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TWO-YEAR COLLEGE
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Career Impact

Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 1

Meet WITC's 2014
Student Ambassadors

Constructing a
Solid Career Path

MAKING THE CONNECTION

**DONNY KRINGEN HAS A RISING
CAREER THANKS TO A MARKETING
DEGREE AND A LOVE FOR TECHNOLOGY**



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INDIANHEAD
TECHNICAL
COLLEGE

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Golf

Fore Scholarships

2014

WITC-Ashland: Golf for Scholarships

The 15th annual Golf for Scholarships event raises money for scholarships for WITC-Ashland students. The four-person scramble will be held Thursday, June 26, at 11 a.m. at the Chequamegon Bay Golf Course in Ashland. Registration is \$320 per team or \$80 per person, and includes 18 holes of golf, greens fees, golf cart, lunch, door prizes and dinner. To sign up or for more information, contact Robyn Lulich at 715.682.4591, ext. 3113.

WITC-New Richmond: Fun-Driver Golf Benefit

The 19th annual four-person scramble will be held Monday, June 23, at 12:30 p.m. at Bristol Ridge Golf Course in Somerset. Money raised from this event goes toward scholarships and other Foundation programs at WITC-New Richmond. Cost for the event is \$320 per team (\$80 individual) or \$280 per team (\$70 individual) for Bristol Ridge members. Fee includes 18 holes of golf, cart, registration packet, dinner, prizes and team photo. For registration or more information, contact Natalie Landgreen at 715.246.6561, ext. 4217.

WITC-Rice Lake: "Vegas" Golf Scramble

Taking place on Friday, June 6, the WITC-Rice Lake "Vegas" Golf Scramble will include a day of "Vegas-style" golf, along with lunch, evening reception and prizes. This scramble is for high rollers and low rollers alike. Join us and enjoy golf on the beautiful 18-hole course at Tagalong Golf Resort, while you help support scholarships for WITC students pursuing their educational goals. Cost is \$340 per foursome or \$440 for a hole sponsorship and a foursome. For more information or to register, contact Lori Bowman, at 715.234.7082, ext. 5335.

WITC-Superior: Alumni/Foundation Golf Tournament

This five-person scramble will take place Friday, August 1, at the Nemadji Golf Course in Superior. The event raises money for scholarships and other organizations supported by the Alumni Association. The scramble begins at 11:30 a.m. Registration fee is \$35 per person or \$175 per team, not including greens fee and cart rental. For registration or more information, contact Mary Ann Pebler at 800.243.9482 ext. 5264.

Career Impact is published for the community, alumni and friends of Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College.

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WITC is part of the Wisconsin Technical College System, with four campus locations (Ashland, New Richmond, Rice Lake and Superior), two outreach centers (Hayward and Ladysmith), a learning center in Spooner, and an administrative office in Shell Lake.

Visit our Web site at witic.edu.

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MISSION STATEMENT
Learning is our passion. As Northwest Wisconsin's leader in technical education, WITC creates dynamic opportunities for career preparation and personal effectiveness. We are committed to making each and every experience with us meaningful and professional.

4th BEST
TWO-YEAR COLLEGE
2013
WITC is ranked the fourth best two-year college in the nation by Washington Monthly magazine.



Inside



4 A Cut Above

WITC grads turn dream of owning a salon into a reality

6 Power to the Future

Students in the agricultural power and equipment technician program have constructed solid career paths

10 Making the Connection

With a marketing degree and a love for technology, Donny Kringen has a rising career

12 Going Places

Stephanie Romanoff can't sit still – she's got too much to do

14 Student Ambassadors

Meet the 2014 Student Ambassadors

18 Alumni Spotlight

A Fresh Start for Christy

Do you have news or information about an alumni, program or event at WITC? Contact witic.news@witic.edu

12



WITC grads turn dream of owning a salon into a reality

Story and photo by Jena Vogtman

A Cut Above

Sometimes people you met years ago pop back into your life later in a big way, and in this case, become your close friend and successful business partner.

Amanda Nelson and Amber McGregor met at Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College-Superior in the cosmetology program, graduating together in 2000. It wasn't until they both were working at a Duluth, Minn., salon several years later that they really got to know each other. Over quiet workplace discussions, they recognized they both had a common vision for owning their own salon.

