

IOWA WESTERN

A Magazine for Alumni & Friends

A portrait of Arnaldo J. Ovalles, a man with short dark hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a white button-down shirt under a navy blue blazer. His arms are crossed, and he is wearing a watch on his left wrist. The background is a warm-toned wall with a textured, scale-like pattern.

**2024
OUTSTANDING
ALUM**
Arnaldo J. Ovalles

in this issue

Fall 2024

2024 Outstanding Alum : Reivers Making an Impact

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Dear Alumni and Friends,

As the President of the Iowa Western Alumni Association, I am thrilled to share the latest news from our alma mater. Each new semester at Iowa Western represents a journey filled with new students and new promise and possibilities. Similarly, this edition of the Alumni and Friends Magazine is filled with exciting new developments at the College: a new facility and endowment, a new 2024 Outstanding Alum recipient, and the new growth of high-demand programs. I hope these stories reconnect you to the College and inspire you to join us in a collective celebration of all things new at Iowa Western.

John and Harriet Wiebe Football and Soccer Complex and John and Harriet Wiebe Scholarship Endowment

A generous donation of land over 15 years ago has resulted in both a new athletic facility and a new scholarship endowment. We are grateful for the generosity of John and Harriet Wiebe and excited by the impact their gift will have on countless Iowa Western students. You can learn more about the Wiebe donation on page 6.

Growing Transportation Industry

Iowa Western’s automotive, diesel and CDL programs are experiencing significant growth. Check out the story on page 8 to find out how the College is preparing students for these in-demand careers.

Iowa Western Outstanding Alum, Arnaldo Ovalles

Iowa Western and the Alumni Association take great pride in recognizing Arnaldo “Arnie” Ovalles as our 2024 Outstanding Alumni recipient. His exceptional achievements and contributions serve as an inspiration to us all. We encourage you to read more about Arnie on page 10 the magazine.

As Iowa Western continues to grow and evolve, your involvement and support remain integral to the College and the Alumni Association. I invite you to stay connected, share your stories, and participate in our upcoming events- like Homecoming on September 28.

One more new item to share...

I am excited to introduce Ashlee Young, our new Alumni Coordinator. With a passion for fostering meaningful alumni connections and a deep commitment to our community, Ashlee is dedicated to serving and engaging with our alumni network. Welcome Ashlee!

Pam Beall-Hill,
President, Alumni Association



4



6



8



10



16

Iowa Western Alumni Magazine

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Fall 2024

CONTENTS

- 2 Letter from Pam Beall-Hill, Alumni Association President
- 4 Reivers Making an Impact
- 6 John and Harriet Wiebe: A Generous Gift from Grateful Hearts
- 8 Transportation Program: Shifting Gears
- 10 Iowa Western Outstanding Alum: Arnaldo J. Ovalles
- 14 IWCC Retirees: Over 275 Years of Service
- 16 Reiver Athletics | National Champions
- 20 2024 | Homecoming | Save the Date



REIVERS MAKING AN IMPACT

By Carrie Chambers

Reiver Involvement Team

people who keep it running — the faculty and staff.

“We’re just a group of people who value employee appreciation and employee wellness,” explained Angela Backstrom, Training and Development Coordinator and Co-chair of the Reiver Involvement Team.

Backstrom says the group, now 16 strong, has two goals: ensuring employees feel appreciated and promoting overall physical and emotional wellness, which is also important to her co-chair Cara Whitmire who is the Benefits and Compliance Manager at Iowa Western.

“We typically have about four to five employee appreciation events during the year that are sponsored by the Reiver Involvement team,” said Whitmire.

Those include events like a recent ice cream social and appreciation breakfast. On Earth Day, the group hosted a campus cleanup to remove trash and plant flowers across campus. When it comes to the physical aspects of wellness, there are events like Reiver Relax and Recharge and Recess at the Rec.

“We set aside the gym over at the Marshall Wellness Center, specifically for employees, for about an hour a month. It gives people an opportunity to take a break from their day,” said Whitmire.

They set up games like cornhole and pickleball to contribute to the social aspects of wellness.

“We want to get a group of people who may not work together, may not meet each other normally, and focus on that

The student body certainly plays a role in campus culture, but for a consistent community culture, look no further than the

community as well,” said Whitmire.

Employees get time to focus on their physical wellness through group exercise, the use of gym equipment, and growing-in-popularity wellness events like Climb the College with Dr. Kinney and a walking group. The Reiver Involvement Team leverages its reach to cross-communicate offerings through IWCC’s wellness and employee assistance programs.

Engagement goes beyond the walls of Iowa Western with four Lunch and Learns per year with local community partners being invited to come speak like Mouw Family Chiropractic and New Visions Homeless Services.

“They came in before Christmas and shared how they help the houseless population here in the area and what they do,” recalled Backstrom. She says that led to Iowa Western staff sponsoring 50 children last year.

Promoting volunteer opportunities also helps employees take advantage of the eight paid volunteer hours Iowa Western offers employees each year.

“Sometimes you need to take some time out and do something for someone else and that helps you as well,” says Whitmire.

