

# TRANSFORMATIONS



## DECADES OF CHANGING LIVES

Vicki J. Martin retires after  
35 years serving MATC

MATC GROWS  
A GREENER FUTURE

A CAREER GAMBLE  
PAYS OFF IN SPADES

TRANSFER STUDENTS  
EXCELLING BEYOND MATC



### MISSION

Education that transforms lives, industry and community

### VISION

The best choice in education, where everyone can succeed

### VALUES

Empowerment, Inclusion, Innovation, Integrity, Respect

## MATC DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023-24

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## MATC PRESIDENT

**Dr. Vicki J. Martin is the 10th president of MATC.**

She has served in higher education for four decades, at MATC for three decades, and has led the college since 2014. She will retire in June 2024. During her presidency, Dr. Martin launched three life-changing scholarships: the MATC Promise for New High School Graduates, a public-private partnership that provides free tuition for eligible new high school graduates; the MATC Promise for Adults, which provides free tuition for eligible students to finish their degree; and the Ellen & Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program, the college's first full-ride scholarship. Dr. Martin has attracted growing private-sector and foundation support to the MATC Foundation, serves as vice chair of the Higher Education Regional Alliance, is the chairperson of the Bradley Tech High School Commission and is a founding leader of the M<sup>3</sup> (pronounced M-cubed) initiative, which brings together MATC, Milwaukee Public Schools and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to transform the future of Milwaukee through education. Leading the college with a focus on success for all students, Dr. Martin has guided MATC's implementation of the nationally recognized Guided Pathways framework and participation in the nation's first regional launch of the Moon Shot for Equity, which is aimed at eliminating higher education equity gaps by 2030.

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## TRANSFORMATIONS

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Featured in the Spring '22 issue, MATC alumnus David J. Perez III stands with his sculpture "Wet Paint Chango's Perseverance." The artwork was installed at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus in June 2023.



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## MESSAGE FROM THE President and District Board Chairperson

**SIX YEARS AGO**, the faculty, staff and administrators of Milwaukee Area Technical College agreed upon four simple yet transformational statements:

- We can do better.
- We can be student-ready.
- We can build systems, processes and a culture that will achieve better results.
- Other colleges have done it, and so can we.

This was the beginning of implementing a nationally recognized framework known as Guided Pathways, an integrated, collegewide approach to student success that delivers a more structured experience for students from the point of entry through graduation, transfer or both. We paired this work with a strategic goal to improve graduation and transfer rates. After six years, we can announce clear, demonstrable results.

Most notably, **more of our students are graduating on time.** The graduation rate for students coming to college for the first time and seeking a degree has grown by 6 percentage points in the last two years alone. (Specifically, this refers to those who started in Fall 2018 and completed by Fall 2021 compared to those who started in Fall 2020 and finished in Fall 2023).

In addition to more students graduating, the rate of students transferring to a four-year university also grew by 6 percentage points over the past two years. Our four-year transfer programs are among our most popular.



Mark F. Foley, MATC District Board chairperson (left),  
with Dr. Vicki J. Martin, MATC president

In this issue of Transformations magazine, you can read about the success of our transfer students (page 20). You can also read about how public-private partnerships, including our Uniquely Abled Academy (page 16) and a partnership with the rock band Metallica (page 19), are giving students the support they need to succeed.

The result of all these efforts is that MATC is transforming student lives and providing our community and employers with skilled workers needed for economic growth. By graduating and transferring more students, we are achieving the strategic and mission-critical outcomes needed for student social mobility and the community's economic development.

We hope these successes — and everything you read about in this issue — reinforce the positive impact the college generates as we build a diverse, talented workforce for the region. Thank you for your continued partnership.

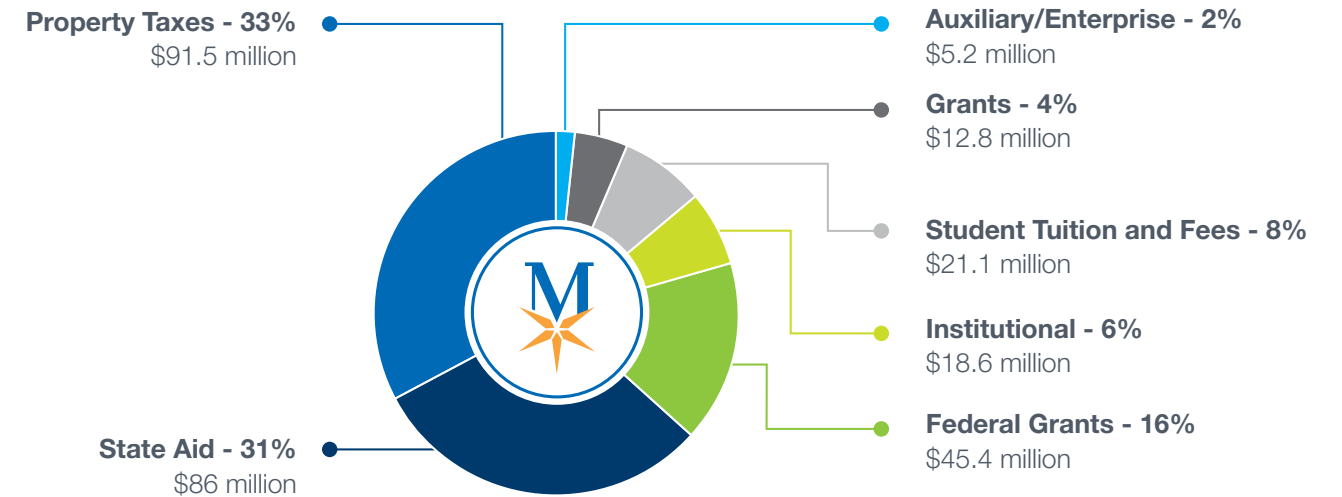


**Vicki J. Martin, Ph.D.**  
MATC President

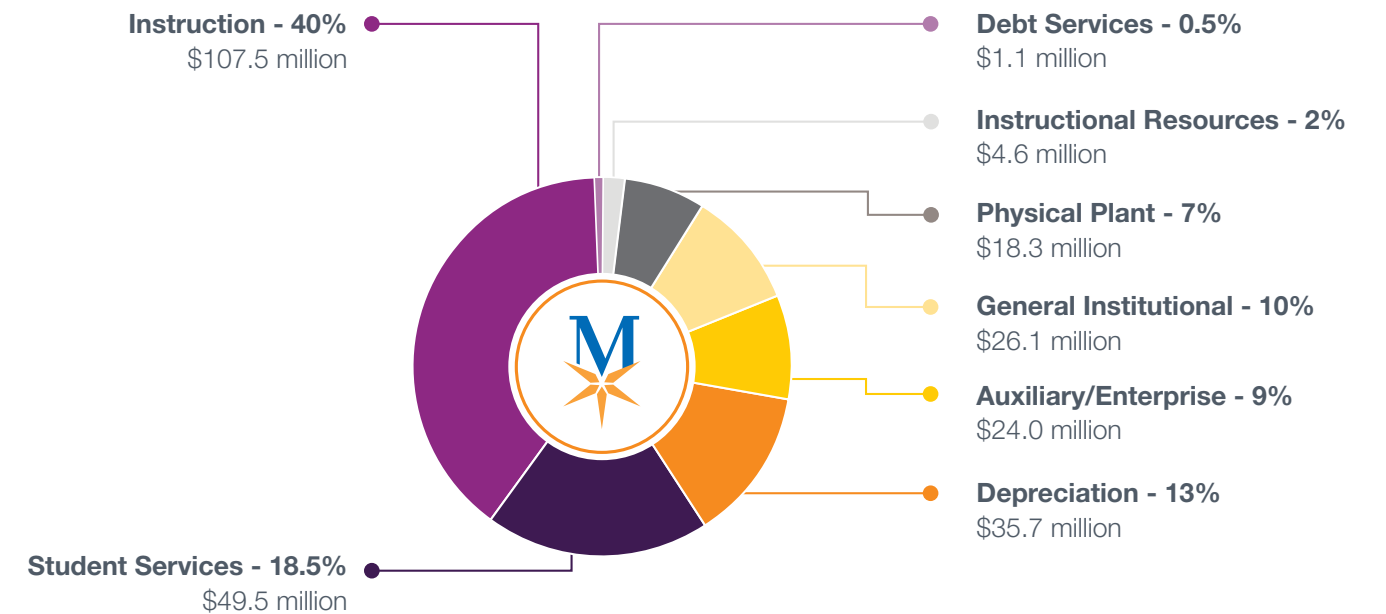
**Mark F. Foley**  
MATC District Board Chairperson

## MATC 2023 Financials

### Total Revenue \$280.6 Million



### Total Expense \$266.8 Million



**Milwaukee Area Technical College is fiscally responsible, balancing the needs of students and taxpayers.**

The college retained a strong Aa1 bond rating from Moody's Investors Service in the 2022-23 fiscal year. The tax levy decreased from 1.009 (2022) to .8998 (2023) for every \$1,000 of equalized value. The owner of a \$100,000 home in the MATC service district paid \$89.98 in 2023, compared to \$100.94 in 2022, a decrease of \$10.96.

