

FALL 2026

Impact



WAUKESHA COUNTY TECHNICAL COLLEGE

*it is silk in its natural
form. As silk is luxurious,
so is the selection.
Greige Pâtisserie*

 **Greige**
pâtisserie
— Milwaukee, WI —

Careers on Their Terms

Five Alums on Being
Their Own Boss

How May (A Student) Help You?

Discover Services Available
to the Community



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Impact is published twice a year for the communities of Waukesha County Technical College.

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Waukesha County Technical College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (hlcommission.org), a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and it is a member college of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS).

All information in this edition of Impact is current as of publication printing. The most current information is located on our website at wctc.edu.

Text "wctcalerts" to 78015 to sign up for WCTC emergency alerts.

WCTC prohibits discrimination or harassment based on any status protected by applicable state or federal law.



To view the digital edition and accompanying video content, scan the code.



In higher education,

sometimes we get so focused on what students should be learning, that we lose perspective on the amazing things that our students will do upon graduation. I am reminded of this almost every day throughout Wisconsin when I meet WCTC alumni. In addition to driving our economy in the traditional ways, our graduates are also phenomenally successful as business owners and entrepreneurs.

One of the reasons for the success of our alumni in business and entrepreneurship is because many of them, while WCTC students, are heavily involved in operating one of our internal business functions, like our restaurant or salon. These internal businesses are responsible for generating their own revenue and covering their expenses. This is not an accident, as we know there is no substitute for the “real world.” At WCTC, we believe the world of work that our graduates will experience must exist within the walls of the College every day.

This is not fiction; it is an intentional approach to delivering the best workforce for southeast Wisconsin and our commitment to community and economic prosperity.

Thank you for your support of WCTC.

Rich Barnhouse, Ph.D.

A Message from the WCTC

PRESIDENT

Enjoy this fall edition of the Impact.

WCTC Impact is designed to showcase stories of how our graduates, students, instructors, and community and business partners strive to make a difference in the world around them, and how WCTC has propelled them to succeed. This publication highlights the latest happenings, changes and improvements at the College, and it shines a light on student and alumni achievement.



WAUKESHA
COUNTY TECHNICAL
COLLEGE

Hands-on
Higher Ed

800 Main Street, Pewaukee, Wisconsin 53072

WCTC BREAKS GROUND

ON MAJOR APPLIED AI LAB EXPANSION

— Second-Floor Addition on Track to Open in 2027 —

Earlier this summer, Waukesha County Technical College celebrated a significant milestone with a ceremonial groundbreaking for a 12,200-square-foot second-story addition to the WCTC Applied AI Lab. The event brought together 80-plus supporters, including College officials, business and community partners and local legislators to mark the beginning of the lab's expansion.

This addition builds on the early success of the lab, which originally opened in fall 2024, to help businesses and startups implement practical artificial intelligence solutions.

The second floor will be dedicated to academics and house the College's existing and growing AI, tech and data-related programs. It will integrate student learning with industry activities and feature state-of-the-art tech classrooms, collaborative workspaces, an entrepreneurial presentation space ("pitch pit") and more. The project also adds 720 square feet to the main floor for new stairwells and an elevator.

Construction Progress and Project Timeline

Construction kicked off in June and it remains on schedule, said Rich Haen, WCTC's executive director of district facilities.

Early work in summer focused on site preparation, foundation excavation and building the support structure for the new stairwells and elevator. More

recently, crews completed foundation work, backfilling and interior concrete pours, and workers have begun structural modifications such as removing portions of the roof to prepare for incoming structural steel and masonry components.

In the coming months, the focus will shift to the raising of the building structure, construction of the stairs and elevator shafts, installation of steel decking and the development of second-floor walls and the building enclosure. Leading up to May 2027, when the project is due for substantial completion, work will concentrate on interior systems, finishes, technology, infrastructure and final commissioning.

"It's exciting to see the Applied AI Lab project taking shape after several years of planning. This summer marked a major milestone as we moved from design into active construction and completed much of the foundational work needed to support the addition," Haen said.

"Corporate Contractors (general contractor), Zimmerman Architectural Studio (architect) and the entire project team have done an outstanding job coordinating the work





while keeping the project on schedule and minimizing disruption to campus operations.”

