

FALL 2024

Impact

WAUKESHA COUNTY TECHNICAL COLLEGE



WCTC

COLLEGE
CENTER

The

PULSE

of **HIGHER EDUCATION**



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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.

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

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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.

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A Message from the WCTC **PRESIDENT**

As I'm writing this message, I'm looking out my office window during a fall day. I'm looking at completely full parking lots, a college bustling with activity, and a huge mix of students, community members and local business owners. At WCTC, we aim to be the premier regional hub for all of the communities we serve, and we live it every day.

Our College continues to grow in enrollment, degree programs and in prominence across our state and beyond its borders. WCTC is leading in artificial intelligence, robotics, automation integration and cybersecurity, not just in Wisconsin but across the country. In addition, our liberal arts degrees have seen significant growth, as well as our dual enrollment programs for high school students. We now have high school students graduating with an associate degree from WCTC in the same month they complete high school (not a bad utilization of your tax dollars...).

Recently, I was visiting a medical facility, and I asked the nurse where she went to college (I did not tell her who I was). She replied, "WCTC. I love that place, it changed my life."

Thank you for your support of WCTC and the students we serve.

Rich Barnhouse, Ph.D.



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WCTC ON THE

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OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Adapting to Change & Anticipating Programming **KEEPS COLLEGE AHEAD OF THE CURVE**

Throughout 2023, Waukesha County Technical College celebrated its first 100 years of operation, recounting the progress, innovation and trends reflective of that time. During that century, WCTC focused on practical, hands-on education that created paths to employment in trade, technical, health, protective services and other areas.

The College remains rooted in this proven approach - but it's also challenging the status quo by becoming the area's modern, comprehensive regional college. WCTC is adapting to the changing landscape of what students require and industry demands, while keeping its finger on the pulse of higher education.


"Right now, we're defying gravity, but it's not by accident," said WCTC President Rich Barnhouse, Ph.D. "Part of the credit belongs to our predecessors as an institution, who really built an unbelievably solid

foundation. Now, we're laser focused on the needs of our region through the 2030s."

THE PACE OF CHANGE

Today, the College is thriving - with a 7% enrollment increase - at a point when higher education nationwide is experiencing obstacles such as declining enrollments due to demographic shifts, increased costs and resistance to change. WCTC is looking at progress through a different lens, trying new approaches and taking calculated risks.

