



FOUNDATION AND ALUMNI 2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT



Western Nebraska
Community College



DEAR FRIENDS,

This past year has been such an amazing one at Western Nebraska Community College. From the record-setting Monument Marathon, enhanced engagement with our amazing alumni, and opening the new Health Sciences Renovation and Expansion, WNCC and the Foundation were on the leading edge.

As we move into our Centennial year, it is a great opportunity to honor our past, develop the present, and plan for a bright future. The support of donors, business partners, alumni, and friends has been so key to 100 years of success. Please join us as we celebrate this year all the things that make WNCC such an important part of Nebraska's Panhandle.

Thank you for all the support this past year and we can't wait to have you help us ring in the next 100 years!

Greg Dart
WNCC College President

In 2025-26, 1,636 gifts totaling \$1,332,805

were given to the WNCC Foundation via grants, sponsorships, endowments, scholarships, one-time gifts, and unrestricted gifts. These gifts increase access to education, create opportunities for students, and positively impact the communities we serve.

\$81,390

record amount raised by the Monument Marathon, the WNCC Foundation's major annual fundraiser

\$313,418

awarded to students in WNCC Foundation donor funded scholarships

370

total donor funded scholarships were awarded to **268** students

\$18,225

given by WNCC employees through payroll

\$13,450

performing arts sponsorships

\$56,685

athletic sponsorships and booster club support

\$292,312

recipient specified scholarships from outside organizations

\$22,627

in memorial donations

\$112,056

program-specific grant support

\$99,628

given to help with the most urgent needs, such as student emergency fund, food pantry, urgent scholarships, and more!



DEAR WNCC SUPPORTERS,

It is an honor to address you as the new president of the WNCC Foundation. I want to express my sincere gratitude for the confidence the Foundation Board of Directors has placed in me. I am eager to collaborate with such a dedicated group of leaders to advance our mission, which is to inspire investment in student success.

I also want to extend a heartfelt thank you to Judy Chaloupka. Judy, your tireless hard work and steady leadership as outgoing President have left a lasting mark on this Foundation. You have set a high bar for excellence, and we are all better for your service.

The true impact of your generosity is seen in the lives of our students. Over the past year, the Foundation awarded scholarships to deserving students who have demonstrated exceptional potential in their academic pursuits. These opportunities not only support educational achievement, but also empower students to pursue their goals and create brighter futures for themselves and their communities.

As we look ahead, I am excited to continue building upon the strong foundation that has been established and to further advance opportunities for student success. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to our mission.

I look forward to building upon our strong momentum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jodi Ruzicka".

Jodi Ruzicka, WNCC Foundation Board of Directors



ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT: MICHELLE SANCHEZ

Michelle Sanchez (Class of 2024) is building strong foundations—both in the classroom and for her own future. Michelle, an Early Head Start teacher with ESU 13, is dedicated to early childhood education and creating meaningful learning experiences for young children. Originally from Alliance, she now lives in the Scottsbluff/Gering area and is a proud mother and grandmother.

Michelle earned her Associate Degree in Early Childhood from Western Nebraska Community College in 2024. She was the first in her family to attend and graduate from college. While balancing work and family, she completed her degree online, immediately applying what she learned in her classroom. Her WNCC experience strengthened her confidence and helped her reach her goal of leading her own classroom. She is continuing her journey at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, working toward her bachelor's degree and teaching certification.

GROWING THE EDUCATORS WHO GROW OUR COMMUNITIES

A Conversation with Faculty Robin Hayhurst and Patsy Yager

Western Nebraska Community College plays a critical role in preparing educators who serve—and often remain in—our rural communities. Faculty members Robin Hayhurst (Education) and Patsy Yager (Early Childhood Education) share how their programs respond to local needs and why continued investment matters.

Q: How would you describe the mission of WNCC's education and early childhood programs?

Patsy Yager: At the heart of our mission is quality. We want highly-prepared, passionate teachers in classrooms with children. Teaching, especially early childhood education, is a profession that requires skill, knowledge, and heart. Our job is to help students understand how important their role is and prepare them to do it well.

Robin Hayhurst: Education is foundational to everything else. Strong schools mean strong communities. I believe deeply in preparing future teachers not just academically, but practically—through real classroom experiences—so they can decide early if this vocation is right for them.

Q: Teacher shortages continue across rural Nebraska. How is WNCC addressing this challenge?