Financial Support from Businesses, Community

The addition of the WCTC Applied AI Lab has become a reality thanks to tremendous financial support from corporate and community donors.

In summer 2024, the WCTC Foundation launched a \$6 million fundraising campaign, kicked off by an initial \$1 million gift from the Harry V. Quadracci family’s Windhover Foundation. Over time, momentum was built upon by WCTC and individual donors, as well as regional business partners including InPro, Eaton, Waukesha State Bank, the Petcoff Foundation, Trace-A-Matic and the We Energies Foundation – all of which sponsored an area within the Applied AI Lab.

In fall 2025, the WCTC Foundation reached its fundraising goal with a generous \$2 million gift from the PPC Foundation, which is the

“THE PROGRESS WE’RE SEEING TODAY BRINGS US ONE STEP CLOSER TO PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH A STATE-OF-THE-ART LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOCUSED ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES.”

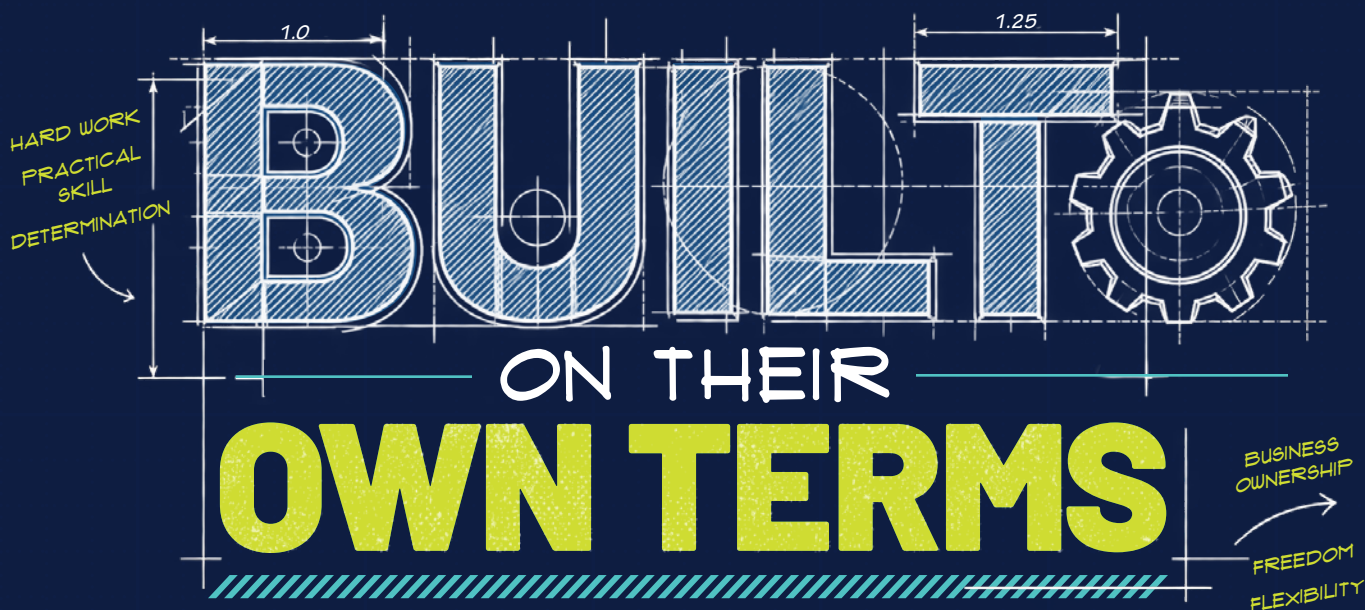
philanthropic vehicle for the PieperPower family of companies. This includes naming rights for Building Q, which houses the lab. The PPC Foundation donation closed out the campaign allowing the College to move forward with the addition.

That vital philanthropic backing is already yielding visible results, Haen said, in the form of brick, mortar and steel.

“The progress we’re seeing today brings us one step closer to providing students with a state-of-the-art learning environment focused on artificial intelligence and emerging technologies,” he said. ■



College Q Building Addition



LEARN HOW FIVE WCTC ALUMS FORGED THEIR PATHS TO BUSINESS OWNERSHIP

The standard path to career stability often involves climbing someone else's ladder. For five Waukesha County Technical College alums, true fulfillment came from building a foundation of their own.