"I guess I didn't think it was that big of a deal," Nelson explained. "It was risky. We were more scared to tell our boss."

"At that point, we had to work a lot of Saturdays and really wanted the freedom and flexibility," says McGregor. "We had the clientele to move on. We started looking for a location, and I think we didn't realize how much work it would be."

It took a village to raise their business from a mere idea to the modern, chic salon that they and their clients are now proud to visit. Friends recommended locations, and they eventually landed in Hermantown, Minn., just off U.S. Highway 53.

"We don't accept walk-ins, so we didn't need to be front and center," Nelson explained. "We take appointments by referrals."

From there it became a family affair. McGregor's husband painted, her mom wallpapered and her dad worked on sinks. Nelson's sister helped with the decorating and her brother installed new floors and remodeled the bathroom. Even with all the help, one particular person was missing for

Nelson – her father, who died shortly before the women embarked on their new endeavor.

"It was hard not having him here for advice, because he owned a small business," Nelson says.

When opening day came around, the new business owners could hardly have picked a worse day to start, but they got lucky.

"The night before we opened, the snow came in a winter that wasn't snowy," Nelson says. "We weren't plowed out, we had no internet or phone, our sign was not up yet and we still had every client show-up on time. Our clients were so supportive. It's always scary not knowing if they are going to come."

Parlour 53 has now been open for two years. The women have had more than 650 clients, adding up to 4,311 appointments. That's not to say the business hasn't come without some growing pains. While the duo say the first couple of months were hectic trying to balance the workload with new business responsibilities, their similar foundation of a WITC education, made it easier to work together.

"We both learned the same way, and I feel like WITC really stressed professionalism," McGregor says. "We knew what to expect from each other."

"Our instructor always told us to stay healthy and exercise," says Nelson. "We did so much as a team in the classroom, learning to be a team player. We had so many hours we had to be there, getting up and going to school. We could not miss and had to be on time and always looking professional."

Between the two of them, they cover all the roles of owning the business – they are the receptionist, hair dresser, cleaner and the managers. One of their future goals is to hire someone to help take calls and keep everything organized, plus perhaps bring in another stylist to rent chair space in the building.

"We are artists. We have to be focused," Nelson says. "When all the messages and cleaning and stuff is in the back of your mind, you don't have as much time to focus. I don't want to be much



Business owners, Amber McGregor and Amanda Nelson

bigger than this, and this size is perfect to have a family and kids one day. It's not my goal to have a full-service salon."

Having worked at salons in Superior and Duluth, Nelson and McGregor both say they quickly realized how their education at WITC stood out after graduation and made it easier for them to progress in their careers.

"We just got to do a lot more hands-on work. It was a very professional atmosphere, and there was a good variety of people to work on," says McGregor. "Other stylists were sloppier and their skills not as honed as WITC graduates. Plus, it's a lot easier to get licensed in other states once you have the Wisconsin license."

Besides learning the usual cutting, perming, styling, manicures, facials and coloring, McGregor says she also took away soft skills

too, like how to handle clients, customer service and salon politics.

They have some advice for those who would like to also follow their lead and venture out on their own.

"Be ready and have your own clientele built-up," Nelson advised, saying that aspect takes a lot of hard work and time. "Usually people just getting started feel entitled and don't want to work weekends or nights. Up until I worked here, I worked every Saturday. Also, don't turn down clients, be consistent, and don't change your schedule. Keep educated, go to classes, be a good team player and help out your fellow stylists."

"Meet with someone about the business aspect," McGregor added, saying that was the toughest part. "Don't let the business run you. You run the business," says Nelson.

POWER

TO THE FUTURE

By Elizabeth Whitchurch
Photos by Tom Lindfors





STUDENTS
IN THE
AGRICULTURAL
POWER AND
EQUIPMENT
TECHNICIAN
PROGRAM HAVE
CONSTRUCTED
SOLID CAREER
PATHS

Alicia Lutscher, a second-year WITC student says, “I grew up watching others fix trucks and cars and started fixing them myself from about the age of 14. I remember helping my dad and others work on car engines, and I help around the farm where my mom lives.”

Lutscher is a 2012 Ellsworth, Wis., High School graduate who wasn’t sure what she wanted to do with her life beyond high school. A WITC career specialist introduced Lutscher to the agricultural power and equipment technician program and she was immediately interested.

