

TRANSFORMATIONS

THE ROAD TO SERENITY

Alumnus Kenneth Ginlack helps
others overcome addiction

MATC'S CRITICAL ROLE IN
THE BIOHEALTH BOOM

TRAINING EMPLOYEES
TO BE LEADERS

SUPPORTING FATHERS
BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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MATC PRESIDENT

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

Dr. Cruz, who previously served as president of the Kendall Campus of Miami Dade College in Florida and has almost three decades of higher education experience, is using his expertise to increase educational opportunities, enrich the student experience and bolster student success at MATC.

Since becoming MATC’s president, he has emphasized his philosophy of ensuring that our work is centered on serving students. He has outlined systems of support and channels for change to strengthen the organization.

His experiences have given him a profound understanding of the complexity of the higher education landscape and the opportunity to celebrate the diversity of the unique backgrounds and perspectives of the students, faculty and staff that he serves. Among the action steps he is taking are hosting Coffee with Cruz/Cafecito con Cruz sessions to allow for student/staff engagement; inviting hundreds of district residents, business executives and community leaders to participate in a series of Presidential Roundtables to share input about MATC’s next five-year strategic plan; and, most recently, launching a new Voice of the College LIVE series that focuses on specific topics that help us better serve students and/or support one another.

Dr. Cruz is committed to creating innovative approaches to reduce the skills gap, increase the number of college graduates and build a stronger employee culture centered on excellence and endless opportunities. Dr. Cruz believes that prioritizing communication, civility and trust is critical for our future.

MISSION Education that transforms lives, industry and community

VISION The best choice in education, where everyone can succeed

VALUES Empowerment, Inclusion, Innovation, Integrity, Respect

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MATC MOMENT

Earth Day 2025

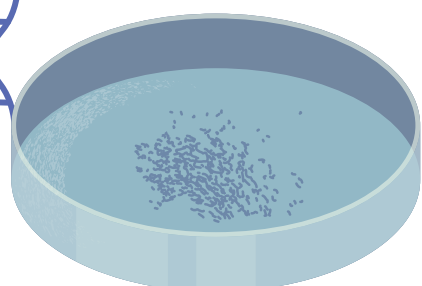
MATC hosted a peace tree planting at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus. James Flores, manager of tribal relations at the Milwaukee Public Museum, buried an arrowhead at the base of the tree to symbolize “burying weapons and negative thoughts.”

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MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE
TRANSFORMATIONS MAGAZINE, FALL 2025



BUILDING THE WORKFORCE WE NEED.

HERE'S HOW
YOU GET THERE.  **MATC**

Letter From the President

BY NOW MANY OF YOU have heard that “students first” is my core philosophy to ensure we are laser-focused on serving students. We should center ourselves on serving, engaging with and listening to students.

In this issue of Transformations magazine, you will read about the career progression of alumni that began with someone taking the time to listen.

That’s what MATC retention coach Dr. Reggie Parks did when he met automotive student Martin Kennedy. Dr. Parks asked Martin about his goals, his dreams and his life. Most importantly, Dr. Parks listened and built trust.

Martin had always been interested in cars because as a kid his family never had dependable transportation. Before his mother passed away in 2023, she encouraged him to go to college and pursue his passion.

While enrolled at MATC, Martin became a father, adding parenthood to a plate already filled



Martin Kennedy received support for classes, work and parenting while earning his degree.

with school and work. Fatherhood might have stopped Martin from finishing his education, but Dr. Parks and MATC were there to support him. You can read more about Martin and the services available to MATC’s student parents on page 20.

Martin represents what MATC is about — meeting students where they are and helping them succeed. This issue features a few alumni who share how faculty and staff supported them.

Alumna Hallee Tretow, a dual enrollment student, credits her welding instructors with her success in the field (page 34). And, nutritionist Troy Luengen recounts the career and job-hunting advice his program instructors gave him and his fellow students (page 36). Yeng Tha Vue recalls how staff created a caring culture by treating everyone with respect (page 25).

This issue also highlights two alumni who returned to the college to share their career experience with current students. Karen Bell, a renowned chef and butcher, showed Culinary Arts students how to carve up a lamb and offered insights into today’s restaurant business (page 22). And finally, Kenneth Ginlack, the CEO of Serenity Inns and our cover story, appeared on a panel in March, sharing with students and staff how obtaining an MATC education helped him overcome adversity (page 16).