Yager: In early childhood education, the shortage is especially urgent. Many of our students are already working in classrooms as paraprofessionals or assistants. Through flexible online and hybrid courses, TEACH scholarships, and strong employer partnerships, they can continue working while earning credentials to move up.

Hayhurst: The need is real. Every semester, there are open teaching positions across the state. We can remove barriers such as cost, geography, and access so students can start their journey. Completing the first two years at WNCC gives future educators a more affordable pathway.

Q: How do your programs meet the needs of rural students specifically?

Yager: Accessibility is everything in rural areas. Many of our students cannot relocate or stop working. We offer online coursework, blended classes, dual credit opportunities, and certificates alongside degree pathways. We also prioritize connection—frequent check-ins, Zoom meetings, and hands-on observations—so online students never feel invisible.

Hayhurst: Relationships matter. We work closely with local administrators, bring them into classrooms as guest speakers, and place students in area schools for observations. Students see firsthand what teaching looks like here and many return to serve these same communities.

Q: Why is continued community and donor investment so important right now?

Yager: Support makes education possible for students who might otherwise not pursue it. Scholarships, partnerships, and advocacy ensure we can keep growing local educators for local classrooms.

Hayhurst: When donors invest in teacher preparation at WNCC, they invest in the long-term strength of our communities. The return is seen in classrooms, families, and the future workforce of western Nebraska. By investing in accessible, high-quality teacher preparation, Western Nebraska Community College is strengthening classrooms, schools, and futures across the Panhandle. Every scholarship awarded, partnership formed, and student supported helps ensure that local children learn from dedicated educators who understand and are committed to the communities they call home. When we grow educators at WNCC, we grow the communities they serve.

"WNCC GAVE ME MORE THAN AN EDUCATION—IT GAVE ME A SENSE OF BELONGING AND A FOUNDATION THAT CONTINUES TO SHAPE HOW I SUPPORT AND CONNECT WITH MY STUDENTS EVERY DAY."

Morgan Mickey Smith, Class of 2021



"Education is a profession. Being a teacher—especially of young children—takes passion, preparation, and a deep understanding of how children learn."

Patsy Yager



"If we don't have strong schools, our communities will suffer. Education is tied directly to the future of this region and our students are part of that future."

Robin Hayhurst



ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT: MORGAN MICKEY SMITH

A second-grade teacher in rural western Nebraska, Morgan Mickey Smith, Class of 2021, is dedicated to helping students grow both academically and socially. She focuses on building strong relationships with her students, families, and the community while creating a classroom environment where every child feels supported and valued.

After graduating from WNCC, she transferred to Chadron State College to earn her bachelor's degree in education and is currently pursuing a master's degree in educational administration at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Her time at WNCC was shaped by supportive faculty, flexible learning opportunities, and a strong sense of community. This experience that continues to influence her work in the classroom today.

HEALTH SCIENCES RENOVATION: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY AND EXCELLENCE

A State-of-the-Art Learning Environment for Tomorrow's Healthcare Professionals

In January 2026, students were welcomed into a significant renovation of the Health Sciences spaces in the John N. Harms Center, encompassing 34,421 square feet across two levels. This renovation centralized WNCC's Health Sciences programs and included new simulation spaces, classrooms, labs, and offices. The project was largely funded by the LB1014 Sec. 36 ARPA Grant and underscores WNCC's commitment to advancing health science education.

Donors to the WNCC Foundation contributed \$130,000 for equipment and future programming for the Health Sciences renovation.

For a tour of this state-of-the-art facility, contact us at the WNCC Foundation!

"THE NEW SPACE IS AMAZING FOR OUR CURRENT STUDENTS AND POTENTIAL STUDENTS [BECAUSE] IT SHOWCASES THE DIFFERENT PROGRAMS. ANYONE VISITING CAN LOOK THROUGH THE GLASS WALLS AND SEE WHAT THE STUDENTS ARE DOING. WE NOW HAVE STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY, AND IT GIVES STUDENTS THE EXPERIENCE THEY WOULD GET IN THE REAL WORLD."

*Nicole Danielzuk, Health Information
Technology Program Director*





OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY

Scholarships are more than financial support, they are catalysts for student success at Western Nebraska Community College. By reducing financial barriers, scholarships allow students to focus on learning, persist through challenges, and complete their degrees or credentials with confidence. Each award represents an investment in potential, empowering students to pursue their goals, strengthening our workforce, and building a brighter future for themselves, their families, and our communities. The following scholarships were established in the 2025-2026 academic year. To learn more about Foundation scholarships, visit wnccfoundation.org.