# Highlights 2023



## MATC Students Celebrate Citizenship

GOV. TONY EVERS, MATC PRESIDENT DR. VICKI J. MARTIN, Wisconsin Technical College System President Dr. Morna Foy, and MATC instructors Diane Steigerwald and Veronica Torres presented recognition certificates to two dozen new citizens at the New Citizen Recognition & Resource Fair.

The event, which was held November 20 at the MATC Education Center at Walker’s Square, celebrated the students’ completion of citizenship classes and the requirements to become a U.S. citizen. At the resource fair, students received information about postsecondary education programs, financial aid and scholarship options, and voter registration.

“Becoming a citizen so often can be a long, difficult journey, but it also has so many great rewards,” said Dr. Martin, who urged the new citizens, now eligible for financial aid, to take advantage of what MATC offers to further improve and transform their lives. “We are committed to being your partner to unlock your potential,” she said.

## Checota Scholar Recipients Share Their Stories

ON NOVEMBER 27, MATC ADMINISTRATORS AND STUDENTS, along with Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson, urged current and prospective MATC students to apply for the Ellen & Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program by January 5, 2024, so they could start as early as the Spring 2024 semester.

“I know there are obstacles out there,” said Mayor Johnson, who was the first person in his family to earn a college degree. “But there are doors open. You just need to walk through those doors.”

“With good-paying jobs, families, neighborhoods and our city can achieve stability,” Johnson (right) added. “This program brings students closer to that stability.”

Checota recipients Gabrielle Armon-Wickers, Demetrius Bradford Jr., Yeng (Cloud) Tha Vue and Anthony Owens shared how the scholarship changed their lives.



## MATC’s New Web Series Spotlights Faculty Experts

IN A NEW SERIES CALLED “PRO TIP,” MATC’s expert instructors explain simple yet important life tasks, helping viewers increase their knowledge and perhaps consider taking courses at the college.

In the first video, now available on the college’s YouTube channel, Brian Quinn, a full-time MATC instructor since August 2022, showed viewers how to carve and present a Thanksgiving turkey.

“You will hear the oohs and aahs of your friends and loved ones,” Quinn promised viewers.

To catch Quinn and other instructors in action, go to MATC’s YouTube channel and subscribe.

## MATC Graduate Wins Gingerbread House Competition People’s Choice Award Twice

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, Elizabeth Cueto, a recent graduate of the Baking and Pastry Arts program, won the People’s Choice Award at MATC’s annual gingerbread house competition.

And this year she pulled off a delicious double play by also winning first prize in the judging.

“Winning the people’s choice two years in a row is great because you know a lot of people support and like what you’re doing,” Cueto said. “But winning first place after not placing at all last year (in the judging) feels wonderful.”

Gabrielle Harwick placed second, Noelia Contreras placed third and Mandy Schenn received an honorable mention. This year, nine students in the Baking and Pastry Arts and Culinary Arts programs designed and constructed holiday gingerbread houses that were displayed at the Milwaukee Public Market.



## Lecturer Receives Fulbright Grant

PETER BURZYNSKI, lecturer of English and communications at MATC since 2019, was awarded a Fulbright grant. He is among more than 800 U.S. citizens who will teach or conduct research abroad during the 2023-24 academic year thanks to the international exchange program.

“I was flabbergasted to receive the Fulbright, and I am so grateful to be granted this privilege,” Burzynski said.

MATC has had several other Fulbright Scholars. Phil Blank, who taught mathematics and advised international students

at the college for 35 years, received two Fulbrights — one to teach in Turkey from September 1963 through June 1964 and the other in 1982 to teach in what was then West Germany.

American Studies instructor Charlie Dee served as a Fulbright Roving Scholar in Norway in 2003. In 2019, Dr. Jacqueline Robinson won a Fulbright and traveled to Senegal, where she conducted ethnographic fieldwork examining food knowledge, practices and traditions of women in the city of Dakar.

Burzynski, the son of Polish immigrants, is in Slovakia, doing research and working on a book about growing up in his parents’ restaurant in Milwaukee.

## German Native Is the First International Player on Women’s Volleyball Team



IN LATE JULY 2023, Alina Lemke left her hometown of Ettlingen, Germany, and became the first international player on MATC’s women’s volleyball team.

“I had finished high school only three weeks before I left,” said Lemke, who had never even heard of the city of Milwaukee.

Shel DeLisle, head coach of MATC’s women’s volleyball team, had seen video of Lemke playing at her German sports club

through a digital recruiting platform that connects players to potential schools and coaches with potential recruits.

DeLisle then connected with Lemke and set up a virtual tour. “Everybody seemed extremely nice,” said Lemke, who chatted via Zoom with several MATC students and DeLisle.

When Lemke agreed to come to MATC, she became one of 100 international students attending classes.

With Lemke, the Stormers had its first winning season ever, finishing 20-15. The team hosted a National Junior College Athletic Association playoff match and made it to the NJCAA regional semifinals, losing to Madison College.

And so far, she’s happy here. “Right now, I’ll say yes to coming back next year,” said Lemke, who is taking business management classes and living at Westtown Green. “I’m having a really good time here. I’m playing well, and I really like the team and the coaches. I think I’m in a good spot here.”

# Highlights 2023



## College Opens New Center Dedicated to STEM

**THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS** Academic and Career Pathway opened a new educational center that is dedicated to STEM students.

“This is a place where our students can get to know one another and develop relationships. Studies have shown this can improve retention and persistence rates,” said Dr. Kamela J. Goodwyn, dean of the STEM Pathway.

Nearly 100 MATC administrators, faculty, staff, students, industry partners and guests officially opened the STEM Educational Center at the college’s Downtown Milwaukee Campus on September 29, 2023.

“This will be a game changer,” said Dr. Mohammad Dakwar, MATC’s vice president of learning. “Our goal is to inspire students and enhance their experience. The STEM Educational Center will help them do that.”

Tall windows allow passersby to easily see robotic and technological equipment on display. At that opening event, STEM faculty and students shared demonstrations on 3D printing, anatomy and physiology, chemistry, electronics engineering technology, and information technology.

Along with ensuring student success, the STEM Educational Center will be used to encourage students in K-12 to pursue STEM in college and as a career, and to establish and strengthen STEM industry partnerships in Wisconsin and beyond, Dr. Goodwyn said.

## New Programs in 2023

To better provide area employers with the skilled professionals they need right now, MATC introduced five new programs in the fall of 2023:

### Associate of Arts-Communication

This degree combines theory and pragmatic approaches to the field of communication. Students learn public speaking, conflict communication, and interpersonal and intercultural communication.

### Bilingual Clerical and Customer Support Clerk:

Students acquire computer, customer service and math/budgeting skills; learn to operate Office 365 (word processing), Excel (spreadsheets), PowerPoint (presentations); how to use effective workplace communications; apply technology skills to business and administrative tasks; and perform touch keying of the alphabetic keys.

### CNC Swiss Multi-Axis Machining

Students gain hands-on experience in Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Swiss Multi-Axis machine setup and operation. Students can apply credits toward the CNC Technician technical diploma.

### Enhanced Yoga Instructor

Designed to elevate students to trusted wellness practitioners/partners within the healthcare community, this program enhances skills in working with special populations, injury prevention, and mindfulness for a holistic approach to wellness for individuals and communities. Graduates can register with the Yoga Alliance at the RYT500 designation.

### Diagnostic Medical Sonographer

Students learn how to perform routine sonographic (ultrasound) examinations of the body. Graduates can work in a variety of healthcare settings, including clinics, hospitals, private practice physician offices, and public health facilities and laboratories. They are also eligible for certification in sonography through American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT).



## Estate Gift Supports Milwaukee PBS and Student Success

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, Geraldine Grace “Gerry” Geischer was devoted to her students and lifelong learning. Geischer, who died August 26, 2023, at the age of 92, entrusted the MATC Foundation Inc. to continue her legacy through an estate gift.

Geischer directed \$360,000 to help support Milwaukee PBS, the Student Emergency Grants Fund and scholarships in her memory through the Ellen & Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program.

“With planned gifts like Ms. Geischer’s, we see firsthand how commitment to MATC’s students can continue for generations,” said Laura Bray, MATC vice president for advancement and external communications and executive director of the MATC Foundation Inc. “As fiscal steward for gifts to Milwaukee PBS and the college’s philanthropic partner managing multiple student success funds, the MATC Foundation is grateful for this remarkable faculty member’s generosity.”

To make a gift or discuss planned giving in support of MATC students and community, contact MATC Foundation Chief Development Officer Ginny Finn, [finnvr@matc.edu](mailto:finnvr@matc.edu), or Milwaukee PBS Chief Development Officer Dan Mueller, [muell33@matc.edu](mailto:muell33@matc.edu).

