

# TRANSFORMATIONS

## DR. ANTHONY CRUZ

Putting students first, MATC's new president leads into the future



BUILDING A  
BETTER MILWAUKEE

MATC PREPARES  
WOMEN FOR CAREERS  
IN THE TRADES

MOTHER-DAUGHTER  
EMTS TO THE RESCUE

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**Dr. Anthony Cruz** was unanimously selected as 11th president of Milwaukee Area Technical College in May 2024 by the MATC District Board of Directors and began his tenure in July 2024.

He previously served as president of the Kendall Campus of Miami Dade College in Florida.

During his 28 years of higher education experience, Dr. Cruz has used his expertise to increase educational opportunities, enrich the student experience and bolster student success. He has held leadership roles such as campus president, vice chancellor, vice president and dean at several community colleges and universities.

These valuable experiences have given him a profound understanding of the complexity of the higher education landscape and the opportunity to celebrate the rich diversity of the unique backgrounds and perspectives of the students, faculty and staff that he has served. He works collaboratively with community partners to build pathways and initiatives that remove barriers to student success. Dr. Cruz is committed to creating innovative approaches to reduce the skills gap and increase the number of college graduates.

He has a bachelor's degree in political science from Florida International University, a Master in Public Administration from Florida State University and a doctorate in higher education from Florida International University.



**MISSION** Education that transforms lives, industry and community

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#### Mission

As the college's philanthropic partner, the MATC Foundation builds donor relationships to facilitate private investments that remove barriers to education, accelerate careers and deliver skilled talent to the Milwaukee area.

#### Vision

A prosperous region built on expansive access to education and economic opportunities.

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700 West State Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233-1443



Graduation is a time when students celebrate their achievements and honor the support system that helped them reach this milestone. Read more about increased graduation rates on page 9.

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# BUILDING THE WORKFORCE WE NEED.



HERE'S HOW  
YOU GET THERE.



## Letter From the President

IN MY FIRST MONTH serving Milwaukee Area Technical College, I was fortunate to be able to welcome presidential advisor John Podesta, U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and other partners for major announcements connected to the region's economy and workforce. I also had the opportunity to meet with leaders of local business and civic groups including the Greater Milwaukee Committee and Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce.

Throughout this college's incredible 100-plus year history, leaders across many levels and political affiliations have chosen MATC as a go-to partner for building the region's diverse talent pipeline.

In this edition of Transformations, you will read a few of the reasons why. The MATC alumni we are celebrating include a graduate who is quite literally building the future of the city (page 16),



*Dr. Cruz joined Sen. Baldwin and Gov. Evers to celebrate a \$49 million award from the Wisconsin Biohealth Tech Hub.*

women who continue to break into historically male-dominated trades (page 21), and a local credit union CEO who credits this college with giving him his start (page 26). Our successful grads continue to reflect the breadth and depth of the programs we offer, from Culinary Arts (page 34) to Emergency Medical Technician (page 38) and the state's only Adult High School (page 36).

I invite you to read about all their successes and the role we were grateful to play in their journey. In equal measure, I am grateful to you and everyone connected to the MATC community who helped provide me with the opportunity to serve as your president. You can read more on my background and educational philosophy on page 12, though two words describe it best: students first. As we grow MATC together, I know stories like those featured here will only multiply. Thank you for entrusting me with leading this venerable institution and shaping its bright future.

Sincerely,

**Anthony Cruz, Ed.D.**  
MATC President

CONNECT WITH DR. CRUZ

@dr.anthony\_cruz

Anthony Cruz, Ed.D.



# Highlights

## Freedom in the Air: Honoring Juneteenth

**TO MARGARET HENNINGSEN**, the bright, colorful Juneteenth flag is a reminder of the blood, sweat and tears shed to make all people free.

“Don’t forget the significance of this flag,” said Henningsen, who is often hailed as the mother of Milwaukee’s Juneteenth Day Celebration. “People had to fight for that.”

Henningsen offered this important reminder on June 18, when MATC students, faculty, staff and administrators gathered at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus to raise the Juneteenth flag.

Juneteenth recognizes June 19, 1865, when — two years after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect — Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, to announce that all enslaved people in the state were free.

“As a minority-majority institution, we understand the importance of the resilience, strength and cultural richness African Americans have added to our community,” Laquitha “Elle” Bonds-Jones, the



college’s vice president of human resources, said at the event. “Let us celebrate our progress but also remember the work we still need to do.”

The college celebrated the federal holiday on June 19, participating in the citywide parade and sharing information at the annual celebration on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. The college flew its Juneteenth flag until noon on June 21.

## Celebrity Chefs Chew the Fat at MATC

**CHEF PAUL BARTOLOTTA** AND “**TOP CHEF**” contestant Dan Jacobs shared their culinary insight, inspiration and experiences with almost 200 MATC students, faculty and staff during a visit March 28 at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus.

Jacobs, the Milwaukee chef who co-owns restaurants DanDan and EsterEv, was one of four finalists on this season of Bravo’s “Top Chef,” which was filmed on location in Wisconsin. Bartolotta, who was a guest judge on the show, is an MATC alumnus, James Beard award winner and the owner of 17 restaurants in the Milwaukee area.

The pair counseled culinary and pastry arts students to be committed to hard work, determined to follow their ideas, dedicated to fresh ingredients and open to constructive criticism. And, they shared insights into Milwaukee’s restaurant scene and the city’s culinary job outlook.



“I think the city is on the verge of something really, really big,” Jacobs told the students. “And you are going to be the next wave of chefs here. In the next seven to 10 years, you will be the ones we are going to be talking all about.”

## Strengthening the UWM Transfer Process

**TRANSFERRING TO THE UNIVERSITY** of Wisconsin-Milwaukee got a lot easier for MATC students thanks to new transfer agreements.

Eligible associate degree students with at least a 2.0 GPA are guaranteed admission and a transfer of at least 60 credits toward a bachelor’s degree at UWM. The institutions have been transfer partners since 1934. UWM

requires a minimum of 120 credits for a bachelor’s degree, so most incoming associate degree holders will be halfway to graduating.

“Students won’t worry about potentially wasted credit; they will have less debt and be prepared for success,” MATC’s then president, Dr. Vicki J. Martin (above), said when the agreement was announced in January. Dr. Martin noted that the college is the largest source of transfers to UWM — 205 MATC students transferred there in the fall of 2023.



## MATC Named a Top Producer of Fulbright Scholars

**FOR THE 2023-24 ACADEMIC YEAR**, the college was named a Top Producing Institution of Fulbright U.S. Scholars.

Fulbright is the United States government’s flagship international academic exchange program. Fulbright scholars are faculty, researchers, administrators and established professionals accepted in the competitive program to teach, conduct research and carry out professional projects in affiliation with institutes abroad.

MATC was one of only 12 honorees in the associate and baccalaureate/associate institution category, and only one of three technical colleges.

“We are so pleased to have received this honor,” Dr. Martin said. “This affirms that our faculty are seeking greater opportunities to explore, grow and learn concepts they can bring back to MATC for the betterment of the college. I congratulate them, and all the Fulbrighters who are making a positive impact across the world.”

Several MATC instructors were Fulbright Scholars: Phil Blank, Charlie Dee, Executive Dean Barbara Cannell, Dr. Jacqueline Robinson and Peter Burzynski.



## Remembering Friends of MATC

**THE COLLEGE LOST TWO** champions of higher education this past year — Herb Kohl and Dr. Michael Lovell.

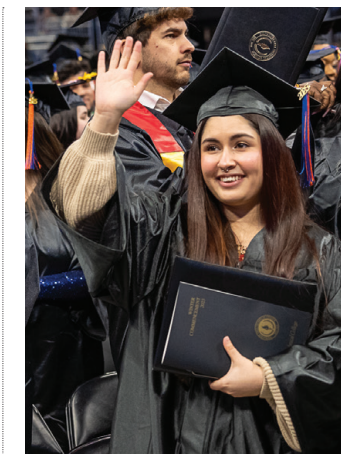
Kohl (above) was a Milwaukee native, a businessman, a former U.S. senator and a respected philanthropist. He passed away in December 2023. He donated more than \$1.5 million to programs and initiatives connected with MATC, one of his cherished educational institutions. Through his private foundation, Herb Kohl Philanthropies, he invested nearly \$400,000 directly into the MATC Foundation, the college’s philanthropic partner in student success. He was an early supporter of the MATC Promise, the first free-tuition program of its kind for new high school graduates in the state.

Dr. Lovell, who was president of Marquette University, passed away in June. Dr. Martin remembered him as “a great partner, and a remarkable leader with energy and vision, who shared the same passion for providing quality education to students in the Milwaukee area.”

## Guided Pathways Make a Difference

**SINCE THE INTRODUCTION** of the Guided Pathways educational framework in 2018, MATC’s retention rate increased by 13 percentage points and its graduation rate increased by 6 percentage points.

This result means that more students are succeeding thanks to Pathway resources, such as advisors, retention coaches and support personnel. Pathways are



designed to lead students to graduation by supporting them inside and outside the classroom, providing students the tools they need to overcome the real-life obstacles that often derail success.

Partnerships also made a difference. Under Dr. Martin’s leadership, the college partnered with EAB in October 2020 and joined the Moon Shot for Equity initiative. The goal of this partnership was to eliminate equity gaps and boost student success by 2030.

Early results showed that students who used Moon Shot tools were more likely to stay on the path to graduation.

“We have seen clear, demonstrable impacts from our work,” Dr. Martin said when the increased rates were announced in January.

“Only through thoughtful planning, dedicated action and continual improvement to our processes can any meaningful change be made,” she added.

## Employees in the National Spotlight

**SCOTT FISLER**, automotive instructor, was named the 2023 Byrl Shoemaker Instructor of the Year by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. The award recognizes instructors who demonstrate excellence through their commitment to students.



**CHARLES BARBOUR**, HVAC instructor and MATC alumnus, became the second educator in Wisconsin to earn the title of Certified Master HVACR Educator, a prestigious honor held by fewer than 150 HVACR instructors across the country.



**RANDY CASEY**, athletic director, was named the Junior College Men’s Basketball Coach of the Year by the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association. Casey was also named the WBAC Junior College Coach of the Year in 2023, 2020 and 2019.



# Highlights



## New Semitruck Takes Truck Driving Students Farther

**STUDENTS IN THE TRUCK DRIVING PROGRAM** got a cutting-edge piece of equipment to help them be successful: a 2024 Volvo VNL 760. It's the first brand-new, automatic transmission, sleeper semitruck ever secured by the college.

