to lift everybody up together, we should be OK."



UW-River Falls student Jadyn Nelson discusses her research project during the Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Fall Gala event last year. This year's event is scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 5. UWRF photo

UW-River Falls to host URSCA Fall Gala on Dec. 5

Event to showcase students' research projects across academic disciplines

Nov. 22, 2023 - Students' high-level research will be on display at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Fall Gala on Tuesday, Dec. 5.

The annual event highlights the research and scholarly displays of undergraduates whose work include research posters, oral presentations, artwork, short films and interactive displays. About 100 students will take part in this year's event.

The public is invited to attend the event, scheduled for 4-6:30 p.m. in the Riverview Ballroom in the University Center, 501 Wild Rose Ave., River Falls. Opening remarks are scheduled for 5 p.m.

Event attendees can engage with students and learn about their research projects. Student projects cover a wide range of topics, URSCA Director Molly Gerrish said.

"This event is a highlight on campus that showcases the incredible diversity of work and depth of research of our students across all content areas," Gerrish said.

UW-River Falls hosts the Fall Gala annually. Undergraduate students are also encouraged to present their research at state and national locations, as well as at discipline-specific conferences.

For more information, call the URSCA Office at 715-425-3902 or email ursca@uwrf.edu.



Toni Mattson, co-owner of Trinity Equestrian Center of Eau Claire, speaks about the importance of equine assisted therapy in helping veterans better deal with the adverse impacts of their time in the military. UWRF photo.

Veterans Day event features equine assisted therapy program

Main speaker discusses the ongoing need to help veterans recover from adverse impacts of military service

Nov. 9, 2023 - When Toni Mattson, her husband William and her sister established Trinity Equestrian Center in 2002, they envisioned numerous ways, from trail rides to horse boarding and training, that their business could provide enjoyment and benefit the surrounding community.

In ensuing years, the Mattsons provided those activities and more at their horse business just south of Eau Claire. But as time progressed they decided to change their operation and focus on offering equine assisted therapy for people in need of it and to develop youth mentoring and leadership training.

Among the most important parts of that change in business has been providing equine assisted therapy to military veterans, Mattson told an audience attending Thursday's Veterans Day ceremony at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. The event also included addresses by American Legion Post 121 River Falls Commander Larry Larson, UWRF Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs David Travis and UWRF Information and Technology Director Joe Kmiech.

"For years, a big part of our business had to be about making a living, paying the bills," Mattson said. "Then we were able to make a shift from making a living to making a difference. The idea is we know we have so many hours in this life. How do you

make as big of a difference as you can with the time that you have?"

That idea of maximizing impact prompted the switch to a more therapy-driven business model, Mattson said. The focus on providing veterans with a better way to deal with the adverse impacts of their military service was also motivated in part by a frightening experience Mattson, then 9, had with her father, Charles Schmidt, a 20-year U.S. Army veteran. That instance was a sign that her father was struggling with PTSD and survivor's guilt, Mattson said.

"It was a very powerful experience," Mattson said. "It's something that has stayed with me to this day."

Many veterans struggle following their service as they attempt to adapt to civilian life, Mattson said, and equine therapy has proven to be an effective means of addressing their challenges.

"It's amazing to see the change that comes over the veterans when they are with the horses," she said. "You can see the stress melt away, see them make a connection to the horse."

Trinity Equestrian Center also provides equine therapy for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as well as to people afflicted with dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. In addition, the organization provides leadership training to groups and organizations.

"There are so many amazing stories that you see when people connect with the horses," Mattson said. "We tap into the heart and head of the horse to help people heal and grow."

Cheryl Grubb, veterans services coordinator at UW-River Falls, said the equine therapy services that Trinity Equestrian Center provides offer a valuable way to help veterans. The Veterans Day ceremony at UWRF is intended to recognize the school's 125 student veterans as well as faculty and staff veterans and those in the surrounding community, she said.

"These veterans have given so much of themselves to ensure our freedoms and our way of life," Grubb said, "and it's important that we do what we can to help and honor their service."

Mattson agreed, saying speaking at events such as the Veterans Day event at UW-River Falls provides a valuable way for her to spread the message that veterans need help. Her recently published book, "Unlikely Recruits: How God Enlists Horses to Heal Veterans," details the stories of 20 different veterans and their healing journeys through equine assisted therapy.

"It's a really great way to raise awareness that veteran suicide is still a really big problem," Mattson said of the opportunity to speak at events. "And it is a way to get the message out there that there is hope."