## MATC’s Critical Role in Wisconsin Biohealth Industry Could Expand

MATC COULD SOON ENHANCE AND EXPAND its biohealth program offerings with federal funding that a recently formed group of state colleges, businesses and economic development agencies is trying to secure.

The consortium includes MATC, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, BioForward Wisconsin, Exact Sciences Corporation, Accuray, Plexus, GE HealthCare, Rockwell Automation, WRTP Big Step, Employ Milwaukee, Madison Area Technical College, the University of Wisconsin System administration, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Milwaukee 7 and the Madison Regional Economic Partnership.

The consortium’s aim is to have the Economic Development Administration designate Wisconsin as a regional tech hub. This collaborative effort is designed to advance research in personalized medicine and biotechnology and create jobs in the cutting-edge field. The regional tech hub designation would make the state eligible for \$50 million to \$75 million in federal funding through the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act.

“Competition for funding is fierce, and the fact that we were sought out emphasizes MATC’s educational excellence and leadership in the field,” said Dr. Christine Ryan, co-chair of MATC’s biological sciences department and an instructor since 2004.

## Switching on a Powerful Partnership in Milwaukee’s Metcalfe Park

DEMETRIUS BRADFORD JR. barely breaks a sweat getting to class.

From his apartment on Martin Drive in Milwaukee, Bradford is a short drive, a quick bus ride or a brisk walk from MATC’s recently opened Electrical Power Distribution program’s outdoor training facility in the Metcalfe Park neighborhood.

“It’s practically right in my own neighborhood,” said Bradford, who is training to be a utility line mechanic, also known as a line worker. It’s a career that pays an average salary of \$83,000 per year.

Located on North Avenue between 30th and 31st streets, the Metcalfe Park training facility is the result of collaboration between MATC, We Energies, the City of Milwaukee, the Metcalfe Park neighborhood and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

On October 25, those partners and current Electrical Power Distribution students gathered at the site to watch the installation of the sixth and final training utility pole and to celebrate the historic project.

“This was a vacant lot for so many years,” said Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson, who spoke at the event. “Now this will be green space, parks space, a community space and an education space.”



For MATC, the site features yard space, a trailer for classroom instruction and a series of poles for field instruction. For neighborhood residents, a new swale will help with water retention and other parts of the site will be dedicated for park and recreation use.

“Partners came together to expand training opportunities tied directly to high-demand, high-paying jobs. This will bring a new asset to the great Metcalfe Park neighborhood,” said Laura Bray, MATC’s vice president of college advancement and external communications and executive director of the MATC Foundation Inc.



# TRAILBLAZER

“I like being a pioneer. It helps me be bolder and more courageous.”

—DR. VICKI J. MARTIN

## After 10 years as MATC’s president, Dr. Vicki J. Martin is retiring, leaving a legacy of innovation, improved access and student success

As a child, MATC President Dr. Vicki J. Martin never dreamed she’d go to college. No one in her family ever had.

Dr. Martin expected to follow in her mother’s footsteps and become a secretary, but she admitted that she “wasn’t very good at secretarial work.”

Destiny had other plans for her.

Four degrees and a lifelong career in academia later, Dr. Martin is now preparing to retire in June, having initiated a myriad of programs to improve student success, increase access to college and ensure a talent pipeline for area employers.

### Finding her own path

Dr. Martin discovered another way forward during an internship in high school.

“My employers at my secretarial internship saw that the work wasn’t right for me,” Dr. Martin said. They took her to visit the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse and encouraged her to enroll. She surprised her parents by deciding to go to college.

Her studies led to a career in higher education. After earning a master’s degree in counseling and guidance, Dr. Martin worked with students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Carroll College-Columbia Hospital nursing program. In 1988, she landed a job as director of registration and student services at MATC’s Oak Creek Campus.

Dr. Martin was immediately struck by the challenges prospective MATC students faced. She saw them struggle to balance education, parenting and jobs. Many dealt with low test scores and poor high school grades. “As I worked with them, I saw them grow and succeed because MATC has the support systems and small classes that help students flourish,” she said. “I knew I was in the right place.” She spent the rest of her career at MATC.

She earned a second master’s degree and a doctorate, and she was promoted to team leader and then vice president of the Oak Creek Campus. Over the years, Dr. Martin also held collegewide positions, including continuous quality improvement and strategic planning director, provost and executive vice president, and interim

president. In 2014, she was appointed MATC president.

Dr. Martin is known for launching initiatives that promote student success and access to college, encouraging her team to move quickly.

Being first in her family to attend college had an impact on her leadership style, she said. “I like being first. I like being a pioneer. It helps me be bolder and more courageous. When we have ideas for new programs, I believe we can figure it out as we go if we have enough staff to build momentum. That helps when we try things others might not have tried.”

Perhaps no MATC initiative has gained more attention and accolades than the launch of the MATC Promise for New High School Graduates — the first Promise program in Wisconsin. MATC offered young people who met the criteria the chance to attend the college tuition-free. Similar programs had been offered in other states, but what set MATC’s program apart was the fact that tuition gaps not met by financial aid are covered by donor gifts rather than tax dollars.

Several years later, MATC launched the Promise for Adults, one of the first such programs in the nation, to help students who started but did not complete college. The college also created the ReStart and Reconnect programs, which help students unable to finish college due to student debt.

Under Dr. Martin’s leadership, MATC was the first college in Wisconsin and one of only a small number nationwide to join the Second Chance Pell program, which helps incarcerated individuals access college education. Other initiatives she launched include MATC Drive and the Al Hurvis/PEAK Transportation Center, which expand access to automotive and transportation programs for students in underserved areas; the Ellen & Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program, which funds full scholarships for students in short-term training programs; and major gifts from United Health Foundation and Froedtert Hospital to help healthcare students.

Dr. Martin also led MATC to adapt the nationally recognized Guided Pathways framework, which required a major restructuring of the college to improve student success and retention. To build

## Reflections on Dr. Martin

Partners and local leaders share the qualities they admire most in MATC's 10th president.

### LEADERSHIP

She sought every day, in every way possible, to eliminate every obstacle to student enrollment, retention and completion. She changed the lives of thousands for generations to come.

**MARK F. FOLEY**  
chairperson of the MATC District Board

### INCLUSIVE

Dr. Martin's intentional approach to supporting Latinos at MATC has expanded the possibilities that exist for many immigrants and first-generation students in our city.

**FRANCESCA MAYCA WEGNER**  
president and chief possibilities officer of  
Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee

### LIFE-CHANGING

Dr. Martin's work to help 500 students relieve their debts and return to college through the MATC ReStart program has put entire families on the path to good jobs and economic sustainability.

**CHYTANIA BROWN**  
president and CEO of Employ Milwaukee Inc.

### COMPASSIONATE

There has been a clear vision, fierce tenacity and urgency driving her leadership at the helm of MATC. Her leadership hasn't just been about change, it's been about transformation.

**JOANNE ANTON**  
director of giving of Herb Kohl Philanthropies

### INNOVATIVE

I'll never forget Dr. Martin's rollout of the MATC Promise program. Hundreds of students' lives were forever favorably impacted by her vision.

**DALE KOOYENGA**  
president of Milwaukee Metropolitan  
Association of Commerce

on that foundation, Dr. Martin helped create the first cohort to join the Moon Shot for Equity, which strives to eliminate equity gaps by 2030. She also was a charter member of the M<sup>3</sup> (pronounced M-cubed) partnership with UWM and Milwaukee Public Schools, which strengthens pathways and student engagement across the entities. She also oversaw the development of the Westown Green student apartments, which address housing insecurity and offer students a residential experience near the Downtown Milwaukee Campus; the Student Resource Center; and food pantries at all four campuses and the MATC Education Center at Walker's Square.

#### Students first

"My personal mission remained the same throughout my time at MATC," Dr. Martin said. "I always have students and their success in mind."

Dr. Martin said the biggest challenge in her time as president was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed the college's physical doors and forced instructors and students into online instruction nearly overnight. She is particularly proud of keeping workers employed and helping the college to return students safely to campus to participate in studies that required hands-on learning.

Dealing with the response to the tragic death of George Floyd in police custody in May 2020 also was a major challenge, she said. "It was particularly difficult because it happened during the pandemic when we were not here in person to work through our feelings together." As the college and the nation reckoned with racial injustice, MATC launched its first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, overcoming the physical distance imposed by the pandemic.

She believes the biggest challenges facing the college in the future are working to grow enrollment and the need to increase funding, especially for community education programs like GED/HSED and English as a Second Language. Artificial intelligence is another major challenge and opportunity, Dr. Martin said. "AI is changing the way we work and forcing us to examine how we are teaching and how we can be more productive."

Looking toward retirement on June 30, 2024, Dr. Martin said she would like to take courses, serve on boards, consult, travel, continue her artwork and spend time with family.

"I will really miss the graduations, pinning ceremonies and seeing students in the halls and knowing we are helping them," Dr. Martin said. "I will miss dreaming of and doing new things to help students."