Backstrom hopes that overall, faculty and staff engagement will have a ripple effect on Iowa Western students. “I think students see that this is a fun place to work and that it models a good employer, and how good employers value their employees.”



Employees planting flowers in celebration of Earth Day.

Linzi Nouel Sosa Iowa Western Alum Follows Heart to Haiti

Long before graduating from Iowa Western’s nursing program, Linzi A. Nouel Sosa BSN, RN had a different plan. She had just graduated from a university in California and she thought she was going to be a social worker. But she hit a detour while exploring another passion — international missions.

“I did an internship in West Africa, a study abroad in Italy, and mission trips in Mexico. And when I graduated with my bachelor’s degree, I had the opportunity to go to Haiti.”

Danita’s Children, a faith-based organization that educates and empowers vulnerable children and families in Haiti, is where Linzi was called to serve. On her first trip in 2007, there was no hospital, only a children’s home, a church, and a school. Sosa helped wherever she could—in the kitchen or with the children. During that trip, one of those children changed everything.

“I fell in *love* with the country and the people of *Haiti*, and its an honor to use my *life* for something bigger than myself.”

— Linzi Nouel Sosa

“He was very malnourished, and they found out he was being abused. I ended up staying longer to help take care of him. And that changed the whole trajectory of my life.”

Sosa returned home after three months and thought, “I’m probably never going to go back to Haiti.”

“But I’ve actually never stopped going back.” That is when she decided to change career paths and become a nurse. She said, “I wanted to be able to tangibly help people and knew I wanted to be a nurse in Haiti.”

Originally from Iowa, Sosa knew Iowa Western, where her mother had graduated, would be her best option. She started the nursing program and continued to visit Haiti every year during Spring Break, Christmas, and any chance she could.

In 2010, she was in the middle of nursing school when the earthquake in Haiti hit.

“I knew immediately I needed to go back, but I had already paid for my semester of school. I prayed about it and knew I needed to take time off school and to go back,” she recalled.


“I brought it to the administration and said, ‘This is very important for me. I will come back to school to fulfill my dream of becoming a nurse, but could you support me in this?’”

Iowa Western refunded her tuition, and Sosa took that semester off to volunteer, not only at the orphanage but also at the hospitals, translating and working as a CNA. When she gradu-

ated, she got her first job at Bergen Mercy in Omaha, but her heart was still in Haiti.

In 2017, she moved back to Haiti with her husband and now 9-year-old son to become the administrative director at the pediatric hospital where they work with severely malnourished children to provide high quality of care to the Haitian people.

“It is an honor to serve here in Haiti, but I wouldn’t be where I am without the support, knowledge, and opportunities that the IWCC nursing program gave me.”

“People ask me all the time, ‘Why did you go to Haiti?’ I can’t explain it in words, but it’s a calling that God has placed on my life. Through all those experiences, I fell in love with the country and the people of Haiti, and its an honor to use my life for something bigger than myself.” 

