

IOWA WESTERN

A Magazine for Alumni & Friends

OUTSTANDING ALUM Michael Hoy



in this issue

Fall 2025

2025 Outstanding Alum :: Culinary Program: Building Careers from Scratch

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Fall is in the air—or at least it will be by the time this magazine reaches you—and with it comes a renewed sense of energy and momentum here at Iowa Western. This issue of the Alumni and Friends Magazine is packed with moments worth celebrating: meaningful memories, major anniversaries, programs launching bold careers, and, of course, the announcement of our 2025 Outstanding Alum, Michael Hoy.

As the Alumni and Community Relations Coordinator, I can honestly say it’s been a fast, but incredibly fun year at Iowa Western. From reconnecting with alumni at events to celebrating new milestones on campus, the spirit of this community continues to inspire me every day.

That spirit is especially important now, as we look to the future with an exciting opportunity on the horizon. This fall, voters in our service area will consider a bond issue to support the construction of a new Transportation and Logistics building and the much-needed renovation and expansion of our Construction, Electrical, HVAC, and Welding programs. These improvements are vital to meeting the growing workforce demands of our region—and to ensuring our students have access to the hands-on training and modern facilities they deserve. You can learn more about the bond and its potential impact on page 20 of this magazine.

As Iowa Western continues to grow and evolve, your involvement and support are more important than ever. Whether you’re flipping through these pages to reconnect, reminisce, or simply catch up, I hope you’re reminded of the powerful community of which you’re a part.

And of course, we hope to see you back on campus for one of the most fun events of the year—**Homecoming 2025 on Saturday, September 27.**

With Reiver Pride,

Ashlee Young
Alumni and Community Relations Coordinator
Proud Alum, ‘21



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Iowa Western Alumni Magazine

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Iowa Western Alumni and Friends Magazine is a publication of the Iowa Western Community College Alumni Association.

CODY C. MASON

Aviation Scholarship

By Mike Watkins

Cody Mason was fascinated by airplanes and aviation from the time he was little. “We have a photo of him when he was little playing with a blue airplane with spinning propellers,” said his older sister by 18 months, Hollie. “Having a dad who was 35 years in the Air Force in a variety of different roles, including maintenance and repair, also had something to do with his love of aviation.”

Several months after Cody, a 1998 graduate of Iowa Western’s Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT) program, unexpectedly died from cardiac issues in June 2024, Hollie and their dad, Robert, made it a point to immortalize him – and give back to the profession he loved – with the Cody C. Mason Aviation Scholarship. It will be awarded annually to a second-year Iowa Western AMT student.

In late April, the first \$1,000 scholarship was awarded to Dylan Pirnie, who Hollie and Robert – with the guidance of faculty – chose because of his commitment to aviation and the program. The scholarship will cover costs of summer tuition.

Pirnie received the scholarship during a special ceremony at the Iowa Western Aviation Facility “for demonstrating the strong work ethic, commitment, and academic excellence that Cody exemplified throughout his life.”

“I didn’t expect to be called,” said Pirnie, who learned of the scholarship during the award ceremony on April 28. “I know I do great work, but many of my classmates, they do great work also. It (scholarship) will absolutely make me work harder and try to live up to his name.”

During his 26-year aviation career, Cody held roles from mechanic to Aviation Safety Inspector for the Federal Aviation Administration.

He was known for his work ethic, generosity and willingness to share his many talents with family and friends.

“Cody set a high standard,” Robert said during the ceremony. “This scholarship hopefully inspires students who are here in the program today. It means a great deal that he’s going to maybe set the standard. They wouldn’t have his picture on the wall if they didn’t think a lot of him.”

According to Hollie, Cody was always “very technical” and “mechanically gifted.”

While he loved aviation, he never pursued becoming a pilot because he enjoyed working behind the scenes – making sure planes were mechanically sound and safe – more than being at the helm.

After graduating from Iowa Western, he started at a repair station with TAC Air (now part of Signature Aviation) at Eppley Airfield before being promoted to an inspector of other mechanics’ work.

For a few years, Cody worked in the corporate sector, maintaining



jets for Kiewit, but was always looking for more information and opportunities to learn.

“Beyond what he learned in school, he loved studying about different engines and always kept up with the latest in the industry,” Hollie said of her brother. “Even when he was an inspector, he was working with mechanics. He missed getting his hands dirty.”

It was during his time at Duncan Aviation that he stepped into the inspector role with the FAA, a role he enjoyed up until his death when Cody was just 46 years old.

Also an Iowa Western graduate, Hollie (’96) said she vividly remembers taking him to Iowa Western to find out about the aviation program – one of a handful in the country.

“He loved it right away; he knew it was for him,” said Hollie, who went on to get her bachelor’s degree from Buena Vista University and law degree from Creighton. “Cody was always tinkering. He was so inquisitive.”

It was this thirst for knowledge that led Cody to apply to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to be part of the space program – again, not in the capsule but behind it.

