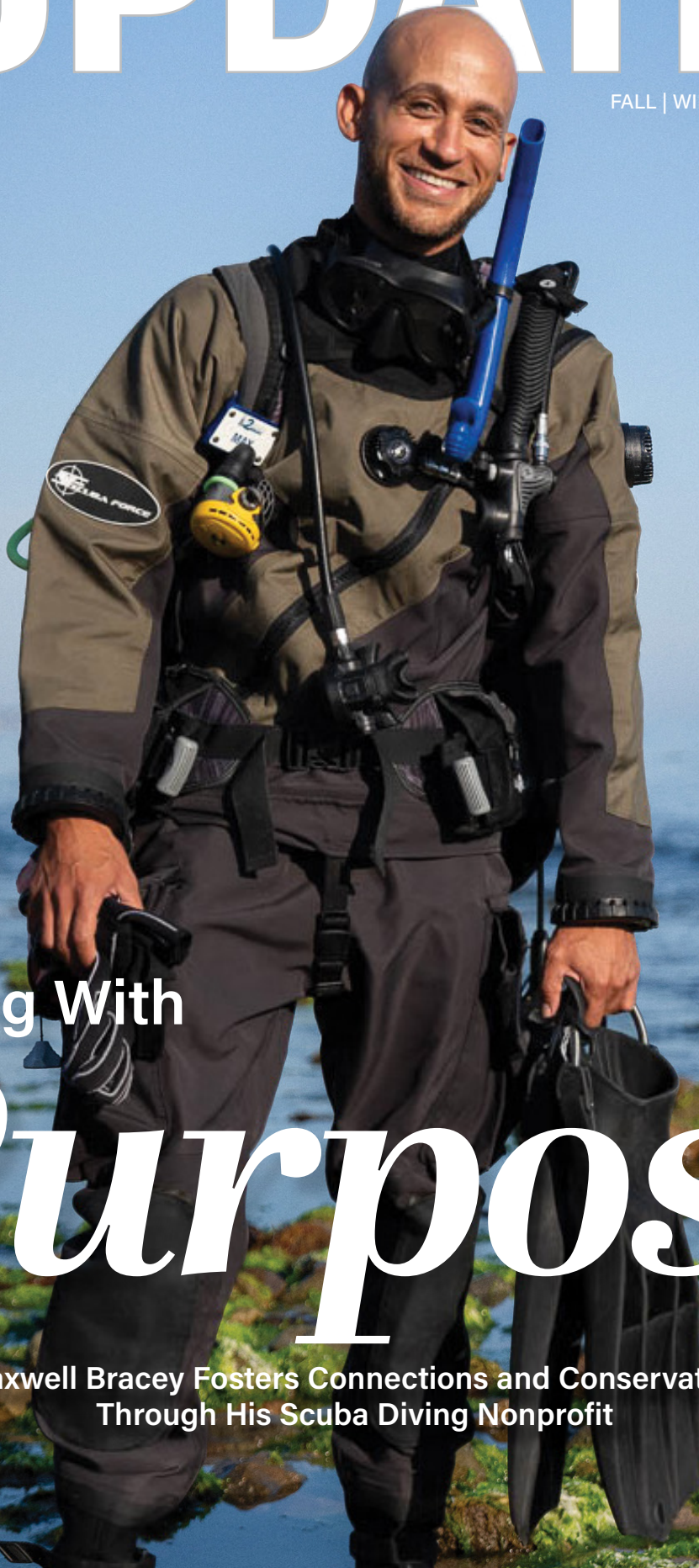


WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

# UPDATE

FALL | WINTER 2024



+  
Qualtrics CMO Lynn  
Giroto shares her  
magic formula for  
marketing success

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Diving With

# Purpose

Maxwell Bracey Fosters Connections and Conservation  
Through His Scuba Diving Nonprofit





Dean Sambamurthy (left) gets a personalized tour of Grainger Hall renovation projects. Learn more on p. 29.

# Letter From the Dean

This fall marked my five-year anniversary at the Wisconsin School of Business, and as I consider this milestone, it's natural to reflect on our successes.

Over the past five years, we've seen an increase in our rankings, a record number of applicants to our school, and a growing demand for our students across industries.

I'm thrilled with the progress we've achieved, and I'm even more excited about what's to come. That's because WSB is taking a bold, forward-thinking approach to the future that will further cement our status as a leading institution for developing entrepreneurially minded leaders.

Over the next five years, we will infuse our student experiences with more industry engagement and experiential learning—in partnership with alumni—to create the next generation of innovative, ready-to-lead Business Badgers.

Dynamic leadership and forward thinking are also key characteristics of the alumni profiled throughout this issue. You'll meet Maxwell Bracey, who's championing a mission of inclusion and conservation through his nonprofit, DiverSeaFy (p. 16). You'll also meet

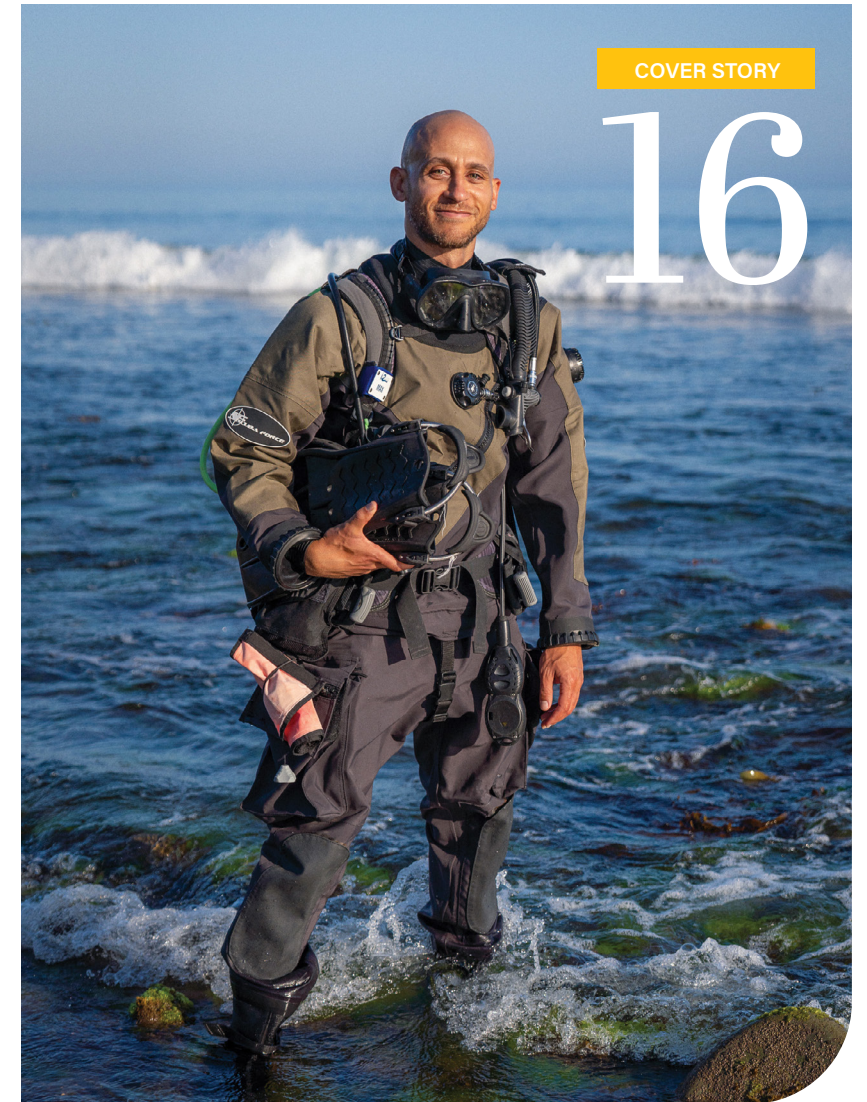
tech innovators Lynn Giroto (p. 10) and Vince Abney (p. 08), and hear about how Jake Piekarski has expanded his campus-based business across the Midwest (p. 03).