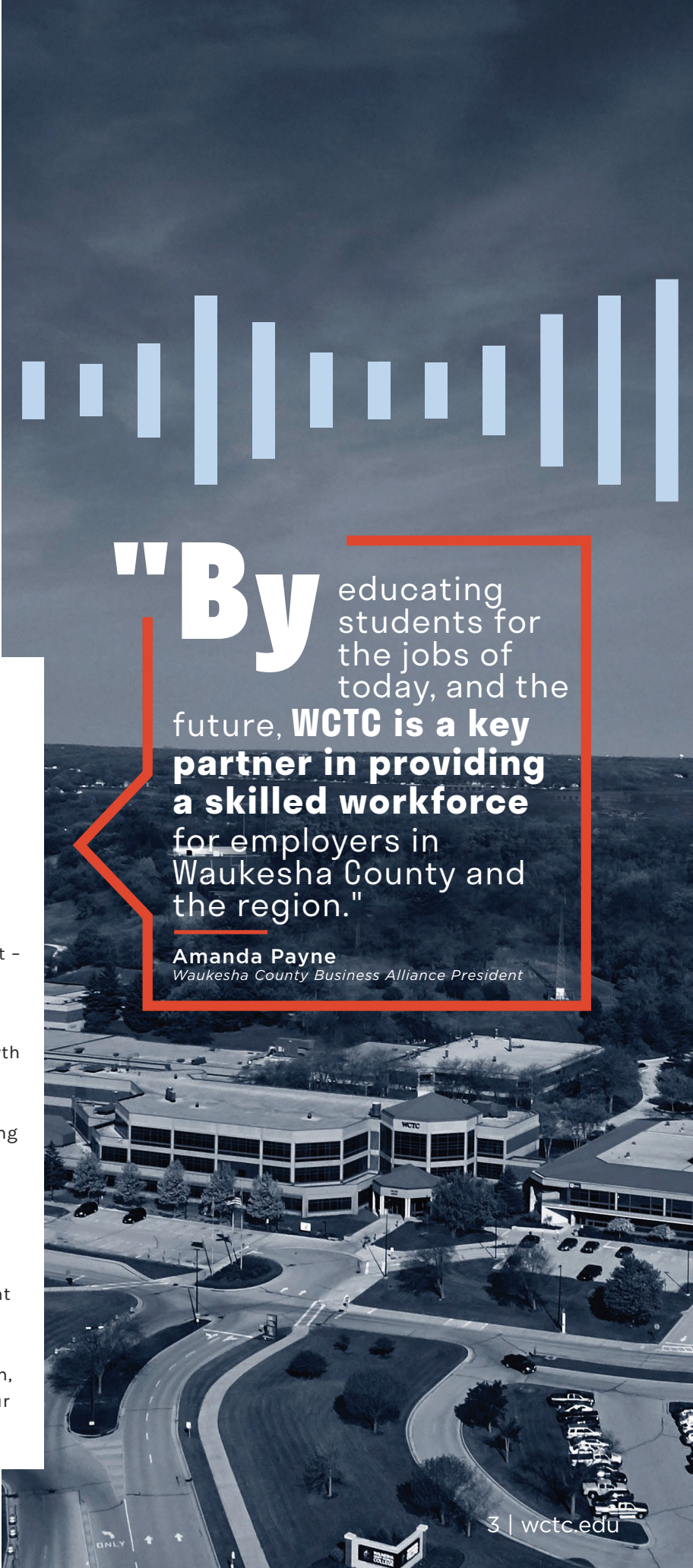
"Not being willing to - or not understanding the need to - change as an institution is one of the many contributing factors to where the overall academe is and where many institutions are finding struggles today.



It's easy to say it's the demographics. It's also easy to say, this year, it's the fiasco with financial aid. But these are not the (main) issues," Barnhouse said, stressing the importance of adaptability and providing for the future before it arrives.

Perpetuating an intentional mindset – one that puts students first and has a heavy focus on workforce development – has made WCTC indispensable.

"Our post-secondary partners are a critical piece of ongoing economic growth in Waukesha County. By educating students for the jobs of today, and the future, WCTC is a key partner in providing a skilled workforce for employers in Waukesha County and the region," said Amanda Payne, Waukesha County Business Alliance president. "Business and industries change at a rapid pace, and our employers adopt and implement new technology every day. Programs like the new artificial intelligence (AI) offerings at WCTC help foster innovation, skill and reskill employees, and keep our businesses competitive."



"By educating students for the jobs of today, and the future, **WCTC is a key partner in providing a skilled workforce for employers in Waukesha County and the region."**

Amanda Payne
Waukesha County Business Alliance President

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE throughout WCTC

Over two years ago, research began in earnest on AI. It started with information gathering meetings with employers and guidance from Intel Corp. and has led to two short-term certificates, a named AI undergraduate degree, and multiple bootcamps and workshops.

"We developed (the AI Data Specialist associate degree) program and got approval for it before the industry was ready for it, and now businesses are clamoring for it," Barnhouse said. "We've moved from providing what's needed at the time and elevated it to meet the needs of the future."

The degree program has garnered widespread interest from students, industry partners and the community alike, said Alli Jerger, WCTC's associate dean of Information Technology.

"The initial classes filled, and we quickly responded to the demand by adding more sections," Jerger said. "We have business community members committed to hiring these graduates, and we are looking forward to meeting their needs."