For more information about Trinity Equestrian Center, visit <https://www.trinity-ec.com>. Toni Mattson's book can be ordered on Amazon.



Graduates celebrate with a selfie at the UW-River Falls fall commencement ceremony on Dec. 16, 2023. UWRF photo.

Commencement speakers praise UW-River Falls graduates for persevering through challenges

Obstacles don't deter students from obtaining their degrees

Dec. 18, 2023 - Students graduating from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Saturday endured numerous challenges during their time at the university, including the coronavirus pandemic and the deaths of students and a faculty member this semester.

But finding ways to persevere despite difficulties shows that students who received their degrees possess the skills and resilience that will serve them well in the future, Chancellor Maria Gallo told an audience attending the fall commencement ceremony at Knowles Field House at the Falcon Center.

In fact, Gallo said, oftentimes struggles prompt reactions of support from others. That has happened at UW-River Falls this semester, she said, as countless people and organizations reached out to assist the university this semester.

"Your journey to this day I know has not been easy. So much to navigate has been out of your control," Gallo said. "Graduates, there is no doubt that your success is the result of a resilient human spirit that allows us to push forward despite the heartbreaks and roadblocks."



UW-River Falls enabled students to grow as people and scholars, Gallo told students, “But it was you who took the chances, grabbed the opportunities, and never gave up.”



A total of 305 students received their degrees; 272 earned bachelor’s degrees and 33 their master’s degrees.



Psychology Professor Melanie Ayres, the recipient of this year’s Distinguished Teaching Award, credited graduates for studying and learning amid struggles. Overcoming challenges is a key life skill that allows for success, she said.

“Working hard to learn under difficult circumstances is something worth acknowledging. I want to thank all of you for doing this difficult work,” Ayres said. “And also assure you that it’s worth it – not for the diploma, although that will be useful too – but for the growth and resilience you have developed.”

Ayres noted the importance of forming meaningful connections with others, saying those relationships help people through challenging times. Such interactions help build empathy and a sense of well-being, she said.

“You have been building a community here at UWRF,” Ayres said. “You have collectively gone through challenging things and come out the other side stronger and more encouraging and supportive of yourself and of others.”

Two student speakers spoke about the importance of overcoming obstacles. Cailyn Kuechle of South Haven, Minn., who graduated with a bachelor’s degree in marketing communications, recalled the beginning of her college career awaiting weekly COVID-19 test results and the loneliness that accompanied online-only learning during the pandemic.

She and other students, however, persevered and thrived despite those challenges, learning new skills in and out of the classroom along the way. Obtaining their degrees is a celebration of their persistence, she said, and a sign of all that is yet to come.



“You have what it takes to reach your dreams. Whatever is ahead of you, you can conquer it,” Kuechle said.



Seth Howard, of Oskaloosa, Iowa, came to UW-River Falls to earn a master’s degree in business administration and to continue playing college football. A torn Achilles injury ended his football career, but he turned that challenge into working as a graduate assistant on the Falcon football team and a new career aspiration of coaching football. He urged audience members to transform setbacks into opportunities.

“Coming to college, you almost always have a plan of how you want it to go. But being a student, we have all learned that things rarely go to plan,” Howard said. “I firmly believe that part of our education is learning how to pivot, shift our perspective, and problem solve our way toward a new outcome.”

Headshots (top to bottom):

Maria Gallo

Melanie Ayres

Cailyn Kuechle

Seth Howard

Gilmer named new dean of students at UW-River Falls

Previous work includes numerous initiatives to support students

Dec. 4, 2023 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has named Michael Gilmer as its new dean of students, a position that university officials have cited as key in supporting students and helping them find success.

Gilmer will begin his new job at UW-River Falls on Jan. 9, 2024. He currently works as director of student conduct and academic integrity at the University of Central Florida, the largest university in Florida, where he oversees the university's disciplinary process.



Gilmer will replace Alicia Reinke-Tuthill, who was named interim dean of students for this fall semester. Reinke-Tuthill replaced Katie Jackson, who was dean of students from summer 2022 until July 28.

Previously, Gilmer worked at multiple private and public universities, where he supervised student housing, facilities and student care services and led numerous strategic campus initiatives. In each of his previous higher education workplaces, Gilmer said he prioritized student success and helping students graduate.

"I have worked in higher education for almost 20 years because I believe in the transformative impact of higher education," Gilmer said. "After learning about the UW-River Falls community and the scope of the dean of students position, I believed this would be a position where I could support students and add to their overall experience."