Discovery and curiosity have long been part of the WSB ethos and have led to our longevity and enduring status as one of the nation's oldest and most respected business schools. These values will continue to drive our mission as we approach our 125th anniversary in 2025—and beyond—and I can't wait to see how we grow from here.

On, Wisconsin!

Vallabh "Samba" Sambamurthy  
Albert O. Nicholas Dean  
Wisconsin School of Business

Photo by Paul L. Newby II



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Photos by Boris Zharkov, Jim Newberry, and Paul L. Newby II





Photo by Jeff Miller

## A MARBLE MARVEL

Take a stroll down University Avenue, look up, and you might find yourself marveling at one of campus' most striking art pieces. Whether it's the sheer size or the way sunlight hits the neon purple and green hues, Grainger Hall's *Library Window* is sure to catch your eye.

Created by Ed Carpenter, a Portland, Oregon-based artist specializing in large-scale public installations, *Library Window* is composed of 75,000 glass marbles held together across 56 window panels—and can be seen from both inside and outside the building. The piece was commissioned for the Wisconsin School of Business in 1993 through Wisconsin's Percent for Art Program, which allowed a portion of construction costs for new state buildings to be used for the permanent, public display of artwork. In 2018, *Library Window* was preserved when WSB transformed its Business Library into the state-of-the-art Learning Commons.

*Library Window's* composition weaves together historical and modern design elements to illustrate folk patterns and computer circuitry. The piece symbolizes the idea of information storage, a critical component of libraries, computers, and business. Using marbles instead of traditional stained glass, Carpenter created a unique design that also acknowledges the neo-traditional style of Grainger Hall.



# UPDATE

FALL | WINTER 2024

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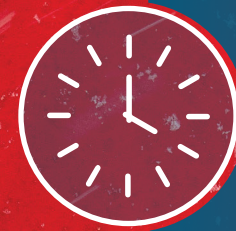
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Cover photo by Jim Newberry



## GOT A MINUTE?

### ▶ Jake Piekarski (BBA '24)

FOUNDER AND CEO  
SNOW SCHOLARS  
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA

A PEEK AT WHAT MAKES BUSINESS BADGERS WHO THEY ARE

#### What is Snow Scholars?

It's a residential snow removal business that employs college students at six Midwest universities. I started the business in 2022 when I transferred to UW–Madison and heard my friends talking about the lack of high-paying jobs that were flexible enough for their school schedules. During our first season in business, we paid out over \$5,000 in student wages.

#### What are some of your proudest achievements?

We jumped from 34 customers in year one to over 400 customers in year two, and had over an 85% customer retention rate. Also, we successfully ran the business remotely when we expanded from UW–Madison to the University of Minnesota.

#### What is your favorite WSB memory?

Being accepted to the Weinert Applied Ventures in Entrepreneurship program was pretty cool because I got to take a master's level course. I also loved attending WSB's Distinguished Entrepreneurship Lunches hosted by Lisa Collins (BBA '84, MBA '86) and learning from professors like Jon Eckhardt, who helped advance my entrepreneurship path.

#### Oh, and a few more things:

A big fan of networking, Piekarski maintains working relationships with mentors from **Great Wolf Lodge**, **Best Buy**, and **Deloitte**. | **Lily and Napa**: His golden retriever puppies. | **40+**: Countries visited including Japan, French Polynesia, and Australia. | Advice to entrepreneurs: **"There's no perfect time to start. If you have a good idea, just go for it."**

Photo by Paul L. Newby II



# SCHOOL NEWS

To read more, visit [business.wisc.edu/news](https://business.wisc.edu/news)



Dean Samba (center) stands alongside four recipients of the 2024 WSB Alumni Awards, including (left to right) Colin Welch, Amy Jo Pedone, Cheryl Stallworth, and Dan Kelly.

## Alumni Receive Prestigious Awards From WSB

In October, the Wisconsin School of Business honored six outstanding alumni with awards recognizing their talent, service, and ongoing commitment to the Badger community.

The Distinguished Business Alumni Award honors individuals with exceptional careers who have made far-reaching impacts in their community, their industry, and at UW-Madison.

The WSB Impact Award recognizes individuals who have volunteered their expertise, time, and talent to advance the Wisconsin School of Business, and have demonstrated service to the school.

"We are incredibly pleased to honor such accomplished and dedicated members of our Business Badger family," says Vallabh "Samba" Sambamurthy, Albert O. Nicholas Dean of the Wisconsin School of Business. "On behalf of the entire WSB community, I congratulate each award recipient on this well-deserved recognition."

### Distinguished Business Alumni Award recipients

Dan Kelly (BBA '84, MBA '85)  
Ricky Sandler (BBA '91)  
Cheryl Stallworth (MBA '81)  
Colin Welch (BBA '92)

### WSB Impact Award recipients

Sean Jacobsohn (BBA '94)  
Amy Jo Pedone (BBA '96)

## New Faculty Members Offer Unmatched Business Expertise

Six new faculty members joined the Wisconsin School of Business this fall, bringing research expertise and teaching talent in cutting-edge business topics like financial reporting, the sharing economy, and cybersecurity. These thought leaders will enhance the depth and scope of WSB's strong reputation for academic excellence and dedicated commitment to the Wisconsin Idea.

By academic department, the new faculty members are:

**Accounting and Information Systems**  
Dain Donelson

**Finance, Investment, and Banking**  
Jason Allen

**Management and Human Resources**  
Shotaro Yamaguchi

**Operations and Information Management**  
Kaitlin Daniels | Jinan Lin | Min-Seok Pang

Photo by Paul L. Newby II

## WSB Ranks High on National Scale

WSB ranked #9 among public institutions and #18 overall in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2024-25 annual rankings for best undergraduate business programs.

Several academic programs ranked in the top 20:

#1 Real Estate	#2 Insurance/Risk Management	#8 Marketing
#16 Operations Management	#16 Accounting	#20 Management

## Opportunities Abound for Students Pursuing Entrepreneurship

For the first time, undergraduate students have the opportunity to pursue WSB's new, standalone entrepreneurship major. The in-demand major comes at a time of increased focus on entrepreneurship at UW-Madison, as laid out in Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin's strategic priorities for the university.

The new major will help students develop mindsets characterized by curiosity, ambition, and creativity—key skills coveted by today's top employers. "We've found that big companies are now valuing the entrepreneurial mindset so much more than they used to because they want the students, their future employees, to have that

perspective," says Dan Olszewski (BS '87), Goldberg Family Director of the Weinert Center for Entrepreneurship at WSB. "They realize that they need to be an innovative company to survive in the future, so firms are seeking that out."

Additionally, the major acts as a strong complement to other areas of study, allowing students to combine entrepreneurship with another functional expertise like marketing or finance. Students can also enroll in a brand-new class, Strategic Innovation and Corporate Entrepreneurship, designed by WSB faculty member Florence Honoré, and take advantage of the major's experiential learning opportunities.

## WSB Welcomes New Leadership to Knowledge Centers

The Wisconsin School of Business welcomed alum Alan Stoffer (MBA '13) as the new director of the school's Marketing Leadership Institute (MLI). Since 2022, Stoffer has served as the industry liaison for the Tech Marketing Hub within the MLI, where he mentored students and taught a popular digital marketing course. Stoffer brings a wealth of experience and knowledge from his time working in product marketing at Intuit and Facebook, as well as leading campaign and product launches at General Mills.

The school also appointed Jacques Gordon as the new director of the James A. Graaskamp Center for Real Estate. A distinguished leader in the real estate industry, Gordon served as the senior executive in residence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Real Estate and held the role of global head of research and strategy for LaSalle Investment Management for almost three decades. WSB is excited to leverage Gordon's extensive experience, strong industry connections, and engaging leadership style. ◀



# A HIDDEN COST

Exploring hospital mergers, labor outcomes, and adverse health effects with WSB's Stuart Craig

BY CHRIS MALINA | PHOTO BY PAUL L. NEWBY II



STUART CRAIG

When it comes to the cost of health insurance, most people are only interested in one thing: the dollar amount that comes out of their paychecks.