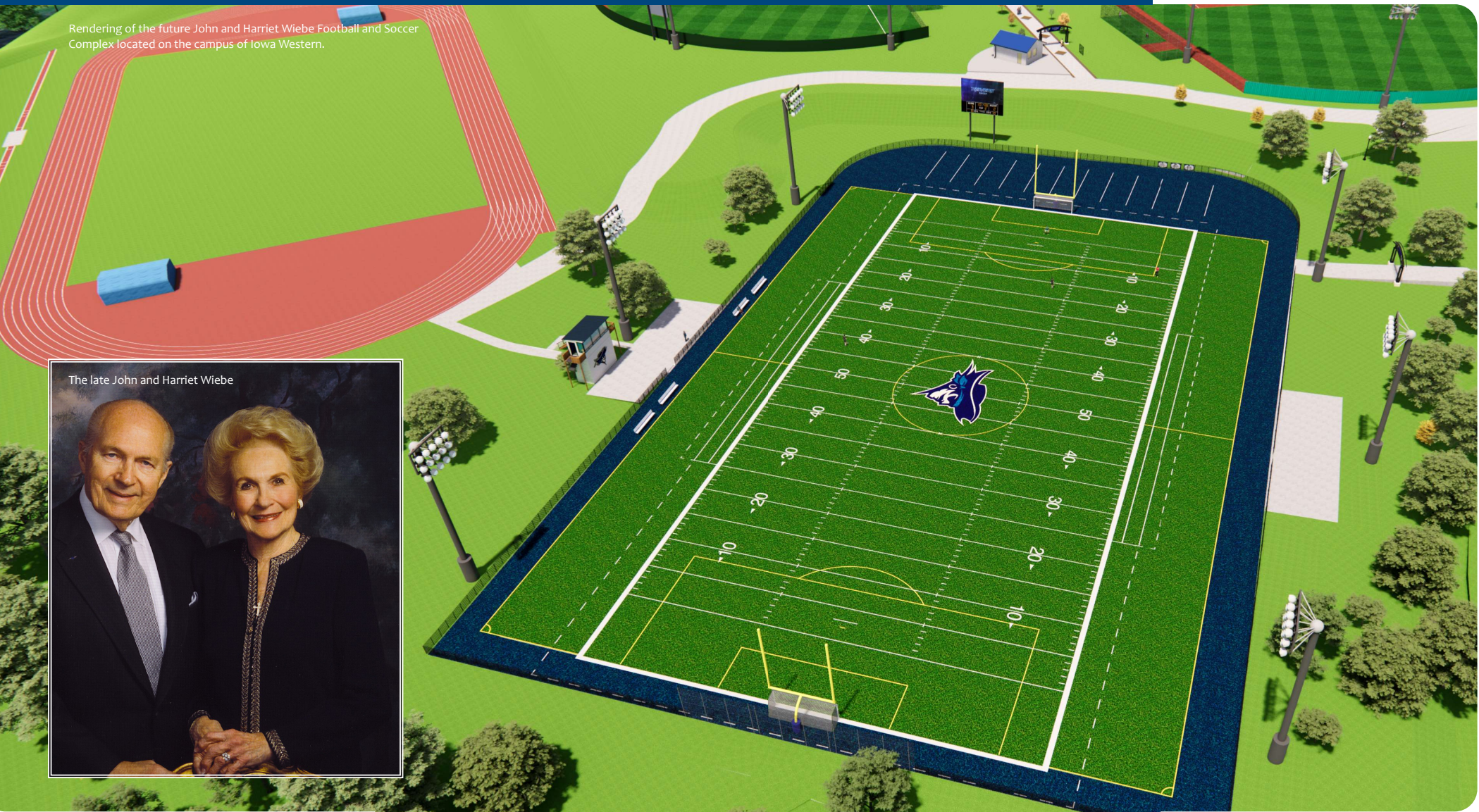


Employees took part in a parachute activity during a campus engagement event.

John and Harriet Wiebe

A Generous Gift from Grateful Hearts

by Kara Schwiess



Rendering of the future John and Harriet Wiebe Football and Soccer Complex located on the campus of Iowa Western.

The late John and Harriet Wiebe

In 2007, developer John Wiebe gifted a little over 100 acres of land, located just east of IWCC’s main campus in Council Bluffs, to the Iowa Western Community College Foundation. It wasn’t until late last year that the land was sold for approximately \$9.8 million, resulting in the largest gift ever made to the foundation.

The Iowa Western Foundation Board voted to split the funds, with around half the proceeds to be used for a football and soccer facility on the Council Bluffs campus and the other half used to establish an endowment that will begin providing financial assistance to students this fall.

“The land from John Wiebe has transformed into two incredibly beneficial and important uses, both with the football and

soccer complex and the scholarship fund. It’s been a long time coming, and we’re excited to see it happening,” said Molly Noon, VP of Institutional Advancement.

John and Harriet Wiebe Football and Soccer Complex

The renovated athletic facility—to be named the John and Harriet Wiebe Football and Soccer Complex—will host both soccer and football practices and will serve as the home field for the Reivers men’s and women’s soccer teams. Improvements will include new turf, lights, and a scoreboard. The college’s soccer and football programs have collectively won multiple national championships, Noon said, so the upgrades will serve them well.

“The facility will allow those programs to grow and perform at the caliber that our communities have come to expect,” she said. “In addition to our own student-athletes, the facility will be used by local K-12 schools that do not currently have access to similar facilities or turf.”

John and Harriet Wiebe Endowment

The John and Harriet Wiebe Endowment will provide much-needed financial assistance to students and continue in perpetuity. Although its emphasis will be for students studying early childhood education or the fine arts, it will not be limited to only those programs.

John Wiebe passed away only two years after making the land donation to Iowa Western, and his wife Harriet predeceased him in 2006. The foundation consulted with family member daughter Roxanne Wiebe, as determinations were being made regarding how to best use the proceeds from the land sale to benefit the institution and its students.

“I’d guess that my mom and dad would want the sale of the land—and resources that would bring to Iowa Western—to benefit Iowa Western and its students, and the community it serves, for as long as possible... Most of all, they wanted it to do good things,” Wiebe said. “My mom always said that ‘you give from a grateful

heart.’ And I think my parents felt that they had been blessed far beyond what either of them ever had imagined, though they certainly worked hard... Sharing their blessings with others was a big part of what they basically believed in and was part of their Christian ethic, personally: to share with others, to help others, and certainly to help others who didn’t have the means or resources.”

Surprisingly, the Wiebes are not Iowa Western alumni and have no other personal connections to the college. They’re not even from the area, Roxanne Wiebe said, explaining that the couple came to Omaha during World War II for an opportunity for John Wiebe to work at the Glenn L. Martin Bomber Plant at Offutt, an aircraft manufacturing facility that operated from 1942

to 1945. The couple chose to stay in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area to raise their family.

John Wiebe, who was inducted into the Omaha Business Hall of fame in 2001, also built a successful business here. His development company Wiebe Enterprises was probably best known for the circa-1955 Center Mall, Omaha’s first enclosed shopping mall, as well as Westroads Mall that opened in the late 1960s and is still a retail presence today. Over the years, Wiebe Charitable Foundation donated millions of dollars to numerous charities, including Children’s Hospital in Omaha (now Children’s Nebraska), most with a focus on youth. Despite their success, her parents were rather low-key, Roxanne Wiebe said.