One is crafting artisanal pastries. Another is beautifying homes through custom remodels. Others are curating treasured vintage items, designing digital campaigns and solving complex tech challenges.

These ambitious grads – Jessica Reinhardtsen (Greige Patisserie), David Sayas (Sayas Carpentry LLC), Patricia Orlebeke (The She Shed Vintage and More), Alex Albrecht (Badger Digital Marketing Solutions) and James Ballard (Cryptek Cybersecurity Solutions) – made business ownership a reality through hard work, determination and practical skill. All share a unifying thread of gaining hands-on experience from their time at WCTC and skills they can apply to their respective businesses.

WHILE THEIR DAILY OPERATIONS LOOK VERY DIFFERENT, THEY SHARE A COMMON MOTIVATION: THE FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY OF BEING THEIR OWN BOSS.

These business owners are just a handful of WCTC grads who have decided to run their own show. On the following pages, read more about their experiences and what it takes to make their businesses thrive.



Badger Digital Marketing Solutions is a full-service digital marketing agency, which operates on the philosophy of “Foundation First, Marketing Second.” The firm specializes in automated lead capture and conversion through its ProspectMax solution, to ensure businesses never miss a lead. Services range from digital strategy to complete lead management, helping inquiries become customers.

MEETING MARKET DEMAND: HOW A WCTC ALUM ADAPTED AND BUILT A DIGITAL AGENCY

When **ALEX ALBRECHT '14** first walked onto the Waukesha County Technical College campus, he was interested in becoming a teacher's aide. He enrolled in the program now known as Foundations of Teacher Education, but he soon discovered teaching wasn't his passion.

"Just to test the waters," Albrecht signed up for a marketing class, and it led to a career pivot. "That single class made all the difference, and I happily switched my major to Marketing," he said.

HONING HIS SKILLS AT WCTC

As a student at WCTC, Albrecht got involved on campus where he could use his communication and marketing skills, including serving as a campus ambassador and as vice president of civic consciousness for Collegiate DECA, where he led fundraising efforts for charity.

**"NETWORKING AND COMMUNICATION
WERE WOVEN INTO EVERY SINGLE
CLASS, AND THOSE TWO SKILLS
CONTINUE TO PAY DIVIDENDS IN MY
CAREER TODAY."**

"It provided an invaluable environment to cut my teeth, learn from mistakes and grow as a leader," Albrecht said, noting the DECA role required extensive planning, organizing and collaboration skills.

The critical life skills he learned through his classes and campus involvement quickly paid off. "Networking and communication were woven into every single class, and those two skills continue to pay dividends in my career today," he said.

Albrecht also developed an entrepreneurial mindset early on when a marketing class assignment required him to create a business concept from scratch: a sports memorabilia company. "It was the first time I realized I had the potential to turn those skills into my own company one day," he said.

THE PATH TO BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR

He earned his associate degree in Marketing in 2014, along with a certificate in Entrepreneurship, followed by a bachelor's degree in Marketing from Concordia University Wisconsin — all of which helped lay the groundwork for
(Continued on pg. 6)

ALEX ALBRECHT '14

(From pg. 5)

what would become his own agency: Badger Digital Marketing Solutions.

After graduating, Albrecht's career path took a few turns before starting his agency five years ago.

He spent several years working for a trucking company in sales, brokerage and after-hours support roles. Additionally, Albrecht stayed involved in his family's publication business, *TV Weekly the Redbook*, a Milwaukee community shopping and TV guide, which kept his marketing focus sharp.

During COVID-19, the family business, which relied heavily on foot traffic, was forced to adapt and transition to a more online approach to keep moving forward. This put the wheels in motion for Albrecht's business, as he analyzed the changes in consumer behavior and researched online business models. He then returned to WCTC to take small business classes and create a comprehensive business plan, opening his agency shortly thereafter.

"A combination of factors ultimately inspired me to take the leap," he said. "The dramatic shifts brought on by COVID-19 and emerging market trends highlighted a clear need for digital solutions, while the strong support of my friends and family gave me the final push and confidence to build a business of my own."

Albrecht said there is definitely a learning curve when it comes to running a business, but overall, he said it's been a rewarding experience.