On March 27, MATC students, faculty, staff, administrators, and representatives from Volvo and Kriete Truck Centers gathered at the Oak Creek Campus to celebrate the delivery of the new truck, which is Volvo's best-seller. The interior is spacious with ergonomic seats and easy-to-read dashboard controls. The exterior is aerodynamic to improve fuel efficiency. The truck has state-of-the-art LED lights for better visibility and reduced maintenance and an industry-standard automatic transmission.

"This truck is 97% of what comes from the factory right now," said David Kriete (above), president of Kriete Truck Centers. "Learning on this kind of truck speeds up how quickly students can get into the workforce."

## WTCS President Visited MATC

**DR. MORNA FOY**, president of the Wisconsin Technical College System, stopped by the Downtown Milwaukee Campus on May 1 during her "Tour of Excellence," in which she visited each of the state's 16 WTCS colleges.

The goal of the tour, which kicked off in November 2023, was to recognize and celebrate the technical college students, staff, instructors, alumni and business partners who make each campus unique places of purpose in their communities.

Dr. Foy had a full, fruitful and fun day at MATC, where she changed a tire with an automotive student in the state-of-the-art AI Hurvis/PEAK Transportation Center, shot baskets with an award-winning men's basketball player, and feasted on food prepared by Culinary Arts students.

"Like I always say: My favorite technical college is the one I'm visiting," said Dr. Foy, who will retire later in the year.

## M<sup>3</sup> Partnership Enhances Student Success

**THROUGH MILWAUKEE DIRECT ADMIT**, high school juniors attending Milwaukee Public Schools can apply to MATC or UWM in less than five minutes at no cost.

The M<sup>3</sup> partnership rolled out the new program in January at an event covered by local media. Through a streamlined online application, Milwaukee Direct Admit will connect a student's MPS transcript to the school of their choice. The application does not require attachments, an essay or letters of recommendation. Students are guaranteed acceptance to at least one of the schools they select, helping students, especially first-generation college applicants, have better access to opportunities after graduation.

In addition to Milwaukee Direct Admit, the M<sup>3</sup> partnership continued its work to increase college enrollment by holding Smart Start, a college orientation program intended to address the phenomenon known as "summer melt," which is when students who plan to go to college in the fall never actually enroll.

## ESL Students Publish Book

**CHIAKI HAEL WILL NEVER FORGET** the sights, the smells and the scenery of her hometown in Japan.

Hael, who came to the United States in 2019, wrote vividly about her home country's stone-paved streets, fragrant cherry blossoms and aromatic cuisine in a book entitled "Sharing Our World: A Collection of Writing From the Students of MATC's ESL Department."

The first edition was published in 2020; Hael (pictured above on the right) was one of 230 ESL students representing 47 countries who contributed their stories to the fifth edition. To date, more than 1,000 ESL students from 78 countries have shared their personal stories.

"This book celebrates the richness, diversity, and pride of our ESL students and their contributions to making MATC great," said Erin Helland, the ESL lead faculty member who oversaw production of the book.

The book's release was celebrated April 26 at an event at the MATC Education Center at Walker's Square. Several students, including Hael, read excerpts from the book.



## MATC Steps In To Help SDC Students

**WHEN THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION** abruptly closed in April and immediately ceased all GED and HSED programming, 39 students pursuing high school credentials were left in the lurch.

"We were all in shock," SDC student Samira Alsabki said.

MATC, which offered courses in collaboration with SDC, took in the displaced students: 15 finished their program at the college's West Allis Campus and 24, including Alsabki, finished online.

On May 20, all 39 students from the SDC and 240 other students earned their GED certificates and HSED diplomas at a boisterous graduation ceremony in Cooley Auditorium at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus. Alsabki (above, standing behind the podium) was one of three student speakers at the event.

She plans to return to MATC in the fall and start taking courses to get a diploma in medical coding. "I'm not going to let anything stop me from pursuing my dream," she said. "I know how truly valuable this education is."

## Celebrating Earth Day

**ON APRIL 22**, hundreds of MATC students, staff and faculty did their part to keep Milwaukee beautiful in honor of the 54th annual Earth Day.

Volunteers at all four campuses and at Walker's Square collected trash, cleaned sidewalks and planted flowers. Students and employees at the Downtown Milwaukee, Oak Creek, Mequon and West Allis campuses grabbed trash bags and trash pickers to clean up the campuses and neighborhoods. Student Life provided light snacks, refreshments and T-shirts for the volunteers at the four locations.

"The work you're doing is critically important," said Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson, who was one of several city officials to attend the celebration at Walker's Square. "When your city is clean, it invigorates you. It becomes a place you value. My goal is to make this city a cleaner, safer, healthier environment for everyone."



## Pride Flag Raised at MATC Campuses

**FOR THE FIRST TIME** in MATC's history, the college raised the Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride flag in recognition of Pride Month during a ceremony held June 10 at the Oak Creek Campus.

Students, staff, alumni and guests spoke about the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. Flags also were raised at the Downtown Milwaukee and Mequon campuses. Construction at the West Allis Campus temporarily prevented flying any flags.

The initiative was led by the LGBTQ+ and Allies employee affinity group and the Rainbow Alliance student organization. The Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride flag was chosen because it serves as the most inclusive and up-to-date LGBTQ+ flag.

## New Marketing Campaign

**MATC LAUNCHED A NEW** brand and enrollment campaign through KW2, a Madison-based advertising agency with a strong portfolio of work for higher education institutions. The campaign, "Get There," debuted in the spring, and the college is already experiencing an increase in applications.

The campaign's key message to potential students is that the effort to go to school is worth it — that it may take hard work, but with MATC's help, investing in an education will pay off.

The goal is to enroll the equivalent of 8,650 students in academic year 2024-25 and to increase the college's share of full-time Hispanic/Latino/a students in college-level courses by 1.5 percentage points. The effort builds upon existing knowledge of MATC and emphasizes the college's impact.

New ads are appearing across the Milwaukee area featuring MATC students and alumni. The campaign also includes targeted, digital enrollment messages to reach prospective students, area employers and the broader community.





# FRONT & CENTER

An engaged leader with a passion for education, Anthony Cruz, Ed.D., brings his students-first philosophy to MATC as the college's new president

The motto, mantra, modus operandi, mission and motivation of MATC's new president can be summed up in two simple words: students first.

If he had his way, Anthony Cruz, Ed.D., would stitch those words on a sampler, paint them on a framed canvas, emblazon them on a banner and skywrite them against the bright blue heavens. Maybe even tattoo them on his forehead.

Well, okay. Maybe not the tattoo.

Dr. Cruz started his tenure as the college's 11th president on July 15. And to anyone and everyone meeting him, talking to him and listening to him, he quickly, energetically and emphatically makes it clear how important those words are to him.

"When I say it, I mean it," Dr. Cruz said. "I don't think everyone in higher education believes that. That's not meant to be malicious. We need to continue to emphasize it. At our meetings, at our events and at our connections with our community and employee partners, if the word student or students doesn't come up, there's something wrong."

## An unexpected offer

It all started with a phone call.

Dr. Cruz was well into his fifth year as a campus president at the sprawling Miami Dade College Kendall Campus in Florida and was not considering a career change when the search firm working to find MATC's new president reached out to him.

"To be honest, I did not know about MATC," he said.

With his curiosity piqued, he took several more phone calls and did some research. He read about the college's diverse student population, its mission, its wide range of programs, its status as an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution and its financial stability.

"The more I learned, the more it became a combination of an opportunity and a challenge for me," he said. "The students MATC serves and the ones I have served at the places I have been are very similar: first-generation college students, high financial need, and people looking to improve their lives.

"In the end, MATC had a lot to offer."

Dr. Cruz applied. After being selected for a first-round interview, he eventually became one of four finalists for the position, and on May 2, the MATC District Board of Directors unanimously voted to hire him.

"The board was particularly impressed by Dr. Cruz's students-first educational philosophy, his in-depth knowledge of MATC, and the high regard in which he is held by the students, faculty, and administrators with whom he has worked in the past," MATC District Board Chairperson Mark F. Foley said.

Dr. Cruz certainly has the experience MATC wanted in its next leader. He served as president at two of the eight campuses at Miami Dade College, a nationally recognized community college valued for its diversity, affordability, accessible campuses, modern facilities, wide range of programs and extensive support services.

He was president at Miami Dade's Hialeah campus for two and half years and then president at the Kendall Campus, which serves nearly 30,000 students.

Dr. Cruz has also worked extensively in the Midwest. From 2016 to 2019, he was vice chancellor of student affairs at St. Louis Community College, and vice president of enrollment management and student affairs at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, from 2012 to 2016. He was dean of enrollment and student development at Cincinnati State from 2009 to 2012.

"I've served at every level of administration," Dr. Cruz said. "All of these experiences have given me a profound understanding of the complexity of the higher education landscape. At every level, I have tried to learn as much as possible."

## Choosing his career path

Dr. Cruz was born in Chicago. His family moved to Florida when he was 9 years old. Both his mother and father worked in factories. In elementary and middle school he gravitated to student government. He graduated from high school and became the first person in his family to attend college.



Dr. Anthony Cruz meets students at Oak Creek.

While working on his bachelor's degree in political science at Florida International University, he considered becoming a lawyer, until a college class on constitutional law dispelled him of that notion. He contemplated a career in politics and interned for several elected officials in college, but he decided against that career path. He also thought about working for a municipality, serving as a city manager or county executive. He was looking for a municipal job in 1993 when he saw an ad for a job as an admissions recruiter at Florida International University.

"I read it and thought to myself, 'I can do that,'" he recalled.

He took the job. "I absolutely loved it," he said.

“The college cannot reach its highest level without collaboration with our community partners. We need to work with others to make MATC bigger, better and more accessible.”

MATC PRESIDENT DR. ANTHONY CRUZ

Later, a friend lured him into the financial services business, and he became a stockbroker for a few years. But a long commute, lower-than-expected earnings and nagging job dissatisfaction pulled him back into education for good. He was hired as director of advising at an online college based in Boca Raton. When he started, he was a staff of one serving 300 students. Within a year, he had a staff of 16 advisors working with 5,000 students.

“I needed to go back,” he said. “And I was so happy that I did.”

Dr. Cruz went on to earn a Master in Public Administration from Florida State University and a doctorate in higher education from Florida International University.

“I always thought I would end up in some kind of public service,” he said. “I have always been keenly interested in public policy.”