Building on that momentum, the WCTC Applied AI Lab recently opened in fall as a first-of-its kind space to serve as a hub for artificial intelligence. The first floor

is an incubator space for businesses and entrepreneurs to develop and test their AI ideas, while the second floor (in development) will include tech-centered classrooms and labs for students in a variety of IT programs. Specialty programming will also be offered in AI.

"We've partnered with the nationally ranked startup accelerator gener8tor to provide entrepreneurs and business startups free access to coaching, mentoring and investor networks through WCTC's Applied AI Lab," said Dan Lindberg, director of the Applied AI Lab, noting the center will also have open enrollment workshops and other trainings. "I want to foster an ecosystem between students, faculty and businesses."

"We've moved from providing what's needed at the time and elevated it to **meet the needs of the future."**

Rich Barnhouse, Ph.D.
WCTC President





STRENGTHENING High School Partnerships

More and more, area K-12 school districts are tasked with providing their high school students with college-level options.

Mark Hansen, superintendent of Elmbrook Schools, has said while a high school's job was once to get students to college, now it's the high school's job to get students through college. And WCTC offers numerous ways for students to do so, thanks to dual enrollment options.

"The Elmbrook Promise - 30 or more college credits while in high school - became real and viable (in our district) thanks to the innovation of WCTC. We are fortunate to have such a strong partnership. WCTC is changing the world," he said.

Local high school students have been able to earn college credit through a number of opportunities, among them WCTC's Dual Enrollment Academy, Start College Now, Youth Apprenticeships and, most recently, the Excelerate initiative.

Because of these opportunities, students are reaping the rewards of little to no debt, transferring to a four-year college or university at junior-level standing or securing rewarding, full-time employment right after graduating from WCTC. (See related story page 10.)



The Importance of **HIGHER ED COLLABORATIONS**

Beyond working closely with high schools, WCTC has robust partnerships and seamless transfer agreements in place with many public and private four-year institutions. And, two local universities have or will have a presence on campus.

Last year, Lakeland University relocated its Milwaukee Center to WCTC's main campus, which expanded the college's reach in southeastern Wisconsin and created an easier transfer plan. WCTC is also welcoming University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee students to campus as a UWM University Center is in development. This will allow UWM to continue offering affordable higher education in Waukesha County through bachelor's degree completion options and later, exploring additional degree options.

"We're going to **push the envelope** and do the things that people say aren't possible."

Rich Barnhouse, Ph.D.
WCTC President

The Associate of Arts and Associate of Science liberal arts transfer degrees have grown since they began in 2023, with more than 230 students currently enrolled. This equates to the first two years of a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree at any UW institution and many private colleges and universities.

"We're happy to collaborate and work with our peers, all colleges and universities in the state," Barnhouse said.



Becoming a **REGIONAL HUB**

Every community has a center, and it is Barnhouse's hope that WCTC is becoming that for the county by keeping stakeholders' needs in mind and using taxpayers' dollars wisely. In summer, the College announced a partnership with YMCA of Greater Waukesha County that will bring a new full-service YMCA to the College's Pewaukee campus in the coming years. Additionally, College leaders are exploring other points of interest to be added to campus.

"I think we'll grow consistently in enrollment over the next five years, but we'll also grow in scope and size with the types of programs, the types of facilities that we have... and we'll also grow in bold ideas," Barnhouse said. "We're going to push the envelope and do the things that people say aren't possible. As Walt Disney said, 'it's kind of fun to do the impossible.'" ■

A Foundation for the Future

Alumna Robyn Ludtke Joins WCTC Foundation as new Executive Director

This summer, the WCTC Foundation welcomed Robyn Ludtke as its new executive director, and it has been a bit of a homecoming for the 2012 Waukesha County Technical College Marketing graduate.