Sincerely,

Anthony Cruz, Ed.D.
MATC President



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 [@dr.anthony_cruz](#)

 [Anthony Cruz, Ed.D.](#)

Highlights

Ramadan Celebration

THE ROHINGYA STUDENT ASSOCIATION marked the end of Ramadan by hosting an event on April 2. Students, faculty and staff gathered at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus to learn about Eid al-Fitr, a feast celebrating the end of Ramadan, and share traditional food.

“This is a day of celebration, family and tradition,” said Zar Ni Ko, president of the Rohingya Student Association. “It’s a time to bring peace, joy and comfort.”

Milwaukee has become home to one of the largest contingents of Rohingya refugees in the United States, and many of them have come to MATC.

Hnin Yati Aung, an MATC student and event coordinator for the student association, explained how the Rohinyga perform charitable acts, buy new clothes, pray, visit relatives and prepare traditional foods to honor Islam’s holy month of fasting.

The guests feasted on a buffet that included sticky rice, coconut milk jelly and malabar chai tea.



Students Explore Careers and MATC Programs at M-Cubed Event

NEARLY 1,500 SOPHOMORES from 20 MPS high schools attended Explore Your Future, a daylong event held March 20 as part of the M-Cubed initiative.

Students toured classrooms and labs at the Downtown Milwaukee, Mequon, Oak Creek and West Allis campuses. These tours introduced the college’s 180 programs and state-of-the-art facilities, and empowered students to make informed decisions about their future, said Nutan Amrute, MATC’s interim director of student career, employment and transfer.

Students tested their driving skills in the trucking simulators; used computer simulators to weld a pipe; saw robotics in action at the Electronics Technology Lab; watched Culinary Arts instructor Paul Carrier whip up pancakes, chicken tenders, french fries and spicy rice; and used a pneumatic wrench to remove lug nuts while learning about in-demand automotive careers that can pay up to \$50 an hour.



“This gave me a whole lot to think about,” said Ronald Reagan High School student Nacie Ramirez. “But having choices is a good thing.”



Voice of the College Live

TO ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY and foster a caring culture, Dr. Cruz introduced Voice of the College Live, a series of listening sessions designed to gather input from employees on topics important to MATC.

In the spring, the college hosted two sessions. The first, held in February, addressed the ways the college hires, promotes and addresses complaints. The second, held in April, tackled closing student achievement gaps.

Cleaning Robots

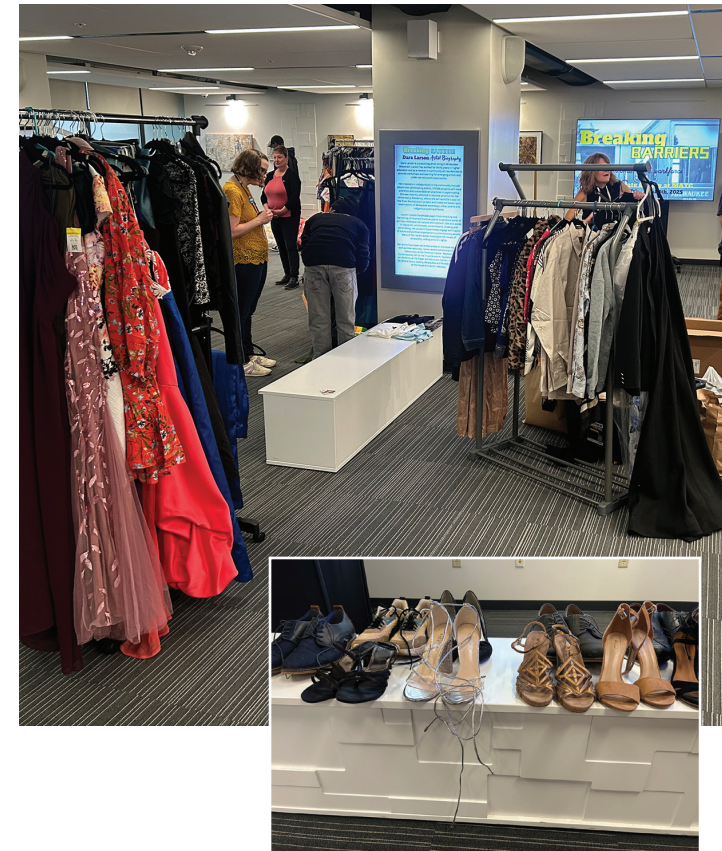
CRUISE THE HALLS at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus, and you’ll probably run into a pair of robotic cleaners keeping the floors spic-and-span.