#### Creating community

More than 30 years later, Dr. Cruz arrived at MATC.

He almost immediately made himself known. He held five Coffee with Cruz events at the college’s four campuses and the MATC Education Center at Walker’s Square, pouring coffee and chatting with hundreds of students, faculty and staff. Dr. Cruz, who often updates his own accounts on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, encouraged them to post their experiences on social media.

“He is very engaged, and I think that’s what we need right now,” said Dr. Nicole Tanner, the college’s director of admissions and testing and interim executive director at Walker’s Square.

At Miami Dade, Dr. Cruz was all about engagement. He organized social events like Coladas with Cruz and Pizza with the Prez, launched an esports room and brought Chick-fil-A and Starbucks to campus. At Hialeah, he created a monthly social media show about the community. Going forward at MATC, he will continue to host Coffee with Cruz gatherings to foster greater engagement.

“Colleges need to adapt to changing landscapes and leverage marketing to promote a sense of community and belonging,” he said. “We need to amplify our value, highlight our services, showcase our campus events and celebrate our achievements.”

And it didn’t take him long to become the college’s biggest fan, said Jaime Hurtado, who is the owner and founder of Insulation

Technologies Inc. and serves on the board of the college’s philanthropic partner, the MATC Foundation.

“I was really impressed with his ability to speak on the initiatives of the college and how he already has made them his own,” Hurtado said. “You can feel that when you speak with him. When you look for a leader, you look for authenticity, integrity and love. He leaves you feeling all of that.”

#### A bigger and better MATC

Personally, he and his wife, Diana Sarmiento-Cruz, are establishing their home in Milwaukee. The couple met in college, have been married for 30 years and have two grown children. Their son, James, works in healthcare in Ohio, and their daughter, Caroline, is a certified public accountant in Chicago.

Professionally, his immediate goals are to increase MATC’s enrollment, and to reinforce and expand the college’s community partnerships.

“The college cannot reach its highest level without collaboration with our community partners,” he said. “We need to work with others to make MATC bigger, better and more accessible.”

Hurtado, who belongs to the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce board, said Dr. Cruz is well positioned to connect with regional businesses and stake MATC’s claim as the leader in workforce development.

“There are so many opportunities on the horizon,” Hurtado said. “By working with businesses and visiting groups like the chamber, he can put us in the forefront.”

Most of all, Dr. Cruz is looking forward to seeing the students come to MATC and transform their lives.

“It’s amazing to see a new wave of students coming every year. That’s one of the first things I noticed when I started working in higher education. There is always someone new looking to start their journey,” he said. “That’s something very different from what you see in any other business or industry. And it’s very special.” ■



Clockwise from bottom left: Creating connections is a hallmark of Dr. Cruz’s leadership style. During the Coffee with Cruz events, he energized the crowd, took selfies with students, explained his students-first philosophy and poured coffee for each attendee. Above: Dr. Cruz and his wife, Diana Sarmiento-Cruz, take a stroll along Lake Michigan.



**Brick by brick, board by board,  
Michael Emem is determined  
to build a better Milwaukee.**

With a vision for interconnected neighborhoods that are safer, developer Michael Emem is investing his talent, experience and resources in his hometown.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, he got his first job in construction while attending Milwaukee Public Schools' Bradley Tech High School. At the age of 20, he won a regional award for designing a house. Two years later, he earned an associate degree in Architectural Technology from MATC.

Over the next 10 years, Emem built up his resume, working at two construction firms in Milwaukee and at Habitat for Humanity before going into business for himself. As president and CEO of Emem Group LLC since 2018, he has managed more than \$100 million in residential and commercial development projects in the Milwaukee area.

His project portfolio also includes an art gallery and museum in the Bronzeville neighborhood, a 52,000-square-foot medical office and community clinic in the Williamsburg neighborhood, and the next home of the 190,000-square-foot Milwaukee Public Museum in the historic Haymarket neighborhood.

Emem is also developing the new Martin Luther King library branch and 93 apartments in the Harambee neighborhood as well as 20 duplexes in King Park.

"I believe real estate is central and essential to how you assess quality of life," Emem said. "There are many, many people dedicated to improving this city. I am trying to be one of those people."

He certainly has the experience: He's a certified construction professional, a master builder through the Wisconsin Builders Association, and holds a project management certificate from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

Along with his MATC degree, Emem holds a bachelor's degree in finance and real estate from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and in 2015, he graduated at the top of his class in Marquette University's ACRE program, which is designed to expand and support BIPOC representation in the commercial real estate industry. He also serves as a volunteer on the Finance Committee of the MATC Foundation, the college's philanthropic partner.

In 2013, when Emem was age 25, the Milwaukee Business Journal honored him as a 40 Under 40 recipient. And, he was named a Corporate Trailblazer at the Milwaukee Times Black Excellence Awards.

"Michael is a visionary leader and an extremely innovative developer and builder," said Brian Sonderman, executive director of Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity. "He has deep roots in this city. Michael could focus his time and talents exclusively



Michael Emem

## A Vision for Milwaukee

Developer Michael Emem manages several projects that will energize the city's landscape.



### Milwaukee Public Museum

Designed to evoke rock formations found in central Wisconsin, this five-story building will house exhibits, a planetarium, a butterfly garden and a rooftop terrace.



### MLK Library Apartments

Built around Milwaukee Public Library's new, state-of-the-art MLK branch in the Harambee neighborhood, this 93-unit complex will offer affordable housing.



### Thirteen31 Place Apartments

Residents of this mixed-income, 89-unit development in Walker's Point have access to social services that share space in the multipurpose building.



### Gallery 507

Home of the Bronzeville Center for the Arts, Gallery 507 also features private offices.

on high-end projects with large budgets, but he continues to invest in the people and places that make Milwaukee neighborhoods great."

### A passion for construction

Emem grew up on 42nd Street and Garfield Avenue, blocks away from Milwaukee's Washington Park. As a junior at Bradley Tech, he got a job with Cross Management Services installing cabinets in Milwaukee Public Schools.

"I had a knack for working with my hands," Emem said. "I started in construction when I was 16, and I never looked back."

After graduation, he took a job at T.L. Reese Corporation, one of the leading Black-owned contractors in the region. "I was young and thrown into the fire," he recalled. "For me, it was a time of significant growth."

To grow even more, he enrolled in MATC's Architectural Technology program. At the time, he was a teenage father of a daughter and full-time worker. The college offered flexibility, affordability, proximity and transferability, he said.

"MATC was the perfect choice for that time in my life," Emem said. "MATC had night courses and it was right in my backyard, about a mile and a half from work and 3 miles from my house."

"As a first-generation college student, I didn't have a whole lot of money, so I had to pay for most of my college. But I knew I was earning credits that could transfer," he added. "The knowledge I gained at MATC was paramount in establishing the foundation of what I am doing today."

After five years at T.L. Reese, Emem became construction director at Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity in April 2013, overseeing the construction of new homes and the repairs of many others for low-income owners. In 2015, he took a position as project manager at Wangard Partners Inc. and worked there for three years before branching out on his own.

"My plan was to be an entrepreneur. But with a family, I knew I needed a salary as I grew my experience, my knowledge and my network," he said. "By 2019, I felt like it was time. I knew enough that I could support my family."

### Better homes

So far, business is good. Emem juggles several projects at once, including an ambitious plan to create a city neighborhood from scratch on 60 lots located near 21st and Walnut streets. Much of the land has been vacant for more than a decade.

"The goal is to fill out every lot with a new home," Emem has said. "There were more than 60 plus lots when we started this. We have six homes that are all occupied, and we have three under construction."

Along with actual buildings, Emem wants to develop interconnected neighborhoods where residents can feel safe, connected and proud about where they live. He has served on the board of directors of We Got This Inc., a community group dedicated to incorporating the "neighbor" back into

Milwaukee "hoods."

He also strives to be a role model for today's youth. He works with Pathfinders Milwaukee Inc., a group that values youth as vital assets to the community and welcomes them as partners in decision-making. He urges people from all walks of life to share their life stories.

"There is power in sharing your experiences," Emem said. "By sharing, you build trust and the people listening can see a piece of themselves in you. They can see themselves in how I was when I was 16. If they do that, maybe they believe they can be like me when they are 35. We need to work and unlock the potential within each person, and show them the inner power that they have." ■

Be inspired by the Architectural Technology program at [matc.edu](http://matc.edu).

“There is power in sharing your experiences. By sharing, you build trust and the people listening can see themselves in you.”

MICHAEL EMEM, president and CEO of Emem Group LLC

## Brightening Smiles

### As one of the first Froedtert scholarship recipients to graduate, Ana Paulina Cardenas is loving her new career as a dental hygienist

On a partly cloudy, chilly day in early February, Ana Paulina Cardenas arrived at the Dental Associates office on Miller Park Way, ready to work.

She had been at the West Milwaukee dental practice for more than 20 years, serving first as a receptionist and then as a certified dental assistant.

But on this day she arrived with a new credential: She was a full-fledged, board-certified, state-licensed dental hygienist ready to see her first patient.

"I couldn't believe that I was already doing this," said Cardenas, who earned an associate degree from MATC in December 2023. "I'm not going to lie; I was a little nervous. But I loved every minute of it. I actually enjoyed it even more than I thought I would."

For Cardenas, who came to the United States from Mexico as a child, her educational journey was challenging. She attended classes at the college while she worked, completed assignments at night and on weekends and raised her three children. Paying for tuition, books and equipment fees stretched the household budget.

"It could be quite difficult at times," she said. "But my husband of 22 years was a huge help and I couldn't have done it without him. Many nights I did my homework together with my kids. My sisters and my brother were also there when I needed them. They were all part of my support system."

She received some much-needed financial assistance from the Froedtert Memorial Hospital Scholarship program, established in June 2021 when Froedtert Health gave \$6 million to the MATC Foundation to help students pursuing healthcare careers, such as nursing, dental hygiene, surgical technology, medical assistant and pharmacy technician.

The Froedtert scholarships cover tuition, required books and supplies, and licensure exam fees. They also include a stipend and access to emergency grant funding.

MATC awarded Froedtert scholarships to 48 students in the fall of 2023. Cardenas was among four students who completed their studies and graduated right away in December 2023, said Vee Tillotson, an MATC graduate project assistant who works with the Froedtert scholarship recipients.

"This scholarship was a huge blessing," Cardenas said. "When it came, it was such a relief. There was equipment I needed to get and exams I had to register for. With the scholarship, I didn't have to worry about how we were going to handle all that with our finances. It made so much difference."