She is satisfied with her accomplishments. "I've started everything I wanted to start," she said. "Now it's up to the next president to decide if they want to continue to grow those programs or go down different paths. I gave the best 35 years of my career to MATC. It's time for someone else to take it to the next level. I'm so grateful to have served as the 10th president of MATC for 10 years." ■

# DECADES OF DIFFERENCE

As president of Milwaukee Area Technical College, Dr. Vicki J. Martin led a series of firsts that benefited students and the college. Here's a snapshot of her presidency by the numbers.

35

Years at MATC, 10 as president

7,360

Students awarded scholarships

15,801

Dual enrollment credits earned  
by high school students in 2021-22

78%

Percentage of MATC students  
employed in their field of study

\$36 M

Donated through the MATC Foundation  
for student success

\$2 M

The tuition dollars saved by high school  
students through M<sup>3</sup> College Connections

54%

This fall-to-fall student retention  
rate is a 13 percentage point  
increase since 2020 due to  
Guided Pathways

39%

Percentage of employees who identify as  
people of color, an increase from 31% in 2013





## A Job for Everyone

With MATC and a boss who believes in him, Eric Gama proves there's a place at work for people with autism

### Eric Gama is just one of the guys when he punches in at 9 a.m. and starts his day

as a machining assistant at Allis Manufacturing Corp. in West Allis. He begins his scheduled tasks on one of the company's computer numerical control (CNC) machines. He reviews blueprints and programs machines that produce an array of metal parts. Sometimes he eats lunch with co-workers and talks about a few of his favorite things: his cats, world history, video games, Lego blocks.

"I love going to work," said Gama, who has autism and recently graduated from MATC's Uniquely Abled Academy (UAA). The program is designed to give students with autism the hands-on training needed to prepare for a career as a CNC operator.

Gama was in the second group of students to participate in the Uniquely Abled Academy, which started in 2021.

"Every business is looking for people who can show up on time, take pride in their work and are always asking what more they can do," said Peter Rathmann, the no-nonsense, straight-talking president, CEO and owner of Allis Manufacturing. "Eric is proving all the time that he can do that. He's committed to us, so we are committed to him."

#### A natural fit

During the summer, Gama worked six hours a day, three days a week at Allis Manufacturing. This fall, he's working as many hours as he can there while taking additional CNC grinding courses at MATC and serving as a tutor for the third cohort of students in the UAA. In the spring of 2024, he plans on taking more CNC classes.

In MATC's UAA program, students get more than 500 hours of instruction over two semesters. They learn to interpret industrial and engineering drawings, precisely measure parts so they pass inspection, perform basic machine tool equipment setup and operation, and practice machine shop safety.

UAA students also take career readiness and social skill classes, learn how to build resumes, and go on interviews. They visit prospective employers and watch employer presentations, said Goldmong Vang, UAA coordinator at the college.

"Eric is an amazing student and has a huge interest in machining," Vang said. "We really enjoyed having Eric in our program. He flourished."

At his job, Gama has continued to grow, personally and professionally, Rathmann said. "Since he started, he has really

opened up. He is a fun guy. His first day, we had him do some things to see where he was, and he was knocking out parts on Day 1."

While a student at Nicolet High School, Gama said he considered being a welder or an electrician. He had helped his father renovate a bathroom in the family home, repair a dining room ceiling and paint.

"I thought about attending a four-year college for mechanical engineering, but the more I thought about it, I realized I would be better off in a trade," Gama said.

He met with a Pathway advisor at MATC's Mequon Campus and discovered that he would be a good fit in the CNC program. He enrolled in the UAA program.

"I really enjoyed it. I was always happy to go to class," Gama said. "I learned a lot and found it fun."



#### Unique partnership

Gama and his family met Rathmann at the academy's completion ceremony. Gama talked with him again a few weeks later and started working in June.

*Allis Manufacturing CEO and President Peter Rathmann (left) is committed to hiring workers with autism like Eric Gama (right), who has thrived in manufacturing (above right).*



Shop manager Buddy Bree (left) and Eric Gama discuss plans for the day's work.

Rathmann is keenly interested in neurodiverse disorders. His oldest daughter, Emma, was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism, when she was 12 years old. He has helped her navigate life, secure several jobs and become more independent.

"Many places don't know what to do with these kids," Rathmann said bluntly. "They bring them in but have no ability to manage them or grow them. So they end up kind of hiding them. They might be working third shift in the stockroom."



"Getting over the fear of the unknown is key for many businesses ... If businesses give this chance, I believe they will see the value."

PETER RATHMANN, CEO and president of Allis Manufacturing

He found out about MATC's Uniquely Abled Academy a few years before the COVID-19 pandemic and has been an ardent supporter and evangelical advocate for neurodiverse inclusion ever since.

According to the Autism Society, more than 3.5 million Americans live with autism. Many are either unemployed or underemployed.

About 100,000 people with autism live in Wisconsin, according to a May 2022 study published by the National Library of Medicine. Rathmann believes these individuals can help companies alleviate labor shortages if those businesses are willing to be flexible and accommodating.

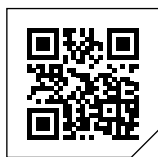
"Getting over the fear of the unknown is key for many businesses," Rathmann said. "They need to create a committed ecosystem where leadership, management, other employees and family members are on the same page. If businesses give this chance, I believe they will see the value."

MATC's program is a partnership with the Uniquely Abled Project, which is based in Los Angeles and was established in 2013 by Ivan Rosenberg, an aerospace industry consultant and parent of two children with autism.

Since MATC launched the program in 2021, more than 65 private sector donors have contributed \$357,000 to the MATC Foundation. In addition, the Wisconsin Technical College System awarded a two-year grant to provide seed support to launch the effort.

"Our program is another innovative approach where MATC is working to nurture the talents of individuals in our district while meeting employer demands in an industry that needs skilled workers," said Laura Bray, MATC vice president of college advancement and external communications and executive director of the MATC Foundation. "This is a clear win-win for students and employers."

Rathmann agreed. "I love what MATC has done with this program," he said. "I applaud that they have integrated it, and I will do whatever I need to do to help support it." ■



Find out more about MATC's Uniquely Abled Academy.



## Heavy Metal Support

Thanks to the rock band Metallica, Ernesto Becerra Ovalle is taking his future into his own hands

Ernesto Becerra Ovalle was just a kid when he learned that using his head was just as important as using his hands.

His father worked in construction and then operated his own landscaping business in Milwaukee, where Ovalle was born and raised. Ovalle often helped repair and maintain the equipment, but his father also made sure Ovalle understood the value of education.

"Doing well in school was an expectation," said Ovalle, 19. "In high school, we were pushed to excel, so I went into college with the same mentality."

At MATC, Ovalle is learning trade skills that use his hands, taking academic courses that expand his knowledge and getting help from the legendary heavy metal band Metallica.

Ovalle, who plans to own and operate a trucking business using all the skills he is learning at MATC, received a scholarship from All Within My Hands (AWMH), a workforce initiative established in 2017 by the members and management of the band Metallica to help prospective students, recent high school graduates and adults discover and explore hands-on careers in "heavy metal" fields, including automotive/diesel technology, truck

driving, computerized manufacturing, HVAC and welding.

In July 2022, MATC was selected from a competitive field of community colleges across the country to receive \$100,000 from AWMH. Scholarships are based on students' financial needs. Since then, 84 scholarships have been awarded to MATC students through the MATC Foundation Inc., the college's philanthropic partner.

"The mission of Metallica's All Within My Hands aligns perfectly with our mission, which is to offer an education that transforms lives, industry and community," said MATC President Dr. Vicki J. Martin in receiving the grant. "This funding will help students enroll in our high quality, in-demand programs that meet local employer and community needs — leading to careers that provide family-supporting wages and better lives."

After graduating from Saint Thomas More High School in the spring of 2022, Ovalle enrolled at MATC. He earned a technical diploma in Welding in May 2023 — with scholastic honors — and this summer is enrolled in MATC's Truck Driving program. He plans to enroll in the college's Diesel and Powertrain Servicing program in the fall.

"I wanted to go to a technical college right out of high school," Ovalle said. "A university wasn't really for me."

"With Ernesto, it is never enough when it comes to his education," said Erik Riley, an advisor in MATC's Manufacturing, Construction & Transportation Pathway who told Ovalle about the Metallica scholarship. "His ability to quickly adapt to the college experience and excel demonstrates his potential. Young men like Ernesto are what the trade industry needs, and I'm confident he will succeed in any direction he may go."

"The Metallica scholarship has really helped me out," Ovalle said. "It kind of calmed me down knowing I had some financial help to go to college. Without it, I would not have been able to take this great journey at MATC."

Ovalle also effusively praised his advisor, Riley, who counseled him on school, work and life. "I would often visit his office two or three times a week," Ovalle said. "He helped me with financial advice and helped me plan out my journey at MATC. He reached out to me whenever there were any scholarships available. That is how I came across the Metallica scholarship. Not only is he a great advisor, but he's a great person to talk to about any school or personal matters. He really helped me with my plan."