“He loved space, and wanted to be part of the private space launch arena,” Hollie said.

He interviewed to be part of the program and study engineering but passed away before he could take any further steps.

For Hollie and Robert, providing this annual scholarship in Cody’s name is their way of keeping his memory alive forever.

“After he died, dad and I discussed ways to make sure someone else who also enjoyed learning would have an opportunity,” Hollie said. “We spoke with Molly (Noon) at IWCC about starting a scholarship, and she made the process so easy.

He spent his life trying to be the best at everything, and he valued people who knew what they wanted. Now, that won’t go to waste. It will live on with future aviation students. He would have loved that.”

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

By Mike Watkins

Leslie Southard remembers her encounter with Kitty Carlisle, the American stage and screen actress and arts advocate, with great affection.

“It was November 2003 when Carlisle found herself with an eye injury while waiting for her flight in Milwaukee (on her way to Council Bluffs),” said Southard, who was a member of the Arts Center’s Advisory Committee. “Upon her arrival in Omaha, I arranged for her to see an ophthalmologist, and she and Tony Randall created quite the charming scene in the waiting room, delighting fellow patients with their presence. They were in town to perform Love Letters at the Arts Center.”

Throughout her time on the committee, Southard had the privilege of contracting and meeting with an array of extraordinary artists, including Linda Eder, Kitty Carlisle, Tony Randall, Richard Thomas, The Lettermen, Richard Jeni, Jennifer Holliday and many more.

For her, each of them was remarkably gracious and easygoing, making the experience truly special – and memorable.

“I shared a lighthearted experience with (American singer and actress) Linda Eder, who rode in the front seat of my car,” she said. “We chatted effortlessly during the ride to the hotel and Arts Center, making it an unforgettable encounter.”

Constructed by Lund-Ross and designed by HDR Architecture and Design, the Arts Center – originally called the Southwest Iowa Arts Center – stands as a landmark of excellence. Its doors opened in September 2001 – shortly after the events of 9-11 – with an inaugural performance by Eder.

Frank Fauble, the visionary behind the project’s design a founding member of the Arts Center board and a generous donor, made such an impact that the main theater has now been graciously named the Frank Fauble Theater, commemorating his lasting legacy.

THE ARTS CENTER
AT IOWA WESTERN
25 YEARS

It was built before many of its peer performing arts venues now in the region — including The Holland Center, Steelhouse, The Astro, The Admiral, Slowdown, and PACE — even existed.

“We were programming before all of those venues began, and we were doing it right here in Council Bluffs,” said Tim Dickmeyer, who stepped into the director role of the Arts Center in October of 2014. “I grew up in Omaha, and my early perception saw Council Bluffs as secondary to Omaha.

“But in the last 25 years, there has been a concerted, organized effort to improve the amenities and quality of life here in Council Bluffs – and the Arts Center has been part of that.”

Over the past two-plus decades, the Arts Center has offered high quality, nationally touring professional arts and entertainment programming at an affordable price.

Dickmeyer said studies have proven that a thriving arts and entertainment sector directly impacts quality of life and drives the economic growth of its community.

“It bridges the gap between world-class *artistry* and local everyday celebrations and grassroots *community* gatherings.”
-Leslie Southard

“Several features of the Arts Center drew me to the job,” he said. “Its size is unique in the area, making for a niche in programming. The pace of programming is also nicely balanced between professional touring shows, college events and community rental events.”

He added that the Arts Center receives tremendous support from Iowa Western, which is crucial to its success.

“I have now been here nearly 11 years and have truly found my place,” Dickmeyer said of the Arts Center, which averages 30,000 people each year. “This performing arts center and this college are special, and I’m fulfilled both professionally and personally.”

Southard feels similarly, noting that, from the beginning, the Arts Center has been and remains a “cultural lifeline for the community.”

“It bridges the gap between world-class artistry and local, everyday celebrations and grassroots community gatherings,” she said. “At its core, the Arts Center is a vibrant hub where diverse events – from dance recitals and graduations to class reunions and non-profit meetings – come together.”

For families, students and civic groups alike, the Arts Center is a safe haven for learning, expression and connection. It inspires pride and unity among community members and offers a venue for them to become active participants in nurturing creativity.”

Dickmeyer said the future of the Arts Center is secure but the challenge to remain relevant in its programming is important as younger generations become part of the growing target audience.

“I don’t worry about much, but I do worry about how to bring younger audience members into our fold, without losing the older audience that has been so loyal over the last 25 years,” he said. “Our programming will inevitably evolve, but controlling that evolution so it happens slowly is quite a trick.

There are all sorts of examples of art and entertainment on social media platforms that primarily younger generations are consuming. It’s like the modern Vaudeville. I think there is an interest in taking those performances out of the digital realm and experiencing them in a live setting. That might be the very field we end up cultivating to fill our stage in the future.” **W**

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

By Mike Watkins



**89.7
THE RIVER**
The Cutting Edge of Rock

combinations on-air before coming up with a line-up that carried The River through its first few years.