Purchased from the Atlanta-based Veritiv Operating Company for \$94,500, the robots clean and sweep floors while the college’s human maintenance workers dust and scrub hard-to-reach spots like the top of lockers, entryways and stairwells.

“We will be able to get so much more done,” said Michael Clay, the college’s manager of facilities. “It is imperative that our staff is utilized to its maximum potential.”

The robots use the college’s Wi-Fi system and floor maps to navigate the halls. Once they reach their starting location, the robots get to work. The machines operate with numerous camera eyes and will automatically stop when someone crosses their path.

“Downtown is the test, but we hope to have more of these in the coming year,” Clay said.



Clothing Swap

QUEER-IDENTIFYING STUDENTS from across the city came to MATC on March 28 for a pride clothing swap. They browsed through racks of elegant evening dresses, high-end shoes, luxurious suits, spiffy shirts, silk ties and other accessories.

The items were donated to Planned Parenthood for the event, which was held in the Create Gallery. Nice Hair MKE offered free haircuts and styling. Courage MKE, an advocacy group that supports LGBTQ+ youth across Wisconsin, sponsored makeup and skin care tips for transitioning students.

Along with the clothes, Planned Parenthood and other organizations offered students information on LGBTQ+ resources. MATC recruiters provided information about the college.

“This campus is a great spot,” said Jessica Mirkes, director of education for Planned Parenthood Wisconsin. “It’s centrally located, and by having it at MATC, students also get to see what college looks like.”

And MATC was thrilled to have the event on campus, said Sara Cappaert, manager of scholarships and an active member of the college’s Pride Alliance affinity group.

“I believe it’s really powerful that MATC stands strongly with our community,” Cappaert said. “I am proud we can offer a place where every student and every person feels like they belong.”

Highlights



New WTCS Student Ambassador

NIGERIA NATIVE and Associate of Science student Naomi Omoruyi will represent MATC for the 2025-26 school year.

Each year, Wisconsin’s 16 technical colleges select one student to participate in a leadership development and recognition program in late April in Wisconsin Dells. Following that session, the students officially serve as WTCS ambassadors for one year and, unofficially, for a lifetime.

MATC received 33 completed applications for the position, which includes a \$1,250 scholarship, said Anne-Marie Bernard, MATC’s student life manager.

To qualify for the honor, students must have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.5 and meet other criteria. A committee scores the applications and selects the ambassador.

Omoruyi looks forward to representing MATC. She wants to give back to the college where she has received ample assistance and found much success. She has been nominated to the National Society of Leadership and Success, the nation’s largest leadership honor society, and so far has compiled a 3.9 grade point average in her classes.

“I have received so much support here,” she said. “If I have a question, someone will help me with the answer. And people here are so very patient. I can ask them 10 questions, and they will answer all of them and still be smiling.”

She added, “At the end of the day, school is supposed to prepare you for life. Sometimes, the smartest path is the one that gets you where you want to go faster and with fewer obstacles.”



Enrollment Efforts Pay Off

HUNDREDS OF NEW and continuing students got ready to attend the Spring 2025 semester at a Rapid Registration event held January 11 at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus.

Representatives from admissions, advising, financial aid, multicultural services and various student-facing departments assisted prospective, new and returning students sign up for college classes.

The Rapid Registration sessions are designed to reach students who had been admitted to MATC but had not yet registered for classes. The events have been held on weekends because many new and continuing students work and cannot come to campus during the week.

More than 170 students registered at a similar event held in August 2024.

Esports at MATC

THE COLLEGE LAUNCHED an esports program slated to compete against other state schools in the Wisconsin Esports Conference.

Esports, short for electronic sports, refers to competitive video gaming where players and teams compete in leagues across various game titles. Esports encompasses a wide variety of genres, with some of the most popular being Rocket League, Valorant, Super Smash Bros and Overwatch 2.