“My dad thought that you should gain your sense of achievement within yourself, not from what others think about you,” she said. “That humility and humbleness, was a definite thread through their work.”

Although the Wiebes weren’t familiar with soccer, they greatly enjoyed football and would have appreciated being associated with the athletic complex that will bear their name, their daughter said. World War II had interrupted the couple’s own plans for college, so they especially valued the opportunity for higher education for their own daughters and subsequent generations. They contributed to several educational institutions during their lifetime.

“I think they often tried to find schools that would benefit a great deal from a donation,” Wiebe said. “And I think they would really love that their (Iowa Western) endowment was promoting education.”

“We are very excited that the endowment is really going to help a lot of youth be able to afford college,” said Dr. Dan Kinney, President of Iowa Western Community College. “And that it will be affecting students for years down the road. I wish John and Harriet Wiebe were still around to be able to see how their donation of that land is going to help not only Iowa Western Community College, but our students, and how far into the future it’s going to go. I’m grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe for their foresight of making that donation to our college well over a decade ago.”

Noon also expressed gratitude on behalf of the Iowa Western Community College Foundation for the generosity of the Wiebes as well as the support of Roxanne and their family.

“They have generous and genuine intentions. They were supportive of the College and Foundation utilizing that gift in a way that will most benefit our students,” she said. “It’s really been a pleasure to work with the family and to have that support.”

"The land from John Wiebe has transformed into two incredibly beneficial and important uses, both with the soccer and football complex and the scholarship fund."

— Molly Noon

Transportation

Shifting Gears to Meet Industry Demands

by Carrie Chambers

A growing need for skilled trades workers is driving growth in Iowa Western's transportation programs.

"When I started in this industry, there was about one job per every five mechanics," said Clint Meyer, head of IWCC's Diesel Technology and Automotive Technology programs. "Currently, there are about ten open positions for every student I have in the program."

Meyer says his class size has grown alongside industry demands over the past eight to ten years. To accommodate this, Iowa Western plans to build a new facility to house its growing diesel technology, automotive technology, and commercial driver's license (CDL) programs.

"In the diesel program last fall, we had just short of 70 students," explained Meyer. "So, when you take a space that worked well for 35 and then double that, it doesn't work so well anymore."

Iowa Western's CDL program has grown not only because of the need for more drivers — it's a direct response to federal changes to industry rules in 2022, says Logistics and Trades Coordinator Toni Scheffler.

"Now you have to have ELDT (Entry Level Driver Training), and a Range and Road course to get your CDL. There are some schools out there that say come out and practice, and we're going to test you. The difference with us is we're a driving school and we can teach someone who's never driven a semi how to drive semi."

Scheffler admits they're doing a pretty good job of it, too, according to feedback from various employers.

"They've called me specifically to say how good the drivers are and that they love to hire them out of this class," said Scheffler. "They'll come and do talks with each new class because they're so impressed with the driving."

The CDL program is a non-credit program that turns out certified drivers every four to five weeks with Department of Transportation examiners right on campus. Scheffler says while they're required to keep the numbers in each class down, the program has kept up with demand in other ways.

"When I got here one year ago, we had one truck. Now we have six trucks and six trailers. We've also added classes in Harlan and Atlantic, Iowa, and we now have a certified



Rendering of the new transportation building set to break ground in the spring of 2025.

Road and Range course in Harlan along with the CDL course."

The robust CDL program is an added benefit to students in the diesel program said Scheffler.

"This is the first year that we're actually getting the diesel students their CDL once they're done with their second year. We're going to try to repeat that every year because they're going to need it eventually anyway," she said.

The close proximity of the programs also helps keep IWCC trucks running and gives Meyer's students extra training.

"Clint does a good job. It is great that we have him on campus because when one of our trucks has an issue, guess who we call? And the part I like is he will, if we can, have the students do the work. So, they are getting that real-world experience too, diagnosing what the problem is and then fixing it without too much cost for the CDL program," she said.

Not only are all three transportation programs filling up with traditional and non-traditional students looking for an affordable career change, but Meyer says he typically has between 20 and 25 high school students from across Southwest Iowa taking part-time classes.

"It's kind of nice for them because instead of doing something they don't want to do or taking a class that they're not really interested in, they can come out here for three-and-a-half hours a day and actually get college credit," explained Meyer.

Not only is it more efficient, but earlier development means less money out-of-pocket since some high schools cover the cost for their students. Meyer says the savings don't always stop there. "Employers have started to figure out here in the last few years that if they want quality students, they have to get them early." Some employers even sponsor students and help with the cost of tuition and tools.

"I would say, right now, that's about 40% of my current students, first and second year. They go out and get these students, sometimes when they're seniors in high school. Sometimes they talk to them after they've started the program here, but they will pay for their schooling 100 percent, as long as they maintain some attendance and grade requirements," said Meyer.

Scheffler says she's proud of these programs, and the local employers and communities that support them.

"Some of these kids, if you sent them off out into the world, they wouldn't go to school. Or they would and they would have thousands of dollars in debt, and it just puts you behind before

you even get started," she said.