When John arrived in 2004, the station was switching fully over to an Alternative format that leaned toward active rock.

She characterizes The River as a representation of what Iowa Western has accomplished and continues to accomplish – an opportunity to learn and practice that doesn’t exist at most community colleges.

Students are on air from 6 p.m. until midnight, and they apply every semester for different positions such as music director, production director, promotions director and morning and afternoon producers.

This allows them hands-on experience that prepares them for the real world of radio and digital communications/broadcasting.

“The radio station is a huge marketing gem, much like athletics for IWCC,” she said. “We are 100,000 watts, which allows us to reach out to the masses in the Omaha, Council Bluffs and Southwestern Iowa area.

The student goes through the entire process of applying, interviewing and getting paid part time wages with the positions mentioned. Not only are we a recruitment tool for the college, but we are out on the streets and personally involved in the community affairs on a daily basis.”



Similar to his co-worker, Jake Ryan ‘98 always loved music and going to concerts, but he never thought about being on the radio until he went to school for accounting. Yes, accounting.

“Accounting didn’t spark my interest the way I anticipated, and it turned into trying radio out at Northwest Missouri State,” he said. “It was an enjoyable experience and one that I was somewhat naturally talented at.

I took a small break from school after that and, because of that experience, wanted to try it again. The River allowed me to do that.”

He took the next two years off from school before enrolling at Iowa Western in the summer of 1996. By the winter semester of 1997, he applied to join the staff at The River and shortly thereafter was on the air.

“I enjoyed listening to the station my first year, so I called the request line and asked the DJ if it was a college station, and she said yes,” he said. “I applied to the station, and except for two stints at KKCD (CD 105.9) and KEDJ – The Edge in Phoenix, I’ve been at IWCC.”

Ryan returned to 89.7 in 2004 and stayed at the station until 2012 when he moved into a role with Iowa Western athletics for the next 9-plus seasons. He returned to familiar territory behind the mic in 2022.

Ryan said most people don’t realize the clout The River has had over the years when it comes to interviewing famous bands and entertainers.

Among those who’ve appeared on 89.7 include Gavin Rossdale (Bush), Lars Ulrich and Robert Trujillo (Metallica), Chris Martin (Coldplay), Andy Fletcher (Depeche Mode) and even Chris Kirkpatrick from NSYNC.

“We’ve had actors, comedians and wrestlers stop by, and it’s still surreal to be able to interview people that you’ve known just from afar,” he said.

For Ryan, being able to bring new music to people and spark their nostalgia with older tracks, in addition to broadcasting Reivers’ athletics and dropping a funny line now and again for the entertainment aspect is “fun for me,” said Ryan. He added that music, sports and a little humor is a “pretty good life.”

“The River’s impact on the metro will always be felt, whether it’s an epic concert or helping out various nonprofits to spread their message, the station has always been a proponent of doing it locally,” he said. “Businesses, bands, etc. – the staff and students that have relayed the message over the years are people that actually live and work locally and having that pulse is an important piece of community engagement.”

“Just like athletics at IWCC, The River is a huge tool to spread the word, not only about the College, but the communities that we serve.” Spread the word, and, of course, teach.

“On-air is just one aspect of the radio industry, and The River has taught everything from production and promotions to sales and marketing,” Ryan said. “Some students have even become crew members for bands or taken their skills to television and video production.

Radio lays the foundation for every media medium, from podcasts and interviews to books on tape and even silly videos on social media. Those that have come in with a goal to work hard and get into the industry in some form or another have succeeded.” **W**



BUILDING CAREERS FROM SCRATCH

By Carrie Chambers

Before Nate Steinbach stepped into the classroom at Iowa Western, he hadn't planned to become an instructor. He and his wife had closed their restaurant after eight years of long shifts and late nights. When his role as executive chef at LinkedIn's Omaha campus ended during the pandemic, he took an adjunct position with Iowa Western.

"I loved it – the students, everything. Before, I always enjoyed having interns. It's even more rewarding watching the students grow and to see where their careers are going."

Students who complete the program receive an Associate of Applied Science. They can also earn a Baking and Pastry Certificate. Steinbach has helped grow the program into a fully integrated culinary career lab.

"We're expanding. We've incorporated a lot more business courses into the curriculum as a lot of students coming in want to own food trucks or bakeries. We do have a food truck we take out into the community."

He says 60-70% of the students have shown interest in operating a food truck, something that's becoming increasingly popular in the Midwest. Iowa Western even offers a food truck certificate in its non-credit programs.

"The only other culinary program I know that has a food truck is Northwest Arkansas," he explained. "Our goal isn't to compete with other food trucks in the community. We just want to offer a more hands-on student experience."