As the only female in her class, Lutscher often fills a variety of rolls. “Sometimes I’m the organizer, sometimes the ‘mom,’” she explains. But one thing is clear – Lutscher knows her way around an engine, be it auto, tractor or otherwise.

At first glance, a visit to the Ag power engine lab garners a look at the students with heads bent over engines, the smell of diesel fuel and the amicable cajoling shouted over the grumbling sounds of a tractor engine. But when you look closer, you realize the structured chaos at work. Lutscher blends in well, though she’s the only female in the second-year class. But there you will find her focused on pulling the electrical system out of a Bobcat. She doesn’t miss a beat as she shouts out answers to mechanical questions and lets others know where a classmate or instructor is without losing concentration on her own engine work.

But these students are more than just business, as Lutscher says. She recently helped organize the Ag Power Club’s trip to Waterloo, Iowa, to visit a John Deere production plant, and to Racine, Wis., to tour the Case-New Holland (CNH) facility.

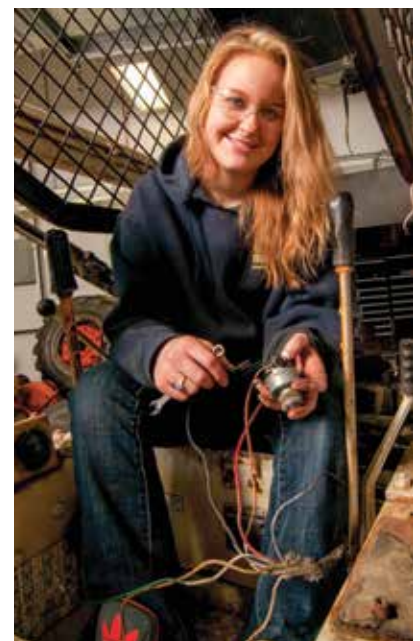
“At CNH, we saw everything in production – parts, cabs, engines. It was great,” she says. The group also stopped in Kenosha, Wis., to tour the SNAP-ON innovation center.

“It was all good,” Lutscher says, “but the SNAP-ON history museum was probably the best part. They showed the entire development of their tools from idea to completion.”

“I definitely recommend this program (agricultural power and equipment technician) to others interested in big engines. But I also think people should shadow the program to get a feel for it,” Lutscher says. “You work hard and learn a lot.”

Lutscher graduates from the two-year program this spring after she completes her internship with Value Implement in Ellsworth. “I’ve applied for an opening at Minnesota Ag Group in Hastings, and I got an interview!” But she’s not sure if she’s done at WITC. “I’m looking at WITC’s accounting program, too.”

“If I’m offered the job,” she says, “I definitely feel good and I’m ready to get started.”



CITY LIFE'S NOT ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE

When this 19-year-old rural Amery, Wis., native chose an avenue to pursue after high school, he looked at Chicago Avenue as the place for him. So, he packed his bags and set off to the Windy City to attend Universal Technical Institute. But, as the saying goes, all that glitters is not gold, and after only one semester, Cole Andersen found himself disenchanted by the sights and sounds – and education – proffered by the big city.

Back in Amery, Andersen wanted to pursue a different avenue, one that better suited his style and pace in learning. Still interested in learning how to repair the big engines, he considered the technical colleges in his area. His final decision: the unique-to-Wisconsin agricultural power and equipment technician program at WITC-New Richmond.

Andersen points out that because of the type of instruction and curriculum of the WITC program, a new student doesn't necessarily need much background in farming or power equipment. "The units last long enough to give you time to learn it right," he explains. "[Other schools] rush students through."

It's clear Andersen has life in order at this point. His tenacity and determination are obvious in that he already has a hands-on electronic equipment internship working



"I like the program here," Andersen says. "I relate to [instructors] Lee and Scott – they understand how I want to get involved and learn. They're also willing to talk with me about school and life."

at Frontier Ag and Turf in Osceola, Wis., a year before it's required as part of the program. And his confidence is apparent as he works around the power equipment lab on campus.

His short-term goals are to maintain a good grade point average and graduate from WITC in the spring of 2015. Eventually he plans to pursue a John Deere master technician designation. "I

set my goals and achieve them," he says. "If necessary, I reset them."

Goals. Determination. Confidence. Three strong qualities a future employer will find attractive in the future. But at this point, Andersen's content to be back in Wisconsin, learning in a program and internship he finds rewarding ... and destined to be another successful WITC grad.

Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician

The agricultural power and equipment technician program consists of practical knowledge and shop management skills to help students master installation, service, assembly, adjustment, repair and operation of various types of machinery and tractors. Students will also learn how to work with hydraulics, transmissions, electrical systems and air conditioning.

For more information about the agriculture power and equipment technician program, **visit witc.edu/programs**.



i am WITC
Marketing-Online

Newly Designed Program

“Because of the online programs offered at WITC, I have been able to continue my work and volunteering with little impact to my schedule.”

– Joshua McGraw, WITC Marketing Student

If you have creative ideas, an interest in working with people, and a desire to develop product or service promotions, then this program is for you. WITC’s Marketing-Online program will prepare you for a career in marketing management, selling, buying, merchandising, financing, customer relations, and entrepreneurship.

The majority of courses will follow an eight-week structure. It is designed for busy schedules and people who can commit to completing their degree in a two-year, six-semester model.



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For more information, visit witc.edu/programs.



MAKING THE CONNECTION

**DONNY KRINGEN HAS A RISING CAREER
THANKS TO A MARKETING DEGREE AND
A LOVE FOR TECHNOLOGY**

**STORY AND PHOTO BY
DEBORAH ANDERSON**

When Donny Kringen was a young boy, he loved to take things apart – but not always getting them put back together. As he got older, he was interested in technology and building his own computers, as well as doing freelance web and graphic design.

Kringen got his first summer job when he was 14-years old because he wanted a cell phone. Later, summer jobs included working at an amusement park and then in a factory, where he enjoyed the hands-on maintenance of the machinery.

With technology and machinery being high on his list of interests, a person might think a logical career choice for him may have been in those areas.

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"THE MARKETING COURSES WERE DIRECTLY RELEVANT TO MY JOB NOW. THERE WERE SOME THINGS I DIDN'T COMPLETELY ABSORB AT THE TIME, BUT LATER PROVED INVALUABLE IN MY CAREER."

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But, Kringen says, actually, he loves the technology as an end user.

"What I like most is using the products, not so much the technology of building it," he says. "I built my own computers because I knew what I wanted them to do."

In high school, Kringen was envious of two relatives who had good paying jobs, were doing very well for themselves and driving nice cars.

"I wanted that," he says.

His relatives had both graduated from WITC-Rice Lake with two-year marketing degrees. Kringen learned from them that marketing is a broad degree that could lead to a career in a variety of industries, with touches of creative design, human resources, psychology, selling and more.

It was then that he set his sights on a marketing degree and, with that goal in mind, decided he needed to start applying himself during his last two years in high school and improve his grades.

After graduating from Turtle Lake High School in June 2006, he was admitted to WITC-Rice Lake that fall.

Marketing instructor Renelle Gill says that even though Kringen was right out of high school, "He was smart as a whip, interested in everything and had a real drive to succeed."

He also got a part-time sales job at the local Dobson Communications CellularOne store. The job fit his personality.

"Talking to people and selling doesn't seem like work," he says.

Soon after, Dobson Communications was acquired by AT&T, and Kringen got to experience firsthand the merger and transition of the two wireless companies.

In his last semester at WITC, Kringen used his job at AT&T as an internship, an elective course that boosted his load to 20 credits. Working full time as well, he felt himself falling behind in his courses.

"Renelle Gill took the time to sit down with me, and we worked out a plan to get everything done and graduate on time," he says.

Kringen says he will never forget all the instructors and staff at WITC who, like

Gill, "really connect with students."

After graduating in 2008, Kringen was rapidly promoted at AT&T, moving to a variety of stores in southern Minnesota as assistant manager, then manager, and on up the ranks.

"The marketing courses [at WITC] were directly relevant to my job now," he says. "There were some things I didn't completely absorb at the time, but later proved invaluable in my career."

Kringen is now Northern Plains Market Lead of the Regional Market Execution Team, his territory encompassing Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and the Dakotas.

"Not having a four-year degree has not been an issue in my rise in the company," Kringen says. "If asked, I just say I wanted to develop the required skill set in a shorter amount of time."

As project manager, Kringen spends about half his time traveling to stores throughout the five-state region, building relationships with operations managers and vendor partners, giving presentations and talking with store employees. He also performs random spot checks on the new AT&T Digital Life home security installations, making sure all facets are operational, personalized for the customer and user-friendly.