Gilmer said he is attracted to UW-River Falls because the university's strategic plan, its core values, its culture and Chancellor Maria Gallo's vision for the university resonated with him. His ideas related to student success appear to be a good fit with how UW-River Falls officials envision enhancing student supports, he said.

"As I learned more, I was excited to see the vast potential at UW-River Falls," Gilmer said. "The university is strategically positioned to help students excel through a variety of efforts."

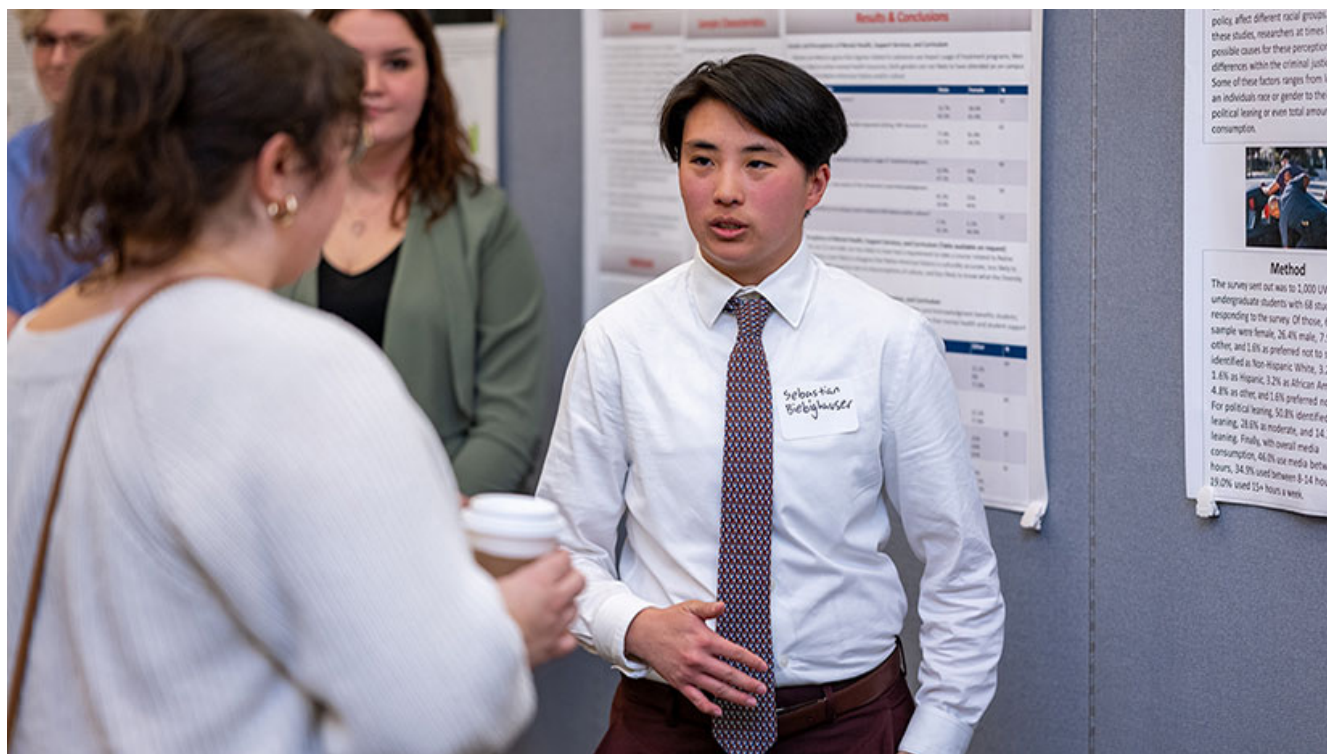
Gilmer possesses an extensive background working with and supporting students, skills that will serve UW-River Falls well, said Laura King, vice chancellor for student affairs and strategic enrollment. The dean of students "is a critical position" that highlights students' concerns, mobilizes campus resources, and brings groups together to support student success, she said.

"Dr. Gilmer brings with him an extensive background in working with and supporting students," King said. "He will be a great addition to Student Affairs and Strategic Enrollment, UW-River Falls, and the greater River Falls community."

Gilmer earned a doctoral degree in educational leadership from the University of Central Florida, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of South Florida, a bachelor's degree in psychology from Valdosta State University, and a certificate in alternative dispute resolution from St. Edward's University.

Among Gilmer's first goals at UW-River Falls is reaching out to faculty, staff and the River Falls community to understand what works well and challenges to work on. His aim as dean of students is to find ways to link students with resources available to them, especially in times of crisis, Gilmer said.