But it's what *isn't* listed on those pay stubs that interests WSB's Stuart Craig.

"Employers in the U.S. actually contribute about 80% of most people's health care premiums, so most of us are shielded from seeing the full cost of our health insurance," says Craig, an

assistant professor of risk and insurance.

There might be more going on behind the scenes than you think, especially as costs associated with health care have soared significantly in recent decades. How employers respond to these increasing costs, and how that ultimately impacts employees in a variety of ways, is at the crux of Craig's research.

Because the majority of Americans receive insurance through an employer-sponsored arrangement, health care pricing in the U.S. is an especially complicated dance—and Craig says the prices we actually pay aren't typically set with the end consumer in mind.

"They get set in a business-to-business negotiation between hospitals and insurance companies," says Craig. "A lot of what I'm doing is trying to model these negotiation environments to understand what features of them result in certain kinds of prices."

Most recently, he turned his attention to hospital mergers as a way of measuring the various impacts of rising health care costs. In the past 20 years, more than 1,000 hospital mergers have taken place across the U.S., with previous studies suggesting prices tend to increase when insurance companies have fewer hospitals to negotiate with.

Using claims data from several large health insurers, combined with additional data from federal sources and agencies, Craig and his co-authors found that the average hospital merger led to price increases of 1.2% within two years. That, in

income and income tax receipts, while causing a rise in unemployment and unemployment insurance payments.

Following the downstream effects even further, the data ties these findings to adverse health outcomes:

could potentially be utilized by policymakers and federal regulators to better predict which mergers may result in price increases and adverse outcomes—and which ones might also need antitrust enforcement.

"The price increases we observe seem to be largely driven by a subset of mergers between hospitals that are in direct competition before the merger. By blocking these anticompetitive mergers, you could reduce health care prices or health care price growth without harming people or making health care worse," he says. "Really, there's merit to studying where these prices come from, whether they represent value for consumers, and if there are ways to ensure people are protected from business practices that raise prices without creating value. I'm all about research that helps everyday working people." ◀

**"I'm all about research that helps everyday working people."**

—STUART CRAIG

turn, caused a complex and troubling domino effect in labor market outcomes, like reduced earnings and job losses, among those primarily earning between \$20,000 and \$100,000 annually.

More specifically, Craig notes that a 1% increase in premiums caused both payroll and employment at non-health care firms to be reduced by approximately 0.4%. At the county level, these price hikes caused a reduction in per capita labor

Craig's study shows that one in 140 individuals who become separated from the labor market after health care prices increase will die by suicide or from a drug overdose.

"It's deeply frustrating to think that the price increases we're looking at have such a negative outcome on the very people that the system is set up to help," Craig says.

While Craig isn't trying to demonize all mergers, he notes that research like his





ALUMNI FEATURE



# THE POWER OF THE Pivot

## Continuous growth, learning define Vince Abney's journey to Adobe

BY CHRIS MALINA  
PHOTOS BY BORIS ZHARKOV

Some people like being comfortable. Vince Abney (BBA '08) isn't one of them, and it's what's driven him to make some major pivots throughout his business career.

"I have this growth mindset of wanting to be continuously learning and challenging myself," says Abney. "If I ever feel like I've stagnated or plateaued, that's the time to make the jump."

It's an approach that's served him well, taking him from Wisconsin's Fox Valley to Silicon Valley. He's led teams, earned promotions, delivered exceptional growth—

and isn't afraid to try something new.

So, when the opportunity arose to join Adobe and dive into the emerging field of artificial intelligence, he didn't hesitate.

"What drew me to this role was the opportunity to work at the intersection of creativity, productivity, and generative AI," says Abney, who joined Adobe in 2024 as principal for corporate strategic partnerships. "So far, it's been really exciting. It's also been really challenging, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

### Born to bounce

Growing up in Neenah, Wisconsin—the epicenter of paper country—Abney always believed a career in the consumer packaged goods industry was in the cards.

"It was just expected you'd go and work for a big CPG company," says Abney, whose dad and uncle both worked for hometown company Kimberly-Clark. Intrigued by his uncle's financial role with the company, Abney would pursue a finance major after being accepted into UW-Madison.

At WSB, he enjoyed learning from instructors like Loren Kuzuhara (MBA '93, PhD '94) and Belinda Mucklow, and appreciated the real-life examples they brought to class. He also credits advising staff with helping him secure a finance internship at Kimberly-Clark, which primed him for a position at Procter & Gamble after graduation.

There, he worked as a cost analyst and finance manager before pivoting into brand management. Working with products like Downy and Bounce, Abney found his business skill set being expanded, thanks to P&G's cross-functional approach to its work.

"You had to be very knowledgeable about every other function that was related to your brand," Abney says. "I needed to understand the

Much like the ample options in any Adobe program's toolbar, Vince Abney gives users the power to embrace their creativity.

finances almost as well as the actual finance manager. Same thing with sales and consumer market knowledge."

Abney credits P&G with helping him build a strong

strategic partnership roles at Google, primarily focused on monetization efforts within the mobile apps and gaming spaces. He'd quickly be promoted to more senior

**"I can draw a very clear line between my work and how it makes a positive impact in someone's life."**

—VINCE ABNEY (BBA '08)

foundation of business skills that served him well when making his next big career pivot—one that would take him off the CPG path and onto something new.

### Getting into the game

Looking to break into the tech industry, Abney applied to and was accepted into the MBA program at Stanford University, where he developed an interest in strategic partnerships: something he describes as the "connective tissue" between a business' internal teams and external partners.

But even with his expanded business education, he initially experienced rejection when trying to secure a tech job. Dozens of applications and interviews later, his persistence paid off when Google came calling with a job offer.

Over the next nine years, he'd hold a variety of

positions and lead his team to achieve over \$1 billion in annual revenue.

Then, as global head of gaming publisher partnerships at YouTube, Abney worked alongside gaming partners to amplify their major marketing moments. That included working with Rockstar Games on the record-breaking release of the first Grand Theft Auto VI trailer, which racked up over 90 million views in the 24 hours after release.

Even while enjoying such successful performance metrics and revenue statistics, Abney saw an emerging technology gaining steam in the industry—and decided the time was right to take a chance on a new position centered around AI.

### Comfort is overrated

At Adobe, Abney uses his negotiation skills to strike mutually beneficial deals

between the company and other players in the tech and generative AI spaces.

"We're trying to build strategic partnerships to integrate our products into their platforms, driving innovation and expanding our market reach," says Abney. "We're also working to ensure that when innovating with AI, we're doing so ethically and in a way that helps users express their creativity more effectively."

The result of this work has implications for Adobe's flagship products, including Photoshop, Acrobat, and Illustrator. With millions of users relying on these programs, it's a responsibility he takes seriously.

"There are people whose entire livelihoods are dependent upon our products," he says. "That's good pressure, but it's good pressure. I can draw a very clear line between my work and how it makes a positive impact in someone's life."

As he gets acquainted with his new role, Abney is leading with the same passion that made him successful in previous positions. At any point along the way, he could have settled for comfort—but where's the fun in that?

"I'd be lying if I didn't admit that making these moves carries a bit of a risk," he says. "But what I'm most proud of is never letting the fear of the unknown prevent me from pursuing career pivots that would allow me to expand my influence in new and meaningful ways." ◀



# Inside the Mind of a CMO

Lynn Giroto of Qualtrics talks marketing, leadership, and the power of listening

BY CHRIS MALINA | PHOTO BY PAUL L. NEWBY II



Over a 30-year career in business, Lynn Giroto (BBA '90) has seen seismic shifts in the field of marketing. But her ability to keep learning, adapting, and adjusting—while maintaining a laser focus on the customer—is what's cemented her in-demand status for one of business' highest-profile jobs: the chief marketing officer.