## MATC SPOTLIGHT



### Dental Hygiene

Fantastic is how Tonia Morley describes the career outlook for dental hygienists.

“Students can have a job lined up when they start the program,” said Morley, chair of MATC’s dental programs and a Dental Hygiene instructor. “Right now, there are not enough hygienists for the number of jobs that are out there.”

A labor shortage caused by retirements and made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic means graduates can work where they want, when they want and earn a competitive wage.

“The starting salary right now is \$45 to \$52 an hour,” Morley said. “And on top of that, they might receive a signing bonus.”

To cope with the shortage, the American Dental Association is encouraging practices to offer flexible work schedules, competitive salaries and generous benefits.

“Dental offices are very much into helping their hygienists so they can keep them,” Morley said.

The need for bilingual dental hygienists is even greater, she added. Practices that serve Spanish-speaking populations have a harder time finding hygienists because students must be fluent in English to pass the national exam.

MATC is doing its part to help with the labor shortage. The college recently received a grant through the Wisconsin Technical College System to expand the program and admit more students.

#### Ready for more

Cardenas was born in Michoacan, Mexico, and immigrated with her parents to California when she was 5 years old. The family moved to Wisconsin in 1992. She graduated from Wauwatosa West High School in 2001 and started classes at MATC.

“But, as often happens, life got in the way,” she said.

Cardenas got married, took a job, and eventually had her son, Fernando, and daughters, Carolina and Jimena. At Dental Associates, she worked in various positions but thought she could do more. She decided on dental hygiene.

“The office staff was supportive and always motivated me,” she said. “I felt like I was gaining a lot of knowledge in the field. I wanted to help people, and I feel it’s very rewarding.”

#### Eager to learn

She started taking science courses at MATC and was admitted into the Dental Hygiene program in 2021. She learned how to clean teeth, administer fluoride treatments, process X-rays and provide dental counseling. Her three children helped by serving as patients during her studies.

Program instructor Cynthia Nienhuis remembered Cardenas as a diligent, attentive student who received high marks from her patients and always assisted her classmates when needed.

“Ana showed up every day eager to learn, focused on doing her best, with a caring attitude and professional demeanor,” Nienhuis said. “As a bilingual speaker, she was called upon to translate for others in the clinic, and she did so without hesitation.”

“I could recognize her passion in not only being an outstanding student, but also her drive to achieve her dream of becoming a professional,” said Tonia Morley, chair of MATC’s dental programs and a Dental Hygiene instructor. “Ana’s family is extremely important to her. She

knew this path would help her family to be more successful. Ana is a team player and provides top-notch care for each of her patients. She has excellent communication skills, empathy and was able to adapt to the variety of situations required as a Dental Hygiene student.”

“My instructors at MATC were amazing,” Cardenas said. “Whenever I had questions or concerns, I reached out and they were there. They showed us it was OK to make mistakes in the classroom so we could learn and not make mistakes on the job. That made me feel better about what I was doing and made my experience so much better.”

Cardenas received the Froedtert scholarship in her final semester, and it helped pay for her board certification and state exams to earn her license. At the beginning of February, she started her new position.

Being a native Spanish speaker, Cardenas is excited to help the Hispanic/Latino/a patients who come to the clinic.

“I’m very proud of being bilingual and that I can educate and communicate with the people in my community,” she said. “Dental hygiene, proper brushing and flossing is so important and can affect so much in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, especially in patients who might be managing diabetes or high blood pressure.”

Down the road, Cardenas is thinking about earning a bachelor’s degree and perhaps even a master’s degree. She’s taking a year off from school to relax a little, pay off some debts and settle into her new job.

“It’s all about getting into the flow of seeing patients,” she said. “I’m working to get used to that right now. I don’t know if my first patient knew they were my first patient, but I marked it down in their chart.” ■

[Learn more about the Dental Hygiene program at matc.edu.](https://matc.edu)



## WOMEN IN THE TRADES

America needs more workers, especially in the trades, and women are one answer to alleviating some of the labor shortage. Though representation still lags, an increasing number of women are entering these fields. Four women — Druanne Pierce, Charlene Lee, Mariya Sorensen and Samantha Albert — share how MATC helped them achieve their goals. Now they are using their experiences to inspire others.



Druanne Pierce

## AVIATION MAINTENANCE

Druanne Pierce, co-owner and vice president of Plane Safe Aircraft Maintenance

These days, Druanne Pierce's world is chock-full of blue skies and tailwinds.

Pierce has been fixing aircraft of all shapes and sizes since earning her Airframe and Powerplant License in 1993. For the past two decades she has been co-owner and vice president of Plane Safe Aircraft Maintenance, which maintains and repairs more than 200 small planes every year at an airy wood and brick hangar at Waukesha County Airport.

But before her life reached the clear, calm airspace where the sun shines nonstop and the clouds are harmless wisps, Pierce had to deal with turbulence.

And there was a lot of turbulence.

The bumps started early. Her first attempt at aviation was tossing a paper airplane off the roof of the old seven-story West Allis Inn, where she lived as a child. "I wrote a secret message inside the paper airplane thinking it would fly for miles and miles and reach some far away land," she recalled. "But it just fell straight to the ground."

Against the wishes of her mother, who wanted Pierce to do something with her artistic abilities, she signed up for the Aviation Maintenance program, which had a two-year waiting list at the time. In the meantime, she attained her High School Equivalency Diploma and started taking commercial art classes at MATC.

Then she made it into the aviation program. Lilli, her maternal grandmother, loaned her money to buy a car to attend school, creating a lasting bond between the pair and cementing Lilli's role as a supporter, encourager and mentor.

After starting classes, Pierce received a package from Lilli. Inside was an aviation handbook from the 1940s along with a cloth patch from New York's LaGuardia Airport that read "Academy of Aeronautics." Lilli revealed that she had wanted to be a "Rosie the Riveter" during World War II.

"I had no idea my grandma wanted to work on planes," Pierce said. "She was so proud and excited for me. She was and will always be my inspiration."

"My grandmother used to say: 'Your greatest power is your power to choose. You have the ability to control much of your life, mood and situations with the choices you make.' I made a choice to become a good mechanic."

**"My grandmother used to say: 'Your greatest power is your power to choose.' ... I made a choice to become a good mechanic."**

### DRUANNE PIERCE

As the only female in the program at the time, Pierce ignored sexist remarks from classmates and put-downs from her instructor, and went on to earn her degree with honors. In the years since, more women have graduated from the program, and Pierce, who came back to teach aircraft physics, aircraft propellers and aircraft fuel systems courses at MATC, noted: "Once I started actually learning and getting to fix things, it felt so natural. It felt like home. I knew that working on planes was something I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

Her first job, though, was a nightmare. She endured lower pay, frequent insults and continual mistreatment. One of her instructors encouraged her to take legal action, but she didn't. "I knew if I did that, I would never get another job in aviation ever again for the rest of my life," she said. "I had two children to provide for and needed to work."

She persevered until she got a job with Sussex-based printer Quad Graphics, servicing cargo planes. She got a raise and was able to get off government assistance.

In 1998, she met Sam Cryer, another aircraft mechanic. A few years later, they started a mobile aircraft-repair business. They purchased a truck and trailer and never looked back. "She has been there right from the beginning," Cryer said. "We got so busy that Druanne left Quad to dedicate all her time to the new company. We took that truck and trailer all sorts of places to fix planes: airports, farm fields, anywhere and everywhere."

In 2006, they settled into a hangar at the Waukesha airport. This year Plane Safe was voted the best service provider by the airport's tenants. Today, the firm has seven additional employees and services single engine, twin engine, piston, light turbine and turboprop aircraft, along with experimental aircraft and restored military planes.

Pierce also shares her knowledge, especially with young women, to spur interest in the aviation field. She has spoken at the Wings Over Waukesha air show and to local Girl Scout troops. Her company participates in Youth in Aviation and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) events.

"This is a field that will need people in short order," she said. "The older generation is retiring."

Her goal now is to find a way to reach out and speak to young people, those who are struggling, to encourage them and assure them that there are resources available.

"Sometimes I look back, and I think about everything that has happened in my life and all that I have done, and wonder how the heck did I accomplish all that? There have been some dark times," she said. "I realize I have an awful lot to be grateful for and proud

of. I feel so very blessed. I want to show others that hard work pays off and that you can do and become anything you put your mind to."

## CONSTRUCTION

Mariya Sorensen, senior integrated construction manager at Mortenson Construction

It's almost impossible to think of Mariya Sorensen doing anything without a plan.

Yet there she was in the summer of 2009, arriving in the Wisconsin Dells from Belarus with \$400 and her passport in her pocket, and having absolutely no idea what she was going to do after her seasonal jobs ended.

"When I came to America, I wasn't planning to stay. I wanted to explore, study and travel," she said. "I had no idea what was going to happen."

Sorensen was no ordinary summer worker. Back in her hometown of Babruysk, she excelled in mathematics and physics in primary school and high school. She attended college in Minsk, the nation's capital and largest city, and earned an electronics engineering technology degree from the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics.

When her summer in the Dells ended, Sorensen decided to stay. She moved to Milwaukee, took a job as a waitress and found a small apartment. "For me, it was one day at a time," she said. "I never knew if I would still be here the next day."

She heard about MATC, and, almost on a whim, she enrolled in the college's Architectural Technology program. Three years later, she earned her associate degree.



Mariya Sorensen



## Non-Traditional Occupations

MATC is proud to train women for non-traditional occupations in the trades. Here is a list of trade-related professions that offer family-sustaining wages and the median salary for each:

AUTOMOTIVE TECHNICIAN AND MECHANICS

**\$47,770**

AVIATION MECHANIC

**\$75,020**

CARPENTER

**\$56,350**

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER

**\$104,900**

ELECTRICIAN

**\$61,590**

HVAC MECHANIC

**\$57,300**

PLUMBER

**\$61,550**

TRUCK DRIVER

**\$54,320**

WELDER

**\$48,940**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Today, all Sorensen does is plan.

As an award-winning, senior integrated construction manager at Mortenson Construction, Sorensen leads a six-member team that fabricates buildings on a screen using computer modeling, digital design, robotics and virtual reality equipment and then analyzes and solves potential problems before the first shovel hits the dirt.

“I like to call myself a virtual superintendent,” she said. “While in college, I realized construction was the one thing that I wanted to do. I love the challenges that every day brings and the reward of seeing the accomplishments at the end of the project.”