"I'm looking forward to talking with the faculty and staff to hear their ideas and find new ways to support their mission," he said.



UW-River Falls student Sebastian Biebighauser speaks about his research studying people's perceptions of the criminal justice system related to a variety of factors during Wednesday's Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Fall Gala. UWRF Photo.

URSCA event showcases students' research skills

Projects help develop students' critical thinking, work ethic, partnerships

Dec. 6, 2023 - As he studied the potential impact of a mushroom from Thailand on treating cancer patients with fewer side effects than traditional medications, University of Wisconsin-River Falls student Ali Khan learned one of the lessons of research: predicted outcomes often aren't predictable at all.

Khan, a senior from Woodbury, Minn., majoring in biomedical and health science, researched whether lingzhi, a mushroom used as a traditional medicine in southeast Asia, could effectively treat lung and breast cancer by slowing the growth of diseased cells. Khan was one of more than 100 UW-River Falls students whose research was on display at the university's Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Fall Gala Wednesday.

The research he conducted with his faculty mentor, Associate Biology Professor Cheng-Chen Huang, showed that treatments of mushroom extract did indeed reduce cancer cell growth. Excited, Khan next studied the impact of the medicine on noncancerous cells.

The result? Unfortunately, the traditional medicine also slowed the growth of healthy cells, meaning it would not be usable as a cancer treatment in its current form.

"That surprised me," Khan said of the medicine's impact on healthy cells. "It was a disappointing result. But it opens doors for future research."

The annual URSCA Fall Gala highlights the research and scholarly activities of undergraduates, whose work included research posters, artwork, short films and interactive displays. Students described their research projects to people attending the event at the University Center.

Those discussions require a deep understanding of their work, URSCA Director Molly Gerrish said. The event celebrates students' research, she said, and showcases their high-level thinking and research skills.

"This event is really about showing off what our students can do, their strong work ethic and their high level of knowledge," Gerrish said. "It shows the high-quality research our students are doing."

Like Khan, Sebastian Biebighauser was surprised by the outcome of his research project. Biebighauser, a senior from Victoria, Minn., majoring in criminology and sociology, studied people's public perceptions of the criminal justice system related to a variety of factors.

Before beginning his research, he figured that race and media consumption would most directly shape people's criminal justice views. He was surprised that his work showed that political leanings were instead the most important factor.

"I was pretty surprised to find that," Biebighauser said. "That is why research is so important. It shows us that our preconceived ideas aren't always borne out in fact. And research is always changing what we know. It is always evolving."

As students discussed their research with event attendees, the quality of their work and their diligence were evident. In many cases their projects took months to compile. Others have been ongoing for more than a year and will continue.

Ashley Gruman, a senior food science and technology major from Fredonia, researched whether taurine, an essential amino acid, and caffeine can be combined and included in a dairy beverage that would be a healthy alternative to common energy drinks. Research projects teach students to think critically and find solutions to obstacles, she said.

"Doing research teaches you perseverance," Gruman said. "You can't run into a problem and just stop your research. That isn't an option. You have to find a way to solve the problem or find a way to work around it."

Gruman and four of her classmates did just that on another research project she was involved in. Last fall they began work developing a dairy-based, high-protein food that provided a calming effect. They titled the yogurt-like product RootCurd, and the team won a national award for its invention last summer.

Their research, along with RootCurd samples, was on display at the URSCA event. Anna Euerle, a senior majoring in food science and technology from Litchfield, Minn., worked with Gruman and others to develop RootCurd. The process was especially challenging, she said, in part because it included so many variables.

"When I started that project, I was a very by-the-book person," Euerle said. "You do everything in order, and it should just go a certain way. RootCurd has taught me that isn't the case. You have to expect that things are going to go wrong, and you have to always be thinking so that you can find ways around the problems."

That sentiment is music to the ears of Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs David Travis. He recalled his time as an undergraduate and the importance of research that he said, “changed my life.” As he asked students about their URSCA research, Travis said he was thrilled to see them learning the same lessons he did long ago.

“They are learning about forming a hypothesis, about doing the work of original research, about drawing conclusions from that work, and how those conclusions can change and evolve,” Travis said. “Developing those high-level skills will set our students on a path to success.”



Rueben Nilsson was recently hired to manage the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at UW-River Falls. University officials say his background that involves operating small- and larger-size dairy plants makes him the perfect choice to oversee the newly renovated \$9 million dairy pilot plant at UW-River Falls.