"Part of what I love about the craft of marketing is that it's constantly changing," she says. "And as the business and technology landscapes have evolved, it's been more and more apparent to me that the breadth of skills that I've developed is actually what today's CMOs really need to have."

She describes her path to the C-suite as less of a rocket ship blasting off and more of a gradual, experience-focused journey—one that's allowed her to develop deep skill sets across the marketing discipline, apply those principles to business, and drive successful outcomes. Her career has taken her to small startups, tech giants, business-to-business organizations, and some of the most recognizable brands in the world.

As the CMO of experience-management company Qualtrics, Giroto spends her days providing strategic oversight and leadership to teams that touch technology, data science, creative, brand management, and much more.

*Continued on page 12*



She'll tell you that the role of CMO is broader, more complex, and more challenging than it's ever been—but that's also the fun part.

"The things that once created stickiness with brands, or made it hard to switch, don't really exist anymore," she says. "So, it brings me back to the foundation of our jobs as business leaders, which is to understand what experiences customers are having and figure out how to create that authentic connection with someone."

In a business environment where engaging and retaining customers is harder than ever, it's of the utmost importance to have a CMO with the experience and education to drive business success—and what's clear is that Girotto has the expertise to get the job done.

#### Winning friends, influencing people

Girotto's very first job was arguably the most critical in shaping her interest in business—even if it isn't on her résumé.

"Both of my parents were business owners, and I pretty much grew up as my mom's mini assistant," Girotto says. "She worked in insurance and was the person that did the finances, the marketing, operations, everything. So, business just kind of stuck for me."

Pursuing business at UW-Madison, about an hour away from her hometown of Darlington, Wisconsin, felt like a natural next step. At WSB,

### Girotto's CMO Journey

After working for globally recognized brands like PepsiCo, Microsoft, and Starbucks, Girotto entered the C-suite, working the top marketing job at:

#### Amperity

Built a marketing team from the ground up.

#### Heap

Served as the company's first CMO and scaled demand to grow the business.

#### Vimeo

Expanded a creative brand to business users.

#### Qualtrics

Leading a new phase of growth and innovation.

Girotto took a marketing class that covered the fundamentals of consumer behavior, and how marketers can leverage that information to quickly influence buying decisions. That course ended up influencing a big decision of her own: her choice of major. If Girotto's undergraduate curriculum was an introduction to the philosophy of consumer behavior, then her first marketing job at PepsiCo after graduating from WSB was a crash course in it.

"That's where I really learned that marketing is the science behind sales," says Girotto. "Let's be honest, when you're selling colored

caffeinated water, it's really about connection to the brand and creating an experience."

The job ultimately took her to a new home in Paris, where she worked to expand the brand's reach and cultural connection across Europe. But after five years with the company, Girotto decided to return to the U.S. to pursue an MBA from Harvard Business School before sharpening her marketing skills in the tech industry. She joined Microsoft, which presented her with a new set of marketing challenges, including working on the launch of the Bing search engine.

"We were going up against the 800-pound gorilla in the marketplace," says Girotto, referring to Google. "We had to work to change the market perception, make traction, and start growing in a place where people didn't know Microsoft even had a search engine."

After a decade with Microsoft, Girotto made her next move after meeting the CMO of Starbucks, who was looking for someone to lead the marketing effort

for the company's ready-to-drink retail products. It was a category-leading brand position requiring multiple aspects of marketing knowledge and a passion for technological innovation: a natural fit for Girotto.

"It was a moment where I could really take all the learning throughout my marketing career and combine product development strategy, brand strategy, and much more," she says. "And it really brought me back to the importance of brand and customer experience."

#### Leading by listening

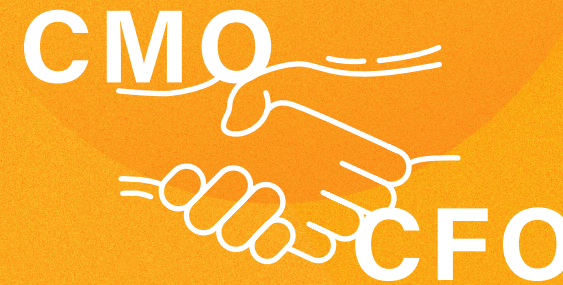
While rising through the ranks, Girotto says becoming a CMO wasn't necessarily a career goal. A self-described analytical marketer, Girotto didn't immediately identify with the creative-centric CMOs she met early in her career, nor did she initially see many women in senior marketing roles. But working with strong women CMOs at Starbucks and later at Tableau Software helped her to begin seeing things differently.

**"I have huge aspirations for what I think the company can do and how marketing can impact the business."**

—LYNN GIROTTO (BBA '90)



Girotto speaks with Audible CFO Cynthia Chu (BBA '99) at the 2024 Marketing Summit about how marketing and finance teams can support each other.



### The power of a partnership

While the top marketing and financial jobs at a company may have very different goals, Girotto says there's a huge benefit to CMOs and CFOs working closely together—which can help diffuse any potential conflict over how money is being spent.

"Marketing is such a powerful lever to invest in business growth, retention, and customer loyalty, but some of that is really hard to measure," says Girotto. "That's where tension can develop with a CFO, whose job is to hit quarterly numbers. So, in addition to providing them with information about what can be measured, a CMO can put the right indicators around what can't accurately be measured to help the CFO understand the right signals of healthy growth."

Adds Girotto: "It's about building a relationship. It's being transparent and taking accountability to make sure you have the right financial measures in place to understand whether marketing is really working or not."

Photo by Kyle Weige, Ueda Photography

"I was fortunate to have a slate of people I could look to and be inspired by," Girotto says, and soon, she accepted her first CMO role at software company Amperity. She'd follow it up with CMO roles at digital-focused platforms, including Heap and Vimeo, before landing at Qualtrics in May 2024.

There, she's working to evolve the company's brand perceptions beyond surveys, helping businesses understand their customers and employee experiences through AI-powered insights to take action when it counts the most.

Before she begins to tell this story, however, she's committed to listening to those who have a stake in it. In her first few months on the job, Girotto has been on a worldwide listening tour

spanning several countries, three continents, and numerous cities across the U.S.—all to better understand her customers' experiences.

"A lot of my job right now is just listening and learning and processing as fast as I can," says Girotto, who's embracing a philosophy that's served her in the past: think big, start small, and act fast. "That's what you have to do as an executive these days. You have to make an impact quickly. And I have huge aspirations for what I think the company can do and how marketing can impact the business."

Her commitment to listening also extends to the employees around her, and her curiosity-centered mentality is something that's come to define her leadership style. It's a similar approach to how she tackles any marketing campaign: start with the user—whether it's a customer or colleague—and let them tell you what they need.

Because in the mind of a successful CMO, there's always room for new ideas, strategies, and tactics—which is how today's marketing challenges become tomorrow's best practices.

"I like to say that I reserve the right to get smarter," Girotto says. "I have a lot of experience and things are always changing and there's always new perspectives to take into account. Communication and empowerment—it's the magic formula that brings it all together!" ◀



# READY, SET, BUSINESS

Alexis Steinbach empowers students to pursue their passions through WSB's pre-business program

PHOTO BY  
PAUL L. NEWBY II

Since 2021, Alexis Steinbach (BS '13, MS '18) has channeled her passion for academic advising as WSB's director of pre-business, certificate, and transfer advising to help countless UW-Madison students become Business Badgers. She helped make pre-business more accessible, equitable, and community-focused—and now continues to serve those students as an assistant dean for undergraduate student affairs.

**WSB:** How would you describe the pre-business program?

**Alexis Steinbach:** Our program supports over 1,500 undergraduate students interested in pursuing an area of study at the Wisconsin School of Business. WSB is dedicated to giving students a pathway into the BBA program, even if that doesn't happen through direct admission to the university.

But the pre-business process is so much more than students just applying to be admitted. The program allows students to find community with others going through this intense process as freshmen and helps

them establish a home with WSB before they're officially admitted.