When she started at MATC, the soft-spoken Sorensen kept to herself, working on assignments and improving her English. “Everything was so new and so terrifying,” she recalled. “I knew that I could quit at any time, but I also knew I had come all this way and wanted to do well.”

After earning her degree in 2012, Sorensen took a job as a drafter at a local roofing company. She then became an engineer and an estimator. In 2017, she took a job on Mortenson’s virtual design and construction team.

Founded in 1954 in Minneapolis, Mortenson Construction has built almost 250 entertainment and sports venues in the United States, including Fiserv Forum, home of the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks. In Milwaukee, Mortenson is perhaps best known for constructing healthcare facilities.

Sorensen has worked on numerous projects, including the Dwight and Dian Diercks Computational Science Hall at the Milwaukee School of Engineering; The Art Preserve, an art museum and a satellite campus of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan; and the Center for Advanced Care at Froedtert Hospital Campus.

Her meticulous work has been widely praised: She won Mortenson Pinnacle Awards in 2018 and 2023. In 2019, she was named an outstanding woman in construction by the Daily Reporter, which covers the construction and development industry in Wisconsin.

“Mariya’s persistence and passion for driving innovation helps her and her team meet new challenges and achieve innovative success,” Mark Peterson, an integrated construction manager at Mortenson, said in 2019. “Mariya helps the

team think ahead, plan smarter and leverage technology to improve our construction processes.”

“The more women we have, the easier it will be for them to stay in the industry. We need to expose girls as early as possible to the opportunities that are there for them.”

### MARIYA SORENSEN

empowHER, a national group that supports, advocates for and recruits women in the construction industry, and frequently speaks to high school girls and college women about her experience.

She was a guest presenter at MATC two years ago, instructor Daniel Inyang said. “The students were so impressed that one of them said ‘she blew my mind’ with the level and quality of the advance work she was doing as a program graduate,” he said.

“The more women we have, the easier it will be for them to stay in the industry,” Sorensen said. “We need to expose girls as early as possible to the opportunities that are there for them. Show them what they would be like working in the industry. As a leader in a culture where I have been allowed to thrive, I feel like I have more of an impact. My hope is that I can be a role model to them.”

Sorensen is also committed to getting more women into construction and other science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields (STEM). She is involved in



Samantha Albert (left) and Charlene Lee

## AUTOMOTIVE, TRUCK DRIVING

### Samantha Albert and Charlene Lee

Samantha Albert’s first year in the college’s Automotive Maintenance Technician program was a rough ride.

She was a single mother raising a son with special needs. Albert suffered a bout of lupus, a painful autoimmune disease. Some of her classmates males — and mostly right out of high school — sometimes hid her tools and made snide comments, Albert said.

“It was tough. I had great instructors, but some of the other class members were younger than me and didn’t have the same life experience,” Albert recalled. “As the year went on, I wanted to give up.”

The college stepped in to help. When Albert reached out to Erik Riley, her advisor in the Manufacturing, Construction and Transportation Pathway, he connected her with Charlene Lee, who was earning technical diplomas in the college’s Truck Driving and Diesel and Powertrain Servicing programs.

With the college’s support, Albert and Lee started a student organization called Labor Ladies. They formulated a mission, created informational flyers and buttons, and developed a webpage on the MATC website.

“We as a college are making change by bringing about this new student organization,” said Becky Alsup, dean of the Manufacturing, Construction and Transportation Pathway. “Samantha has had a leading role in making a difference. Now there is more support, more networking and more interaction available to these women.”

The group aims to support, motivate and advocate for women pursuing educational and career goals in the trades.

“We believe in the potential of every woman to excel in traditionally male-dominated trades and we are committed to breaking down barriers, shattering stereotypes, and fostering an environment where women can reach their full potential,” Albert said.

“We want to inspire a generation of women who are confident, skilled and ready to make their mark in the world of trade programs,” she added.

The group meets at the Oak Creek Campus, where many of the MCT programs are taught. Albert and Lee also got Karen Feliciano, the instructor who created the college’s first bilingual welding program, to speak at meetings.

“I see so much power in women, and I don’t want us to settle. We are strong, and we belong in the trades, too.”

### SAMANTHA ALBERT

Albert, who graduated from the Automotive Maintenance Technician program in May 2023 and from the Auto Collision Repair and Finish Technician program in May 2024, and Lee are also visiting local high schools to share their stories.

“The power to communicate with other women is awesome,” Albert said. “I see so much power in women, and I don’t want us to settle. We are strong, and we belong in the trades, too.” ■

“I view it as a safe place for women to come, talk and share what is happening in their classes and in their lives,” Lee said. “A place where they can see a friendly face.”



## Hometown Banker

**Kevin Nitka, president and CEO of Guardian Credit Union, found his calling close to home at MATC**

While others might have yearned to go away, Kevin Nitka stayed.

The Greenfield native sank deep roots and, for the last four decades, has become a fixture in his community.

Nitka graduated from Greenfield High School and earned an Accounting degree from MATC, taking his first courses at the college's Oak Creek Campus on Howell Avenue.

Today, more than 40 years later, he's president and chief executive officer of Guardian Credit Union, managing \$300 million in assets and tending to 30,000 depositors from his office on Howell, mere miles from where his career path started. He is also a certified public accountant who has served on the board of several local nonprofit organizations.

"I credit everything to my start at MATC," Nitka said while sitting at his desk in Guardian's glimmering, glass headquarters. "I have often been in the right place at the right time, but I have never forgotten the things I learned that first year at MATC."



**"I credit everything to my start at MATC. I have often been in the right place at the right time, but I have never forgotten the things I learned that first year at MATC."**

**KEVIN NITKA**, president and CEO  
of Guardian Credit Union

Nitka, the son of a machinist father and homemaker mother who had previously worked as a bookkeeper, didn't really know what to do with his life in 1978 after he left high school, a place where he survived and hardly thrived.

"I didn't have great grades in high school, so scholarships were not an option, nor did my parents have a lot of money to send me to college," he said. "Starting in a two-year program at MATC was right for me. My mom had taken classes at MATC, and my aunt went to MATC. Everyone in the area knew the school."

Nitka took an introductory accounting class and it was a revelation. He did well in the class and liked the subject.

"I never had any idea I wanted to go into accounting until I took that one class," he recalled. "I hadn't really applied myself in high school like I should have. Thanks to the great instructors we had in the business division, I applied myself a lot more at MATC."

### A future in finance

He graduated from the college in 1980 and took a job as a bank teller at Security Savings and Loans, which eventually became part of M&I Bank, then BMO. He then took a position in the accounting department at Security. He began attending classes at Lakeland College, now Lakeland University.

There, Nitka experienced two life-changing events: He became an



*An introductory accounting class at MATC helped Kevin Nitka discover his aptitude for finance.*

accounting supervisor at Guardian Credit Union and met his future wife, Kathy, in one of his auditing classes. In 1988, he graduated from Lakeland with a bachelor's degree in accounting and a minor in economics. He then passed all four parts of the Uniform CPA Exam on his first attempt — an impressive feat only about 30% of test-takers achieved in the nation at that time.

At Guardian, Nitka steadily moved up. He became vice president of finance, executive vice president and chief financial officer, and then in 2016, he was named the third president at Guardian since 1965.

Nitka and nearly 100 other employees are celebrating Guardian's 90th anniversary this year. In May 2024, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel name the credit union one of the top small-business workplaces in Milwaukee for the sixth year in a row.

"It's all about having great people around you," Nitka said. "You can't do it without great people. We have an incredible team that drives our culture and success, and I believe that makes us a truly special organization."

Now nearing 64, Nitka knows he is close to the end of his career. "We have a strong management team here, we have a good succession plan, and I believe Guardian will be serving our community for many years to come," he said.

Nitka has plenty of things to do. He owns several dogs, loves baseball, volunteers at his church and in the community, and is keenly interested in history. And, he has considered teaching. In the early 1990s, he taught evening accounting classes at several MATC campuses and at Greenfield High School. He talks up his daughter, Lauren Marie Nitka, an elementary school art teacher and well-regarded artist in Milwaukee. And while he has never been outside of the United States, Nitka and his wife of 34 years enjoy traveling and have visited many states and cities across the country.

Still, he always returns to southeast Wisconsin, the place where he grew up, got educated, learned his craft, and found personal happiness and professional success.

"I am so grateful for all the opportunities I have had during my career," Nitka said. "I have the fondest memories of where it all started at MATC. I've had a wonderful career journey." ■



Brigette Bendzka's path to nursing began at MATC.

## Straight Talk

**Nurse recruiter Brigette L. Bendzka uses her experience and her MATC education to find the next generation of nurses.**

Brigette L. Bendzka speaks nurse fluently.

With two decades of professional experience at the Clement J. Zablocki Veterans' Administration Medical Center in Milwaukee and a rich education that started with a practical nursing diploma from MATC, Bendzka can tell it like it is to today's high school and college students who want to become tomorrow's registered nurses.

"The idea of nursing being a calling has changed in the minds of many people," said Bendzka, a Milwaukee native. "Nursing is hard work. It's very rewarding work, but still hard work. Hearing from a person in the profession, having a peer-to-peer conversation with someone who knows the landscape of policies and procedures, I think is very impactful. I believe they listen to that."

Her no-nonsense perspective and straightforward talk helped Bendzka become one of the first medical center nursing

recruiters in Wisconsin's Veterans Affairs system, in September 2022.

Bendzka and her fellow nurse recruiter, Jennifer Scott, host career fairs, travel to area schools, attend job fairs and have established a partnership with M<sup>3</sup> (pronounced M-cubed), a collaboration between MATC, Milwaukee Public Schools and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The recruiters cover a 7,500-square-mile territory that includes 16 counties in southeastern and east-central Wisconsin.

Bendzka started as a recruiter in 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, which made the job difficult. But she found success. She works with many colleges, including MATC. She encourages high school students who are thinking about nursing as a career to work at her facilities.

"We introduce them to the opportunities that we have and hopefully get them into entry-level positions such as a nurse's

assistant. Then we provide professional development in the way of financial support, mentorship and educational guidance," Bendzka explained.

### Discipline leads to success

Direction was something Bendzka lacked in high school. She attended Milwaukee Public Schools' Rufus King High School for more than three years before graduating from MPS' Custer High School in 1988. She was a less than serious student, and years of academic disregard caught up with her. "I was rambunctious," she said with a smile. "Realizing that I was not mature enough for college, I joined the Army."