UW-River Falls hires new dairy pilot plant manager

Rueben Nilsson's cheese-making background will serve him well in new role, officials say

Dec. 13, 2023 - As Rueben Nilsson makes his way through the maze of shiny metallic equipment that fill the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, it quickly becomes evident that dairy plants are second nature to him.

Milk tanks. Separators. Pasteurizers. As Nilsson moves from one dairy-related device to another, he describes how each works and will play its role in turning milk into cheese and ice cream in this dairy plant.

That knowledge comes from Nilsson's nearly two decades spent in the dairy industry. He has worked in numerous jobs at several dairy plants and has overseen operations at them. Those experiences prompted UW-River Falls officials to hire Nilsson to manage the university's dairy pilot plant. He replaces Michelle Farner, who spent a decade making the new dairy plant a reality before leaving in November.

"I wanted to return to the vats, to have a direct hand in helping create what gets produced," Nilsson said when asked what attracted him to oversee the UW-River Falls dairy pilot plant. "I really do enjoy the ins and outs of creating, of working on details and being able to find ways to make better-tasting products."

Nilsson has a background in food science and decided he wanted to make artisanal cheese. He worked at the Caves of Faribault in Faribault, Minn., from 2006-14, helping make high-quality cheeses. He left there to help operate the small dairy plant Lone Grazer Creamery in Minneapolis, which built a reputation as a high-end cheese producer before it closed in 2018.

Nilsson returned to Caves of Faribault, then left there to oversee the building of the Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery in Menomonie, which opened in 2022.

“Through the years, as my career in dairy progressed, I wore all the different hats,” Nilsson said. “Now I’m excited to see what I can do with the dairy plant here at UW-River Falls.”

Those experiences will serve Nilsson well as he seeks to turn the new dairy pilot plant into an operation in which students learn how to make dairy products and that will serve as a training site for the dairy industry. The plant also will serve as a “test site” of sorts, Nilsson said, a place to experiment a bit with different varieties of cheese and ice cream.

The longtime dairy plant at UW-River Falls ceased operations five years ago because of outdated equipment. Farner and other UW-River Falls officials started work five years before that to build a modern, updated version of the plant. The dairy plant was renamed for the Wuethrich Family Foundation and Grassland Dairy Products, Inc., of Greenwood, after \$1 million in donations helped make the plant a reality.

After struggles along the way, the new 6,000 square-foot, \$9 million plant was officially opened at a celebration in October. Nilsson is fine-tuning plant operations and said he hopes to begin producing dairy products as soon as January.

Farner got to know Nilsson several years ago. She took students in a dairy manufacturing class to visit the Lone Grazer Creamery he operated. She was impressed with his dairy plant background and skill set, and she recommended that he be hired to replace her.

“Rueben has vast knowledge of quality assurance, cheese production, entrepreneurship and education,” Farner said. “When I learned he was seeking a new opportunity, I knew he would fit in nicely as the next dairy plant manager at the UW-River Falls.”

Given his varied background across a range of dairy plant jobs and different-sized processing plants, Nilsson was a strong choice to replace Farner, said Michael Orth, dean of the UW-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES).

“With his expertise in small batch artisan cheeses, he will be a great fit for the type of projects that he, along with faculty, students, and industry personnel, will undertake here,” Orth said of Nilsson.

In fact, Orth and Farner said they see Nilsson as the perfect person to transition from the dairy pilot plant that Farner helped create to an operating plant that will serve as a test site that educates students and industry workers while producing high-quality cheese and ice cream.

“I look forward to seeing how he will bring to fruition the vision that our college and industry had 10 years ago when the commitment to renovate and upgrade the dairy plant was made,” Orth said.

Nilsson is eager to do just that. He sees great potential in the positive impact the dairy pilot plant can have on Wisconsin’s

dairy industry. Nilsson is a self-described cheese aficionado, as evidenced by several varieties of artisanal cheese on his desk on a recent afternoon. He said he hasn't produced ice cream yet but looks forward to that experience.

"I get to help the dairy industry and students learn. I get to make this a place where we can experiment a bit and create and fine-tune products," he said. "For me, this is a dream job."



Barron County dairy farmer Cheyenne Christianson interacts with his dairy herd. Christianson's farm has been a research site for federally funded work being conducted by UW-River Falls faculty member Kate Creutzinger to study cows and calves. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls professor awarded federal grants to study animal welfare

Research focuses on living conditions of calves and their health outcomes

Dec, 14, 2023 - A Holstein calf just a few weeks old lay next to its mother on a late fall day in a pasture at Cheyenne Christianson's Barron County farm, seemingly content and healthy.