Our team is also dedicated to helping students explore a variety of majors across campus that may relate to their interests in business, or may be something new that they've never considered.

**WSB:** What's new in the program?

**AS:** We've seen an across-the-board improvement in the number of applicants that are fully prepared for everything by requiring students to take the Pre-Business 101 workshop before applying. This workshop highlights what to expect in the first year, and how to prepare for the application process. In terms of equity and accessibility, requiring Pre-Business 101 allows us to ensure every single applicant has the same information and an equal playing field when they apply.

We also created the Business-Related Majors Fair to help our pre-business students navigate their interests in business and learn about other majors at UW-Madison. At our Fall 2024 event, we leveraged campus partnerships to host advisors from 14 majors, 10 certificates, and three programs. The event has served over 200 students since launching in Fall 2023.

**WSB:** What resources and opportunities are available to pre-business students?

**AS:** We structure the pre-business process to incorporate students into life at Grainger Hall, so they feel a sense of identity and belonging within the school.

Students can participate in Business Badger Badges, which is a customizable leadership program that includes workshops, conferences, and case competitions. We also highly encourage applicants to get involved in student organizations. There are over 50 options to choose from that focus on major, industry, and identity, so there are a lot of opportunities.

Our Student Success and Policy team helps students with the transition to college, including wellness-focused events with the school's embedded mental health provider, Julie Phillips. Additionally, our Multicultural Center excels at fostering a strong sense of belonging, with students actively engaging in affinity groups and participating in programming opportunities. We show pre-business students everything they can access within the school, allowing them to choose what will contribute to their overall sense of belonging and wellbeing.

**WSB:** How does your team support students throughout this process?

**AS:** Our admissions team does an excellent job of making sure that admitted UW-Madison students can learn about the program and understand the support they'll receive. We also do everything we can to demystify the process and prepare all applicants to be as competitive as possible. Our career team helps us with our résumé workshop, and we do an all-hands-on-deck résumé review week. In addition, we host an essay-writing workshop with UW-

Madison's Writing Center. This past year, pre-business applicants could have their application essays reviewed as well—and we had over 400 students take advantage of that.

Our team has also developed a tremendous number of resources to help students who are not accepted into WSB. Throughout the entire process, our advisors help students explore all of the academic opportunities at UW-Madison, helping them discover that their career and academic interests may be more in line with a degree outside of WSB. Our advisors are extremely empathetic people who truly understand how much students put into this application. They're so talented at helping students find confidence and a path forward, and we never let them go until they're ready to move on. We're there for students to find their home on campus. ◀

*Interview conducted and edited by  
Haley Tollison*

**First-year undergraduate students can gain admission to WSB through two separate paths:**

**Direct admission:** Students who apply to UW-Madison and indicate a business major as their first choice are automatically considered for direct admission to WSB's undergraduate program.

**Pre-business program:** Students who are admitted to UW-Madison, but are not selected to join the business school as freshmen, can begin the pre-business admissions process and apply for admission within their first four semesters on campus.



COVER STORY

# Sea Change

Maxwell Bracey promotes equity and sustainability through his scuba nonprofit

BY CHRIS MALINA | PHOTOS BY JIM NEWBERRY

**F**or Maxwell Bracey (BBA '12), there's nothing more powerful than a plunge into the ocean.

"It's a whole different world under the water," says Bracey, a certified scuba diver and instructor. "It's quiet, and nothing down there really cares about what's happening up here. Being able to experience that is humbling."

He's passionate about sharing that experience with others—especially those who have historically been underrepresented in water activities. It's what led him to create DiverSeaFy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating access for youth of color to scuba diving.

"I wanted to see more people who look like myself have these opportunities," says Bracey. "My vision is to create a world where the ocean environment is accessible to anybody, regardless of race or socioeconomic status."

It's a vision for the future, Bracey says, that reckons with an ugly American past: one that saw people of color barred from public pools and beaches, causing a lasting effect on who gets to participate in water-based recreation. But the mission also offers a hopeful future—one aimed at fostering inclusiveness while inspiring a new generation of conservationists in the age of climate change.

"The ultimate goal is to create a symbiotic relationship between our students and the ocean environment," Bracey says. "The health of the ocean is essential to all life on Earth, and we need all hands on deck advocating for it."

*Continued on next page*



## An ocean of possibility

Bracey's story has taken him across the world's oceans, but his interest in aquatics started on a markedly smaller scale.

"My parents weren't super keen on letting us have pets in the house, but I was able to have fish," says Bracey. "I had a fish tank in my room and loved watching them."

As the Southern California native began thinking beyond high school, Bracey discovered a summer educational program offering ocean adventures—including scuba—and college credits. With the support of his family, he earned his diving certification in 2007, joined the program, and made plans to study marine biology in college.

But his direction shifted after falling for UW-Madison on a campus tour. While the landlocked university couldn't offer him a marine biology degree, it could provide a robust marketing education through the Wisconsin School of Business, which appealed to Bracey's creative side. He took the plunge.

At WSB, Bracey was inspired by his brand management classes, which introduced him to marketing's potential to foster belonging, shape opinions, and inspire action on important causes—all of which would eventually power his environmental activism.

"One of the best decisions I ever made was to go to Wisconsin," says Bracey, who also became involved with

peer mentorship and the MKT marketing society.

After graduation, Bracey spent nearly four years at the FX television network, where he worked in promotions, writing, and production. But a book about finding purpose through international travel would set him on a different path.

"It just resonated with me," says Bracey. "I didn't necessarily have a ton of money saved to do something like that, but thought teaching scuba diving could be a way to make it work."

Over the next couple of years, Bracey would travel to

Divers are surrounded by a surprise swarm of kelp bass and garibaldi in the Catalina Island waters.



places like Honduras, Bali, and Hawaii while funding his wanderlust through diving instruction. While he savored the experiences, he was struck by what he saw—the negative impact of human activity on the ocean—as well as what he didn't see:

other people of color going on dives.

That's when his personal and professional interests merged, causing a new idea to float to the surface.

### Recreation, plus conservation

Stuck at home during the pandemic, Bracey wrote the business plan for DiverSeaFy and launched the organization in 2020. Balancing a full-time job and fundraising, he utilized his marketing expertise to recruit and sponsor an initial cohort of five divers in 2021. Since then, he's trained dozens of teenage divers off the

coast of California's Catalina Island, where Bracey himself was certified more than 15 years ago.

He'll be the first to tell you that the activity isn't cheap. Divers need specialized equipment, boats, pool training, and in some cases, swimming lessons—all of which DiverSeaFy covers. But the payoff comes when students take their first ocean dive. Whether it's observing rare fish or seeing how sunlight filters through an underwater kelp forest, there are awe-inspiring sights and surprises at every turn.

**"My vision is to create a world where the ocean environment is accessible to anybody."**

—MAXWELL BRACEY (BBA '12)



Photos submitted by Maxwell Bracey

"On one dive, a sea turtle actually came right up to our group. I'd never seen a turtle there before, even after hundreds of dives in that spot," Bracey says. "It was like the ocean saying, you know, these students belong here."

Through both recreational and environmental clean-up dives, Bracey hopes to inspire a sense of duty among his students to protect natural spaces—and maybe ignite interest in conservation careers. But he's also happy seeing them build the confidence to try new things, which is something he's also embracing for himself. Days after graduating DiverSeaFy's ninth cohort of divers in July, Bracey began a full-time MBA program at UCLA focused on sustainability and social impact.

During this new adventure, he'll continue diving, building DiverSeaFy, and flexing his marketing skills to make the case that everyone has a role to play in conservation.

"We think the planet is here to serve us when it should be the other way around," he says. "Everybody should consider themselves an environmentalist, and being able to rebrand and shift how we view ourselves in that greater landscape can make a huge difference." ◀

DiverSeaFy alumni took part in the annual Coastal Cleanup Day dive near California's Santa Monica Pier in September 2023.

Student Pamela Sacko poses with a giant sea bass: an endangered species that can grow to be seven feet long and over 700 pounds.