"Some of the biggest hurdles have been mastering the operational side ... and adapting to the fact that business truly does run around the clock. But the rewards make every challenge worth it," he said. "There is no better feeling than landing a new client, delivering exceptional work and seeing their excitement when our strategies produce real, positive results for their business." ■



YOUNG CRAFTSMAN FINDS TOOLS FOR SUCCESS AT WCTC

DAVID SAYAS '24 discovered the foundational tools he needed at WCTC to lead him on a journey to becoming a skilled craftsman.

As a high school senior, Sayas got a jump start on his career by taking carpentry classes through a dual enrollment initiative at WCTC, finishing all but a few courses due to other commitments at the high school. He later returned to the College, completed the remaining classes and earned his Building Trades-Carpentry technical diploma in 2024.

"I wanted to learn about carpentry so I could do repairs and renovations on my own house in the future," he said. "I ended up really enjoying it and getting a job right after high school. I also came back to WCTC to finish three classes I missed due to sports obligations."

HANDS-ON TRAINING AND REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

While completing his studies at WCTC, which included Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10 certification training, he gained proficiency using hand and power tools in both workshop and job site settings. He also developed essential techniques of the trade, such as wall layout, framing, roofing and general interior and exterior work.

As part of his hands-on experience, Sayas and his classmates helped build homes for a Habitat for Humanity subdivision, Domenica Park, in Waukesha. Students worked on various phases of construction, including framing and siding. In the workshop, they practiced cabinet installation, door and window installation, trim and basic drywall.

BUILDING HIS OWN FUTURE

Sayas, who is in his 20s, knew early on he would eventually run his own business; it was his dream. But, he said, "I did not think that could become a reality so soon!"

He launched Sayas Carpentry LLC in June 2025, after spending a few years working at an integrated design-build firm and also helping to rebuild a historic log cabin in Fredonia, Wis. Additionally, he was inspired by a friend who started his own framing company.



Sayas Carpentry LLC specializes in finish carpentry and custom remodels. Owner and carpenter David Sayas started the business in 2025, with a focus on high-quality work and creating transformative kitchen and bathroom remodels in Waukesha County and surrounding areas.

"MY SCHOOLING AND HANDS-ON TRAINING THROUGH WCTC, AND MY WORK AT MKE DESIGN BUILD, GAVE ME THE SKILLS TO START MY OWN BUSINESS."

"My schooling and hands-on training through WCTC, and my work at MKE Design Build, gave me the skills to start my own business," Sayas said. "I think that gave me the confidence to go forward with my own company."

LOOKING AHEAD

Still early in his career, Sayas acknowledges WCTC for giving him a strong start. He is excited to see what's ahead and how he will be able to grow his company in the coming years.

"I really wanted to start my own business so that I could have more freedom, be a leader, make bigger decisions and make a greater impact on the people I am doing work for. In the next three to five years, I would like to be managing my business while still working in the field," he said. "(WCTC) has been the first step in getting me to where I am today." ■

DAVID SAYAS '24

SWEET BY DESIGN:

HOW TWO DEGREES LED A WCTC ALUMNA TO RUN A THRIVING BAKERY



Growing up in the subdivision right behind the Waukesha County Technical College Pewaukee campus, alumna **JESSICA REINHARDTSEN '10, '16** drove past WCTC every day. She wasn't interested in attending a four-year university, so shorter program options, the College's solid reputation and its proximity to home made it a perfect choice.

She earned her first associate degree in Interior Design in 2010 and spent the next few years working in retail management and personal banking roles. She soon realized an office job wasn't for her, and she craved something more creative.

"I thought, 'I cannot sit at a desk for the rest of my life; this is not me,'" she said, so she returned to WCTC and earned her second associate degree in 2016, this time, in Baking and Pastry Management.

BUILDING HER OWN SPACE

Reinhardtson worked as a cake decorator at a hometown bakery, followed by a stint as a pastry chef at a downtown hotel, but she knew she was destined to become an entrepreneur — it was in her blood.

"I grew up in an entrepreneurial family. My grandpa started his own business as a young man, and my dad started working there in his teen years and shortly became an owner of the business," she said.

Her father also ventured into other businesses, and many of her parents' friends were entrepreneurs. Plus, her sister owns a hair salon. "So that was really all I knew," she said. While studying interior design, Reinhardtson considered opening her own residential design firm after interning at a small, woman-owned kitchen and bath remodeling company.