A moment later the young calf stood up and ambled a short distance. Several other cows nearby made way for the youngster, then huddled around it protectively. The calf's mother followed, then bent down to lick the young bovine's head.

"Look at that," Christianson said, standing among his dairy herd of about 80 cows. "You see the other cows look out for the little one and the mother following him and being attentive."

Such instances of mother cows' interactions with their calves are exactly the kind of behavior that Kate Creutzinger, assistant professor of animal welfare and behavior at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, hopes to document. Creutzinger has been awarded two U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants to study the welfare of calves in different situations. Creutzinger is one of five faculty at UW-River Falls funded by the Wisconsin Dairy Innovation Hub.

Creutzinger received one grant to investigate the health and welfare of cows and calves on dairy farms where calves are kept with their mothers following their birth. She has partnered with several farmers, including Christianson, to document the health of calves that farmers keep with their mothers after they are born.

The practice of keeping dairy calves with their mothers is an alternative practice to conventional dairy practices. Dairy calves are commonly removed from their mothers within hours of being born to reduce the risk of disease transmission to the calf and to ensure they receive proper nutrition that is key to future health.

However, public interest has increased regarding concerns that calf separation from their mothers is detrimental to the cow's and calf's welfare. Creutzinger's research will explore common measures of health and animal welfare on farms that keep dairy calves and cows together for extended periods of time to better understand this practice.

Creutzinger was awarded a second USDA grant in conjunction with Jessica Pempek, a research animal scientist with the USDA Livestock Research Unit. Their project will study the health and welfare of calves in the veal and dairy-beef systems. Such calves are referred to as "surplus calves" because they are typically male calves who can't be used in the dairy industry and are sold to be raised for meat.

Those calves most often receive poorer care before being sold on veal and dairy-beef farms, leading to higher levels of death and substandard living conditions.

The cow-calf study is for two years; the study of dairy-beef calves has a five-year timeline. Those longer timelines allow for more detailed, thorough research, Creutzinger said. Funding for the two grants totals \$600,000 for UW-River Falls. The projects allow for student research, providing students with valuable learning opportunities, she said.

Creutzinger said she proposed researching those two projects because of their high level of importance currently in the dairy industry. A growing number of consumers are concerned about the living conditions under which farm animals are raised, and they often make buying decisions based on that information, she said.

"There is huge concern from the public about both of these practices and we need good information to make data driven decisions going forward," she said.

The two USDA grants awarded to Creutzinger are a recognition of the strong agriculture education programs at UW-River Falls, said Michael Orth, dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences.

"These research projects are being done on issues that are very topical in the dairy industry today," Orth said. "They represent the important kinds of work that our university is a part of."

Cows sometimes aren't thought to be good mothers, said Christianson, whose farm has been the site of previous cow/calf



research being conducted by Creutzinger. But Christianson said he sees ample evidence that cows do care for their babies. By spending time with their mothers, calves learn valuable behaviors, he said.

"The babies learn from their moms," Christianson said. "Those calves learn how to graze, they learn other activities."

Creutzinger is optimistic that the findings of her two research projects will help create a baseline of information that can lead to continued study of those topics and improved practices concerning animal welfare.

"It is a great opportunity to be able to conduct this kind of research," Creutzinger said. "Hopefully this work can impact the dairy community in a positive way."



UW-River Falls students participating in the American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Assessment Contest held in November at UWRF work on one of the animal welfare judging projects that were part of the competition that included participants from 24 universities from North America and Europe. Contributed photo.

UW-River Falls students excel in animal welfare competition

University team, individuals perform well against schools from North America, Europe

Dec. 21, 2023 - When a team of University of Wisconsin-River Falls students competed in a competition at their home campus that included peers from across North America and Europe, it was an opportunity to learn from experts and students about animal welfare.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Animal Welfare Assessment Contest held Nov. 17-19 was also an opportunity for UW-River Falls students to showcase their knowledge of how to care for animals.

A five-student team made up animal science majors of Emma Hamilton, Brooke Casey, Alli Matzek, Beth McIlquham and Lilly Streich placed third in the senior undergraduate division, defeating larger research universities. Matzek also placed fourth in the individual part of the competition. Student Shawna Sigl participated in the event's graduate level.

Participating students said they didn't feel that they had done especially well in the competition, in part because of its rigor. When team members learned they had placed third, they were surprised and heartened.