Her mother was a chief master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, and her stepfather also was in the Air Force. Her father served in the Marines. Several of her uncles were in the Army.

"The military gave me the discipline I needed," Bendzka said. She served in military intelligence for a brief period before transitioning into the medical field during the first Gulf War. She was honorably discharged in 1991.

She returned to Wisconsin and enrolled in MATC's licensed Practical Nursing program. "MATC was strict, but coming from the military, it was an easy transition for me," she said. "Everything was structured, disciplined and demanded respect."

Bendzka remembered her MATC nursing instructors as tough but fair. "I always said they were like bananas — soft on the inside but firm on the outside," she said. "Classes started at 8 a.m., and the doors were closed by 8:05 a.m. Three tardies and you got kicked out of the class. But they taught us what

we needed to know, and they reminded us that MATC was the important first step."

She worked as a medical laboratory technician while attending classes and earned her diploma in 1999. She went on to get an associate degree in nursing from Cardinal Stritch University, a bachelor's degree in nursing from Concordia University and a master's degree in nursing from Western Governors University.

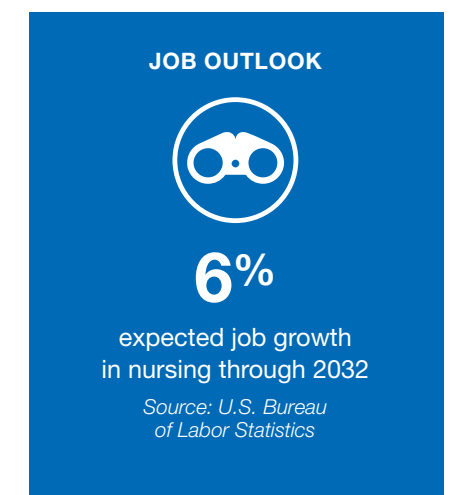
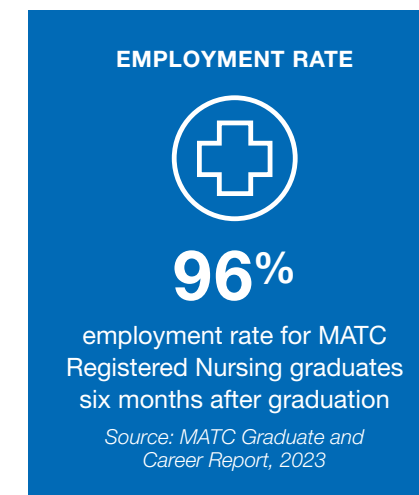
In 1999, she took a job at Milwaukee's VA Medical Center, where she met her husband, also a nurse, while working on the spinal cord injury unit. They got married and now have an 18-year-old daughter.

"I can't speak highly enough about what MATC did for me and my career," Bendzka said. "It gave me the foundation for everything that came after." ■

"I can't speak highly enough about what MATC did for me and my career. It gave me the foundation for everything that came after. No other school that I attended after MATC matched it."

BRIGETTE BENDZKA,  
MATC Practical Nursing graduate

**Nursing is an in-demand program at MATC. Read more about the Healthcare Pathway at [matc.edu](https://matc.edu).**





Heena Dhyani tests a water sample in her lab at MMSD.

# Renaissance Woman

**As an artist who loves science, Heena Dhyani uses her creativity and training from MATC to protect Milwaukee's water**

Heena Dhyani's brain brims with ideas and concepts, with aims and objectives. Thoughts slosh and swirl around in her head, constantly moving, continually flowing.

"I have always had a hard time doing just one thing," Dhyani admitted. "My mind is always racing. I've always had a lot of interests. When I was growing up, I wanted to be an artist, a scientist and a teacher."

Thanks to MATC, Dhyani is a laboratory technician at the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. The job, which entails keeping city water safe, quenches her thirst for knowledge and provides a secure, long-term career.

Dhyani, who earned an associate degree in the college's Environmental Health and Water Quality Technology program in 2018, has worked at the sewerage district since April 2021.

She analyzes wastewater samples coming into treatment plants called influent and discharging samples called effluent. Her testing provides data that helps the sewerage district monitor the treatment process, which in turn keeps Milwaukee's waterways safe for residents.

"I feel the work I do is meaningful and vital to keeping our water supply safe," Dhyani said. "It combines a lot of my interests and offers employment security. The environmental health program really set me on the right track."

### An artist at heart

Growing up in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, Dhyani liked science but loved art. She attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and earned a bachelor's degree in visual arts in 2010. She worked at a jewelry company before her job was eliminated.

She joined AmeriCorps and served as a literacy tutor for a year. After completing her year of service, she used an education award from the program to enroll in cooking classes before working in restaurants around Milwaukee.

Dhyani changed course yet again when she enrolled in MATC's Environmental Health and Water Quality Technology program. Dhyani took to the program quickly. She enjoyed science classes and the individual attention she got from instructors and staff.

"Heena is just a delightful individual — thoughtful and kind, creative and insightful," said Kathleen Bates, program coordinator/lead faculty and instructor in the Environmental Health and Water Quality Technology program.

And, her dedication to her craft left an impression on Bates, who remembered that for a class project Dhyani "borrowed a friend's manual ice-fishing drill so that she could get water samples for her project."

Dhyani liked the smaller class sizes. "MATC's program really helps you network," she said. "With the classes having fewer students, you can make connections easier."

While completing her studies at MATC, she interned with the sewerage district. Dhyani also earned a program scholarship and the Marian Drake Breskvar Scholarship, named for a Milwaukee Public Schools teacher who left a significant portion

of her estate to the MATC Foundation, the college's philanthropic partner in student success, to endow scholarships.

"The scholarships helped me quite a bit," Dhyani said. "They came as I was finishing, so, at the end, I didn't have any loans to pay off. It was nice to not have to worry about that, especially after getting a four-year college degree."

### Many career paths

After graduation, Dhyani worked as a food technologist, creating and testing seasoning blends, shelf-stable cheese sauces, and enzyme-modified cheese flavors.

She initially felt having so many different career paths might be a red flag for employers. But she came to realize most companies

“I feel the work I do is meaningful and vital to keeping our water supply safe.”

HEENA DHYANI, laboratory technician,  
Milwaukee Metropolitan  
Sewerage District





viewed it as an asset. She was pleased to discover numerous employment opportunities for graduates in a host of industries and decided on a job at the sewerage district.

Now 36, she satisfies her creative side by painting, making metal jewelry and sculpting. Lately, Dhyani has been connecting with the outdoors by hunting for mushrooms in the Wisconsin woods. She will always find ways to express her creativity while having a stable, secure career thanks to MATC.

“I feel I was prepared very well by MATC,” Dhyani said. “My internship overlapped with my studies, so there were things I would learn in the classroom one day, then put into practice in the real world the next day. ... Plus, with this job, there is always something new to learn.” ■

**Learn more about the Environmental Health and Water Quality Technology program at [matc.edu](https://matc.edu).**

## MATC SPOTLIGHT

### Environmental Technicians

Students come from as far away as Manitowoc, Kenosha and Whitewater to take courses in MATC’s Environmental Health and Water Quality Technology program — the only one of its kind in the state and an important source of the workers, technicians and specialists who keep our air, water and food safe.

“Four minutes without air, four days without water, four weeks without food, and we die,” said Kathleen Bates, the program’s coordinator and lead faculty member. “This program is so vital to our community.”

Based at the college’s Mequon Campus, the program teaches the principles and techniques used to assess the safety of food, water and the environment through hands-on coursework along with class instruction. Students work in the field and participate in internships to develop their skills, always keeping in mind that the work they do goes beyond their community.

“Air, food and water isn’t just what’s on the table in front of us,” Bates said. “It’s all around us, in farm fields and cities. It’s all interconnected like a spider web.”

Program graduates go on to careers in areas such as natural resource management, public health, water treatment and food safety. According to Bates, the career outlook in this field is good, with environmental health technicians making around \$60,000 in their first year.

“As long as someone is curious and concerned for the world, they can do this profession,” Bates said.



Jacob Schwartz

## Sharpening His Skills

### MATC helped Jacob Schwartz get on-the-job training toward becoming a surgical technologist with Froedtert Hospital

Deep down in his gut, Jacob Schwartz felt he’d end up working in healthcare one day.

Schwartz’s interest in the field started at Greenfield High School, where he participated in a medical career club. He joined the U.S. Army in 2020 and trained to be a combat medic. He left the service after 10 months and returned to Wisconsin.

In the fall of 2021, he enrolled at MATC and took several classes. Then he became interested in the college’s Surgical Technologist program.

“Those lingering feelings I had about healthcare never really went away,” Schwartz said.

At MATC, he learned the theory of surgical technology. He received practical experience at Froedtert Hospital thanks to a job placement program called JobUp Milwaukee, a work-education program that connected employers with MATC students interested in paid, on-the-job training in their field of study.

Schwartz said he responded to an email about the program and the Froedtert placement. He attended classes two days a week and worked one day a week at Froedtert as a sterile processing technician. He disinfected, decontaminated, sterilized and inspected surgical instruments, and put together trays of equipment for the

upwards of 90 surgeries that Froedtert personnel perform each day.

“I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to dip my toes into the field,” Schwartz said. “This has been 100%

WAGE



**\$62,250**

mean annual wage for surgical technologists

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

valuable. It’s the kind of opportunity that has set me up for success. It has given me real-world experience, challenged me to balance work and classes, and taught me how to manage my time.”

He earned an associate degree in May 2024 and started working at Froedtert in June. Surgical technologists like Schwartz ensure operating room environments are sterile, that equipment functions properly, and that the procedures are conducted as safely as possible.

He plans to continue his education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, studying either neuroscience or healthcare administration.

“My MATC classes have done a great job preparing me,” Schwartz said. “I feel confident in my abilities. MATC has been nothing but a positive experience for me. Getting this position at Froedtert was a long process and the college really went the extra mile for me.”

**Discover careers in healthcare at [matc.edu](https://matc.edu).**



## Fired Up for Success

**At 28, chef Connor Murdoch has perfected the recipe for a culinary career with a side of work-life balance**

In August 2010, 15-year-old Connor Murdoch spent his time playing video games, hitting golf balls, riding Kawasaki motorcycles and cooking food. That year, the South Milwaukee High School freshman also created a Facebook account and made his very first post: “Started New Job at Cousins Subs.”

“I discovered there was such a thing as cooking for money,” Murdoch recalled. “When I saw the big lunch crowd for the first time, it energized me. My co-workers weren’t thrilled about how busy it got, but I absolutely loved it.”