“We believe this is a great opportunity for students who may or may not have considered college athletics to have the collegiate athletics experience,” Athletic Director Randy Casey said. “Gaming crosses all demographics and allows students to participate in a team while they pursue their future careers.”

Many colleges and universities have programs to develop gaming skills and offer scholarships to skilled players. MATC is the only two-year college in the state to offer an associate degree in Computer Simulation and Gaming.



HVAC/R Equipment Donation

IN DECEMBER, MATC received six Rheem heating and cooling systems from Design Air, a local heating, ventilation and air conditioning distributor and wholesale supplier.

The six Rheem units, valued at about \$200,000, are heat pumps coupled with high-efficiency gas-fired furnaces. Heat pumps are refrigeration systems that have the capability to cool and also bring warm air in from the outside to heat homes.

Capital Heating, Cooling and Electric, an HVAC contractor based in Menomonee Falls, installed the equipment at the Oak Creek Campus.

“Like MATC, Rheem is deeply committed to investing in the next generation of skilled trade technicians. It is more important now than ever to find and attract new talent to address the current shortage facing our country,” said Jose De La Portilla, senior manager of education and training at Rheem.

Design Air and Rheem have donated additional equipment that will be installed at a later date and will benefit multiple HVAC-related programs.

“These donations are super powerful for our students,” said Dr. Phillip King, the college’s executive vice president and provost. “They will have the opportunity to learn on the best equipment to best serve future customers.”



Remembering Edie Skinner

EDDIE MYRTLE SKINNER, the Practical Nursing alumna who endowed a scholarship for Black nursing students at MATC, passed away January 24, 2025, at her home in Milwaukee. She was 92.

Skinner, who graduated in 1962, helped countless people as a nurse, volunteer and community benefactor.

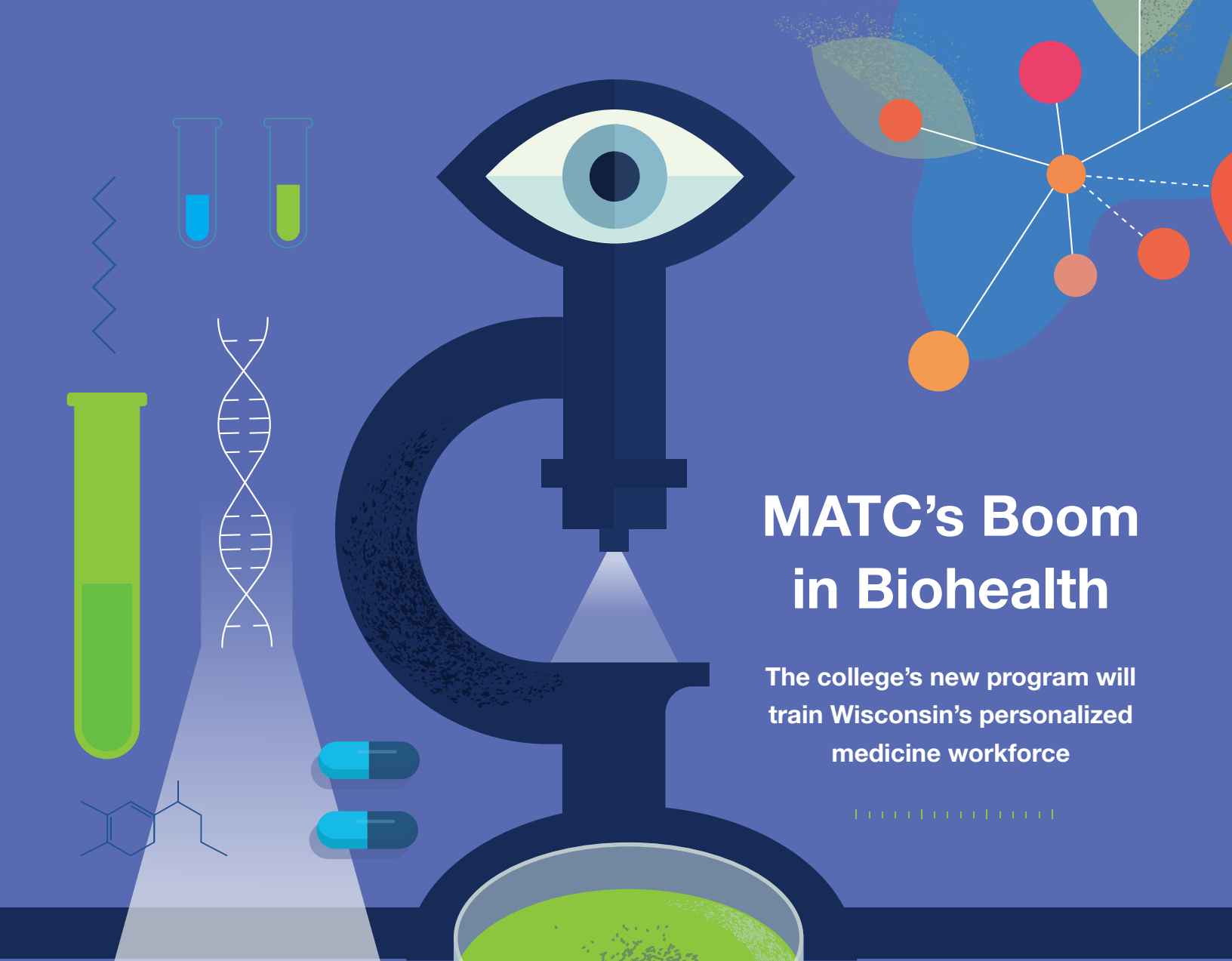
In 2004, she endowed the Edie L. Somerville & Eddie Myrtle Skinner Nursing Scholarship in memory of her mother, who was one of the first African Americans to graduate from MATC’s nursing program. Since then, the scholarship has helped dozens of students complete college.