“At first I couldn’t believe it,” Casey said. “Then I realized that we really had done well, and it felt really good.”

As team members waited to hear how they had placed, their coach, Kate Creutzinger, assistant professor of animal welfare and behavior at UW-River Falls, waited with them. When their third-place finish was announced, Creutzinger let out a yell of excitement.

“It was great to see this team come together under challenging circumstances and perform so well,” said Creutzinger, who was hired by the Wisconsin Dairy Innovation Hub to study dairy cattle welfare and behavior.

Some 232 undergraduate, graduate, and veterinary students from 24 universities participated in the judging contest as they learned about animal welfare. The event began in 2002 at Michigan State University and has grown substantially since. It moves to different locations across the U.S. UW-River Falls will host the event again next year.

As part of this year’s contest, students were provided with information depicting living conditions for farmed bison, tortoises in a zoo, cage-free laying hens, and lab rats. Students studied those scenarios and worked to explain shortcomings of each situation and how to improve conditions for animals.

Contest participants faced tight timelines to assess animals’ conditions and prepare comments for judges. They felt pressure to perform well because their judges were animal welfare experts.

“It was stressful,” Hamilton said. “You have to really know what you’re talking about because you’re explaining animal welfare to people who are experts in their field. It can certainly feel intimidating at times.”

Sigl described participating in the event similarly, saying the time constraints were challenging.

“It feels like there’s no time to breathe,” Sigl said. “There is so much work to do in such a short amount of time to get ready for the judges.”

‘Important role to play’

Sigl and Hamilton said their animal welfare coursework helped prepare them for the rigors of the competition. UW-River Falls focuses on animal welfare with its [Animal Welfare Lab](#), started in 2012, and the [Humane Handling Institute](#) (HHI), a training program for humane livestock handling begun in 2022 [with the support](#) of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Kurt Vogel, professor of animal welfare and behavior who oversees the university’s Humane Handling Institute, began work in 2019 to bring the contest to UW-River Falls. Hosting the event was delayed a couple of years because of the Coronavirus pandemic, but this year’s high turnout was evidence that interest in it has returned, he said, praising the work of university staff to make the event a success.

“Hosting this contest means a lot to us,” Vogel said. “We have been doing a lot to build up our animal welfare program, and this was an opportunity to show that we have a high-quality program here.”

As part of the event, attendees toured the Minnesota Zoo and the Jon-De Farm in rural Baldwin.

With animal welfare becoming a topic that people are increasingly aware of, hosting the competition allows UW-River Falls to

help teach about it, Vogel said.

“We feel we have an important role to play in helping educate people about animal welfare and why it matters,” he said. “This event serves as a way for us to do that.”

Learning about animal welfare certainly has impacted Cassey. When she arrived at UW-River Falls, Casey planned to become a veterinarian. She grew up loving animals and knew she wanted to help them as part of her profession.

Then Casey studied about animal welfare, and now she is considering working more specifically in that field.

“Before this year, it never occurred to me that there was another avenue besides being a vet,” she said. “Now, through my work in animal welfare coursework, I know that there are other options.”

Sigl’s story is similar. She wanted to work as a veterinarian but is now studying for her master’s degree in agriculture education with an animal welfare and behavior focus. She took a course in animal welfare and now plans to work assessing and improving dairy cow welfare.

“Once I got into this work and began to understand it better,” she said, “I realized the big, positive impact you can make in animal welfare. That is a big motivator for me.”

Hamilton is a senior from Adams, Casey is a junior from New London, Matzek is a junior from Appleton, McIlquham is a senior from Chippewa Falls; and Streich is a junior from Clear Lake. Sigl, of Seymour, is seeking a master’s degree in agricultural education with an animal welfare and behavior focus.



Students in the UW-River Falls Sales Promotions and Event Planning class recently raised \$2,500 for a nonprofit organization that purchases wigs for cancer patients who lose their hair because of cancer treatments. UWRF photo.

Students raise money for wigs for cancer patients

Thrift sale, silent auction raises \$2,500 for nonprofit EBeauty Community

Dec. 21, 2023 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls Marketing Communications program students turned a holiday fundraiser into free wigs for people experiencing medical hair loss.

Students in the Sales Promotions and Event Planning class hosted the third annual Gift and Thrift on Dec. 7. The holiday-themed event, which included a thrift sale, make-and-take crafts and a silent auction, raised \$2,500 for EBeauty Community, an Arizona-based nonprofit organization that provides free wigs to individuals undergoing cancer treatments.