Meyer says the classes Iowa Western offers alongside his program are an added benefit, better-preparing students with the extra skills needed to get them ahead, like business writing and how to ask potential employers the right questions.

"When I applied for my first job, I wasn't thinking about insurance or retirement, or any of that stuff. I wanted a job and whatever came along with it, that was going to be okay," recalled Meyer. "Now we have them take an interpersonal communications class, which basically gives them better tools to communicate with other people in the home, society, and on the job."

While the demand and salaries increase for these roles, Meyer admits that it's a lot of hard work but it's not to be outweighed by the benefits.

"At the end of the day, they can go home and say, 'You know, I accomplished something today. I can take something that is broken, or not moving, or they can't get the load to wherever it needs to go, and at the end of the day, I made that happen.'"

Iowa Western hopes to break ground on its new transportation facility in the spring of 2025. [iw](#)



Clint Meyer guiding a student in the diesel lab.

Arnaldo J. Ovalles

2024 OUTSTANDING ALUM

By Kara Schweiss



Photos: Mac & V

When Venezuela native Arnaldo “Arnie” J. Ovalles came to Iowa Western Community College in January 2002 to play baseball, he probably wouldn’t have foreseen that he’d be named the institution’s 2024 Outstanding Alum, let alone that he’d build a life and career and raise a family in the Midwest. The timing was certainly less than ideal, he said, explaining that—within days of his arrival—it was quite a “shock” to see snow on a baseball field for the first time.

“The weather in January compared to Venezuela can be an 80 degrees difference,” he said, adding, wryly, “So that was an adjustment that happened.”

Ovalles not only adjusted, he ultimately flourished at IWCC as a student-athlete. However, it was a departure from his original ambitions.

“In December 2001, Coach Therron Brockish called me to offer a baseball scholarship, as he needed a catcher for the baseball team for the spring semester of 2002. The connection between Coach Brockish and me was through the San Diego Padres international scout, Ricardo Petit. Like most teenagers in Venezuela, I wanted to play professional baseball and was in serious conversations about signing a professional contract and starting to play in minor leagues in the Dominican Republic,” Ovalles said. “My parents and I decided that coming to the U.S. to get an education and play baseball was the best route forward.”

Ovalles attended IWCC from 2002 to 2004, taking ESL classes and rapidly advancing his English language skills. He earned an associate’s degree in business and was named to the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) All-Academic team in 2003. Ovalles went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in business from Wayne State (Nebr.) College in 2006 and a master’s degree in economics from the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO). He credits Iowa Western with getting his higher education off to a good start.

“IWCC prepared me in many ways. It provided me with the academic foundation to transfer to a four-year college and helped me build deep relationships with professors, administrators, coaches, teammates and classmates,” he said. “IWCC created a path for me to succeed both professionally and personally.”

Ovalles, who carries the professional designation of CFA (Chartered Financial Analyst), is now a partner at Prodigy Asset Management, an investment firm renowned for helping families and nonprofit organizations achieve their financial objectives. He began with the firm as an intern 17 years ago and worked his way up.

“My work ethic and contributions to the firm propelled me to assume increasing responsibilities, including being named partner and overseeing assets exceeding \$3 billion. Over the years at Prodigy, my partners and I have achieved significant milestones in helping our clients allocate hundreds of millions of dol-

Continued on the next page



lars to fulfill their missions. For example, through our dedicated efforts, we have supported a long-term client in spending and contributing to its community hundreds of millions for the past decade,” he said. “Additionally, I have been invited to speak at national conferences. For several years, I used to teach an investment class to UNO MBA students.”

Ovalles said he also feels it’s important to give back, including to IWCC and southwest Iowa. Being named Iowa Western Community College’s 2024 Outstanding Alum reflects that giving spirit as well as Ovalles’s career success.

“I remain committed to community service, serving as a trustee for the Iowa Western Community College Foundation—I have been a Foundation Board member for the last four years. I enjoy giving back to IWCC and helping the foundation fulfill its mission of financially supporting students. I also enjoy serving on the investment committee for the Foundation Board, given my background,” he said, adding that he has other close ties to the region: “My wife, Emily, is actively involved in the southwest Iowa community and has served as an OB/GYN at Jennie Edmundson Hospital for the last 10 years.”

In addition to his service to IWCC, Ovalles is a member of

“

IWCC created a *path* for me to *succeed* both personally and professionally.

— Arnaldo Ovalles

”


the Investment Committee for the Archdiocese of Omaha and holds leadership positions at Saint Margaret Mary Catholic Church. He also serves as an advisor to the University of Nebraska Omaha College of Business.

Ovalles is still physically fit 20-plus years after coming to Iowa Western to play baseball, but now that’s mostly through jogging, playing tennis, and spending time outdoors with his family, he said. The Ovalleses have four children—sons Anthony and Isaac, and daughters Lucia and Claudia—so Ovalles is also ushering in a new generation of athletes these days.

“Our four children are heavily involved in sports...I enjoy coaching them, as a former student-athlete,” he said. “We try to manage how many sports they can do each season, because we’re only two parents. We’re outnumbered.”