Kringen also got married right after graduating from WITC and lives in Wyoming, Minn., with his wife, two- and four-year old boys, and a baby girl born last summer.

He has big goals for the future. Since AT&T offers tuition reimbursement, Kringen is now "chipping away" at a bachelor's degree online from UW-Stout and, he is happy to say, "100 percent of my WITC credits transferred." Then he plans to earn a master's degree and continue his rise to the top of the company.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark brown beanie, a bright pink scarf, and a dark quilted jacket, is smiling warmly at the camera. She is standing in front of a large, intricate wireframe dome structure, possibly a geodesic dome, which is the background of the page. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

GOING places

By Jim Biros, Photo by Jed Carlson

Stephanie Romanoff can't sit still.

It's not really her fault – she's got too much to do.

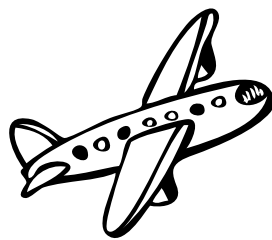
As a child, she hopped across the United States and South America – attending three high schools between Maryland and Ecuador. With a father who works in international agricultural development, relocating was expected for Romanoff and her two siblings. As if growing up isn't a difficult enough process, she had to adjust to not only new teachers and classmates, but to a new country and culture.

All of that moving around instilled in Romanoff a desire to connect with the place and people that she called home – even if it would only be for a short while.

“Being that I've moved around to different parts of the U.S., I still always feel that appreciation of where I am and try to embrace that,” she says.

The wanderlust did not stop in Ecuador. After getting an undergraduate degree in economics, Romanoff worked for human service nonprofits in Philadelphia and Chicago before she landed in Northwestern Wisconsin and instantly felt a connection with the place.

“When I got to Ashland and Washburn, I thought ‘I guess I'll just be there for the summer’ and the place was like Velcro – in a good way – and I just knew I was home,” she says. “I fell in love with it – I just knew that was my home.”



“WITC was supportive along the way,” she says. “They knew about my commitment to volunteering and working with youth. When the youth wanted to explore things like taking CNA classes, WITC was right there, whether it was taking tests to see if they could get in, to helping them secure funding for school, they were really proactive about it. They understood, respected and encouraged that type of involvement.”

counseling courses and is currently in a master’s program for social work in the Duluth area that she calls home – for now.

She is employed as the marketing director for the Integrative Holistic Board, which provides doctors education and board certification in integrative holistic medicine, working to connect doctors and other medical professionals to the organization. At WITC, she became interested in how to help heal effects of trauma on developing brains, which is something she is still passionate about. In her current position, she is learning about a more holistic approach to health and wellness that will affect her own future practice in therapy settings.

“Social relationships are absolutely critical for our physical well-being, she says. “[That’s] why it’s so important to connect with others and be a part of a community. The more I learn about this, the stronger my commitment is to our community and maintaining our community. That’s what’s so special about Ashland and about Washburn and about the WITC campuses – they do have that community and it affects us professionally, emotionally and ultimately it affects us physically.”

While there, Romanoff looked into continuing her education and weighed her options to stay in the Chequamegon Bay area or seeking out a new destination.

“My sister lives in Chicago and I had looked at classes there,” she says “[For] the cost of a course there, you can take a semester at WITC-Ashland and the reputation is solid. You know you’re going to get hired. If you’re interested in health care, WITC’s nursing program is just rock solid.”

The switch from economics to nursing, along with a changing career path, was something she felt confident and excited about pursuing.

“My undergraduate provided a strong skill set, but I wanted to pick up some technical skills as I transitioned my career to be more focused on direct service,” Romanoff says. “WITC, especially the nursing program in Ashland, had really strong reputation. My understanding was that WITC would be a challenging program that carried a lot of weight with employers.”

Romanoff speaks highly of the program.

“It exceeded my expectations,” she says. “At this point, I’ve taken a lot of classes in various settings. I can’t say enough good things about my courses and teachers at WITC. My anatomy and physiology

classes with Jodi Karr were amazing. Yes, they were wicked hard, but I’ve learned so much that affects me personally and professionally. Professionally, doors got opened. Personally, the knowledge from those courses changed my understanding of my own health and wellness.”