Murdoch has turned his passion for food into a profession. He earned an associate degree from MATC’s Culinary Arts program and honed his skills at two highly respected restaurants in Milwaukee.

And today, at 28 years old, Murdoch is in charge of an entire kitchen as executive chef for Skyline Catering and the Bucyrus Club in his hometown, South Milwaukee.

“While he was pretty young to become our executive chef, we felt his background, his ambition, his credentials, his enthusiasm, his work ethic and his genuine desire to be a leader within our family of fantastic team members was exactly what we were looking for to build our brand and our future,” said Ernest C. Wunsch, owner of Skyline Catering and the Bucyrus Club.

“Most chefs are job changers over their careers,” Wunsch added. “What really impressed me was that after a year of being with our team and trying out his leadership skills, Connor was convinced that our company would be his forever home.”

“I want this to be my last job,” Murdoch said. “This job checks all the boxes. Half the week, I work during the day and can be home by 4 p.m. to be with my kids. Other days, we have events and weddings at the club. It’s been the best of all worlds.”

As executive chef, Murdoch designed many of the dishes on the catering menu for meetings, events and weddings. He also created sandwiches for a small deli that operates within the club and a unique fish fry that has packed the place to the gills on Fridays.

“The owners here have really let me put my own stamp on things,” Murdoch said. “They’ve allowed me a lot of freedom to be creative.”

Murdoch discovered his culinary creativity with his father, who cooked breakfast on weekends and tended the grill on summer nights. As a youngster, Murdoch stood on a chair, hovered over the stove, and helped make bacon and scrambled eggs.

“He inspired me,” Murdoch said about his father. “He loves what I make. He gives me honest reviews. He’s not a stuffy foodie at all. He’s just a South Milwaukee guy who likes to eat.”

After graduating from South Milwaukee High School in 2014, Murdoch attended a summer camp at MATC for high school students interested in culinary careers, and then he got a job at Dream Dance Steakhouse inside Milwaukee’s Potawatomi Casino Hotel. He worked there full time while attending classes at MATC.



“Sometimes cooking feels like an addiction, and I need to do it.”

CONNOR MURDOCH, executive chef at Skyline Catering and the Bucyrus Club

“I think I was prepared for the real world because I was in the real world and school at the same time,” Murdoch said. “Work prepared me for school and school prepared me for work.”

At MATC, Murdoch learned proper cooking procedures, how to respect ingredients, to pay attention to detail and, more importantly, to have the right mindset: “You really have to love it,” he said.

“Connor’s desire and passion were evident when he was in our program,” said Paul J. Carrier, lead faculty and department chairperson of the college’s Culinary Arts program. “That passion has carried him to great success, and he’s continuing that at Bucyrus and Skyline.”



*Connor Murdoch (above and far left) has the freedom to be creative in the Bucyrus Club kitchen.*

After graduating from MATC in May 2017, Murdoch started working full time at Dream Dance. After the COVID-19 pandemic struck, he took a job at Eldr+Rime, another Milwaukee area restaurant. He married his girlfriend, Ashley. His son, Leo, was born in 2021 and his daughter, Ellie, in 2022.

With a family to support, he walked away from the kitchen and took a daytime job in the healthcare field. He lasted six months.

“I had to get out. I couldn’t do it,” he said, shaking his head. “I just couldn’t sit at a desk all day. Sometimes cooking feels like an addiction, and I need to do it.”

Murdoch and Skyline have had a busy 2024. They catered several events to raise money for murals in downtown South Milwaukee. They also catered multiple events for the Republican National Convention held in Milwaukee in July.

And he plans to keep doing it. He loves it so much that he cooks on his days off.

“I still like to impress my wife,” he said with a laugh. “Plus, I have yet to find a food I don’t like to eat.” ■

[See what’s cooking in MATC’s Culinary Arts program at matc.edu.](https://matc.edu)



Jessica Currie's nonprofit delivers essentials to families in need.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, call or text 988 to reach the national suicide and crisis lifeline. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org. Current MATC students can seek help through Counseling and Psychological Services by emailing counseling@matc.edu. Employees who need support may contact MATC's employee assistance program by calling 1-800-236-3231.

## Her Guiding Light

**For Jessica Currie, director of a nonprofit helping mothers in crisis, success started at MATC's Adult High School**

Without a home, without any support, without a proper education, and seemingly without a future, Jessica Currie hit rock bottom.

At 19, she was a mother of two children, a high school dropout, broke, hungry and sleeping in her car.

"I thought about suicide," she admitted. "I cried in my car, not knowing how I was going to continue."

Instead of taking her own life, Currie reclaimed it. She persuaded a kind-hearted landlord to rent her an apartment. She received assistance at a local YMCA, and she decided to go to MATC to get her high school diploma.

"I needed to do this because I knew I wasn't going to go far in life without a high school diploma," she said.

She enrolled in MATC's Adult High School program, which offers individuals 16 and older the chance to earn a high school diploma in a classroom setting. The program provides a full range of academic and student support services, and many courses incorporate hands-on learning.

That's exactly what Currie wanted. "The GED (General Educational Development) program didn't really work for me," she said. "There were too many tests. I needed that one-on-one experience where I could talk to teachers and ask for help if I needed it."

MATC's Adult High School is a fully accredited high school; the diplomas students earn are high school diplomas, not equivalents that employers might reject, said instructor Elaine Hines, who

has worked at the college's Adult High School since 2001. The program delivers a traditional high school educational experience to non-traditional students.

Students with no previous high school experience must complete 46 credits of coursework to earn their diploma, Hines said. They must take at least six credits during the program, which is split into four eight-week quarters.

"Almost every student we have has started high school and never finished," Hines said. "That happens for all sorts of reasons. Things happen in life. We have seen students here ranging from their 20s to their 80s."

Currie attended Milwaukee Public Schools' Washington High School for one year while living with her mostly absent godmother. "She just left me alone. She was hardly ever around. So, I just decided I didn't need to go to school," Currie recalled. "I started hanging with the wrong people."

Soon, she was pregnant and homeless. "I was in survival mode. I went from house to house, from couch to couch," she said.

By the time she started adult high school classes, Currie had three children and was working from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. every day. She

attended classes from 4 to 6 p.m. Currie earned her diploma and went on to receive a certificate in nonprofit management from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

Today, she is a wife, a mother of six, a motivational speaker, an author, and founder and executive director of Missionary Currie for Women and Children, a nonprofit dedicated to assisting underserved and unhoused women and children in Milwaukee and Racine. In the spring of 2024, she ran for a seat on the Milwaukee Common Council.

"Attending adult high school was the best thing I have ever done," Currie said. "I am so happy I found out about it when I was 19 and not when I was 39 or 49. With a high school diploma, I had so many more opportunities. Everything I have done I would have not been able to do without a diploma." ■

[Learn more about Jessica Currie's work at missionarycurrieinc.org.](https://missionarycurrieinc.org)

## MATC SPOTLIGHT

### A Century of Service

MATC's Adult High School program is the only one offered in the Wisconsin Technical College System. Recently, it was recognized for 100 years of service by Cognia, the nonprofit organization that provides quality assurance and accreditation for 40,000 schools, school districts and education service providers worldwide.

"What I like about MATC's Adult High School program is that it provides a service to the community that is so very needed," instructor Elaine Hines said. "We have a strong, caring faculty who are passionate about what they do and really want to see students succeed."

Students in the program are attending an actual high school and will graduate with diplomas universally accepted by employers. MATC encourages students



to continue their education in college-level programs. Adult high school graduates can access the MATC Promise, which offers free tuition to recent high school graduates and adults who started and never completed their degree.

"Many of our students come with barriers and we work with them to overcome them," Hines added. "I believe the consistency and quality of our program is why we continue to thrive."

[Learn more about Adult High School at matc.edu.](https://matc.edu)



## Family Matters

**Teamwork comes naturally to Melissa and Denisa Demczak. Trained at MATC, the mother-daughter EMTs volunteer with the Cedarburg Fire Department.**

Thank goodness Melissa Demczak and her mother, Denisa, and get along so well.

Sitting at the dining room table in their Cedarburg home, the mother and daughter seem like sisters. They smile at the same things. They giggle at the same jokes. They tend to complete each other's sentences and stories.

They truly like each other.

And that's a very good thing, since 24-year-old Melissa, also known as Missy, and 56-year-old Denisa decided in May 2023 to volunteer for the Cedarburg Fire Department together.

That fall, Melissa, who was sponsored by the fire department, enrolled in MATC's Emergency Medical Technician program. Denisa, who at first wanted only to drive an ambulance, also joined the program.

The college's EMT program prepares students to work with other healthcare professionals to deliver critical, prehospital emergency medical care. Students who complete the program can take the National Registry Examination, a requirement for certification and licensure in Wisconsin.

Together, the two women took courses at the Oak Creek Campus and received their technical diplomas in December 2023 at Winter Commencement.

"It wasn't easy," Melissa said. "But we found that what you put in is what you get out of it."

### Embracing hard work

Denisa Demczak was born in what is now known as the Czech Republic and grew up in Switzerland, where her parents moved to escape her birth country's communist regime. Growing up, she learned to speak five languages.

She met her husband in the United States during a family vacation. After marrying, she moved from Switzerland to Illinois to be with him. They stayed in Illinois for 16 years and had three children.

While her children were growing up, Denisa always found a way to be an active mom and role model: She taught piano, drove a school bus, worked weekends at local farmers markets selling French crepes, and opened her own creperie and fondue restaurant. After moving to Ohio for her husband's job, she worked early mornings at a bakery.

In Ohio, Melissa, the youngest of the three children, graduated from high school. She always planned to be a doctor. She attended Bowdoin College, in Maine, where she earned degrees in biochemistry and Francophone studies. Melissa moved to France and taught English for two years.

"After a while, I figured I better get started on my medical school applications, so I moved home to save money and get ready for entrance tests," she said.

By that time, the family had moved to Cedarburg. Melissa took a job as a medical scribe, but she wanted to do more. "I always wanted to be an EMT, but I couldn't pay for the extra schooling," Melissa said.

In April 2023, the Demczaks met a full-time firefighter from the Cedarburg Fire Department at a chamber of commerce event. They both wanted to join — Melissa to become an EMT and Denisa to become an ambulance driver. They applied and were approved as volunteers at the 157-year-old department in May 2023, said Diana Klingler, the department's administrative assistant.

The two women underwent department orientation, started attending monthly training sessions at CFD, and participated in department activities and fundraising events during the summer.