Approximately 350 people attended the event, including UWRF students, faculty and staff along with community members.

"We are so incredibly thankful for all the community support around this event," said student Lily Van Allen. "The community that has been built on and around campus truly made this event a success, and it was amazing to see everyone come out to raise money for the EBeauty Community."

Laura Jirsa, chief operations officer of EBeauty Community, said the fundraiser will provide wigs for 100 women in need across the U.S.

To prepare for the event, students collected donations, tallied and priced clothing items, coordinated a silent auction, planned

craft activities, marketed the event and secured sponsorships.

David Bonko, associate professor and director of the Marketing Communications program, teaches the Sales Promotions and Event Planning class. Hands-on learning projects such as the Gift and Thrift event offer students the opportunity to experience outcomes of their efforts beyond typical classroom experiences, he said.

“In a small-though-powerful way, most students realize they’ve made the world a better place,” Bonko said. “It is my hope this mindset continues through their lives, for they are society’s future school carnival volunteers and youth sports teams’ fundraisers.”



UW-River Falls students, staff, faculty and other officials celebrate the announcement that the university placed first in a statewide competition to give away kits to make off-campus housing where students live more energy efficient. UWRF photo.

UW-River Falls wins state sustainability challenge

Focus on Energy contest helps off-campus housing be more sustainable

Dec. 7, 2023 - University of Wisconsin-River Falls students and staff worked hard in recent months to spread the word about the importance of sustainable practices, and their effort has resulted in a first-place designation in a statewide competition.

UW-River Falls won the Higher Education Kit Challenge, a competition sponsored by Focus on Energy. A total of 11 colleges and universities in Wisconsin participated in the competition that took place from July 1 through Oct. 31. Focus on Energy officials presented UW-River Falls with the award during a ceremony Thursday.

Students with the Sustainability Office combined forces with university faculty and staff to give 140 kits – which were free to receive – containing various items intended to reduce energy usage in off-campus housing where students live. That figure was compared to the number of off-campus students at UW-River Falls. UW-River Falls wound up with the highest percentage compared to competing schools.

“So, we won,” Sustainability Coordinator Mark Klapatch-Mathias said to applause from those attending the ceremony. “The UWRF team did a lot of work promoting this opportunity, and it paid off.”

The award includes \$5,000 from Focus on Energy that UW-River Falls can use toward any sustainability-related effort on

campus.

Heather Feigum, program manager with Focus on Energy, praised UW-River Falls students and staff for their hard work distributing sustainability kits. Those kits totaled 7,420 kilowatt hours in reduced energy annually, she said.

"The energy savings from the kits distributed here cover one house for more than one year," she said. "Taking one house off the grid for more than one year is a significant accomplishment."

While he appreciates the award, Klapatch-Mathias said educating people about sustainability through the contest is the most gratifying part of winning.

"The awareness about sustainability is the biggest part of this," he said. "These measures will save people money in the long run, and for them to get these items for free knowing that it will save them money is a really great approach. It makes them more willing to give this a try."

State Sen. Rob Stafsholt, who represents the area that includes UW-River Falls, praised students, staff and faculty for their work giving away kits and educating others about the importance of sustainable practices.

"We lead by example," Stafsholt said. "We don't just tell people what they should be doing, but we do it ourselves, and this is a great example of that."

The kits people received contain a variety of items intended to reduce energy usage, such as LED light bulbs, low-flow shower heads, efficient light switch covers, and low-energy nightlights. Items that make homes more energy efficient can be expensive and out of the financial reach of most college students, and providing them for free was an enjoyable aspect of the project, said Lauren Schmelzer, a senior majoring in environmental science from St. Louis Park, Minn.

"One of the best parts of this is that it makes sustainable practices more affordable to more people," Schmelzer said. "In the process, they are learning about different ways of living more sustainably."

Amber Rappl, a senior biology and biotechnology double major from Mount Calvary, said their Sustainability Office colleagues work hard to educate students and others about why sustainability matters. The competition provided a means of doing that, they said.

"We were motivated to give away as many kits as we could," Rappl said. "We tried to be in as many places as we could, telling people about the kits. Word of mouth really helped us."

When Rappl, Schmelzer and other students working to give away kits received a message from Klapatch-Mathias that they had won the contest, they thought he was joking. Then they learned that they had indeed placed first.

"It was very rewarding," Rappl said. "But the most important part of this is more people learning about sustainability and implementing it in their lives."