After earning her degree, Skinner joined the nursing staff at Clement J. Zablocki Veterans’ Administration Medical Center, where she worked for 25 years before retiring in 1995.

Aside from working as a nurse, she was a master gardener, served as a den mother and merit badge counselor for the Boy Scouts of America, and taught Sunday school.

In 2020, at the age of 84, she earned a bachelor’s degree in Biblical studies from Midwest Bible College. She battled diabetes, kidney failure and blindness, but she kept volunteering when she could.

“She refused to be idle,” said Markus Watts, Skinner’s grandson and executive director of Racine Kenosha Vocational Ministry Inc. “She devoted her entire life to the education, health and enrichment of people in need. She was an unsung hero.”



MATC's Boom in Biohealth

The college's new program will train Wisconsin's personalized medicine workforce

|||||

MATC is a perfect partner for Wisconsin's push into personalized medicine.

The rapidly growing field tailors tests, treatments and therapies to patients by using their unique genetic code, medical records and environment.

Thanks to federal funding, the state is creating a biohealth tech hub to advance personalized medicine. And MATC will play a pivotal role in the tech hub by training highly skilled professionals to work with these cutting-edge technologies.

With nearly \$4 million from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, the college established a Biotechnology Laboratory Technician program, designed to equip students with the foundational knowledge and practical skills necessary to pursue biotechnology careers.

In the program, slated to begin in January 2026, students will explore molecular biology, genetics, microbiology, bioinformatics, bioprocessing, sequencing and cell culture techniques.

"The jobs that will be available are mostly work in research labs, in efforts to cure cancer and improve cancer screenings," Dr. Michael Jenkins, dean of the college's STEM Academic and Career Pathway, said in April.

The college also is renovating several classrooms in the Main Building of the Downtown Milwaukee Campus into space specifically for the new program.

The MATC District Board approved the new program and building renovations in the spring, and board directors were excited about the potential of the program.

"Every kind of cancer has been involved in biologic therapies, as well as arthritis and diabetes. The more technicians we have the better results we get," said board director Dr. Waleed Najeeb, medical director and CEO of the Medpoint Clinics and vice president of medical affairs of the Independent Physicians Network. "I'm sure these positions will be in high demand."

"I think this is very cool. It's all about finding your niche," said Gale Pence, district board treasurer and an MATC alumnus with more than 20 years of experience as a tool and die manufacturer and business owner. "I also believe this can bring us regional enrollment since we are one of the few technical colleges doing this."

Wisconsin's biohealth tech hub is being created with \$49 million in federal funding awarded in 2024. MATC is part of a consortium formed to help land and now implement the state's biohealth tech hub.