"My classes are fast paced, the instructors are great and I never want to miss a day," Ovalle said. "MATC is providing me with the exact right skills for me to achieve what I want." ■

Learn more about the All Within My Hands Foundation at [allwithinmyhands.org](http://allwithinmyhands.org).

THE COLLEGE'S SMOOTH AND SEAMLESS  
TRANSFER PROGRAMS LEAD STUDENTS  
TO BACHELOR'S DEGREES

# GREAT JOURNEYS START AT MATC

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Here are three stories of MATC alumni who received an associate degree in the General Education Pathway then transferred to one of Wisconsin's four-year universities.



**IRIS SANCHEZ**

## University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Iris Sanchez was always one of the best of the best at MATC.

She earned "A's" in every course she took and made the President's List four times. She was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, an international honor society, and the National Society of Leadership and Success. She participated in student government, volunteered at the Milwaukee Rescue Mission and raised her daughter.

In the fall of 2022, she was named one of MATC's outstanding students for earning her associate of arts degree and spoke at the 2022 Winter Commencement.

She did all that while on MATC's UWM Panther Tracks transfer program, which guarantees admission to UWM for MATC students who meet certain academic requirements. Last spring, she enrolled in UWM's nutritional science program.

Because all her MATC credits transferred over, she was able to take classes in her major right away. "The professors here have told me they can tell I have had experience," Sanchez said.

She did exceptionally well in her first semester, earning a 4.0 GPA. "I owe that to my experience at MATC," she said. "It helped me with the skills needed to excel."

Sanchez said she plans to finish her bachelor's degree and then continue at UWM to earn a master's of public health degree in nutrition and dietetics. She intends to become a registered dietitian nutritionist and make an impact in the community through nutrition.

Sanchez goes to school full time, works as a shift manager at a Panda Express restaurant, volunteers once or twice a week at the campus food pantry and raises her daughter.

"Without a doubt MATC was the right decision for me. The college gave me so many opportunities. I think because of the way MATC is structured, they care a lot about each student. I gained unmatched experience in how to navigate learning, working and living," Sanchez said.

"I feel like MATC is home," she added. "My whole time here I felt supported and recognized. It felt like I had a second family and that was something I really needed in my college experience. MATC provided the perfect foundation for me to be successful."

PAULA PHILLIPS

## University of Wisconsin-Madison

Paula Phillips has always wanted to make a difference.

She grew up in the northern Illinois suburb of Grayslake, daughter to parents who came to the United States from the Philippines. For a short time, she attended ministry college and planned to become a missionary.

Instead, she left school and served two years in AmeriCorps, an agency that engages more than 5 million volunteers to improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement across the United States. In her second year, she served in Milwaukee and attended an evening class in sociology at MATC. She took another class, then another and yet another.

“The caliber of instructors at MATC is so strong,” said Phillips, who has served as director of Milwaukee County’s Equity Operations since September 2022. “They make that effort to reach you as a student. At a four-year school, you have to do that yourself a lot of times. The instructors at MATC advocated for you.”

Phillips received an associate of arts degree from MATC in 2014. She heard about MATC’s Badger Track program, which guarantees students with a 3.0 GPA who complete 54 MATC credits admission to UW-Madison. She enrolled in the program and transferred. “It was such an easy process,” she said. “It was seamless once I was on the track.”

At UW-Madison, she earned a bachelor’s degree in agricultural and applied economics, along with a certificate in global health in 2016. She then continued her career of service, working for the YWCA Southeast Wisconsin, the Medical College of Wisconsin and City Year Milwaukee. She was on the advisory board of Public Allies Wisconsin in Milwaukee and served a four-year term as an elected member of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors from 2017 to 2021.

Her educational base was strong and solid thanks to MATC. “For me it’s important that I put on my bios that I am an MATC graduate,” Phillips said. “The weird stigmas people have of technical and community colleges are dumb.

“The outcomes and the impact are there. You have far less debt, you get a job quicker and you keep your job longer,” she added. “Many first-generation kids hope that education is a way to be successful. MATC certainly helped me start and succeed on that path.”



BRAXTON CLARKE

## Marquette University

Braxton Clarke has modest life goals.

He wants only to run the world.

“I’m finding there are some steps I might need to take before I get there,” Clarke said with a laugh.

Because of the rigorous educational foundation he built at MATC and the college’s transfer process, Clarke is a student at Marquette University.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Clarke graduated from Brown Deer High School in 2015 and didn’t know what he wanted to do. Clarke worked for two years before he and a friend decided to enroll in MATC.

Not sure of his career direction, he tried computer science and business management before deciding to get an associate degree in liberal arts. He also worked in the grants and resources office while an MATC student and earned his associate degree in 2019.

Marquette accepted practically all of his credits, and he earned a scholarship through the university’s Educational Opportunity Program to pay tuition.

He also found his new university a much different place than MATC. “Marquette is a larger campus and there’s always something to do, so I needed to work on time management,” he said. “The classes were much bigger. I was used to the more intimate classes at MATC.”

Clarke plans to get a degree in sociology from Marquette in the spring of 2025. He took 2023 off from classes and worked as an information technology support specialist, serving customers around the globe in data migration, troubleshooting and desktop support.


“For me, MATC was a perfect training ground,” Clarke said. “Between MATC and Marquette, I have experienced two different environments, and I think that can only make me a more well-rounded person.”



### Top 3 Transfer Destinations for MATC Graduates

- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Herzing University
- Bryant & Stratton College

Source: 2023 Graduate and Career Report

A man in a dark suit and tie stands in a modern casino hallway. The walls are illuminated with a warm, orange-red glow, and the ceiling features a blue, geometric lighting pattern. The man is smiling and has his hands in his pockets.

## Hitting the Career Jackpot

**Computer wiz Adam Gruscynski keeps the good times rolling at Potawatomi Casino Hotel**

Even at 8 a.m. on a Monday, the senses can get excited at Milwaukee's Potawatomi Casino Hotel.

Slot machines blink, twinkle, buzz and whirl, chirping out beeps and bits of music. Colored lights illuminate the tall walls. A climate-controlled breeze cools the room. Smartly dressed dealers attentively await customers at their green felt blackjack tables, roulette wheels and craps pits. Hosts and hostesses flash bright, welcoming smiles while serving food and beverages and checking in hotel guests.

Behind all that glitz, glamor and hospitality is a series of unglamorous but sophisticated technology systems that monitor the electronic table games, manage hotel room reservations, process food orders, protect personnel files, operate security systems and ensure the casino has adequate electricity.

And behind all those systems is Adam Gruscynski.

*MATC graduate Adam Gruscynski is the director of information technology at Potawatomi Casino Hotel.*

Gruscynski, who earned an associate degree in MATC's Microcomputer Specialist program in 2006, has worked at the casino for 15 years, and in June 2023 was named director of information technology.

As director, he oversees nearly 100 computer applications that control the casino, hotel, parking lots, lounges, restaurants and gift shop. Gruscynski leads a staff of 45 employees who ensure everything on the sprawling Menomonee Valley property runs smoothly, safely, securely, legally and, maybe most importantly, continuously — 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

"This industry is always looking to become more efficient, to provide better service and come up with new experiences for our guests," Gruscynski said. "You have to like being busy because we never stop."

#### Fascination with technology

Gruscynski was born and raised in Cudahy. He fell in love with technology at an early age and took every computer and keyboarding class he could at Cudahy High School. He also attended a computer camp sponsored by MATC.

"I couldn't learn enough about computers," Gruscynski said. "By the time I graduated high school (in 2002), I knew I wanted to work with computers and the sooner, the better."

"I knew a traditional four-year college wasn't for me," he added. "MATC aligned more with what I wanted to do. I was more concerned about the technical, and at MATC, I certainly got the technical."

At the college, he learned about network operating systems, security and emerging information technologies. He interned at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, working at the newspaper's IT help desk.

"I would learn things in the classroom, and days later I would be putting them to use in the real world," he said.

After earning his MATC degree in 2006, he took a full-time job at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. He spent five years there as a network engineer.

"It was all about getting my foot in the door and learning the industry," he said.

In July 2008, Gruscynski joined one of his former supervisors from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel at Potawatomi Casino Hotel. "I was excited and nervous," he said. "I didn't know the gaming industry. It was a whole new chapter in my life."

As a network administrator at the casino, he supported network resources and ensured stable, efficient and secure delivery of all information technology systems to casino users. This included installing, configuring, administering, maintaining and fine-tuning network infrastructure and server platforms across the organization.

In January 2022, Gruscynski became information technology security manager, responsible for reducing cyber risk at the casino and keeping all guests, employees and assets safe and secure from threats.

That year, Gruscynski worked on three major projects at the casino: replacing the systems that run the gaming floor at Potawatomi Casino Hotel's Carter location near Green Bay so they matched Milwaukee's systems, helping to open a sports book in the Milwaukee casino, and getting We Energies to supply more power to the Milwaukee location. That move required all electronic games in the facility to shut down for a day and then be rebooted.