## DiverSeaFy

### BY THE NUMBERS

**30+**

divers certified since 2021

**\$110,000**

in grants from the California Coastal Commission, California Coastal Conservancy, and Justice Outside to fund diving instruction and continuing education

**4**

board members, including fellow WSB alum Meredith Rolan (MBA '18)

**\$1,200**

cost to certify one scuba diver

**1,376.27**

pounds of trash and debris pulled up from the ocean floor by divers during a 2024 community clean-up event





The UW-Madison Small Business Development Center, led by Michelle Somes-Booher, provides free, localized support to start and grow Wisconsin businesses.

# A Powerful, Local Engine for Growth

The Small Business Development Center at WSB offers trusted and transformational support

BY CHRIS MALINA  
PHOTOS BY PAUL L. NEWBY II

There's nearly a thousand small business development centers across the country, but ask anyone who has worked with the one at UW-Madison, and they'll tell you that it's something truly special.

Located within the Wisconsin School of Business, the UW-Madison Small Business Development Center

(SBDC) provides no-cost consulting and dozens of noncredit courses to help businesses launch, expand, and thrive. With support from a small but mighty team of consultants and outreach specialists, small businesses can get advice on topics from financial planning to team building,

and everything in between. "It's really the Wisconsin Idea in action," says center director Michelle Somes-Booher. "No matter your connection to the university, we can help you. We can

educate you. We can review your business plan. We can do all kinds of things for you that won't cost you anything." The SBDC consults with around 500 clients a year—plus an additional 200 or so who call with one-off questions—and no two look the same. "Every business that starts is a small business," says Somes-Booher. "We've had clients in construction, software development, manufacturing, educational services, and many more industries. We like to say that we're here to provide high-level help to get you going—then point you in the right direction for more industry-specific assistance."

### Rooted in Wisconsin

If a nationwide network of small business support sounds like a good idea, it's because it came from Wisconsin. In 1980, Senator Gaylord Nelson crafted legislation which paved the way for small business development centers to be created at universities

and other locations across the country and funded through federal dollars. The idea of providing free, localized support to start and grow a business—and increase its chances for success—is a model that's remained politically popular for over 40 years, and for good reason.

"We return a lot of impact to the economy," says Somes-Booher. "For every dollar that Congress spends on the program, it produces about \$60 to \$70 back in economic impact." While the mission of the SBDC has stayed the same, its work and scope have evolved over the years. When Somes-Booher took over as the center's director in 2016, she began implementing new resources to keep pace amid a rapidly changing business landscape.

That includes the creation of SBDC's First Steps to Starting a Business course, which guides participants through everything from the feasibility of their idea to assessing personal strengths as a business owner.

"We've had someone from every county in Wisconsin, every state, and 40 different countries take that class," says Somes-Booher. "For a free online course, you'd be happy if 5% of people finished it, but we have a nearly 50% completion rate."

**"It's really the Wisconsin Idea in action."**

—MICHELLE SOMES-BOOHER

Continued on page 22

2023: A banner year for the UW-Madison SBDC

**26**  
Helped launch over two dozen new businesses



Worked directly with **444** consulting clients over **2,513** hours

**2,619**  
Jobs supported in Wisconsin



Helped clients obtain over **\$11.9 million** in capital

**36**  
Training events hosted, which were attended by over **1,800** people





The SBDC staff includes (left to right) Amy Bruner Zimmerman, Chris Gruneberg, Michelle Somes-Booher, Anne Inman, and Stephanie Achten. Not pictured: Heather Ferguson.

The team also provided another invaluable service in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic upended operations for businesses and created unprecedented demand for SBDC's guidance.

"We saw record numbers of people during that time," says Somes-Booher. "In addition to our current clients, we had past clients coming back to us for help understanding all these new government programs."

While working to translate lengthy government missives into easy-to-consume newsletters, the SBDC team revamped their entrepreneurial training program, moving most of their non-credit courses online. They also created a free workbook, *Navigating the New Normal*, which racked up hundreds of

downloads upon release.

"We did many different things to pivot, which has actually shaped the offerings we provide now," says Somes-Booher. "I'm incredibly proud of the work our crew did during that time."

#### Consultation with innovation

Somes-Booher and her team have also been proactive in getting WSB students involved in their work. There's no federal requirement to utilize students, but they realized the value of doing so—both for the students themselves and their clients.

The SBDC now works closely with WSB's student-led Badger Consulting Club. Each semester, the SBDC secures four consulting projects for the club, which include real consultations with real clients, as well as

invaluable feedback for the students.

Most recently, the SBDC launched its Small Business Accounting and Projection Clinic, which helps founders navigate arguably the most daunting part of starting a business: the finances. In addition to offering a free, online Beginner's Guide to Financial Projections course, the clinic hires undergraduate and graduate students from WSB's highly ranked accounting program to assist clients with creating the financial projections necessary for securing loans.

While the SBDC's body of work is vast and often complex, their efforts have not gone unrecognized. In addition to receiving a 100% client satisfaction rating for two years in a row, the Small Business Administration (SBA) recently recognized the team with the Great Lakes Regional Small

Business Development Center Excellence and Innovation Award.

"They're just a really great team to work with," says Somes-Booher. "They're incredibly talented and really care about their clients." ◀

Business Development Center Excellence and Innovation Award.

The team's nomination for the honor was supported by entities including WSB, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the city of Madison, and the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation, which partners with SBDC to provide Spanish-speaking consultation services.

The secret sauce to all of this success, says Somes-Booher, is the people. Because while there may be hundreds of small business development centers nationwide, there's only one with her team.

"They're just a really great team to work with," says Somes-Booher. "They're incredibly talented and really care about their clients." ◀

## Homegrown Success Stories

The Small Business Development Center provided its unique brand of education and support to help these Wisconsin companies grow and thrive



Fetch

Founded in 2013

It's hard to imagine that Fetch—which now boasts "unicorn" status as a privately held startup company valued at \$1 billion or more—was ever a small business.

But the Madison-based company, led by Wes Schroll (x '15) and Tyler Kennedy (BBA '13), wouldn't be where it is today without the services of the SBDC—and Somes-Booher remembers working with Schroll on his second day at UW-Madison.

"Working with the SBDC was instrumental in shaping Fetch's early success," says Schroll. "The organization connected us with local businesses and fellow entrepreneurs, offering invaluable networking opportunities that fueled our growth. Building a business is incredibly challenging, and the positive, supportive atmosphere they fostered made a big difference in those early stages."



Natural Contract Manufacturing

Founded in 2022

What started as a school science experiment to get students thinking about the ingredients in their personal care items has evolved into a thriving manufacturing business, with a little help from SBDC.

Natural Contract Manufacturing, based in Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, offers private label and contract services for natural products, while using sustainable practices throughout its supply chain and operations.

"Working with the SBDC has been one of the highlights of my entrepreneurial career," says founder Kyle LaFond (BS '00). "I'm extremely grateful that one of my banking partners referred me to them to write and edit my initial business plan. Since then, I've met with Michelle regularly over the last decade and her expertise, insight, and guidance have been truly transformational. I trust the SBDC with the most essential aspects of my business and look to them whenever I need direction and support."



Fortune Favors

Founded in 2018

To say that Madison-based Fortune Favors is having a good year would be an understatement. In addition to winning the Wisconsin Small Business Persons of the Year Award from the U.S. Small Business Administration, the nut company was featured during an episode of the recent, Wisconsin-centric season of *Top Chef*.

CEO Sam McDaniel credits the SBDC and consultant Amy Bruner Zimmerman with helping take the business behind the popular pecans to the next level.

"Our partnership has been a key engine for our growth and success," says McDaniel. "We are food people and have big dreams, but were light on financial acumen and direct experience with a lot of the challenges we have faced. The team at SBDC fills in these gaps for us, acting as advisors, cheerleaders, and confidants who actually understand what we are going through and are invested in our success. We cannot recommend them more highly!"