As a WITC student, Romanoff was a mentor at the middle school after-school program and became involved with the Ashland Mentoring Program. Connected with the county court system, youth in the program must complete an alcohol and drug prevention course before being assigned with a mentor.

“I found that one of the most rewarding experiences of my life and I learned a lot – about our community and the students,” she says. “It’s a cliché that you get more back than you put into it, but it’s absolutely true. I got to work with an extraordinary student who now has a full life, is in college and is rocking out and it’s incredible to see her make that all happen.”

While there, Romanoff coordinated the middle school after-school summer camp.

“I loved my job so much,” she says. “I got to work with incredible kids from the Ashland community and we lived it up.

Working with parental involvement, Romanoff, along with Len Moore, Bridget Moore and Rose Spieler-Sandberg, helped organize summer camp activities.

Romanoff had the added benefit of being able to work with the youth when questions about education and their future arose. The mentoring experience had a career-changing effect on Romanoff, affirming her interest in working with youth and taking her to a new city and new schools to continue her education. Not that she’s uncomfortable with change. She has since completed

2014 WITC Student Ambassadors

More than 20 years ago, the Wisconsin Technical College System started the Student Ambassador program, a unique initiative that recognizes outstanding student achievement.

WITC's 2014 ambassadors, James Miller, WITC-Ashland; Blake Berger, WITC-New Richmond; Riley Christensen, WITC-Rice Lake; and Ayla Salter, WITC-Superior; have distinguished themselves through community involvement, leadership qualities and a commitment to higher education.

"The Foundation is proud to support the Ambassador program for WITC," says Craig Fowler, vice president, continuing education/executive director, foundation and campus administrator. "The program not only recognizes some of the college's top students, such as these four individuals, but also gives them the opportunity to develop their leadership skills by representing WITC in our communities."

WITC-Ashland James Miller

Story by Jim Biros • Photo by Dee Barabe

Trying before you buy – it's a good thing. But if you think it's a practice just for choosing cars, clothing or frozen pizza, think again.

James Miller admits to not knowing much about WITC-Ashland prior to becoming a student. Sitting in on a program quickly changed that for him.

"When I was looking for a course to take, I was very enticed by technology," says Miller. "I sat in on a course that Paul Gordon taught. He sold me on the college and the course."

Miller has already completed the information technology – network specialist program and will soon graduate with a second degree in business management. Studying a second program has given Miller a different perspective on learning processes.

"Business management is a bit different than IT," he says. "I have more online courses, along with ITV instruction.

These have taught me valuable skills about self-motivation and responsibility."

"This school has provided me with four years of schooling and employment, relationships and amazing life experiences."

Miller was nominated for the Student Ambassador role by economics and social sciences instructor Damian Von Frank.

"James is an ideal student ambassador for WITC because he embodies everything we stand for as an integral component of the Wisconsin Technical College System," says Von Frank. "Throughout his time at WITC, he has been



WITC-New Richmond Blake Berger

Story and photo by Elizabeth Whitchurch

a dedicated and driven student continually achieving academic success. Along with his school work and campus involvement, James is also an extremely hard worker who's never afraid to get his hands dirty. He continually juggles multiple job opportunities with his studies."

The combination of degrees will give Miller a solid background as he looks toward beginning his professional career.

"I wanted a complimentary degree to allow me to do more than just be an IT technician, and have a broader range of abilities," Miller says. "I want to eventually be a manager in an IT or technological field, preferably with WITC at some point. I couldn't ask for a better atmosphere to be a part of, and hopefully can continue in the future having a career with WITC, to show my gratitude as for all the school has provided me with."

That forward thinking will now assist Miller in his new Student Ambassador role.

"I look more at this as what I can give back, rather than what I can take from this experience," says Miller. "This school has provided me with four years of schooling and employment, relationships and amazing life experiences, which I'm just glad I will be able to give a little back to the school."

Introducing Blake Berger, a first-year automated packaging systems technician student at WITC-New Richmond. Interestingly, Berger brings to WITC nearly five years of education from UW-Oshkosh, where he spent his university years playing baseball. "It just didn't work out," he says, referring to his realization that baseball wasn't going to provide the career he expected. So at the tender age of 25, he began to seek another career.