On that note, Ovalles said, his parents moved here from Venezuela a decade ago. “It takes a village,” he said. They assist with the grandchildren’s activities and have also helped them be-

come more adept at Spanish. In 2002, Ovalles might never have imagined himself sticking around for many winters to come, but the Midwest is certainly now home. And it all began with the friendly atmosphere at Iowa Western’s Council Bluffs campus.

“My experience at Iowa Western was very positive, and that helped me in the classroom to do well, to thrive,” he said. “One of the things that stood out was how welcomed I felt during my two years at IWCC. The community made me feel like I belonged there. The professors, classmates, and administrators were all very welcoming. I was blessed to build relationships that have lasted decades.” 



2024 Retirees

Over 275 Years of Service

By Michael Watkins

In 2024, Iowa Western Community College celebrates the retirement of a group of 14 individuals, who represent 281 years of service ranging from 10 to 38 years.

During their years at IWCC, they experienced and participated in tremendous growth – record enrollment and new facilities and buildings, growth in program offerings and new partnerships and connections.

We salute their tenured impact at IWCC. Included in this early retirement group are two longtime Iowa Western family members who concluded their careers on campus this spring – Don Kohler and Sue Pitts.

Don Kohler, 25 Years

Don Kohler has seen and experienced a great deal of change and advancement during his 25 years at Iowa Western.

He started in November 1999 as marketing director, becoming a Vice President and member of the President’s Cabinet in the early 2000s.

Now, two-plus decades later, he’s leaving behind a marketing and communications legacy that saw enhancements to the Internet, numerous campus marketing campaigns that brought in record enrollments, new buildings, new leadership, the advent



Don Kohler, 25 years

of social media and so much more.

“I have enjoyed being a part of the college’s growth over the years,” said Kohler, who retired this spring as the Vice President Marketing, Public Relations and Information Technology at IWCC. “But mostly, I enjoyed working with some amazing people at the college.”

When he joined the president’s cabinet, he took on additional

responsibilities, including managing the Arts Center and 89.7 The River radio station and later became supervisor over Information Technology. He also managed Enrollment Services for a brief time.

Along with the many physical changes he’s witnessed and been part of during his two-plus decades at IWCC, Kohler said he’s also seen multiple changes in the communications industry – namely the use and importance of social media – that helped IWCC experience record growth not only in enrollment but also in housing, new facilities and new programs.

“The explosion of social media channels created a need to pivot the college’s advertising strategy,” he said. “I am proud of the efforts made to re-brand the institution in 2010, as we involved stakeholders from the campus and the community to produce a new vision for IWCC.

“This long-term project culminated with a new logo and identifying brand statement (The World Is Waiting) for the college along with new imaging for The Reivers.”

When early retirement was offered this year, Kohler decided to take it and move forward to other opportunities as well as make more time to spend with his family.

“My daughter, Sophie, is a junior at the University of Nebraska, and my son, Charles, is a sophomore at Lewis Central,” he said. “My wife, Alyssa, and I love to travel when we can.”

Sue Pitts, 20 Years

When Sue Pitts started in April 2004 as Iowa Western’s Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Regional Director, the opportunity aligned perfectly with her experience and professional intentions.

“My previous experience as a Chamber director and small business owner aligned perfectly with the mission of the SBDC to help small businesses start and grow,” Pitts said. “Although I haven’t changed positions in the last 20 years, I have significantly grown in my role, both in terms of knowledge and my passion for helping small businesses succeed.”

As the SBDC Regional Director at IWCC, Pitts had the unique opportunity to work with two great organizations – the Iowa SBDC and IWCC. The SBDC is a national organization funded federally, by the state and locally. It provides no-cost technical assistance to small businesses and startups.

The Iowa SBDC, hosted through Iowa State University, serves as the hub for 15 regional centers throughout Iowa, including the center at IWCC.

She said she’s watched the organization grow and adapt to the small business landscape, becoming a crucial part of small business growth throughout Iowa.

“The relationships I’ve built through this network of peers have been incredible, and being part of an organi-

Sue Pitts, 20 years



the seven counties I cover,” she said. “Through financial support, resources, and cooperation, IWCC has been instrumental in our success.”

As she looks back over her years at IWCC, Pitts said she is most proud of the businesses she has helped start and grow. Since she’s been in this position, the IWCC SBDC has assisted in the creation of 2,000 new businesses.

Additionally, she and her team have had countless interactions with existing businesses and individuals considering starting a business.

“Our guidance has sometimes helped people make the positive decision not to start a business, avoiding potential pitfalls and ensuring thoughtful planning,” she said. “When we receive referrals and positive feedback about our services and how we’ve contributed to their growth, it is incredibly rewarding.”

She said she’s also proud of how she has expanded the IWCC SBDC to become the state expert in helping small businesses with digital marketing, website optimization, and now using AI technology.

“We have worked one-on-one with clients statewide and have developed over 40 lunch-and-learn sessions, which we have run monthly for the last 15 years,” she added. “These efforts have provided ongoing education and support, helping businesses stay current with the latest trends and technologies.”