GUS G. AND FLORINE E. PAPPAS FUND

Established through a generous gift in Florine Pappas' will, this scholarship honors the lives and legacy of Gus and Florine Pappas. It provides financial assistance to students who demonstrate proven financial need.

VAN BOSKIRK FAMILY ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Established by the Van Boskirk family in memory of Dr. Thom Van Boskirk. This scholarship supports in WNCC's Health Science programs. Thom's support of higher education and WNCC is honored through this legacy scholarship.

LUKAS SIMIANER VETERANS SCHOLARSHIP

The Lukas Simianer Veterans Scholarship honors WNCC alum and Purple Heart recipient Lukas Simianer, a U.S. Army veteran and founder of VetClaims.AI and Clusiv. A decorated 82nd Airborne Paratrooper and recognized entrepreneur by the Texas Business Hall of Fame, Simianer is dedicated to expanding opportunity for veterans and underserved communities.

NE SOCIETY OF CPAS ACCOUNTING SCHOLARSHIP

Created by the Nebraska Society of CPAs, this scholarship is for students majoring in Business Accounting with the intention of transferring to a Nebraska four-year college to complete their Accounting degree. Preference is also given to students who plan to stay and work in Nebraska.

OREGON TRAIL CHAPTER PHEASANTS FOREVER SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship, established by the local chapter, supports a student pursuing studies in Forestry & Wildlife Management, Conservation, Natural Resources, Conservation Law Enforcement, or Environmental Sciences with the intent to work in conservation.

DR. & MRS. JOHN D. CORUM FIRSTGEN PATHWAYS ENDOWMENT

Established by former WNCC Powerline Instructor and Associate Dean, Dr. John Corum and his wife Donna, this scholarship aims to assist first generation college students majoring in an Applied Technology program. Recipients must be pursuing an Associates of Applied Science. Preference will be given to Powerline students who plan to complete their AAS degree.



HONORING A LIFE OF RESILIENCE, SERVICE, AND EDUCATION

Established by his children through the Benny Hochman Trust, the Benny Hochman Scholarship honors a remarkable life defined by perseverance, generosity, and unwavering commitment to community. This general scholarship supports students pursuing a degree in one of WNCC's Health Sciences programs on the Sidney or Scottsbluff campuses, helping prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Benny Hochman was a Holocaust survivor whose early life was marked by unimaginable loss and hardship. As a teenager living in Lodz, Poland, he endured imprisonment at Auschwitz, where his parents and siblings were murdered by the Nazis. Determined to survive, Benny went on to rebuild his life in the United States, eventually settling in Sidney, Nebraska, where he became a respected businessman, community member, and devoted supporter of WNCC.

Benny later shared his extraordinary journey in his autobiography, *From Hell to Here*, preserving his story of survival, resilience, and rebuilding for future generations.

Through this scholarship, his children honor both their father's memory and his belief in the power of education to transform lives—ensuring that WNCC students have the opportunity to pursue meaningful careers rooted in service to others.

Information from: <https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/series-media/nebraska-stories-video/season-13/video-15886/benny-hochman-holocaust-survivor-50018350/>

99 YEARS AND COUNTING: WNCC ALUMNI THEN, NOW, AND NEXT

Since 1926, Western Nebraska Community College has been known as Scottsbluff College, Scottsbluff Junior College, Nebraska Western College, and now WNCC. Each name, location, and most importantly each person throughout the years, has helped to make WNCC what it is today.

As we prepare to celebrate the college's centennial, we pause to honor the generations of former students who have shaped its legacy. Careers launched, communities strengthened, and lives transformed across the Panhandle and beyond - these alumni from across the decades reflect the grit, growth, and opportunity that define WNCC's history and set the stage for the future.



<https://wncc.edu/centennial>



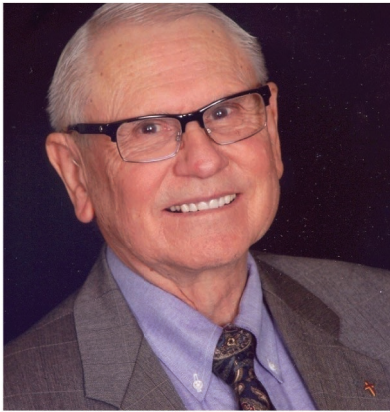
1948

After graduating from Gering High School, Gerhard Schmunk began his studies at SJC before serving in World War II and going on to a lifelong career in medicine. His experience at the college played an important role in his success, a legacy honored today through a scholarship established in his name to support future medical professionals.