In 2018, Reinhardtson made business ownership a reality. She opened Greige Patisserie, a French-inspired bakery, in the heart of Milwaukee's Walker's Point neighborhood. The bake shop's name, which reflects a perfect blend of gray and beige, and in French, an elegant raw silk, is a nod to her interior design beginnings.

Although she initially planned to gain a few years of industry experience before striking out on her own, negative kitchen culture prompted her to launch Greige sooner than expected.

"I wanted to have my own kitchen that created a positive work environment, supporting and motivating my employees, rather than the toxic environment that a lot of kitchens maintain," she said.

LEARNING BY DOING

Reinhardt's path to refining her pastry skills involved a lot of trial and error, but the fundamentals she learned in her WCTC classes were crucial to her success.

"This is a field that you can keep experimenting and keep learning, but the basics of baking, ingredients and their function don't change. They were great building blocks to start a career," she said. "With both degrees, I found hands-on learning was incredibly important."

From creating visual design boards to spending time in the baking labs, Reinhardt's said learning by doing reinforced the skills taught by faculty. "Specifically, for pastry [classes] we were able to experience the array of avenues we could pursue, such as production, chocolatier, cake decorating, breads, etc. That was what really showed me what I enjoyed – and didn't – which helped direct my career path," she said.

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF BAKERS

Reinhardt's ties to WCTC didn't end when she graduated. She stayed in touch with her instructors and sought their advice about becoming a business owner. Today, she gives back to her alma mater by speaking to classes, welcoming students to Greige for field

Greige Patisserie offers French-inspired treats ranging from scones and macarons to custom wedding cakes, along with a variety of espresso, coffee and tea drinks. The bakery also offers bottles of wine available to go. A signature item is the "Sweet 'N Salty" cookie, which features a combination of pretzels, potato chips and chocolate chips topped with sea salt, caramel and a chocolate-covered potato chip.



trips and hiring interns. One former intern is now on staff full time.

While Reinhardt's said there are some unique challenges to running a food business in the current economy, there are also many rewards. Chief among them includes operating the bakery on her terms, planning the menu, flexibility in scheduling to allow for more family time and being her own boss.

"The pride and sense of accomplishment I feel with building a business from the ground up is amazing. I love seeing people enjoy my food or their facial expressions when they see a cake I've created for them. I love being able to call it my own." ■



JESSICA REINHARDTSEN '10, '16

Cryptek Cybersecurity Solutions is a strategic cybersecurity partner to businesses of all sizes, delivering proactive, end-to-end solutions that eliminate vulnerabilities, ensure compliance and strengthen a company's defenses before threats emerge. Cryptek tailors every solution to an organization's specific risks and industry requirements.



PROTECTING BUSINESS NETWORKS WITH MILITARY AND TECH PRECISION

Before WCTC graduate **JAMES BALLARD '19** helped protect businesses' digital networks, he learned tactical defense as a paratrooper during his nine years in the U.S. Army. His experiences, along with a mission-oriented mindset, have carried over into his civilian work in the cybersecurity space.

In the military, securing the objective is paramount, Ballard said. Comparatively, in the digital sphere, while the targets and the medium may be different, protecting what matters most is critical.

"Security is something you are kind of built with from the military, and the infantry in particular, so it was just a matter of taking what I know conceptually and applying the cyberthreat-scape to it," he said.

FROM THE ARMY TO THE CLASSROOM

Seeking a new career path after leaving the Army in the 2010s, Ballard found a natural fit in WCTC's hands-on Cybersecurity Specialist program. Instead of relying on rigid metrics, the curriculum focused on resilience and adaptability – an approach he embraced.

"Security is one of those fields that is constantly changing and there's often more than one way

to accomplish a goal," he said, noting the importance of balancing foundational principles with navigating a fast-moving threat.

Combined with WCTC's workforce-focused training, that knowledge and mindset has given him a competitive edge.

THE PATH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

After graduating and gaining experience across both managed service providers and corporate sectors, Ballard recognized a security gap between small-to-midsize businesses and larger organizations. Inspired to bridge it and provide solutions, he launched Cryptek Cybersecurity Solutions nearly three years ago to serve clients in financial, medical, educational, legal and other sectors.