Up next for Pitts are plans to launch her own business, Just Sue, LLC – a venture that will focus on helping businesses grow by providing integrated digital marketing solutions.

“My goal is to leverage my extensive experience to offer services such as strategic content development, website design, getting a business found online (SEO) and business strategy execution,” she said.

“Additionally, I plan to create educational products like digital guides and workbooks to empower clients and educate them on the strategic aspects of their digital presence. This transition allows me to continue working closely with businesses, ensuring their digital efforts align with their overall business goals, thereby driving growth and success.”

And while retiring early was a difficult decision and probably

zation that helps small businesses has been my favorite part of every day,” she said.

The second organization, IWCC, has been just as important in her role and growth, Pitts said.

In her view, IWCC is one of the most supportive hosts of the SBDC program in the state of Iowa.

“They have played a significant role in helping me expand our program throughout

Keith Christie

Arts Center Technical Director

20 years of service

Teresa Cooley-Daniel

ESL Coordinator

10 years of service

Ruth Husz

Continuing Education Operations Manager

38 years of service

Norm Johnson

Executive Chef

15 years of service

Don Kohler

VP of Marketing, Public Relations & IT

25 years of service

Penny Lilly

Associate Professor, Nursing Clarinda

15 years of service

Deb Lipschultz

Assistant Professor, Biological Science

10 years of service

Jodi Osborne

Senior Desktop Support Technician

21 years of service

David Petersen

Maintenance

17 years of service

Michael Peterson

Software Support Analyst

10 years of service

Sue Pitts

Small Business Development Center Director

20 years of service

Bill Ricketts

Professor, Human Services

32 years of service

Jackie Velthoff

Programmer Analyst


31 years of service

Sue Wiese

Continuing Education Secretary

18 years of service

the most challenging one she’s ever made, Pitts said she been truly blessed to be a part of both the SBDC and Iowa Western.

“I believe I have had the most rewarding career in this position,” she said. “However, I’ve always talked about and dreamed of opening my own small business. Now, the time feels right to take this opportunity and see how I can continue to help our community and businesses in a new journey.” 

REIVER ATHLETICS

NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

GoReivers.com

TEAM Titles

WOMEN'S SOCCER
FOOTBALL
WOMEN'S INDOOR TRACK & FIELD

SHOTGUN SPORTS
COMPETITIVE DANCE
COMPETITIVE CHEERLEADING

The 2023-24 athletics season was among the best in Iowa Western and NJCAA history with 21 teams competing at nationals this year, winning 11 ICCAC Region 11 titles and 4 Midwest District championships. 12 individuals also won national championships in their respective sports. IWCC also won its fourth NATYCCA Cup, given annually by the National Alliance of Two Year College Athletic Administrators.

The Reivers brought home NJCAA National Titles in women's soccer, football, and women's indoor track & field. Shotgun Sports won their third national championship in a row, and competitive dance brought two national titles back to the Bluffs with their jazz and hip-hop routines. Large Coed Cheerleading also won their 3rd World University championship and 2nd in a row. Women's Soccer, Football, Shotgun Sports, and Cheerleading all went back-to-back, defending their titles from the previous season.

WOMEN'S SOCCER



Iowa Western claimed its second national championship in the last two years on a golden goal just a minute and thirty-five seconds into overtime off the right foot of Sophomore Forward Nicole Navarro.

At the start of the overtime period, Defender Nanami Hata gained possession of the ball in the midfield and fed Navarro outside the 18-yard box. Navarro fought through a pair of Titan defenders, got the ball to her

right side, and buried a rocket to the top corner for the game-winner.

The win marked the second consecutive national championship for the Reivers and third overall. Iowa Western finished the season with a perfect 18-0-0 record and has run its winning streak to a school-record 36 victories in a row.

Iowa Western outscored its opponents 11-0 over four games, with Goalkeeper Bella Washington earning all four victories en route to being named the Defensive MVP of the tournament. Navarro was named the tournament's MVP with two game-winning goals; Forward Oruha Hayashi earned the Offensive MVP award, posting four goals and two assists throughout the week.

FOOTBALL



Number 2 Iowa Western rolled to the 2023 NJCAA D1 Football National Championship, topping #4 East Mississippi, 61-14, at War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock, AR.

The Reivers fought back from an early one-point deficit to batter the Lions over four quarters of football to become the first back-to-back title winner since EMCC did it five years ago.

Quarterback Hunter Watson was named MVP after putting up 312 all-purpose yards and accounting for 5 touchdowns throughout the game.

The "Darkside" Defense held EMCC to just 56 yards on the ground while keeping Ty Keyes, the nation's top passer under wraps all game long, recording 4 sacks and forcing a fumble on the Lions QB.

Overall, it's the third championship in five tries for Coach Strohmeier and his staff in 15 seasons of football. In addition to shutting

out Hutchinson, 31-0, last year in Little Rock, the Reivers topped Butler in the 2012 Graphic Edge Bowl in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

WOMEN'S INDOOR TRACK & FIELD



Iowa Western women's indoor track & field claimed a share of the 2024 NJCAA Indoor Track & Field Championship, scoring 106 points along with Barton CC (KS) at the Alachua County Sports & Events Center in Gainesville, FL.