A native of Star Prairie, Wis., Berger graduated high school from New Richmond. He explains that last year when he visited a favorite high school English teacher, he was told he needed to do more with his life. With that prompting, Berger took a more serious look at WITC, his hometown college. There he discovered the automated packaging systems technician program, its excellent job possibilities and earning potential and the likelihood of viable employment after two years.

"As a WITC Ambassador, I look forward to telling others about a technical college education. I hope I can affect others' lives."

"I'm driven to accomplish exactly what I want. I'm focused and it feels good," Berger says. "I realize now my learning style is hands-on, so I plan to work hard to finish the program and get a job in the packaging field. WITC has changed my life. The staff is friendly, and the instructors and program are great."

Berger explains how he's worked since high school with kids through baseball camps and coaching. He loves to meet people and is a good listener – two important skills WITC seeks in its Student Ambassadors.

WITC-Rice Lake Riley Christensen

Story by Deborah Anderson • Photo by Tanner Cernick

Riley Christensen has an eagerness about him that sometimes makes it hard to keep up as he speaks rapidly but clearly. It's obvious that his speech barely keeps up with his thoughts. "I enjoy working the 'muscle' of my mind," Christensen says. "I never stop thinking, breaking things apart mentally – I examine, analyze, come up with ways to fix it. I love physics – how and why things happen in the world."

At Spooner High School, one of his favorite projects was participating in the Rube Goldberg competition. It is an annual contest in which students build a device that will complete a simple task in a minimum of 20 steps – the more the better – in two minutes. A group of fellow physics students designed an apparatus to perform that year's challenge of changing a light bulb. The experience proved invaluable.

Christensen also concentrates on helping his paraplegic father. His father still enjoys hunting, so to get him into the woods to hunt, Riley ordered a crossbow and installed it on a base station.

"I didn't invent it, but would like to come up with other devices for him some day," he says.

Right out of high school, he enrolled in the mechanical design program at WITC-Rice Lake, but soon realized it wasn't exactly what he had in mind. After a break and some research, he decided the telecommunications technologies program – now re-named broadband technologies to reflect the changing industry – was more suited to him and his goals.

"I chose telecommunications because it is broad and well-rounded and will give me the opportunity to get a job and advance," he says. "The hands-on training is very versatile and doesn't limit me to a single job."

In his first year of the two-year program, Christensen has impressed instructor Mark Loehlein. "Riley is very intelligent and is taking certifications in advanced subjects beyond the class material."

After he graduates, Christensen's goal is to continue his education, looking especially at electrical engineering. "I want to develop new technologies and inventions," he says.



"I chose telecommunications because it is broad and well-rounded and will give me the opportunity to get a job and advance."

In nominating Christensen to be Student Ambassador for the Rice Lake campus, Loehlein says, "Riley spends much of his free-time studying, or he's helping his classmates."

Even though Christensen is only in the first year of his program, he has already demonstrated a dedication to his education and the WITC-Rice Lake community.

WITC-Superior Ayla Salter

Story and photo by Jena Vogtman

Nursing student Ayla Salter found that WITC is not what she expected.

On most days, you can probably find her buried in medical books and researching terminology. Salter says she's never spent so much time studying. She says she likes it that way, because the reward of that 'A' is so much sweeter.



“I chose WITC because I couldn’t see a clear benefit to getting a bachelor’s degree immediately. It made more sense for me to go to WITC and be able to afford it.”

“I didn’t expect the program to be so rigorous,” Salter says. “I’ve worked harder in the nursing program than I ever did for my bachelor’s degree.”

If you asked her five years ago if she would be going back to college for a two-year degree, she may not have believed you.

After high school, Salter attended a four-year private college in Minnesota, earning her psychology degree. She later added a couple certificates geared toward her service in non-profits,

including Habitat for Humanity and United Way through AmeriCorps, and also worked in an adult foster care group home. While these experiences harmonized well with her passion for helping people and having a positive impact on the community, she contemplated whether that same passion could be harnessed in another career.

“I have some medical people in my family. I was looking at different options and thought nursing was a better idea. You can better support a family,” states Salter.

She says going to WITC made sense for her dollars and cents when she compared the education and practical experiences offered to other regional nursing programs.

“I chose WITC because I couldn’t see a clear benefit to getting a bachelor’s degree immediately. It made more sense for me to go to WITC and be able to afford it,” Salter says. “After I graduate I’d like to find a job as I’m working to pursue the bachelor’s in nursing. In the longer term, I’d like to get to the master’s or even the doctorate.”