"Returning to campus as an alumna has been incredibly meaningful. WCTC has always been special to me, and stepping into this role feels like coming full circle," Ludtke said. "I'm honored to now be in a position to give back to the community that played such a pivotal role in my own journey.

Being back here, I'm reminded daily of the impact this college has on its students, and I'm committed to ensuring that legacy continues for future generations."

Since beginning her role June 3, Ludtke has immersed herself in the foundation. She has been focused on setting the stage for the future by launching the capital campaign for the Applied AI Lab, hosting impactful events, welcoming new board members and establishing a legacy council.

"Our emphasis on donor stewardship, business connections and nonprofit partnerships ensures that we continue to grow and thrive, staying true to our mission while embracing new opportunities," she said.

SYNERGIZING EFFORTS TO ENHANCE INNOVATION

Prior to joining the WCTC Foundation, Ludtke spent years developing relationships and expanding partnerships through her work in talent development, volunteerism with local nonprofits, representation on local boards and in other roles. Most recently, she was the senior vice president of Strategic Initiatives and Workforce at the Waukesha County Business Alliance.

Ludtke is eager to continue strengthening those partnerships through the foundation and the College.

"With the WCTC Foundation poised to enter its next chapter, we are committed to growth and transformation. As we support the College in its second century, we envision a future where

we expand our initiatives, strengthen our partnerships and empower students to reach new heights. Together, we can build a brighter future for our community."

A FOCUS ON DEVELOPING TALENT

A lifelong learner, Ludtke has earned several credentials, including a Talent Pipeline Management Academy certificate from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, an Organizational Leadership certificate from

“WCTC has always been special to me, and stepping into this role feels like coming full circle.”

Robyn Ludtke
Executive Director, WCTC Foundation



Robyn Ludtke and Rich Barnhouse unveiling WCTC's 100th Anniversary time capsule seal.

MRA – The Management Association and others from the Wisconsin Economic Development Association and Leadership Waukesha.

She broadened her community network during her time on the Hartland Village Board and the WCTC District Board, and she has supported efforts to increase opportunities for women through her involvement in a number of organizations. She is also currently a member of the Hartland Library Board.

Ludtke has been honored for her contributions, most recently with a 2023 Emerging Leaders Philanthropic 5 (P5) Award from United Way and a 2022 Community Leader Award from Waukesha TEMPO.

"Robyn is an exceptionally talented leader who is deeply connected to WCTC as an alumna, former student leader and former member of the College's Board of Trustees," Barnhouse said. "Her leadership and community relationships will be a true asset for the WCTC Foundation. Robyn is perfect for this essential role." ■

Displaying shirts for the Suicide Prevention Awareness Walk are, from left, Rich Barnhouse, WCTC; Jackie Pride, Eaton; Robyn Ludtke, WCTC Foundation; and Amy Machgan, WCTC.



Rich Barnhouse, Ph.D., president of WCTC, said Ludtke's background and experience make her a natural fit for the Foundation position.

Two Graduations in Three Weeks

*Eric Perrin '24 Earns Associate Degree
Followed by High School Diploma*

IN FALL 2022, at age 16, Eric Perrin started his college journey a bit earlier than many of his peers. He began at WCTC through the College's Excelerate initiative, which allows qualified (and ambitious) high school juniors and seniors to enroll in a WCTC program - just like any other College student - and likely have it paid for by the student's K-12 school district.

A junior at the time, Perrin explored the idea of attending college while still in high school as a way to maximize credits through dual enrollment, save money and get a jump-start on higher education.

In May 2024, Perrin realized his goal. He graduated from WCTC earning

an IT-Network Specialist associate degree - three weeks before earning his Brookfield Central High School diploma. Last month, he started classes at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at junior-level standing, thanks to numerous college credits he

transferred into the university. And, he said, he's on track to graduate with his bachelor's degree in Information Science and Technology at just 19 years old, having shaved two years' time off a four-year degree.