"All of those projects went off without a hitch," Gruscynski said. "I believe I was doing things that needed to get done, and people were noticing that."

"I would encourage anyone to go to MATC, a technical college or community college because they are more in tune with giving you the skills you need on day one to have a fighting chance to succeed"

ADAM GRUSZCYNSKI, director of information technology at Potawatomi Casino Hotel



Adam Gruscynski's team supports Potawatomi Sportsbook.

He also enhanced his knowledge by participating in a mentoring program hosted by the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC), a national group of technology professionals. Gruscynski was paired with Brent Hutfless, executive director of IT security for Wind Creek Hospitality, which operates casinos in Alabama, Florida, Pennsylvania and the Caribbean.

"Adam has many traits one finds in successful people. He taps into his education, experience and soft skills to communicate competent strategies and create the relationships he needs to achieve business goals," Hutfless said. "Adam is a man of fairness and integrity and is personable and warm, all traits which come through in his personal and online dealings."

"Adam is a natural leader, talented, a great communicator and charismatic, a combination that is something of a rarity in the tech field."

When the casino's previous IT director retired in the fall of 2022, Gruscynski got the job.

#### Being in charge

As director, Gruscynski strives to create a welcoming, professional working environment for his employees. He fully supports his workers enhancing their skills and acquiring new ones. He plans to expand the team as Potawatomi Casino Hotel adds more games and new attractions.

The casino and hotel recently completed the first phase of a \$190 million expansion, renovated the casino's second floor and partnered with Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons from the rock band KISS to open Rock & Brews. The renovations also include the opening of Cream City Coffee and a retail store, along with adding over 300 new slot machines, which now makes Potawatomi

Casino Hotel one of the largest casinos in the Midwest.

"This is a really great place to work. There is so much going on right now," he said. "We're doing our best to stand out in the market as a premier place to work in this field."

To recruit promising IT talent, Gruscynski maintains a constant and visible presence on LinkedIn, attends career fairs, and speaks to area high school and middle school students. He recently spoke at i.c.stars Milwaukee, an immersive, technology-based leadership development program for young adults.

"I have received the benefit from working with some really great people and learning from them. I've had some wonderful mentors.

So now it's my turn, and I want to try and give back as much as I can," he said.

After being named director, he volunteered for a leadership position on the Tribal Information Sharing and Analysis Center (Tribal-ISAC), a national gaming group that discusses cyberthreats, threat prevention and security.

Gruscynski, who lives with his wife and two children in South Milwaukee, also supports MATC and the work the college is doing to transform lives.

"I believe technical colleges are more in tune with the community. They make a better pipeline to what is needed most and are attuned to what businesses want and can adapt quicker," he said. "I would encourage anyone to go to MATC, a technical college or community college because they are more in tune with giving you the skills you need on day one to have a fighting chance to succeed." ■

## Tech Training at MATC

MATC offers associate degrees, technical diplomas and certificates in these fast-growing sectors of information technology:

#### CODING

MATC recently started a coding boot camp (four sessions, eight weeks each) that goes beyond theory and connects students with the latest skills and industry-standard technology.

#### COMPUTER SUPPORT

Almost everyone at some point needs help from the IT desk. This program teaches how to help businesses set up, configure, administer, troubleshoot and deploy mobile devices, cloud systems, Windows computers and servers, OSX desktops and laptops, IOS and Android Mobile smartphones and tablets.

#### DEVELOPER

Chart the future of IT by developing new web and software applications. Students learn how to develop web applications for a variety of platforms that utilize client and server processing, connect to databases and run simultaneously on multiple devices, as well as manage databases.

#### NETWORKING

Students will help businesses of all sizes fully utilize their computer networks. The college uses the most recent operating systems, hardware and technology from Microsoft, AWS, VMware, Cisco and CompTIA.

#### SECURITY

More than ever, computer systems and computer networks need to be secure. MATC's program uses major networks, including MS Windows, Unix/Linux and Cisco, to show students how to develop information security strategies, perform risk analyses, install security software, monitor network traffic and develop emergency response plans.

**\$97,500** annual mean salary for IT and computer workers

**15%** projected job growth of the computer and information technology sector

Source U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021

Source U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021

# A Little Peace of Green

## MATC's award-winning green roof is an energy-efficient oasis where students cultivate a sustainable future

There is a whole new world on top of the T Building on MATC's Downtown Milwaukee Campus.

Instead of the usual industrial landscape of HVAC units, pipes and tiling, a garden grows on a section of the building's third-floor roof. The green roof is a calm urban oasis with patches of greenery, welcoming benches, a dozen oversized planters and raised beds nurturing an assortment of herbs and other plants.

Completed in January 2023, the \$1.3 million green roof covers more than 4,600 square feet and is publicly visible and accessible from a skywalk connecting the campus' H and T buildings. The green roof and a small, publicly accessible park created near the T Building help manage nearly 24,000 gallons of stormwater every time it rains, according to the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

The project, which was started in June 2022, included reinforcing the roof with new structural steel, replacing windows, and installing fire protection sprinklers, HVAC systems and electrical wiring.

In June 2023, the project was cited in a Green Luminary award given to the college by the MMSD. The honor recognizes exceptional green infrastructure design projects carried out by businesses, organizations and communities. These projects must benefit the city's lakes, rivers and environment. MMSD and the Fund for Lake Michigan both contributed funding to the project.

MATC has a strong commitment to sustainability, including water reduction and protection, said Laura J. Tenpenny, MATC's manager of energy. The college's green roof stores water using sedum, a flowering plant commonly used for green roofs, along with paved stones and planters.

Students in the college's Culinary Arts program grew herbs in the planters to illustrate the possibilities and potential yield of urban gardens. The herb garden sprouted and flourished thanks to compost converted from food waste generated by the college's culinary classes.

The Culinary Arts program has been composting food waste, such as onion skins, egg shells, vegetable trimmings, and chicken, beef and fish bones, as well as paper products since 2016, said Jack Kaestner, an MATC Culinary Arts instructor.

The compost has had an impact beyond the herb garden — it was used to create new garden plots at the Mequon Campus and was donated and delivered to community gardens in Milwaukee.

Isaac Palmer, coordinator of MATC's Landscape Services, prepared the soil and planted the seeds in the green roof's herb garden last spring. Moving forward, culinary students will be in charge of the garden, Kaestner said.

Students will dress the beds with finished compost in the spring, plant more herbs, tend and weed the beds, and then harvest the mature plants in the fall to use as fresh ingredients.

"They will get to see the full circle — from food waste to food, from garbage to a garden," Kaestner said. "It's really a learning experience on multiple levels." ■



*There's nothing like fresh rosemary from the garden (above). Left: Kitchen scraps produced in classes are composted.*

*Culinary students harvest fresh herbs to use in their cooking for a rooftop-to-table dining experience.*



MATC alumna  
Sherrie Williams

## Always in Style

**With an eye for fashion and an unstoppable drive, Cosmetology alumna Sherrie Williams is building her own beauty empire**

Sherrie Williams is tangled in tresses and tendrils. When it comes to cutting, trimming, snipping and styling hair, her family roots are thick and luxurious.

Her aunt is a hairdresser. Her cousin works in a salon. Her two brothers are barbers. Her mother dabbled in styling. Her son attended cosmetology school.

“Hair is in my blood,” said Williams, who was born and raised in Milwaukee.

Williams, who overcame learning disabilities and medical issues to earn a technical diploma in Cosmetology at MATC, opened her own salon in 2008. Later that year, she began concocting her own shampoos, conditioners, oils and treatments specifically to treat the natural hair of women, men and children of color.

Today, Williams styles hair and supplies products to a long list of personalities and celebrities, including actor Vivica A. Fox. Her line, called Simplistic B.S.C., includes nearly 30 different products and can be bought at grocery stores and major retailers like Fresh Thyme, Piggly Wiggly and Walmart. Williams also recently announced that Froedtert Health’s network of hospitals and clinics throughout Wisconsin will use her products, making her the first African American in the nation to sell a hair care line to a major hospital.

“I’ve known Sherrie from a teenager up until now and the word

that describes her best is unstoppable,” said Marlon Lock, pastor of the church Williams attends, the Unity Gospel House of Prayer in Milwaukee. “Out of all the things she’s been through, she refuses to not win. Her intentionality is unmatched. I think this is only the beginning. She’s definitely going higher.”

### Finding her passion

Growing up, Williams had a passion for helping others cultivate their unique style. In middle school, she was the girl who did other girls’ hair. “My mother’s kitchen turned into a salon,” she said.

In high school, she had a baby when she was 18 years old and another at 19. She was diagnosed with a learning disability and at times struggled with schoolwork. She got into fights. “I was bullied. The fights came from the anger I felt about being bullied,” she recalled.

Williams did not finish traditional high school and opted to earn her diploma through MATC’s Adult High School program. After completing the program, Williams came down with bacterial meningitis. She was still recovering in 2006 when she registered for cosmetology courses at MATC. Although she sometimes got ill, she completed her classes and served her apprenticeship at a Milwaukee salon. In her second year, Williams won the Cosmetology program’s skills award — the first Black woman to receive the honor.