## 1950–1959

**Robert (Bob) Keller (BS '50)** opened Madison 3-Cushion Billiards Club, which hosts national and international tournaments. Keller played on UW–Madison's three-cushion billiards team from 1948 to 1949. He also founded Keller Real Estate Group in 1953, which remains open today and specializes in property management.

**Charles Stathas (BBA '53, LLB '58)** retired from his role of emeritus general counsel in 1998 and continues to reside in Madison. He has three children and five grandchildren who have all graduated from UW–Madison or are current students. His youngest grandchild was directly admitted to WSB as a freshman last year.

## 1960–1969



**Martin Feldman (BBA '64)** recently returned from a cruise in Barcelona

and Rome with his wife of 56 years, Janet. Everything went well until the last excursion, when a cliffside elevator broke and they had to climb what seemed like a million stairs to get back to their group!

**Duane Neuendorf (BBA '64)** and his wife, **Karen (Vahovius) Neuendorf (BSE '67)**, have moved to sunny Arizona after living in Wisconsin for 82 years! They are happy to join many other UW–Madison alumni and bring their 60 years of alumnihood to Sun City.

**Pete Barile (MBA '66)** joined the world's leading company for hospitality seating after serving in the military. In 2004, Barile started his own company, which has two factories and 75 employees manufacturing barstools, benches, and more. Barile says his Wisconsin MBA education continues to guide him even 58 years later.

**Steve Cain (BBA '68)** recently celebrated his ninth anniversary of managing the Midwest office of Fairfield Capital Group, LLC.

**Joseph Burke (MBA '69)** and his spouse, Susanna, celebrated their 43rd wedding anniversary in November 2024. Burke says the decision to study at UW–Madison was one of the best choices he ever made and he is very grateful for the tremendous education he received.



**Edward (Kim) Sniffin (BBA '69)** became a Navy pilot and then a pilot with Delta Air Lines after graduating from WSB. He used many of the skills he learned in Madison throughout his working life, including communications, statistics, accounting, and personnel management. Now retired, Sniffin applies his business knowledge in his volunteer work.

More Class Notes are featured in the digital issue at [business.wisc.edu/update/fall-2024](http://business.wisc.edu/update/fall-2024)

## 1970–1979

**Ira Vernon (BBA '70)** is the chief executive officer of Concrete Reinforcing Products, the largest import distributor of concrete reinforcing bar and prestressed concrete strand. His grandfather, Louis Zinn, started the company in 1953.



**Donald Miner (MS '76)** was awarded the Senior Service Award by the Rotary Club of Madison. He is treasurer of several organizations, including Friends of the UW–Madison Odyssey Project, The Daily Cardinal Media Corporation (DCMC), and Friends of the UW–Madison Arboretum. In his role at DCMC, he mentors WSB students by teaching them how to run a business.

**Steve Fisher (BBA '71)** is the Liberty Tree manager at the Providence Forum Ministries of Coral Ridge. The organization has preserved the DNA of the last surviving Liberty Tree, which was used as a gathering spot for the Maryland Sons of Liberty in Annapolis, Maryland. Through a bud-grafting procedure, this DNA has been transferred to new tulip poplar trees, which are being planted in significant U.S. locations.



**Bill Rauwerdink (BBA '72)** was elected to be a voting delegate

at the Republican National Convention that was held in Milwaukee in July 2024. He served as one of the 55 voting delegates from Michigan.



**Stephen Bye (BBA '73, MBA '74)** published his fifth novel, *Who Killed Alexander Kellogg?*, in July 2024. The story follows the investigation into the death of Alexander Kellogg, who is likely murdered in a powerful home explosion.

**Mark Hoppe (BBA '76, MBA '77)** retired in December 2023 and now serves on several nonprofit boards,

including Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, Loyola University Chicago, and WTTW/WFMT, the city's PBS affiliate.

**Mike Seidel (MS '79)** retired from Bell Labs, as well as his positions of certified financial planner and adjunct instructor. For the past five years, he's served as a local high school crossing guard.

## 1980–1989

**Mark Yde (BBA '80)** retired from Novae LLC in Indiana after leading 14 years of dynamic growth. Previously, Yde spent most of his career with Wisconsin-based Menasha Corporation. After being recruited by Menasha from the Wisconsin School of Business, Yde advanced to become president of Menasha's Poly-Hi Solidur Worldwide division—and later led the successful sale of it.



**Matthew Wallace (BBA '81)** recently retired from the German American

Chamber of Commerce of the

## WISCONSIN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AWARD RECIPIENTS



**JOHN MORGRIDGE (BBA '55)**

received the Distinguished Service Award, which acknowledges individuals who've had unparalleled impact on UW–Madison. The former CEO and chair of Cisco Systems, Morgridge was recognized alongside his wife, Tashia (BSE '55), for service and philanthropic giving to the university. Morgridge was a founding member of the Wisconsin Naming Partnership, a major investment to preserve the Wisconsin School of Business' name for at least 20 years.



**GARY WENDT (BS '65)**

received the Distinguished Alumni Award, which honors prestigious alums and their professional achievements, contributions to society, and support of the university. The co-founder of Deerpath Capital Management, Wendt has given back to UW–Madison by creating scholarships and programs, and by developing general business courses for non-business majors at WSB.



**ROSS FREEDMAN (BBA '97)**

received a Luminary Award for his accomplishments in the areas of leadership, discovery, progress, and service. Freedman is the co-founder of Origin, a technology consulting company operating at the intersection of data analytics, artificial intelligence, and automation. He also serves on the advisory board for the Weinert Center for Entrepreneurship's WAVE program, and is the founder of Badgers in Tech.



**ABBY KURSEL (BBA '14)**

received a Forward Award for her outstanding exemplification of the Wisconsin Idea. Kurssel is a partner at gener8tor, a nationally ranked accelerator that invests in high-growth startups, with a special focus on Wisconsin's startup and venture capital network. Kurssel's leadership helped create gener8tor's successful accelerator program, gBETA.

Midwest, Inc. (GACC) in Chicago, where he served as chief financial officer. GACC is part of a worldwide network that supports bilateral trade and investment with Germany. He continues to serve in an advisory capacity with GACC's educational foundation and the German chamber network.



**John Schaefer (BBA '82, MBA '84)** has decided to take

the big risk of retiring after 40 years of managing risk in

his career. Schaefer applied risk management principles in several roles and industries, including insurance, internal auditing, finance, and information technology. His next act? Using standup comedy and improv to bring people together.



**John Cato (BBA '83)** has created the YouTube channel *That's Classic!*

where he conducts fun interviews with television and movie celebrities from past decades. He

has been an actor, voice-over artist, and moderator for over 20 years for the television and movie industry. Cato's background brings a unique insight and passion to the show.



**Dorothy Washington (MBA '83)** has been promoted to

assistant professor of economics in the School of Social Sciences and Applied Programs at Northwestern State University of Louisiana. Washington is also the author of three children's books:

*I'm Glad I'm Not a Zombie; Sonny, the King of Cats; and Douglas the Runaway Christmas Tree.*



**Phil Greenwood (BBA '84, MBA '89, PhD '02)** retired after 25

years as a senior lecturer in strategy and entrepreneurship in the Wisconsin School of Business' Weinert Center for Entrepreneurship. Additionally, he recently published a book on entrepreneurial management

*Continued on page 26*



titled *Creating a Foundation for the Growing Enterprise*.



**Todd Laszewski (MS '85)** retired from Northwestern Mutual after a nearly

39-year career as vice president and actuary. He recently began a new role as adjunct professor at The American College of Financial Services, where he will teach classes geared toward the Chartered Life Underwriter designation. Laszewski thanks his family of Badgers, including his wife, **Ruth Laszewski (BM '85)**, and daughters, **Sarah Laszewski (BSE '20)** and **Krista Laszewski (BA '23)**.

## 1990-1999



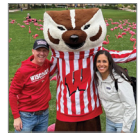
**Lisa (Helsing) Bastian (BBA '93, MS '94)** started a

premium, nut-based granola business in 2022 with her son, Ben, called PremOla Granola. Their quality ingredients ensure a high-protein, low-sugar, and gluten-free product that caters to health-conscious individuals.