There are "unique hills to climb," as a business owner, Ballard said, especially when starting a brand that didn't exist. While the focus is on a particular passion and skill, there are also many other aspects to learn such as marketing, sales and operations.

The late nights, long hours and other sacrifices inherent to entrepreneurship can be daunting, but Ballard said the results are worth it.

"There's a certain peace of mind when you know you built something unique, and you are supplying something to the world in your own way," he said. "It's incredible. I wouldn't have it any other way." ■

FROM CORPORATE CAREER TO VINTAGE SHOP OWNER

Over the course of a 26-year corporate career at a company that published stationery, calendars and specialty items, **TRICIA ORLEBEKE '16** built deep expertise in distribution management, third-party logistics and order fulfillment. But when the company was bought and sold multiple times – and new leadership required that she hold a college degree to continue in her role – she decided to invest in herself. She turned to WCTC and enrolled in the Business Management program.

“I wanted to take classes that would benefit me, as I knew one day I would own my own business,” she said, noting WCTC’s flexibility and affordability also factored into her decision.

Balancing full-time work with part-time college and raising three children was an exercise in discipline, Orlebeke said, but she had full support from her husband, Jerrad, who owns Pro Auto in Hartford, Wis. She worked during the day, took online and in-person classes at night and arrived home just in time to kiss her daughters goodnight.

Orlebeke graduated in 2016 with the skills she needed for her corporate career – and her next move.

NEW LIFE TO PRE-LOVED GOODS

After years of selling antiques at markets and pop-up events, and watching the success of her

parents’ shop, Sharron’s Antiques, Orlebeke was inspired and motivated to start a store of her own. In 2020, she opened The She Shed Vintage and More, in Hartford, Wis., and five years later, when her corporate employer was sold again, she left to run it full time and assist at Pro Auto.

Orlebeke’s business has a strong emphasis on sustainability, with the mission of reusing and repurposing old items, preserving usable goods and reducing waste.

“Our goal is to keep as much as we can out of the landfills by giving it a new life,” she said.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

Originally attending WCTC at her employer’s request, she now applies her skills daily to her and her husband’s small businesses. She credits her speech course with boosting her confidence, Excel and Word with streamlining bookkeeping, and interacting with diverse students for improving communication with customers and vendors.

Running The She Shed has offered Orlebeke many benefits, including the freedom to do what she loves, but also “being able to spend more time with my family, the satisfaction that I did that and reaching my daily, weekly, monthly and yearly goals,” she said. “The greatest reward is – all of it!” ■



The She Shed Vintage and More, located in Hartford, Wis., is a charming home decor store and multi-vendor marketplace. It features a variety of antiques, vintage goods, snacks and handcrafted items, along with “a little bit of new.” The shop hosts unique events like flea markets and open houses, and it is part of the “Vintage Shop Hop,” a self-guided tour of independent antique shops and vintage markets throughout Wisconsin and Illinois.

Real Experience Equals Real Value

Discover Services Run by Students that are Open to the Public

The College-owned business model

goes back more than five decades at WCTC. It gives students an opportunity to gain experience at working businesses under the supervision of experienced instructors.

For the public, it gives them lower-cost options for services and the chance to feel like they are helping to train the next generation of skilled workers in their community.

Reliable, Affordable Childcare

The Child Development Center (CDC) at WCTC has been providing “a safe space for families to bring children” for about 54 years, according to Lauren Holtz, manager of the CDC.

With 17 staff members, including student employees and full-time teachers, aided by 18 students in the Early Childhood Education program, the CDC is licensed to care for up to 62 children, ages 6 weeks to 8 years old.

The staff-to-child ratios are excellent, the care is top notch and the scheduling is flexible.

“I just received a message from a parent telling us WCTC has become like their family more than they could ever have expected,” Holtz said.

The CDC is not only nationally accredited, it also requires staff to complete 25 hours of continuing education every year – 10 more than the state.

Learn more about the CDC at wctc.edu/child-care. ■

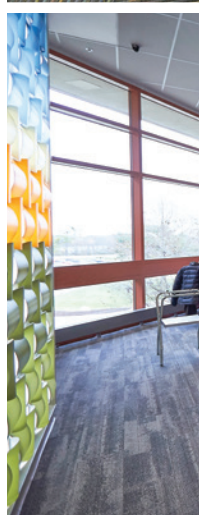
A Taste of the Refined

For more than 50 years, WCTC students have served cuisine from around the world to customers on campus.