"It was kind of surreal, to graduate from WCTC at 17 and then graduate from high school at 18," Perrin said. "It was awesome to have that head start, especially financially, and to have 72 credits wiped off my slate. It's been incredible."

An Eye on Future Goals

Perrin first learned about Excelerate at an informational meeting and talked with the Elmbrook School District's director of Career, College and Life Readiness about dual enrollment options.

"Excelerate just kind of clicked with me in that it seemed like something that would match with my future goals, and I wanted to give it a shot," he said.

**"IT WAS
AWESOME TO
HAVE THAT
HEAD START."**





**"BEFORE I
ENROLLED, I
CAME HERE
AND WAS JUST
BLOWN AWAY."**

Once he visited the WCTC campus and learned more, Perrin was sold.

"Before I enrolled, I came here and was just blown away – especially with the IT building; it's so high tech. And everyone is just so welcoming," he said, noting the support systems in place, such as navigators and instructors.

Prioritizing and Practicing Self-Discipline

Shifting from a high school mindset to a college mindset took some adjustment, Perrin said, and he had to discover ways to balance time for friends, family, school, work and other commitments. He scaled back on extracurricular activities and put sports on hold. He limited involvement in campus activities to open houses and career fairs, and he focused on his classes, internship at Husco (where he still works) and part-time job at Waukesha Memorial Hospital. Perrin also completed various certificates, many in cloud computing.

Prioritizing his projects and practicing self-discipline resulted in Perrin excelling academically. In spring 2024, he earned the Outstanding Student Program Award for IT-Network Specialist and he graduated with distinction.

A Smart Financial Decision

While Perrin is grateful to WCTC for providing him with a solid educational foundation and opening the door to numerous opportunities, he said he also feels fortunate to be at a financial advantage and for the peace of mind it brings.

"Graduating with little to no debt was probably one of my biggest priorities – and still is," Perrin said. "I don't want to feel that pushing me down, weighing on me for years to come. It's freeing to know I will not have to experience (paying off student loans) later in life." ■

WCTC FOUNDATION KICKS OFF \$6 MILLION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR APPLIED AI LAB

The WCTC Foundation, along with Waukesha County Technical College, recently launched a \$6 million fundraising campaign to support the much-anticipated WCTC Applied AI Lab.



Robyn Ludtke, WCTC Foundation, with Joel Quadracci, Quad.

To start, the Harry V. Quadracci family's Windhover Foundation has generously donated \$1 million toward WCTC's new lab, which will serve as a central, technological hub for AI innovation in the region.

Extensive renovations were recently completed in Building Q on a large portion

Rendering of WCTC's Applied AI Lab and future home of the Technology Education Center.



of the first floor dedicated to lab. The space was modified for state-of-the-art offices, technology and equipment to advance AI, conference rooms, huddle spaces, open workstations, and collaboration and incubation space for businesses and entrepreneurs to explore their AI-powered ideas. AI and tech-related exhibits will soon be featured in this area, and it also houses the gener8tor Applied AI Lab accelerator programs. Several workshops and seminars are also being offered through the lab.

Phase two will include building a second-story addition to bridge education with business and industry. This new space, designed predominantly for student learning, will feature AI-centered classrooms, collaboration spaces, an AI concept center and "pitch pit," and an outdoor terrace for AI events. It will become the new home for the College's many IT programs.

To learn more about how make a financial gift, contact Robyn Ludtke, WCTC Foundation executive director, at 262.691.5202 or rludtke1@wctc.edu. ■



**NEW ASSOCIATE DEGREE
& APPRENTICESHIP
PROGRAMS
LAUNCHED
IN FALL**

WCTC began offering three new programs this fall, which address the need for trained professionals in Waukesha County and beyond. These include the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Data Specialist associate degree program, Industrial Metrology Technician apprenticeship program and Teacher Apprenticeship program. Additional new certificates are also being offered, including Digital Video Production and Entertainment and Sports Marketing. ■



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