Chef Steinbach says the revamped program is unique because it considers every aspect of the business side of culinary arts, like business and financial mathematics, writing for the workplace, ethics and entrepreneurship. The success of the program is showing up in every student who gets an early foot in the door.

"I have one student who's the general manager at Corkscrew in Omaha. I have another who's at Cheesecake Factory. She's worked there the whole time she's been in culinary school and she's the kitchen manager now, so that's pretty impressive to be running places before you're 21. A lot of them are in restaurants right now, working at different 'mom and pop' places. Another student is building a food truck with her dad."

Others will be transferring to Iowa State upon completion to become Family and Consumer Sciences teachers. Steinbach says having these tools and resources is a huge value add for Iowa Western.

More importantly, "It's really valuable for the students," said Andrea Huckabee, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. "Nate's students supplied all the treats for the fall musical event and the theater department," she recalled. He tries to provide a real-world experience for students... he makes it very real life for somebody going into the industry."

That real world takes shape for second-year students in the Capstone class called Café Friday.

"They have to design a menu, cost out all the food and then basically act as the executive chef for the restaurant owner," explained Chef Steinbach. "They'll assign other second-year students their cooking tasks, and then the first-year students do all the serving through their dining service class."

Each semester, students prepare multicourse gourmet dinners for the community, putting the money earned back into the program. They show off techniques and dishes they learned in their International Cuisine course and, Steinbach's favorite, Garde Manger and Charcuterie Lab. Students learn to work on whole hogs delivered from Gettler Farms in Red Oak, Iowa, to make ham, sausage and bacon.

"It's fun to see them learn how much work goes into it," he said. "How long it took the farmer to grow it, how long it takes us to butcher it, how long it takes us to cure the bacon. I always tell the students as chefs, we're just spokesmen for Mother Nature — that not everything is instant."



Students volunteer their skills for many other community events, like the Omaha Corgi Races and the Great American Kite Festival. They've placed second the past couple of years at the Taste of Iowa cooking competition through the Iowa Pork Producers Association.

"We lost to Iowa State's food science program. They're always graduate students," explained Steinbach.

Still, an impressive feat for students with less experience under their aprons. To that, Steinbach can confidently say this experience offers so much for students choosing Iowa Western's program.

"That's one of the big things I tell students. I think what's great about Iowa Western is there's a four-year feel. There's so much opportunity and different things going on every day. It's a lot of fun."

COMMUNITY CULINARY CLASSES

Iowa Western's non-credit culinary classes are designed with the community in mind. "We do them because they're fun," said Continuing Education Coordinator Megan Blakely. "It's as simple as that. It's a fun, safe space for the community to learn to make new things and they get to take home some food."

The courses are led by Tasos Kyprianos, executive chef at Google. "Everyone loves him," said Blakely.

Chef Tasos has been teaching Iowa Western's non-credit culinary classes for a year and a half. They're designed for beginners, home cooks and aspiring chefs who want to learn more about the fundamentals. He teaches a variety of dishes twice a month including American steakhouse classics, date night three-course meals, fresh pasta, pizza, calzones and much more.

"Everyone has a place to stand at the table, and we'll host up to 17 people at the most," said Blakely.

Tuition costs vary, depending on the cost of groceries. "We want to keep them at a low rate and try to preplan with the rise in groceries." Blakely recalls carrying in more than 100 eggs for the pasta class.

"It was like carrying gold through the kitchen to put them away," she laughed.



You can find information on Chef Tasos's upcoming classes on Iowa Western's Continuing Education page under Life and Leisure.





OUTSTANDING ALUM

Michael Hoy: A Path to Success

By Kara Schweiss

Iowa Western Community College's 2025 Outstanding Alum Michael Hoy is the owner of Hoy-Kilnoski Funeral Home & Crematory, which opened to the public in the summer of 2011. Hoy, however, began in the business nearly 20 years earlier—when he was only 14 years old.

"I began working for a family-owned funeral home in Council Bluffs in the spring of 1992. Every day after school and throughout the summer I would ride my bicycle to the funeral home. I would wash cars, care for the lawn and help with other duties," he said. "A couple of summers later, once I had a driver's license, my role changed significantly. I began driving to the cemetery and helping (with) all of the services and during evening visitations."

Iowa Western Community College was instrumental in providing Hoy with the necessary educational credentials

to pursue a career in funeral service. He attended classes in the mid-1990s right out of high school.

"I was laser-focused on wanting to be a funeral director, and there were some prerequisite requirements to get into mortuary school. It made the most sense to go to Iowa Western so I could continue to work at the funeral home and then attain those credits," he said. "I took the necessary credits to move on to the next step."

Before he could move forward, though, he had to step aside for a time. While Hoy was attending college, the owners of the funeral home sold their ownership to a national firm. As Hoy put it, "there was no room for me after this acquisition" and he switched course to another service-oriented career path: law enforcement. Hoy initially worked for the Pottawattamie County Sheriff's Office as a corrections officer and eventually became a deputy sheriff. He was later hired by the Iowa

"I'm very humbled by this honor, surprised. And I'll do my best to represent as *outstanding alum*."