The Reivers saw two individual national titles with Ethel Amissah claiming the 400m dash with a time of 54.26s and Mercy Honesty winning the triple jump with a mark of 12.47m.

Iowa Western's 4x400m relay secured the points to move IWCC into a tie at the top spot. The Reivers, running in the fourth of five heats, shot out of the gates with the team of Glory Okon, Amissah, Angeline Pondler Estrada, and Kaylia Kelly combining for a time of 3:41.93 to take the top spot.

This is the third women's indoor title after going back-to-back in 2021 and 2022.

SHOTGUN SPORTS



After five days and thousands of clays at the National Shooting Complex in San Antonio, TX, IWCC once again finished at the top of the ACUI Division IV standings, outbreking 2nd place Iowa Central by 43 to win the Division IV High Overall with a score of 2788. The Reivers finished first in Skeet, Doubles Skeet, Doubles Trap, and Sporting Clays and second in both Trap and Super Sporting.

Freshman Abby Johnson was Iowa Western's lone individual national champion, defeating teammate Janice Tejada, who finished runner-up, and 36 others in the Women's Class B Trap.

As a team, Iowa Western finished 14th out of 106 two-year and four-year colleges and Universities, 131 points behind Lindenwood University, who finished at the top of the overall Team HOA standings with a score of 2919.

This is the 2nd ACUI championship that the Reivers have earned, taking the title in 2022 before winning last year's NCSSAA Division IV title in Las Vegas.

COMPETITIVE DANCE



Iowa Western Dance brought home two more national championships, winning Junior College Jazz and Hip-Hop at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL. The Reivers scored 88.04 points for their performance in Hip-Hop, defeating two other teams in the finals, and 90.14 points in their Jazz routine, taking the top spot over three others.

Head Coach Michaela Patterson has brought three national championships back to Iowa Western in just three seasons at the program's helm.

COMPETITIVE CHEERLEADING



For the second year in a row, Iowa Western Large Coed Cheerleading won the World University Championship at the UCA & UDA College Cheerleading and Dance National Championships in Orlando, FL.

The Reivers scored 90.8 points with no deductions to take the top spot over the University of Puerto Rico-Bayamon who scored 82.4 points. IWCC also finished 3rd in Open Large Coed, 2nd in Open Small Coed, and 2nd in Small Coed in the World University Championships.

Continued on the next page

INDIVIDUAL National Champions

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

Silvia Gradizzi

WOMEN'S TRACK & FIELD

Indoor 4x400m Relay

Ethel Amissah Indoor 400m

Mercy Honesty Indoor Triple Jump

Mercy Honesty Outdoor Triple Jump

MEN'S TRACK & FIELD

Mohammed Kowa Indoor 800m

Mohammed Kowa Indoor 1000m

Paul Rowden Outdoor High Jump

MEN'S WRESTLING

Malachi Bordovsky 141 lbs

CJ Carter 285 lbs

WOMEN'S WRESTLING

Flavia Nagatani 116 lbs

WOMEN'S SHOTGUN SPORTS

Abby Johnson Trap

National Player of the year



Oruha Hayashi
Women's Soccer
United Soccer Coaches
National Player of the Year



McKenna Minter
Women's Basketball
NJCAA DII Woman's Basketball
Player of the Year

REIVER Athletic Achievements

BASEBALL Region 11 & Midwest District Champions

MEN'S BOWLING NJCAA Runner-up

WOMEN'S BOWLING NJCAA 3rd Place

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY NJCAA 3rd Place

WOMEN'S HALF MARATHON NJCAA Runner-up

MEN'S HALF MARATHON NJCAA 4th Place

MEN'S & WOMEN'S GOLF NJCAA National Qualifier

MEN'S INDOOR TRACK & FIELD NJCAA 5th Place

MEN'S OUTDOOR TRACK & FIELD NJCAA 3rd Place

WOMEN'S OUTDOOR TRACK & FIELD NJCAA 4th Place

MEN'S WRESTLING NJCAA 5th Place

WOMEN'S WRESTLING NJCAA 4th Place

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL NJCAA 6th Place

SOFTBALL Region 11 & Midwest District Champions

ESPORTS Call of Duty Gunfight National Runner-up

ESPORTS Hearthstone National Runner-up

ESPORTS Mario Kart National Runner-up

MEN'S BASKETBALL ICCAC Quarterfinals

MEN'S SOCCER Midwest District Runner-up

VOLLEYBALL Midwest District B Runner-up

Iowa Western Community College
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD MEMBERS



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(President, Alumni Association)



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Michael Watkins, '89
Watkins Marketing & Media

The Iowa Western Alumni Association, led by our dedicated board and coordinator Ashlee Young, is committed to reconnecting alumni with the college.

Stay updated on the latest news, events, and opportunities by following the Iowa Western Alumni Association on Facebook and Instagram.

ASHLEE YOUNG
Alumni and Community Relations Coordinator



Stay Connected!

To share news, update your contact information, and ensure you receive future communications, simply scan the QR code, email us at alum@iwcc.edu, or visit the Friends & Alumni tab at iwcc.edu!



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