The group consists of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, BioForward Wisconsin, Exact Sciences Corporation, Accuray, Plexus, GE HealthCare, Rockwell Automation, WRTTP Big Step, Employ Milwaukee, Madison Area Technical College, the University of Wisconsin System Administration, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Madison Regional Economic Partnership and Milwaukee7.

MATC personnel working with the consortium include STEM instructors Dr. Sheldon Garrison, Dr. Christine Ryan, Dr. Lisa Conley, Marie Colmerauer, Dr. Edward "Jim" Kerschen and Scott Schlipp.

Dr. Garrison said that along with creating the Biotechnology Laboratory Technician program, MATC wants to produce more graduates in the CNC, Radiography and Electronic Engineering Technology programs to help the biohealth tech hub.

The college plans to recruit and attract more students into these programs, provide additional resources to retain students, increase community awareness of the programs, expand facilities and modernize equipment, Dr. Garrison said.

In 2024, there were 134 graduates from the three programs currently operating. MATC wants to grow that to 244 across

the four programs each year and to nearly 1,000 graduates during the 10-year life of the federal grant funding, Dr. Garrison said.

"These are ambitious projects. We have formed quite a few relationships. It's important to emphasize the collaborative nature of these projects, which span the entire innovation lifecycle, from idea generation to market deployment," Dr. Garrison said.

He added, "I believe MATC is critical to the success of the state's biohealth endeavors. We're doing things in that space that are making a real impact."

Wisconsin's biohealth industry is large and prosperous, according to a 2022 report compiled by BioForward Wisconsin, the group leading the creation of the biohealth tech hub.

The state's biohealth sector employed nearly 130,000 workers in 2022, the report said. Of those, 52,000 — 15,000 in the Milwaukee region — earned an average annual salary of \$96,000, 70% higher than the state's private sector average, the report said.

Plus, the next generation of jobs in the industry hasn't even been developed yet, said Dr. Conley, an MATC instructor for 19 years.

"No one really knows what could be down the road," she said. "There will be opportunities in the future that we don't have right now. The possibilities for growth and impact are very exciting. We need to be prepared for that." ■



As shown in these renderings, students in the Biotechnology Laboratory Technician program will learn in classrooms that encourage hands-on training and collaboration. MATC hopes to have increase enrollment in all programs associated with the biohealth tech hub.

Just Post It!

President Anthony Cruz is connecting through social media and promoting MATC

The students, faculty, staff and community residents of MATC know all about the college's president, Dr. Anthony Cruz.

He loves pickleball. He likes to eat out. He recently got a new pair of Adidas sneakers. He and his wife visited the Milwaukee Zoo. He proudly displays a sizable collection of coffee mugs, from across the country, in his office.

They also know all about MATC: the 180 programs in seven academic and career pathways, the abundant student resources, the campus events, the well-prepared graduates, the successful alumni, and the generous donors.

That's because Dr. Cruz, who became MATC's 11th president in July 2024, frequently, fervently and unapologetically posts on social media, mostly Instagram and LinkedIn.

He snaps selfies after college events, smiling with students, employees and community partners. He shares reflections and meditations about life. He enthusiastically responds to students and graduates who trumpet their achievements on their own social media accounts.



"If our visibility is greater, if our enrollment is higher, and if our community has more awareness about us, I don't believe there's any reason to change the frequency of my posts.

He added: "You can't post too much if you post about things that matter. This is an important piece of what I do."



Social media is about communication and promotion, Dr. Cruz said. Through LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and X (formerly called Twitter), the college can reach students where they are and tell them about support services; inform the community of the great work being done at the college; market and brand MATC locally, regionally and nationally; and create a sense of belonging and unity for students, faculty and staff.

Perhaps most important, social media also allows the community to get to know the president.

"These posts show a different side of me," Dr. Cruz said. "But you need to be vulnerable. You take a risk of putting yourself out there because this is an extension of yourself."



Impact of social media

Decades ago, Dr. Cruz didn't think about social media much. Before coming to MATC, he was a vice chancellor, vice president and dean at several community colleges and universities for nearly 30 years. In 2019, he became a campus president at Miami Dade College in Florida. Most of that time he was a social media observer. At Miami Dade College, he had a LinkedIn account, but he said he couldn't recall even posting anything.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic. With no students on his campus, Dr. Cruz started recording short videos to keep students, faculty and staff informed and engaged. He began recording short talks on Microsoft Teams and posting them on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Then he produced a podcast.