Department of Public Safety, serving in the Division of Criminal Investigations and as a state trooper with the Iowa State Patrol during his tenure.

Law enforcement was rewarding, but Hoy never forgot his first dream to help families with funeral service. While still working for the Iowa State Patrol, he returned to Iowa Western in 2005 to wrap up the necessary prerequisites and eventually earned his certificate in mortuary science from Des Moines Area Community College.

"When I chose to go back to school to finish my education to become a licensed funeral director, many of the educators—and one counselor in particular—were very flexible with my trying to work full time and go back to school," he said. "I appreciated their grace on some things."

For several years, Hoy worked as a funeral director/mortician during the day and as a trooper on the midnight shift. Soon, he was able to go into business for himself.

"In 2011, I co-founded Hoy-Kilnoski with my grandpa, Walter J. "Bud" Kilnoski. He's certainly been the most impactful person in my life," Hoy said. "In my business... Many, many times it's a generational thing where people have taken it on from a generation or two ahead of them. That wasn't the case for me. I started this one from the ground up, building the building. So, my commitment day in and day out has been here."

Hoy said he sees Hoy-Kilnoski Funeral Home & Crematory as an extension of his life in service to the community. The funeral home, located at 1221 North 16th St. in Council Bluffs, ushered in many firsts to funeral service in the area like providing families with an area for lunches and receptions, offering an onsite crematory, providing a chapel design that allows every family to be accommodated equally and fairly with the flexibility to hold very large services, and making live streaming available so loved ones who can't attend services in person can view a service remotely in real time. The funeral home recently added The Hoy Kilnoski Reception Center at 1414 W. Broadway in Council Bluffs for visitations, gatherings, meals and other events for the families it serves.

The facilities are certainly beautiful, creating an atmosphere of warmth and comfort, but the Hoy-Kilnoski team also

Continued Page 12

strives to provide personalized services to help families with arrangements that memorialize their loved one in a meaningful way, Hoy said.

“It’s an important service to the community,” Hoy said. “People need to be honored for the lives that they lived, and the people that have lost those folks need to be supported by us.”

Hoy has been active in the community for years. He’s been a member of Council Bluffs Optimist Club for nearly two decades and also has served as past president. He’s long supported the West Pottawattamie County Fair, better known as Westfair, particularly the 4-H programming and livestock auction. “All the proceeds go to the kids,” he said.

Earlier this year, Wings of Hope Cancer Support Center honored two community members for their contributions to those on the cancer journey at its annual winter fundraiser, presenting the 2025 Larry Hill Memorial Award to Hoy. According to the organization, this annual award honors those who share their gifts and talents to benefit cancer patients and their families in the Omaha/Council Bluffs metro and throughout southwest Iowa.

Hoy has been married to his wife Jill for nearly 23 years. The couple’s two children, Benjamin and Eve, attend Saint Albert Catholic, just like their father did. Hoy said he doesn’t really know yet if either his son or daughter will follow him into his business.

“I want them to make their own decisions and follow their own passions,” he said.

His own passion for serving the community, after all, is what motivated him to find his own career path and has helped him be successful. Hoy said he was

nevertheless surprised to be named Iowa Western’s Outstanding Alum this year.

“I was so shocked and surprised to get this phone call,” he said. “I thank the nominating committee. I’m very humbled by this honor, surprised. And I’ll do my best to represent as a outstanding alum.” 



STARS Aligned: A Family’s Journey to Higher Ed

By Kara Schweiss

Mother and daughter Rhonda Silva and Mia Silva-Lastrup are an inspiring two-generation success story for both Iowa Western Community College and the STARS Scholarship program, an initiative of the Iowa West Foundation since 1997 to provide Pottawattamie County parents with financial assistance and guidance to pursue higher education.

The reasonable assumption would be that Silva received a scholarship and later influenced her daughter to apply for the program. However, it actually worked in reverse: Silva-Lastrup was the first to receive a scholarship, which motivated her mother to apply.

Silva came to motherhood very early, becoming pregnant with daughter Mia in her junior year of high school.

“I do not come from a long line of college graduates nor high school graduates,” Silva said. “In fact, my

mother—also a teen mom—didn’t receive her GED until well into her 30s.”

Determined to earn her high-school diploma, Silva attended the Council Bluffs Community School District’s Alternative Learning Center and graduated with her class at Abraham Lincoln High School in 1986, marrying the same year.

She was always a working mom, initially in the restaurant industry before taking classes to earn a certificate in accounting from Nebraska College of Business. By the mid-1990s, she was divorced and raising three children. Silva worked multiple part-time jobs to ensure scheduling flexibility to meet her children’s needs, but struggled to make ends meet.

“I guess you could say I was surviving day-to-day and dreaming about the day we would be thriving,” she said.