Photos courtesy of Sherrie Williams

“While in school, she always gave her best — being present, on time, completing assignments,” recalled Kara Walker, an instructor in the college’s Barber and Cosmetology programs since 2004. “It was always her goal to be successful in the beauty industry.”

### Beauty start-up

Williams got married in 2009 and opened her own salon on 78th and Burleigh streets in 2010. Sherrie Cheriell’s Hair Gallery is currently located at 138th Street and Capitol Drive in Brookfield. While styling, shaping and cutting in the salon, she started to experiment with hair product, such as shampoos and conditioners.

“I never paid much attention to shampoo until I was in school. MATC taught me the difference between products. I started to read the ingredients to see what worked and what didn’t work,” she said. “I started mixing my own, and customers started buying it. I began to think I was onto something, and it just exploded.”

In 2018, with assistance and advice from her mentors Celeste Cuffie and Katina Washington, she started her company and sold products to individual customers and area businesses.



*Simplistic B.S.C. products are available at major retailers, such as Walmart and Piggly Wiggly.*

Williams considers herself a guide to women and young girls, especially of color. She teaches them to be comfortable with their natural, textured hair, which can be a struggle to keep clean, conditioned and healthy. With an experienced eye, she can break down almost anyone’s hair, diagnose issues and suggest solutions.

“Knowing what you put on your hair is the same as knowing what you put in your

body while eating,” Williams said. “When you’re young, hair grows at a fast rate. As you get older, it slows down and you need different things in it to stay healthy: protein, iron, vitamins. My products deliver all that.”

Williams offers her expertise to mothers and children at free classes in the community. She has held events for the past several years at the Temple of the Holy Spirit, a church in Milwaukee. She shares tips on managing and maintaining healthy hair and encourages everyone to be proud of their style.

“Sherrie is an awesome, creative, innovative woman,” said Gloria Tatum, pastor at the Temple of the Holy Spirit. “What she does with these young girls is amazing. She seems to know their mind and sensitivities. When she’s here, you can see they feel better about themselves. You can see the smiles on their faces.”

### The road to success

For Williams, the future seems full of smiles. She plans to continue her community outreach and advocate for hair health. She serves on MATC’s Barber and Cosmetology Advisory Committee, reviewing the courses offered by the

college to ensure they meet the needs of employers.

She will keep working to place her products in more retail locations and attract more corporate customers. She also wants share her business journey with other budding entrepreneurs.

When it comes to hair, MATC’s Walker doubts that Williams will ever have a bad day.

“Sherrie has soared in many ways. Her personality is very outgoing, bubbly and personable,” Walker said. “I know that there is more in store for her.”

Williams credits her technical college education and a loving family support system for her success. “MATC taught me a lot. The instructors really took their time with me,” Williams said. “I consider my former instructors part of my great support system.” ■

## MATC SPOTLIGHT

### Entrepreneurial Center

Helping students take their ideas from concept to market is the mission of MATC’s Entrepreneurial Center.

Founded in 2012, the center is led by Armen Hadjinian, an instructor and coordinator in the college’s Entrepreneurship program. Students, faculty or staff with an idea for the next disrupter or a hobby they’d love to turn into a business are welcome to stop by Room M319 on Mondays and Tuesdays from 3-6 p.m. to chat with Hadjinian.

“My challenge is to get them to see the bigger picture,” said Hadjinian, who emphasizes the importance of knowing customers and building value for them.

If you can’t stop by during open hours, then head over to Instagram, where Hadjinian has posted several one-minute lessons about entrepreneurship. Topics range from building a brand to finding your own value.

Check out the videos



Learn more about MATC’s Cosmetology program at [matc.edu](https://matc.edu)



# Q&A



Clayborn Benson at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum

## Milwaukee's Storyteller

**Clayborn Benson, retired WTMJ photojournalist and founder of the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum, talks about MATC's influence on his career and his graduate studies**

### How did MATC's Photography program impact your career path?

I would not have been able to get the job at WTMJ had I not enrolled in MATC's Photography program. One of the conditions of my employment with WTMJ was that I enroll in MATC's Photography program. I started at WTMJ on August 12, 1968, and later in the month of that same year, I started classes at MATC.

I stayed there for two years before being drafted into the Army, where I served as a photographer for seven years.

### Would you share a few of your fond memories from your time at MATC?

I developed some close friends at MATC, most of us were from the same high school, and we are still friends. My wife, at the time, ran for Miss MATC and was the first runner up. We had a great time supporting her effort. The African American student body collaborated around her winning first runner-up of the pageant.

### What specifically did you learn in MATC's Photography program that helped you in your studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee?

I enrolled in UW-Milwaukee after returning from the service. After my time at MATC, I felt I was ready. At MATC, I learned determination. I had to work hard to accomplish my goals to get through college.

### What advice do you have for up-and-coming photojournalists as they cover stories ranging from conflicts overseas to the rising cost of living in the United States?

My advice for students is to learn as much as you can — everything from computer operations to economics, and even making travel arrangements. Photography covers so many areas of importance. The more learned you are, the better able you are to be on top of your game.

I was a true-blood photographer. I loved it! In fact, when I transferred to UW-Milwaukee, I graduated from their film program as an honor student. I took the things that I learned from MATC's Photography program on that journey to receive my bachelor's of fine arts degree from UW-Milwaukee.

### When did your love of history begin?

It first began when I worked in my father's barbershop. He shared historical information and memories with customers that came into the barber shop. The stories he told echoed in my mind, but I never really saw history as a way of earning a living. Photography, for me, was a way of earning a living. Everywhere I went, I took pictures. My understanding of a trip or traveling was to take pictures of the location, events and the people.

### How did your work as a photojournalist shape your storytelling?

I see storytelling and photojournalism as two different mediums. Photography put me in a position where I'm able to see the various stories and process them. That helped me appreciate the life and times of many people and events that I was able to experience. The journey between photography and storytelling was a gradual and visible transition. I might add that my teachers at MATC were quite personable, demanding and very insistent on me learning the craft of photography. I always kept them at the forefront of my mind as I traveled throughout the world and interviewed people.

### Which historical figures in Milwaukee do you find most inspiring? Why?

As a historian, I've been fortunate enough to study and read about all of my people who have migrated to Wisconsin. I must say that I'm quite impressed with some of the early arrivals who were very insistent about having the right to vote — people like Ezekiel Gillespie. I'm in awe of Jonathan J. Myers, who made a decision to travel to Africa with his son in 1860, without a passport or permission to do so. I love the spirit of William T. Green, an African American attorney, who demanded that African Americans be treated equally in public spaces. Nothing would have occurred without the spirit of our sisters, like Mrs. Hattie Fountain, a pianist from Kentucky who became a member of the Marcus Garvey

movement and organized the Milwaukee chapter of Black Cross Nurses to treat African Americans who contracted tuberculosis. Mrs. Bernice Lindsay was someone you would never see on the picket lines, but she was very much involved with issues such as housing. She acquired a plot of land for a subdivision in 1939 for returning war veterans and encouraged them to build their own homes. Mrs. Lindsay also took a delegation of people to West Africa to meet the president of the Congo. She was also involved in creating the Inner City Arts Council and later, the Creative Center. She was one of the founding members of the Delta Sigma Theta-Milwaukee Chapter in the mid-1940s. And, of course, there are many, many others who have made a big difference in our community.

### When you do presentations for school groups (at the museum), what question is asked most often?

Does Wisconsin have a history relevant to Black people? And my answer is, yes it does. Most often people see things that occur in other cities and state of historical reference, but they don't envision those things occurring in our backyard, but they do — even next door. For example, public lynchings, denying the right to vote and other discrimination practices. The struggle goes on and on for Wisconsin's African American citizens.

### Would you recommend MATC to students? Why?

MATC has always been an important educational institution to me. I registered there right after high school, and they accommodated my inconsistencies at the time and taught me how to become more serious about my studies. Over the years, I continued to attend MATC, taking refresher courses to strengthen my academic skills. Before enrolling in UW-Milwaukee's graduate program, I returned to MATC in 2015 for an entire year to prepare myself. That is an example of my dependence on MATC. MATC helped prepare me to attend graduate school. ■

### Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum

Located on the corner of North 27th and West Center streets in Milwaukee, the museum features exhibits on Black workers, the Civil Rights Movement and genealogy. [Learn more at wbhsm.org.](http://wbhsm.org)

**MESSAGE FROM THE  
 Foundation Board President  
 and Executive Director**

At this time, we join together to celebrate the legacy of Dr. Vicki J. Martin, who is retiring after 10 years as president of Milwaukee Area Technical College.

As the college’s philanthropic partner, all of us at the MATC Foundation are honored to have helped build the public-private partnerships formed during her tenure. Thank you to the hundreds of contributors who have given generously. Together, we are redefining a future of higher education that is career-focused, less expensive and more agile to meet students’ aspirations and today’s workforce needs.