Dr. Cruz said that the urgency to maintain clear and effective communication with students, faculty and staff "became paramount."

"I saw what social media could do," he said. "I also saw it was making an impact. People in the community, students and colleagues would tell me they liked it. I think it (social media) made me personally, and us as a college, more relatable and accessible."

When students returned to in-person classes, Dr. Cruz kept posting. He realized many students were using Instagram, so he focused on that platform and decided to use one account: @dr.anthony_cruz.

"Many people have a personal account and a professional account. I decided I needed only one," he said. "It became superorganic. If I got a good reaction, I kept going. Social media opened up a whole new world to me and inspired me, motivated me and informed me."

He also has learned that posting on social media doesn't take a lot of time, just some thought and organization. He

schedules many of his posts in the evening for the next day. He always has his phone ready at events.

Dr. Cruz tries to stay away from polarizing political content; he doesn't endorse candidates or get involved in campaigns. "But I will advocate for things I think are important and in line with what our students need."

Power of the platform

Dr. Cruz's extensive social media presence marked a change for MATC: He was the college's first president to personally use social media to communicate directly with students, employees and the community.

During his first year at MATC, Dr. Cruz encouraged college leaders to be active on social media but understood that some people weren't as comfortable with the platforms as he had become.

Still, he fully believes in the positive impact of social media messaging.

"The power of these platforms is tremendous. It can build personal and institutional brands, and forge valuable relationships with people from all over," he said. "It lets us show ourselves to the world. It's about sharing our story with a broader audience. We're doing such great work. Now we need to tell people about it." ■

Engage with Dr. Cruz on social media:
Anthony Cruz, Ed.D. on LinkedIn
or **@dr.anthony_cruz on Instagram.**



Dr. Cruz has posted about graduation (above), the first day of classes (opposite left), pickleball (opposite right) and dining with his wife, Diana.



Kenneth Ginlack credits MATC instructors with helping him stay on the path to graduation.

After defeating his own addictions, MATC alumnus Kenneth Ginlack discovered his true calling was helping others overcome theirs

Kenneth Ginlack was ready to kill for crack. On a frigid winter’s night in 2007, Ginlack was addicted to drugs and desperate. He was living in his mother’s basement. He had a wife, three kids and zero money. He needed cash to buy crack cocaine.

He slid a metal pipe under the sleeve of his ragged winter coat, walked into the frosty air and straggled down Milwaukee’s West Burleigh Street. Near Sherman Park he saw two guys looking to buy drugs. He talked himself into their car, telling them he could help.

As he sat in the back seat, a long list of mistakes, miscalculations and miseries littered his mind. The memories slammed into each other and piled up into a full-blown disaster, like derailed train cars or out-of-control automobiles.

Growing up watching prostitutes work on his block. Snorting cocaine at 14. Becoming a teenage father. Never getting an A in any class. Getting kicked out of one high school. Missing his eventual graduation because he was selling drugs. Becoming addicted to crack. Lying to his family and his friends. Losing his car, his job, his house.

And now, Ginlack was stealing money for crack. Then, out of nowhere, he heard a voice. *If you do this, your life will change forever.* “I tried to ignore it,” Ginlack recalled nearly 20 years after that fateful night. “But I heard it again.”

If you do this, your life will change forever. Suddenly he leaped out of the car. He doubled over on the cold sidewalk and sobbed uncontrollably. “I was a crackhead and an alcoholic,” he said. “I knew if I didn’t change my life, I’d die. I just wanted the pain to stop.”

That night he checked himself into a detox center. He got treatment and counseling. In time, the agony eased. He got a factory job and was on his way to recovering from addiction. Eventually, he enrolled at MATC and earned an associate

degree in the Human Service Associate program in 2012. Today, recovering addict Kenneth Ginlack holds two college degrees and works as a licensed clinical social worker, a clinical substance abuse counselor and an independent clinical supervisor.

Since December 2021, he has served as executive director at Serenity Inns Inc., which assists, counsels and treats men with substance abuse issues. Serenity has four locations in Milwaukee, including a 14-bed treatment center that opened in August 2024 and a drop-in center that opened in February.