Things were better when Silva secured a full-time data entry position. The position lasted 11 years and through several rounds of downsizing until the work was transferred overseas.

“I decided to return to school because I was unable to find a position with a comparable wage without a college degree,” Silva said, adding that by then, she was already in her 40s.

Her daughter, who was a beginning STARS scholar at the time, suggested that Silva apply for the program.

“It was during my associate’s, as I was transitioning into going into my bachelor’s, when my mom said, ‘How is college? What’s it like? Do you think I could do it?’” Silva-Laustrop said. “And I was like, ‘Absolutely you could do it.’”

Silva used her STARS scholarship from 2011 to 2014, completing an associate degree program at Iowa Western followed by a bachelor’s program in accounting from Buena Vista University—and excelling academically.

“Through the STARS scholarship and programming, I built confidence to pursue other opportunities that led me to receiving the Iowa Philanthropic Education Organization scholarship and becoming a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society,” Silva said.

Today Silva is an Accountant III/Financial Analyst at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska.

Silva-Laustrop’s story begins in a similar manner. She was 18 and a new high-school graduate when she gave birth to her oldest son.

“I just kind of put myself and my future on hold while I tried to grow up with him, if you will ... a kid raising a kid and trying to navigate adulthood and what that looks like,” she said. “I really wanted it to be different than what I watched my mom go through, because she struggled a lot as a single mom of three children.”

Working in a child care center provided discounted care for her son and allowed her to have him nearby while she worked, but it wasn’t a forever proposition. Silva-Laustrop found the STARS scholarship while still in her 20s and used it to launch a post-secondary path that started at Iowa Western and ultimately resulted in a bachelor’s degree in education from Buena Vista and a master’s degree in business and professional communication from Bellevue University.

“The STARS scholarship and living life experience helped empower me to want better for me and my son,” she said. “The fun part (of IWCC) was meeting people that were similar to me and being able to build a support group... It was very supportive to see that there were other people out there like me doing the same thing.”

Silva-Laustrop, now a mother of three, stays connected to Iowa Western alumni events as a member

of the black-tie events committee and is involved in several community organizations. Professionally, she’s been very successful, now serving as Program Director for the STARS Scholarship Program.

“It’s rewarding to give back to the very program that helped set me on the trajectory,” she said. “The STARS scholarship program is a great resource for nontraditional students.” *uw*

The *fun* part of IWCC was was meeting people that were similar to me and being able to build a support group... It was very *supportive* to see that there were other *people* out there like me doing the same thing.



Rhonda Silva,
Mia's Mother

REIVER ATHLETICS

By Travis Jacobson



NATIONAL CHAMPIONS Men's Soccer



NATIONAL CHAMPIONS Men's Bowling

Another fantastic year for Iowa Western Athletics throughout the 2024-25 season. 22 teams competed at nationals, winning nine team national championships, 19 individual national titles, 10 ICCAC Region 11 championships, three NJCAA District titles, and two National Players of the Year awards. Additionally, Oruha Hayashi of Women's Soccer was named the NJCAA Betty Jo Graber Award winner – the NJCAA's Female Student-Athlete of the Year. Iowa Western also finished as the NATYCA (National Alliance of Two-Year College Athletic Administrators) Cup winner for the NJCAA Scholarship division for the fourth year in a row.

The Reivers brought home NJCAA National Titles in Men's Half Marathon, Men's Soccer, Men's Bowling, and Women's Indoor and Outdoor Track & Field. Small Coed Cheerleading also won the 2nd UCA National Championship in program history and its 3rd World University Championship in a row. Shotgun Sports claimed its 4th consecutive national title, while Competitive Dance was invited to participate in “The Battle” for their championship-winning hip-hop routine.

Iowa Western Athletics also excelled in the classroom, with 381 student-athletes earning ICCAC Academic All-Region honors in the Fall semester and 326 student-athletes earning Academic All-Region accolades in the Spring semester, each finishing with a 3.0 GPA or higher.

Before the start of the 2024-25 season, the Iowa Western Board of Trustees approved the addition of Men's and Women's Swimming to the athletic department and tabbed Council Bluffs native and four-time Iowa High School State Champion and State record holder Mykenzie Liston to lead the program.

The Reivers also welcomed two individuals and one team to the Iowa Western Athletics Hall of Fame. Former Baseball Head Coach Marc Rardin –the Reivers' all-time leader in wins– was inducted alongside his 2012 national championship-winning team an longtime supporter and current board member Matt Johnson.

MEN'S SOCCER

Top-seeded Iowa Western Men's Soccer defeated Cowley (KS) 1-1 (3-2) on penalty kicks to claim the program's third NJCAA D1 Men's Soccer National Championship. The Reivers defeated Coastal Bend and Harcum in group play, then knocked out ICCAC Conference Rival Indian Hills on PKs in the semi-finals.