"At first, I was just interested in driving the ambulance," Denisa said. "But then I found out about what EMTs could do, and I thought that sounded pretty cool."

In the fall of 2023, Denisa and Melissa started school.

"Everyone was very accepting. I never felt like I was the oldest one in the class,"

she added. "I thought the class was very impressive, and I was very excited to go through my first graduation in the United States."

"While I was preparing for the classes, I was more nervous about going to class with my mom," Melissa admitted. "I had always loved going to school, but now I had to share what I thought was my territory with her. But it was super cool to have her with me."

WAGE



**\$44,780**

mean annual wage for an EMT in Wisconsin

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

### Ready for the future

With her diploma in hand, Denisa can't wait to put her new skills to use with the fire department. "I'm excited to be able to go on probationary ride-alongs and continue to learn more on the ambulance," she said. "Now I can be much more serious about helping out. Maybe in the future I will do more, like take advanced EMT or even become a paramedic."

After spending the summer volunteering at the fire department, working as a medical scribe and taking several firefighting classes, Melissa started medical school at Des Moines University in August. She plans to volunteer with Cedarburg during holiday breaks. Denisa is on the department's active-duty roster to take ambulance calls.

"Both also have fire gear required to respond to accidents, and both can respond to fire calls as needed," Klingler said. "In 2023, the department logged more than 1,500 calls; our call volume continues to increase every year," she added.

During the summer, the mother-daughter duo attended the department's monthly sessions for specialized training, such as Rescue Task Force, where paramedics, EMTs and fire personnel train with the police department to respond to active shooter incidents, when faster emergency medical intervention is critical, Klingler said.

"Denisa and Missy are really a great addition to our CFD family," Klingler said. "Both are energetic, enthusiastic, caring and really want to make a difference in our community. I could tell that the minute I met them." ■

[Learn more about the EMT programs at matc.edu.](https://matc.edu)

*Melissa Demczak and her mother, Denisa (opposite), suit up (bottom left) and check supplies (bottom right).*



## In Memoriam

We honor and celebrate the lives of the following alums who passed away in the last year, as reported in obituaries in local newspapers.

If you'd like make a donation in memory of an MATC alum or honor an alum in the In Memoriam section, please contact Bob Holland at [hollanrj@matc.edu](mailto:hollanrj@matc.edu).

### A

Joyce Alston (Honeck), 88, August 26, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Enaida Alvarado, 73, April 2, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

### B

Patricia Bacon (Koehler), 82, August 19, 2023, Waukesha, Wis.  
Carol Ann Badzinski (Nimmer), 74, November 2, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.

### C

Marcus Allen Coleman, 68, March 1, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Troy L. Collins, 78, February 6, 2024, Georgetown, Miss.  
Nelida Yolanda Costantini, 93, July 15, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.

### D

Kathleen A. Dixon, 89, May 19, 2024, Sheboygan, Wis.  
Marlene Driessen (Smukowski), 88, July 7, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.

### E

Beverly T. Ellingson, 76, April 19, 2024, Marinette, Wis.  
Richard J. Elst, 64, February 22, 2024, White Lake, Wis.

### F

William S. Ferguson, 68, October 28, 2023, West Allis, Wis.  
Regina Moore Ferrell, 60, March 29, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
LoVonte Ford, 27, March 19, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

### G

Benjamin Noel Gayheart, 72, February 10, 2024, Kenosha, Wis.  
Nathan Goc, 45, May 29, 2024, Friendship, Wis.  
Charlotte A. Gorbette, 98, February 15, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

Bessie Gray, 90, April 29, 2024, Pine Bluff, Ark.  
Carolyn M. Greene (Cowdin), 54, December 3, 2023, Arlington Heights, Ill.

### H

James Walter Hadfield, 72, October 17, 2023, Minocqua, Wis.  
Mary Hamm (Olson), 75, August 17, 2023, Rudolph, Wis.  
Gary Lee Haydock, 80, May 1, 2024, Minot, N.D.  
Jerold "Jerry" Hensler, 71, December 17, 2023, Watertown, Wis.  
Ben Hopinkah, 73, July 6, 2023, Black River Falls, Wis.

### J

Esther Jackson (Anderson), 88, April 10, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Carl Jagow, 68, May 31, 2024, Port Washington, Wis.

### K

Robert Forrest Kesting, 73, July 13, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Deborah Lynn Kowalewski (Winkler), 70, March 29, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

### L

Robert B. Latzel, 90, October 30, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Charles M. Linstrom, 86, February 6, 2024, Granite Bluff, Mich.

### M

James S. McClendon, 45, October 29, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Michael T. Moe, 76, June 4, 2024, Beloit, Wis.

### P

Roberto Jose Perez, 52, June 11, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Gilbert Plotkin, 76, June 14, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Kerry A. Podolske, 78, February 17, 2024, Cassville, Wis.

William J. Purtell, 84, October 11, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.

### R

Sade Robinson, 19, April 1, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

### S

Jeffrey Charles Schiller, 62, November 6, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Robin Lindsay Schutz, 59, March 11, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Todd A. Skibinski, 63, February 9, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Angela Christine Simon, 41, August 5, 2023, Racine, Wis.  
Amari Smith, 30, February 25, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Carlene Joyce Staffaroni, 101, December 29, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Neal C.W. Strehlow, 86, January 25, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

### T

Sheryl A. Thielke (Kolbin), 69, October 23, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Starlette Tucker, 74, April 25, 2024, Chicago Heights, Ill.

### V

James D. Valasek, 61, December 29, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
John R. Van Sickle, 66, March 23, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Kristin Veto, 34, March 25, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

### W

Jennifer Walentowski-Thomas, 57, March 15, 2024, St. Francis, Wis.  
Michael E. Waters Sr., 82, November 15, 2023, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Joan A. Weidensee, 87, December 27, 2023, Watertown, Wis.  
Genevieve N. Wenzel, 74, March 15, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.  
Roger H. Westphal, 75, March 24, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

# ALUMNI NEWS

If you wish to share an MATC Alumni News update or start a scholarship in honor of an MATC alum, email Donor Relations Coordinator Bob Holland at [hollanrj@matc.edu](mailto:hollanrj@matc.edu)

## BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT



**Terrell Nash**, Accounting, graduated summa cum laude in May 2018. Since then, he's participated in the Associates in Commercial Real Estate, a commercial real estate development program; interned at Baker Tilly; and recently completed a master's degree in real estate and urban land economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The next phase of his life is teaching and owning a portfolio of income-producing real estate assets.

## COMMUNITY & HUMAN SERVICES



**Bryan Winters**, Human Services, was featured in an article from the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service. The single father of four is a community health worker at a local hospital. He helps connect individuals recently released from the state corrections department's care with medical care and other resources.

## CREATIVE ARTS, DESIGN & MEDIA



**Christopher E. Burton**, Television Production, is a multimedia artist and Milwaukee photographer whose work has been featured in Vogue magazine. Burton, who became interested in holistic medicine after being diagnosed with diabetes in 2016, is pursuing a degree at the Midwest College of Oriental Medicine in Racine. He was featured in Shepherd Express in December 2023.



**Malaysia Campbell-Leung**, Culinary Arts, was named one of BizTimes' 2023 Notable Women in Hospitality. Campbell-Leung opened her business, Fusion and Spice Catering, six months after graduation. She prepares an assortment of cuisines, including American, French, Italian and Mexican, for weddings, meetings and other events. In the article, Paul Carrier, lead faculty and department chairperson for MATC's Culinary Arts program, described Campbell-Leung as a "gastronomic globetrotter."



**MK Drayna**, Baking and Pastry Arts, was featured in the January 2024 issue of Milwaukee Magazine. The baker and owner of Whisk Chick discussed the resurgence of ornately decorated wedding cakes. Lambeth, her go-to piping method, dates back to the lavish cakes of the Victorian era. In the article, Drayna credited her training at MATC for her maximalist, over-the-top piping practices. She has also been featured in Wisconsin Bride magazine.



**Bill Drehfal**, Photography, embraced wood carving after retirement. He makes his own pieces and teaches veterans at the VA to carve wood. His efforts earned him a spot at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, held May 11-18 in Denver. He and his wife continue to cultivate their love of learning by taking classes at MATC.



**GENERAL EDUCATION**

**Della Wells**, Psychology, was the Arts Advocate honoree of the 2023 Betty Awards by Milwaukee Magazine. Wells, a self-taught artist, works in a variety of media, including collage, painting and folk art. Her work is available for purchase at the Portrait Society Gallery of Contemporary Art (portraitsocietygallery.com).

**Corinne Kaehler**, Culinary Arts, was named one of BizTimes' 2023 Notable Women in Hospitality. Kaehler, the executive chef at Onesto, honed her skills working as a line cook for four years at several Bartolotta restaurants. In the article, chef Paul Carrier described Kaehler as a "rising star in southeastern Wisconsin's dining scene."

**Lisa McKay**, Culinary Arts, was named one of BizTimes' 2023 Notable Women in Hospitality. McKay, the executive chef and owner of Lisa Kaye Catering, nourishes the community through cooking classes and helps fight childhood obesity by teaching kids healthy eating habits.

**MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION & TRANSPORTATION**

**Rashawn Spivey**, Plumbing, was one of 20 guests who sat with first lady Jill Biden during President Joe Biden's State of the Union in March. In December 2023, Biden visited Spivey at his Milwaukee shop near 27th and Atkinson streets. Biden lauded Spivey for his work, especially for replacing a service line at a daycare center, providing children — the most at-risk for lead poisoning — with clean, safe water.

**STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, MATHEMATICS)**

**Tyrone Dumas**, Architectural Technology, was honored with the City of Milwaukee Living Legend Award for his work in the community. In the resolution congratulating Dumas, city officials wrote, "Tyrone Dumas is a well-regarded and beloved member of the community with a long history of being an activist, mentor, and educator."

**Ruthie Vaughn**, Biomedical Technology, joined Kansas City law firm Baker Sterchi Cowden & Rice as an associate attorney. After MATC, she earned a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration from Harris-Stowe State University and a law degree from Saint Louis University School of Law.

**COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

**Jeff Brandenburg**, who took a class in shoe repair at MATC, was featured as a Hidden Gem on TMJ4. His shop, Jeff's Shoe Repair, is located at 3438 North 84th Street in Milwaukee.



*WTCS President Morna Foy, who will retire later this year, changed a tire while visiting the Al Hurvis/PEAK Transportation Center. Read more on page 10.*



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