**Brett Hamilton (BBA '94)** joined Creative Content Platforms in January 2024, where he is responsible for growing the business' digital-human and generative-content services. Hamilton is keen to stay in touch with fellow Badgers and is always looking for talented individuals for full-time roles and MBA candidates for internships.

**Brian Melka (BBA '97)** was appointed chief executive officer of Rehlko in May 2024 after 10 years with Kohler Co. Rehlko is a global leader in energy resilience products

and operates in more than 200 countries around the world.



**Scott Finkelmeyer (BBA '99)** and his wife, **Keiya Bell-Finkelmeyer (BS '96)**, launched Key Imaging

Partners, LLC, in August 2024, an entity that assists health care providers in understanding, negotiating, and selecting the best medical imaging technology at the best value. Finkelmeyer says that being an entrepreneur is a lifelong dream come true.

## 2000-2009

**Quraish Baldiwala (MBA '02, MS '02)** joined Sequel Med Tech as vice president of global supply chain and operations. Baldiwala is leading the commercialization and global expansion of the company's revolutionary automated insulin delivery (AID) device called the "twiist."

**Kristin Branch (MBA '02)** concluded her leadership of the A.C. Nielsen Center for Marketing Research and the Marketing Leadership Institute at the Wisconsin School of Business. She has transitioned into a fully focused teaching role with the school's marketing department and will teach an introductory marketing class to all undergraduate Badgers interested in business.

More Class Notes are featured in the digital issue at

[business.wisc.edu/update/fall-2024](https://business.wisc.edu/update/fall-2024)



**Parker Bauer (MBA '03)** was recently recognized for organizing the Department of Defense's Weapon Systems Software Summit by a deputy assistant secretary of defense. For the past two years, Bauer has planned and led the summits, which teach developers, program managers, and other leaders about critical software topics.



**Jack (J.P.) Grignano (BBA '05)** was promoted to

partner and Midwest market leader at CFGI, where he leads office-wide strategic initiatives and coordinates across departments to ensure that clients receive high-quality service. Grignano's leadership experience helps drive collaboration within CFGI, which is an international accounting advisory firm.



**Anna (Lu-Steffes) O'Malley (BBA '07)** was promoted in early

2024 to vice president of paid media at Full Beaker in Seattle. O'Malley leads the company in strategic planning and business plan development to successfully execute paid media campaigns for key clients in major product portfolios.

**Laura Gramann Richter (BBA '07)** celebrated the arrival of her second son in Spring 2024, as well as the 10-year anniversary of her business, Pieces into Place, LLC. She says it's been a busy but rewarding 2024!

## IN MEMORIAM



**PAUL KONDRAT (MBA '18)**

passed away on June 18, 2024. After serving seven years in the U.S. Marine Corps, he pursued an MBA in supply chain management from WSB. He spent five years at Amazon and was always on the lookout for new experiences. His curiosity and adventurous nature introduced him to mountain climbing, fly fishing, rock climbing, and more. Kondrat lived life fearlessly and left a positive impact on many people as a teacher, coach, mentor, and friend.

## 2010-2019

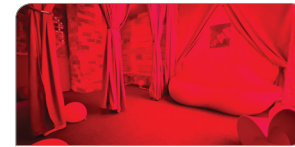


**Shelby Netz (BBA '10)** was promoted to tax principal at Baker

Tilly effective June 1, 2024. She began her career with Baker Tilly in 2011 and now specializes in tax compliance and consulting for not-for-profit organizations. She also serves as Wisconsin chair for the Baker Tilly SOAR committee, where she focuses on recruitment

and retention of diverse team members. Additionally, Netz is treasurer for the Milwaukee Diaper Mission, which provides basic needs to the community.

**William Kiefer (MBA '12)** was an impactful contributor to the acquisition of Union Bank by U.S. Bank in 2023. He's proud to announce that his performance at U.S. Bank earned him the prestigious Legend of Possible recognition in 2024.



**Charles Pellicane (BBA '12)** is celebrating the attendance of over 1,000 visitors to Red Room Art Gallery in Laguna Beach, California. This one-of-a-kind, award-winning gallery is a total sensory experience that explores synesthesia through the color red.



**Yuliya Slesareva Godoy (BBA '12)** recently joined Microsoft

as a senior product manager architect focusing on independent software vendor partnerships in the security space after a decade in professional services. She also completed her Master of Science in cybersecurity from the Georgia Institute of Technology, where she received the Outstanding Graduate Student Award in May 2023.

**Lauren (Pedracine) Benedetto (BBA '13, MBA '18)** and her husband, Jerry Benedetto, opened Jerry's Tavern in May 2024 in Portland, Oregon. After moving to Oregon in 2019 for her job at Nike, Benedetto and her husband missed the neighborhood corner



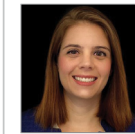
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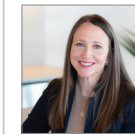
@UWBusiness

bars of Wisconsin and Illinois. Jerry's Tavern has been newly dubbed the official Wisconsin alumni bar of Portland and the couple looks forward to hosting Badger game watch parties for years to come!



**Kelsey Straub (BBA '13, MAcc '14)** received a 2024

– Emerging Leaders Award from the Illinois CPA Society. This award recognizes women who have made significant contributions to the accounting profession, their organizations, and the development of women as leaders.



**Emily Gibson (MBA '14)** was recently promoted to a vice president of

marketing position at Vail Resorts, the world's largest ski resort management company. In this role, Gibson leads the teams responsible for driving strategy



"I'm happy to share that I'm starting a new position as Program Manager at Google!"

—KRISTEN MEZZAPELLE (MBA '19)

and delivering revenue objectives for four strategic enterprise lines of business including rentals and retail.



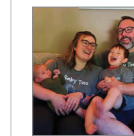
**Jennifer Hoeye (MBA '14)** earned the Associate Certified Coach

credential from the International Coaching Federation. As an executive and team coach, Hoeye helps C-suite employees at large companies navigate times of major transformation.



**Becca McHenry (BBA '15)** leads engineering at Contrast, a small

Chicago startup that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to alleviate administrative burdens on health care workers and provide high-quality patient care. Contrast was selected as a finalist in the VA Health System's AI Tech Sprint, alongside multibillion-dollar giants like Nuance, Abridge, and DeepScribe.



**Amy Walsh (BBA '16)** and her husband welcomed

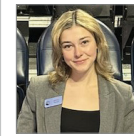
another boy to their family, Mac Schmidt, in May 2024. Their family is so excited about the new addition, and Walsh is enjoying raising the next generation of Badgers.



**Paul Boyer (BBA '19)** celebrated his five-year work anniversary with

UW-Madison in June 2024. Most of this time was spent in his current role as an application and Windows system administrator at WSB. In October 2024, Boyer also married his best friend and partner, **Haley Tollison (BA '20)**, in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, after meeting five years ago on the UW campus. Boyer and Tollison had a blast jumping around with fellow Badgers at their wedding!

## 2020-2024



**Abby Feuer (BBA '23)** started a part-time position with the Minnesota

Timberwolves as a game night assistant after graduating from WSB. Shortly after, she transitioned to a full-time sales role in the business development sector where she sells basketball season memberships and packages.



**Payton Vorreyer (BBA '23)** helps clients navigate the complex Chicagoland real estate market as a broker with RE/MAX Premier. She leverages her marketing expertise to ensure personalized service and professional care. ◀





## Pardon the Noise

PHOTO BY PAUL L. NEWBY II

A steady din of hammers, saws, and drills can be heard throughout Grainger Hall these days. Renovation projects aimed at building an enhanced student experience are happening across the building, including an expansion of the popular Learning Commons. Once finished, the construction tools won't be quiet for long. Next year, a comprehensive project to reimagine Grainger Hall's first floor begins. ◀





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