In the finals, Iowa Western opened the scoring in the 8th minute on a corner kick that was put away off the head of Forward Carlos Camara. The Tigers found the equalizer with just over seven minutes remaining in regulation to force OT. After two scoreless overtime periods, the game headed to PKs.

The Reivers buried three of their first four attempts while Goalkeeper Francesco Tricarico saved three of Cowley's attempts, including the final one to give the Reivers the title.

Tricarico was named the MVP of the Tournament, Seydou Diop took home the Offensive MVP award, and AJ Tesilimi earned the Defensive MVP award, along with being named the United Soccer Coaches National Player of the Year.

Continued Page 16



MEN’S HALF MARATHON

Iowa Western Men’s Half Marathon brought home the program’s first distance team national championship in Richmond, VA, defeating Salt Lake CC by just four points.

The 13.1-mile race came down to a photo finish as Iowa Western’s Barnabas Ndiwa and Odessa’s Mohammed El Youssfi were neck-and-neck at the finish line with Ndiwa edging out El Youssfi by just .10 seconds. Ndiwa’s mark of 1:03:37.1 set the NJCAA record, previously held by Tomas Vega of New Mexico JC in 2023.

Geoffrey Ronoh ended the race in 4th place, and Mohammed Kowa finished 7th

to give Iowa Western the four-point victory over the Bruins.

CHEERLEADING

The 2025 Iowa Western Open Small Coed team brought home the program’s 2nd UCA National Championship at the UCA College Cheerleading National Championships in Orlando, FL.

The Reivers defeated eight other teams with a final score of 86.4 en route to the title. They followed it up with a World University Cup title later that afternoon with a score of 84.3, taking down five 4-year universities.

Iowa Western’s Large Coed team finished 2nd at nationals and 3rd at worlds, while the All-Girl Gameday team ended in 9th place in its first year competing in the division.

MEN’S BOWLING

After three days of bowling and thousands of pins at Airport Lanes in Cheektowaga, NY, Iowa Western Men’s Bowling finished at the top of the standings, going wire-to-wire to earn the program’s first NJCAA Bowling National Championship.

The Reivers were led by Allen Stauffer, who rolled a perfect game on day two; the first 300 at the NJCAA Championships since 2000 and just the 10th time in championship history. Stauffer would finish the weekend with the most pinfalls, 2,759, to earn Tournament MVP honors.

The Reivers led Rock Valley 6,243 to 6,175 after day one of the singles and doubles tournament, then took a 235-pin lead over Hudson Valley after day two. On day three, IWCC held a 440-pin advantage going into the final nine baker games, and the team never faltered, winning the tournament with a final pinfall of 14,341, 534 pins ahead of Hudson Valley.

Both Stauffer and Casey Montgomery earned NJCAA All-American status, going 1-and-2. Trey Hanke, Sebastian King, and Aydan Belfiore all finished in the top 16 out of 131 bowlers.

SHOTGUN SPORTS

Four Peat! Iowa Western Shotgun Sports came out on top of the ACUI Division 4 standings in San Antonio, TX, for their fourth national championship in a row. The Reivers defeated second-place Connors State College, 2,803 to 2,723 after adding the final team totals from all six events.

Sophomore Abby Johnson led the team with national titles in Women’s Doubles Trap and Women’s Super Sporting, while Payton Kruse (Women’s American Trap), Michael Day (Men’s Doubles Trap), and Leo Brand (Men’s

American Trap) each brought home individual titles. Johnson earned All-American honors by finishing in the top 50 among 776 shooters.

The team also defeated all schools from all divisions in American Trap with a score of 497/500.

COMPETITIVE DANCE

Iowa Western Dance won the Junior College DTU Hip-Hop performance at The College Classic from the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL.

The Reivers scored 86.04 points in the preliminary round, then improved their mark to 88.88 points, earning themselves a spot in the prestigious “Battle” to wrap up the competition. Dance Team Union Battles are a showdown of the best of the best, with qualifying dance teams and cheer teams from the preliminary round selected and invited to perform in the Battle, hoping to win the coveted Battle Cup.

Iowa Western also finished as the national runner-up in Junior College Pom and took home third place in Junior College Jazz.

For Head Coach Michaela Patterson, this is her 4th DTU National Championship since starting the program in 2021.

TRACK & FIELD

For the second time in program history, Iowa Western Women’s Track & Field won both Indoor and Outdoor NJCAA Track & Field National Championships in the same year, matching the feat in 2022.

The Reivers were led by Freshman Juliana Sakat, who claimed seven individual national titles and scored a combined 73.5 points for the team, better than 54 other teams across both meets. Sophomore Mercy Honesty also defended her triple jump crown en route to claiming all four indoor and outdoor championship titles from the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons.