Another unexpected aspect of WITC for Salter was the variety of students and activities. As a 27-year-old, she was surprised by the range of ages in the WITC student body, which made it refreshing to come back to college with others like her. She’s also taken advantage of leadership and volunteer opportunities, which she says gives WITC students a sense of community.

“The options have also surprised me,” she says. “I envisioned technical college as going to class and going home, but there are lot of activities available.”

Besides becoming the WITC-Superior Student Ambassador, Salter has become a peer tutor for the nursing program, is the acting secretary for the Nursing Club and has traveled abroad with Guy Healy-Japan Summer Camp, where she worked as camp counselor helping Japanese children practice English.

“I look forward to meeting new people and being able to talk about things that interests them,” Salter says. “I thought becoming an ambassador looked interesting to advocate for technical education in general, because sometimes it doesn’t have the strongest publicity and is undervalued in society. I thought, ‘oh, I can speak to that.’”

A FRESH START

Story and photo by Elizabeth Whitchurch

“Three years ago, on a life scale of one to 10 with one being as low as a person can possibly get and 10 being incredibly happy, I was a one. But now I’m a 10!” says Christy Sperling, gleefully. But as her words indicate, Sperling’s life wasn’t always as sweet as it is today.

A recovering drug and alcohol addict, Sperling knows what many others feel. She’s been to the dark side – and back. Her teenage world was wracked with drugs, alcohol, arrest warrants, jail and near-death experiences. She dropped out of high school and at 16 was living in cars and getting into trouble stealing. She had no place to call home; was separated from her family. A “stereotypical junkie,” she says of herself.

After she was picked up for sleeping in an apartment building hallway on warrants for violating her probation, she spent months in jail, which forced her into sobriety. “I was sick and tired of being sick and tired,” Sperling says. “I needed help.”



“You cannot know what you cannot feel.”

Marya Mannes

Then I had a spiritual experience and things changed for me.

“In 2011 I made a resolution to get my GED and go to college. I started rebuilding my relationship with my family, too,” she says with a smile. “I got into self-help and starting feeling better than ever before. I realized I wanted to

help others get sober and give them hope. I want them to feel as good as I do now.”

While in jail, Sperling saw a WITC catalog and discovered the human services associate program. She enrolled in the inaugural class at New Richmond in the fall of 2011 and proudly crossed the stage in May 2013 to collect a well-earned diploma.

“I got a super high quality education, and I’m prepared in my job because I’ve already learned so much. Now I feel that I’m ahead of the game,” Sperling says.

For Sperling to turn her life around, she credits WITC’s human services associate program and instructor, Joel Gibson. His life experience and high level of caring for his students helped her succeed.

“I really benefited from the program. I only have good things to say about

WITC and Joel – he’s the coolest teacher I’ve ever had. So knowledgeable and amazing,” she says. “Joel’s really good at helping others without over helping. He’s real life.”

When it came time for her internship, Sperling remembered how she wanted to help others feel as good about life as she does, so she asked to do her internship at Kinnic Falls Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services, a halfway house in River Falls, Wis.

“The internship is such an important part,” she points out. “Many places normally don’t include an internship in a two-year program. My education from WITC is more than I expected.”

It didn’t take long for her to discover she was in the right place, and her internship with Kinnic Falls turned into a full-time counseling position. Now she sits in a sunny office, gainfully employed and working on her bachelor’s degree, her WITC associate degree diploma and state certification in counseling proudly displayed on her desk. Daily, she inspires others in recovery: she’s faced the demons they face and won. “It’s part of my recovery to help others,” she says. “And that helps me.”

“I have passion for the work I do. It’s the first job I’ve had that I look forward to coming to work,” she says. “Look at HSA if you like helping people, maybe not necessarily for the pay, but it’s the most rewarding thing. I recommend the HSA program to anyone.”



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91% of WITC graduates
are **EMPLOYED**

- 73% are employed in a job related to their education
- 97% are satisfied or very satisfied with the training they received at WITC and 98% would recommend WITC to a friend or family member

Graduates from WITC earned an average yearly salary of \$35,072, with the majority working in Wisconsin and nearly three-fourths employed in WITC's 11-county district.

**Based on the 2012-2013 WITC Graduate Follow-Up Survey*



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