1957

LaDonna Whittaker Schwieger said her time at SJC was where she truly "grew up," discovering her path in education while getting involved across campus. Her time at the college "opened her world" and led to a 30-year career as a school librarian.





Philip Anderson credits Scottsbluff College with providing a strong, affordable academic foundation that launched his path into chemistry and chemical engineering. The quality instruction prepared him for advanced study and a 36-year career at the Idaho National Laboratory, where he retired as a Fellow Scientist.

1962

NWC



Scottsbluff Junior College becomes Nebraska Western College.

1969

1974

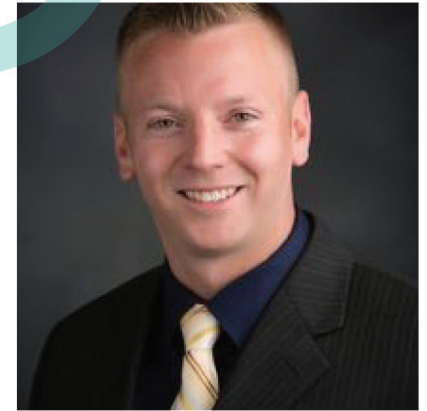
Ethel Treantos Edwards attributes her time at NWC as a meaningful bridge from a small-town upbringing to a successful career in education. The supportive environment and strong academic foundation helped launch a lifelong path in teaching, leadership, and service, shaping her work across schools and state education systems.





1988

Sean McGee came to NWC in 1986 from Louisiana to play basketball and found a life-changing experience beyond the court. He credits the support of teammates, coaches, and faculty for building the confidence to earn his degree and pursue a career in education. He was recently named Teacher of the Year in his district.



2004

1988

Nebraska Western College becomes Western Nebraska Community College.



Western Nebraska
Community College

1998



Tammy Jones DuBray came to WNCC following a job loss and found both opportunity and support as she completed her certificate while juggling work and family. Today, she gives back as a Student Support Specialist on the Alliance Campus, inspired by her own experience and passion for helping students reach graduation.

Scott Stocki, a 2004 graduate of WNCC's Aviation program, turned his education into a thriving career, advancing to a senior management role as VP of Engine Services at Duncan Aviation. He appreciates WNCC's affordability and hands-on training for preparing him to succeed in the dynamic world of aviation maintenance.



Sarah Flores, returned to WNCC as a non-traditional student and graduated from the WNCC LPN program. The strong in-person instruction and encouragement from classmates and faculty prepared her for her current nursing position.

2025

2013



From Gambia, West Africa, Siaka Sanneh began his nursing journey at WNCC, and advanced from CNA to Emergency Medicine Nurse Practitioner at Mayo Clinic Health System. He credits WNCC's supportive environment and strong foundation for launching a path that led to advanced degrees, specialized training, and a thriving career in healthcare.

Tell us your memories and milestones from across the decades - submit your story to alumni@wncc.edu and be part of the next chapter.



Congratulations
**TO THE 2025 WNCC
ALUMNI AWARD WINNERS**



**Outstanding Young Alumnus Award
Andrew Hunzeker, Class of 2008**



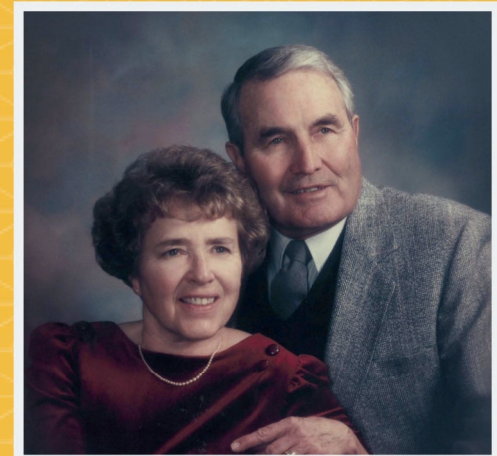
**Outstanding Alumnus Award
Jodi Ruzicka, Class of 1995**



**Tom & Cara Perkins Friend of the College Award
Karen Anderson**



**Lifetime Achievement Award
Merlyn "Mert" Davis, Attended 1950-1951**



**Family Pride Award
Pilkington Family**

2025-26 WNCC FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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