On most Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays throughout the fall and spring semesters, the Classic Room serves a three-course lunch menu from noon to 2 p.m. while the Classic Bistro offers a more casual alternative.

“It’s a natural environment for us to emulate what the students will do out in the real world,” said Chef Andy Tenaglia, WCTC instructor and owner of Lagniappe Brasserie in New Berlin, Wis. “There are some things you just can’t replicate during class.”

It’s great experience for the students, but it’s also a great meal at a reasonable price





for patrons, which is why Classic Room reservations can be hard to come by.

"We sell out almost every quarter within like an hour and a half for Classic Room reservations," Tenaglia said. "We want to expand to be able to seat more people."

The cuisine changes weekly, so be sure to check the menu each week at wctc.edu/classic-room. ■

Spreading Smiles

WCTC's Waukesha facility hosts the fully equipped 30-seat WCTC Dental Hygiene Clinic.

At the clinic, students provide high-quality, affordable services to patients of all ages, all under the watchful eye of licensed professionals.

Appointments cost just \$30, which includes an exam, cleaning and any x-rays needed. Services also include:

- Blood pressure screenings
- Oral cancer screenings
- Full-mouth periodontal assessments and therapy
- Fluoride treatments
- Sealants

The clinic space was also utilized by the nonprofit Community Smiles

Dental organization this summer, so the program could continue serving its clientele while their

permanent space was undergoing renovations.

Learn more about the clinic at wctc.edu/dhclinic ■

Keeping it Classy

WCTC's Style & Class Salon and Spa has proved so popular that the program has doubled in size since it opened in 2015, according to Amy Poshepny, director of the salon and spa.

As word spreads, it's not just friends and family of students who make up the clientele.

"We've made a big enough footprint in the community that we're getting new people just calling and finding out about us," Poshepny said.

Haircuts cost only \$15 and include shampoo and styling, making it a great option for people on a budget. That value extends to the full range of services offered.

Hair services include coloring, braids, highlights and more. The nail services are always up to date on the latest trends. And the spa services include multiple facial options, laser hair removal, body treatments, chemical peels, microneedling and intense pulsed light (IPL) treatments.

Visit wctc.edu/salon for a list of services and salon and spa hours. ■

A photograph of John Molina, a WCTC student, standing on a bridge railing. He is wearing a white short-sleeved button-down shirt with a colorful floral pattern and light-colored trousers. He has a beard and is smiling. The background shows a body of water and green trees.

WCTC student

John Molina's

path to Waukesha County Technical College has been anything but traditional. His late teens and 20s were a time, he describes, fraught with personal hardships, poor choices and stretches with "a lot of valleys."

HANDS-

Rather than attending college or the military after high school in 2007, he took on unfulfilling low-wage jobs to pay the bills and later developed a substance abuse problem. After a few years, he enrolled in a psychology program at a local technical college to better understand himself and his addiction and mental health issues — but he didn't finish his studies.

"Life got the best of me, and I dropped out," he said.

Over the next several years, Molina navigated life's highs and lows — connecting with a sales job that afforded him a nice car, a house and vacations — but because of his addiction, he lost it all. His marriage ended, he experienced periods of homelessness and he acquired a criminal record. He began to rebuild, working as a cook in high-end restaurants and going back to school, this time for culinary studies, but dropped out again due to bad decisions.

"(Addiction) will destroy you from within because it consumes you," he said.

As he started to move forward, Molina got into a major car accident that nearly cost him his life. That, paired with serious legal issues, led to a reckoning:

"I THOUGHT, 'THIS IS THE ONE THING I WANT TO BE PART OF,' AND I COULDN'T MAKE IT HOME FAST ENOUGH TO FILL IN THAT APPLICATION AND SIGN UP."

he became sober, found faith and moved in with family, determined to leave the past where it belonged. It also made him reflect on sacrifices his mother made for him. She came to the United States from Mexico while she was pregnant with Molina, in hopes of a better life and more opportunity for her son.