Iowa Western Men’s Track & Field also finished on the podium in the two national meets, ending in 3rd place. The Men’s 400m Dash was one of the most exciting finishes of the outdoor championship. Michael Francois edged out Tavon Davis of Hines CC by just .002 seconds to take the title at 45.391. With the two 3rd place finishes, a runner-up in cross country, and the half-marathon championship, the men’s program ended the season as the USTFCCCA NJCAA Track & Field Men’s Program of the Year. 

REIVER Athletic Achievements



BASEBALL

Region 11 Champions

Women’s Bowling

10th place at Nationals

Men’s Cross Country

NJCAA National Runner-up

Football

NJCAA National Runner-up

Men’s & Women’s Golf

NJCAA National Qualifier

Women’s Soccer

Region 11 and District Champions

Men’s Wrestling

NJCAA National Qualifier

Women’s Wrestling

NJCAA National Runner-up

Softball

Region 11 Champion

Men’s Swimming

4th place at Nationals

Women’s Swimming

6th place at Nationals

Esports

Rocket League 3rd place at Nationals



INDIVIDUAL National Champions

MEN’S HALF MARATHON

Barnabas Ndiwa

WOMEN'S TRACK & FIELD

Mercy Honesty Indoor Triple Jump

Mercy Honesty Outdoor Triple Jump

Juliana Sakat Indoor Mile, 1000m, 3000m, 5000m

Juliana Sakat Outdoor 1500m, 5000m, 10000m

MEN'S TRACK & FIELD

Michael Francois Outdoor 400m

WOMEN'S WRESTLING

Mia Siqueiros 103 lbs

Rosalia Rubio 117 lbs

Ayana Fletcher 160 lbs

MEN’S SHOTGUN SPORTS

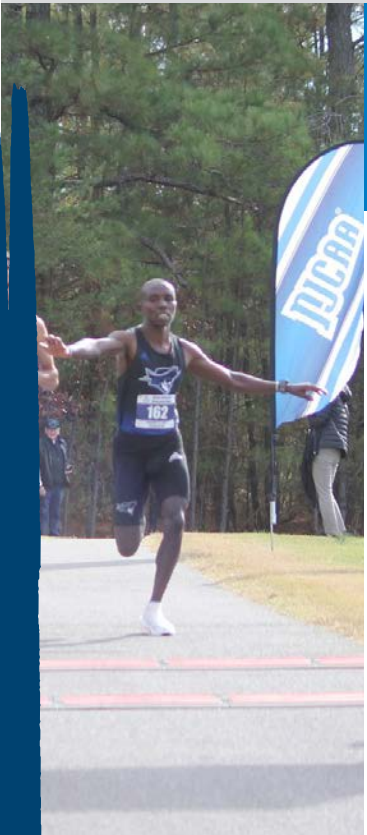
Leo Brand American Trap

Michael Day Doubles Trap

WOMEN’S SHOTGUN SPORTS

Abby Johnson Double Trap, Super Sporting

Payton Kruse American Trap



ALUMNI EVENTS



This spring, alumni and community members gathered for two special on-campus events. On April 12, Petals & Pours brought alumni and community members together for a Saturday morning filled with fresh blooms and local flavor. Attendees enjoyed crafting mini floral bouquets while sampling beverages from area vendors—a perfect way to welcome spring and reconnect with friends.



In June, alumni from the Automotive and Diesel programs returned to campus for a reunion. It was an opportunity to catch up with classmates, connect with current students and faculty, and see firsthand how the programs have grown and adapted. Stories were shared, memories revisited, and new connections formed.

Follow the Iowa Western Alumni Association on Facebook and Instagram to stay connected and hear about future events!



SAVE THE DATE Homecoming 2025

Saturday
SEPTEMBER
27



GLOW-UP COMPLETE

SAY HELLO TO THE NEW ROCKY

ALUMNI BOARD

Pam Beall-Hill (President), '88
Community Volunteer

Diane Osbahr (Vice President), '90
Iowa Western Community College

Brandon Green '07
Collins Consulting

Jeannie Aldredge, '88
SilverStone Group

Rhea Eitmann, '00
Doll Distributing

Beth Smith, '03
Lewis Central School

Bailey McQueen-Jones, '10
Avenue Scholars SWI

Melissa Head, '98
US Army Corps of Engineers

Mike Watkins, '89
Watkins Marketing & Media

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- ◆ New Job
- ◆ Promotion
- ◆ Honor
- ◆ New Degree
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A photograph of two men in a workshop. An older man with glasses and a beard, wearing a blue plaid shirt, is looking down at a large, yellow-painted engine block. A younger man wearing a grey baseball cap with 'NORTH' on it, safety glasses, and a green long-sleeved shirt is using a tool on the engine block. In the background, a white pickup truck is partially visible.

2025 Bond Referendum

No Tax Increase

New Transportation and Logistics Building

**Expanded Technical Education Including:
Construction, Electrical, HVAC and Welding**

Enhanced High School Programs

A green oval graphic with a hand-drawn style arrow pointing towards the election date.

**Election Day is
NOVEMBER 4**