Our collective work has produced remarkable outcomes in the last 10 years and is the cornerstone of momentum for success in the decades to come. The Foundation’s partnership successes have included:

- Addressing specific workforce pipeline changes by securing targeted, private investments from Froedtert Health, Johnson Controls, Molson Coors, Northwestern Mutual, United Healthcare, PepsiCo, We Energies and more. Results have increased enrollment, retention, completion and employment in in-demand industries.
- Creating Wisconsin’s first free-tuition Promise program, garnering more than \$3 million in private investment for scholarships, especially for underrepresented communities: 79% of MATC Promise students identify as students of color as compared to 56% for MATC overall.
- Launching the MATC Drive program. Supported by Tom Hurvis and local automotive industry leaders, the program has since its 2018 inception increased student enrollment by 41%, student diversity by 19% and credentials received by 44% in MATC’s automotive programs.



Laura Bray (left) and Chantel Byrd (right)

- Awarding more than 1,000 students — in just 18 months — a Checota MATC Scholarship through the college’s first full-ride scholarship program, which has a remarkable student retention rate of 86%. That’s 26% higher than the average of all part-time MATC students.
- Increasing the number of students served through scholarships and the MATC Foundation’s emergency grant program by an astounding 346% during Dr. Martin’s service as president.
- Growing a Milwaukee PBS quasi endowment from \$5.9 million in 2014 to \$13.6 million as of December 2023.

Dr. Martin launched visionary college access programs supporting the career dreams of thousands of students while building talent pipelines for industries throughout our region. On behalf of all of your private-sector partners, thank you Dr. Martin!

The future looks bright for all who benefit from the MATC Foundation’s work and the impact we can make together to transform lives, industry and community.

Sincerely,

**Chantel Byrd**  
 Board President  
 MATC Foundation Inc.

**Laura M. Bray**  
 Executive Director, MATC  
 Foundation Inc., and  
 Vice President, College  
 Advancement and  
 External Communications

**MATC Foundation Inc.**  
**Financial Statements**

**2022-23 Revenue**

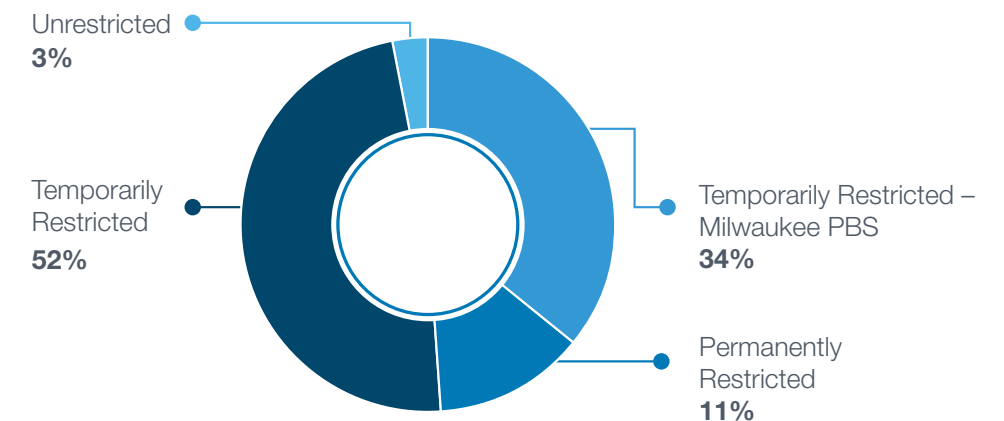
| Revenue Type                  | Amount (in Thousands) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Milwaukee PBS                 | \$ 7,242              |
| Student Success - Programs    | \$ 1,797              |
| Investments - Net Gain (Loss) | \$ 9,964              |
| Scholarships                  | \$ 5,076              |
| In Kind                       | \$ 432                |
| Emergency Student Assistance  | \$ 114                |
| Special Events                | \$ 46                 |
| Other                         | \$ 307                |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>\$ 17,978</b>      |

**2022-23 Expenses**

| Expense Type                 | Amount (in Thousands) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Milwaukee PBS                | \$ 7,119              |
| Scholarships                 | \$ 2,683              |
| Management and General       | \$ 576                |
| Student Success - Programs   | \$ 1,771              |
| Fundraising                  | \$ 387                |
| Program Administration       | \$ 94                 |
| Emergency Student Assistance | \$ 315                |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>\$ 12,945</b>      |

**Net Assets \$38,054,829**

as of June 30, 2023



# New Faces at the MATC Foundation

We are grateful to Milwaukee-area leaders who joined the MATC Foundation Inc. in 2023

## MATC Foundation Board of Directors



**Jaime Hurtado**  
President and founder of Insulation Technologies Inc. (INTEC)

Before establishing INTEC, a family-owned business that specializes in building performance/weatherization and the restoration of historic buildings, Hurtado was executive vice president of La Casa Development Corporation, a franchisee of WECC/The Energy Experts. He also worked at the Community Action Agency in Joliet, Illinois, and at Esperanza Unida Inc., a nonprofit organization in Milwaukee that advocates for changes in worker compensation law. Hurtado has held leadership roles in various community and academic organizations, including as a director on the board of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce, and, for the last 27 years, he has led pro bono personal and professional development seminars globally through Landmark Worldwide. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics from Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois.



**Timothy Smith**  
Retired, Managing Director, The Pfister Hotel and Saint Kate, The Arts Hotel

Retired from Marcus Hotels & Resorts after 35 years with the company, Smith's career with the company included serving as a sales account executive at the Marc Plaza Hotel (now the Hilton Milwaukee City Center), director of sales and marketing for the Hilton Milwaukee, and corporate director of sales at Marcus Headquarters. In 2007, Smith opened the InterContinental Milwaukee as general manager and created the hotel's Pink Rooms, which benefited ABCD: After Breast Cancer Diagnosis (ABCD), a national nonprofit based in Milwaukee. In 2015, Smith became the general manager of The Pfister Hotel and was promoted to managing director of The Pfister and Saint Kate, The Arts Hotel. Smith served on numerous trade and community boards before his retirement.

## MATC Foundation Finance Committee



**Michael Emem**  
President and CEO of the EMEM Group

Building his first house at the age of 20, Emem is a proven leader in the building industry with over 15 years of experience in residential architecture, construction management and real estate development. He has managed the construction of over 100 new and remodeled homes and over 250 multifamily apartment units, contributing to over \$100 million in commercial development experience. At age 25, he was recognized by the Milwaukee Business Journal as a 40 Under 40 recipient and by the Milwaukee Times Black Excellence Awards as a Corporate Trailblazer. Emem has a bachelor's degree in finance and real estate from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, an associate degree in architectural technology from MATC and was valedictorian of Marquette University's 2015 Associates in Commercial Real Estate program graduating class. He has served on the board of directors at Pathfinders Milwaukee Inc. and We Got This Inc.



**Michael Rice**  
Partner, RCP Advisors

Rice is responsible for supporting the business development function of RCP Advisors. This includes sourcing investment opportunities as well as overseeing the firm's fundraising efforts. Prior to RCP, Rice worked as an analyst with Barclays Capital's Institutional Equity Sales group, where he was responsible for covering hedge fund and mutual fund clients throughout the Midwest. He is currently a member of the Investment Committee for Marquette University High School and serves as a director of the Evans Scholar Foundation. Rice received a bachelor's degree in finance and accounting from Marquette University and was a member of the Applied Investment Management (AIM) Program.

# 2023-2024 MATC Foundation Board of Directors

- PRESIDENT**  
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- VICE PRESIDENT**  
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Dr. Vicki J. Martin - President, Milwaukee Area Technical College
- MATC DISTRICT BOARD LIAISON**  
Erica L. Case - Human Resources Director, The LiveWire Group, Inc.

## MATC FOUNDATION MISSION

As the college's philanthropic partner, our mission is to support student success and enhance learning by engaging those who are passionate about the college and the community it benefits.

Founded as a nonprofit organization in 1979, the MATC Foundation Inc. partners with philanthropic organizations, corporations and individuals to work with college leadership on meaningful solutions to two of the most pressing problems in our community: economic disparities and the skills gap. Funds donated to the Foundation support scholarships, emergency fund grants and other student success programs.

The Foundation is also the financial steward for private donations to Milwaukee PBS, a viewer-supported service of Milwaukee Area Technical College.

## Foundation Staff

- LAURA M. BRAY**  
Executive Director  
Vice President, College Advancement and External Communications, MATC
- DENISE TREUER**  
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- ALEXANDRA HABECK**  
Operations Specialist

## MATC FOUNDATION | IMPACT

### Scholarships and Emergency Dollars

#### Ellen & Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program Impact

2022-23



#### MATC Promise Impact

2022-23



#### Student Scholarships and Emergency Assistance Impact

Awarded in 2022-23



#### 10-Year Totals of Student Scholarship and Emergency Assistance\*

\*Scholarship and emergency assistance given by MATC Foundation Inc. between 2013-14 and 2022-23.



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