"The storms I survived weren't meant to sink me. They were meant to teach me that where I

JOHN MOLINA FINDS CAREER DIRECTION AND PURPOSE AT WCTC

fall, he was awarded a generous scholarship from the Marleh Lehmann Scholarship Fund, administered through the WCTC Foundation. It's an honor, he says, that goes well beyond financial assistance.

"It represents somebody believing that I am worth investing in and that I have something to contribute," he said. "When you've worked hard to change the direction of your

ON *Transformation*

was, was never my destination, only the ground from which I'd rise toward where I truly belong," he said.

A Brighter Future

Since then, Molina has looked at his life through a new lens.

He learned about WCTC from a social media ad, visited the campus for a tour and left impressed with what he saw — and inspired at what he could become.

"I thought, 'this is the one thing I want to be part of,' and I couldn't make it home fast enough to fill in that application and sign up," he said.

Initially, Molina began in the Mechanical Engineering Technology program but realized he preferred fixing things and working with his hands. He changed direction and enrolled in the Metal Fabrication/

Welding technical diploma as well as the Metal Fabrication/Welding-Advanced and Quality Management associate degree programs.

Since starting at WCTC in 2025, he has immersed himself in academics and student life. He has held leadership roles in the Student Leadership Council (SLC) and First Gen Club, was inducted into the Tri-Alpha Honor Society for first-generation students, participated in the mentorship program and was named to the dean's list for the spring 2026 semester.

"Getting involved at WCTC has been a huge part of my experience," he said.

Hard Work, Recognized

Molina's commitment to bettering himself and making the most of his education hasn't gone unnoticed. Last

life, having people recognize that effort is incredibly meaningful."

While Molina's second year of school is well underway, he also stepped into a full-time role as a maintenance mechanic at InPro. It's an opportunity that's allowing him to use his technical background and skills while continuing to learn and grow.

Molina said he has worked hard to overcome darker times, and he is grateful to WCTC for being a large part of his second chance.

"My goal now is not just to build a better life for myself, but to build relationships, serve others and hopefully show somebody else that it's never too late to change the direction of your life." ■

EXPLORE OUR PROGRAMS



Advanced Manufacturing

- Electrical Engineering Technology
- Mechanical Engineering Technology
- Manufacturing Integration Engineering Technology
- Metal Fabrication/Welding
- Robotics and Automation Engineering Technology



Arts, Entertainment & Design

- Graphic Design
- Interior Design



Construction

- Architectural Drafting/Construction Technology
- Carpentry
- Construction Management Technology
- HVAC/R Technician
- Electricity



Education

- Early Childhood Education
- Foundations of Teacher Education



Financial Services

- Accounting
- Property Management Associate



Healthcare & Human Services

- Cosmetology
- Human Services
- Dental Assistant
- Dental Hygienist
- Health Information Technology
- Master Aesthetician
- Nursing
- Phlebotomy Technician
- Substance Use Disorder Counseling
- Surgical Technology



Hospitality, Events & Tourism

- Baking and Pastry Management
- Culinary Management
- Hospitality Management



Information Technology

- AI Data Specialist
- Computer Support Specialist
- Cybersecurity Specialist
- Data and Analytics Specialist
- Network Specialist



Liberal Arts & General Studies

- Associate of Arts - University Transfer
- Associate of Science - University Transfer



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Management & Entrepreneurship

- Business Management
- Human Resources
- Leadership Development
- Quality Management



Marketing & Sales

- Marketing
- Real Estate



Public Service & Safety

- Criminal Justice
- Fire Protection Technician
- Paramedic Technician



Supply Chain & Transportation

- Automotive Technology
- Diesel Equipment Technology
- Supply Chain Management

WCTC Foundation Marks 50 Years of Community Impact

As the WCTC Foundation approaches its golden anniversary, it celebrates nearly five decades of connecting donors, businesses and students.

Since its beginnings, the Foundation has been a bridge between community generosity and student success at Waukesha County Technical College. Donor support has provided student scholarships, funded emergency needs, outfitted modern labs with the latest equipment and helped advance programs that train students for the local workforce.

"As WCTC continues to grow and innovate, the Foundation is here to help turn opportunities into possibilities. We can say 'yes' because our community continues to stand with us," said Robyn Ludtke, president of the WCTC Foundation.

Join the WCTC Foundation in celebrating the next 50 years by supporting its mission and helping shape what comes next for students, the College and the community.



Scan to learn more and donate.



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