“I tell myself each day that I am enough,” Ginlack said. “I like to say that finding out what motivates you is an inside job. And inside me is a person who loves doing things for other people.”

Ginlack started his rehab in a residential recovery center on 32nd Street and Locust Avenue. He spent three months in treatment and then lived in a transitional house for three months. While recovering in rehab, Ginlack struggled to find his way.

“I prayed every day for my purpose,” he said. “I had this chance. But I didn’t know why I got it and what I was supposed to do with it.”

One day, a counselor asked him to run a support meeting. The next day, a fellow recovering addict told him he did a great job. “The light bulb went off,” Ginlack said. “It was all revealed to me in that moment.”

He was working in a factory when an entry-level job as a resident assistant opened up at the rehab center he had been at. Ginlack quit his higher-paying gig and started his life’s work.

Along with starting at the rehab center, he enrolled at MATC to earn a certificate in Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) counseling. He found out he could earn his associate degree at the same time.

But even the thought of higher education filled him with dread. “I was terrified,” he said. “I had never been a great student.

“The instructors at MATC were amazing. ... They helped me and encouraged me. Thanks to them, I hung in there and stuck with it.”

KENNETH GINLACK, Chief Executive Officer of Serenity Inns

Sharing his story is key to Kenneth Ginlack's recovery philosophy, whether he's speaking to an audience or one-on-one.



The statistics said I should have been in prison or dead. I was voted least likely to succeed. I didn't walk or talk like all the others heading to college."

At MATC he found the support to succeed.

"The instructors at MATC were amazing. I got the one-on-one time I needed. They helped me and encouraged me," he said. "Thanks to them, I hung in there and stuck with it."

Driven to succeed

As Ginlack stuck with it, the successes piled up. He got an A on a paper. He made the honor roll. He won the President's Award and became the first Human Service Associate graduate to receive the honor. He walked across a stage to graduate for the first time since sixth grade. A fellow graduate cried when she saw Ginlack in his cap and gown — he had counseled her troubled brother.

"All those things people said I could never do, I was doing," he said. "The more I gained, the more I didn't want to lose it. This was a new high for me. A new drive."

He continued his education. In 2014, he earned a bachelor's degree from Upper Iowa University in human services with an emphasis in social work, and in 2017, received a master's degree in social work from Loyola University Chicago.

During the next decade, he worked as a substance abuse counselor and treatment coordinator at several agencies, and he taught in the University of Wisconsin Continuing Education extension program. In 2020, he served as the director of outpatient programs for the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division.

In the fall of 2021, Serenity Inns came calling. "When you are trapped in the horror of your addiction, it consumes you," Ginlack once said. "You might have a

hobby, a wife or a family, but you can't think of anything besides getting high. The drugs take over your life."

Serenity offers a holistic approach to recovery, addressing physical, social, emotional, financial and spiritual well-being. Since the program began, 690 men have walked the path to recovery, Ginlack said.

A hands-on executive leader, Ginlack often visits and talks to men in recovery, always willing to share his personal story to connect with them.

"When they hear my story, they figure out I was right where they are at," Ginlack said. "I tell them recovery is a lifestyle choice. If you don't like your new life, you're going to go back to your old one. I see many men walk in here, and the look in their eyes is hopeless. My biggest reward is seeing hope come back."

This personal approach is key to Serenity's success, said Glenn Mathews, associate dean of MATC's Business and Management Academic and Career Pathway and a member of Serenity Inn's board of directors.

"I have seen firsthand how Ken supports the vision, the people and the mission of Serenity Inns. He is not only a CEO; he's a servant-leader, a mentor and a problem-solver who brings his whole self to the work," Mathews said. "Ken exemplifies what it means to rise from a challenge, lead with integrity and transform systems that often leave people behind. He's a proud MATC graduate who now leads one of Milwaukee's most respected recovery agencies."

Serenity expands

In August 2024, city and county officials celebrated the opening of Serenity's \$3 million, 14-bed house, which will serve 56 additional men. The new center sits adjacent to Serenity's existing 12-bed treatment facility.

"Last time I was here, this was an inner city vacant lot," Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson said at the celebration. "Now we have this new facility to support people who need help with drug addiction and are trying to turn their lives around. Every citizen can support treatment for those in need. It costs nothing to be kind."

Ginlack has been extensively lauded for his kindness.

In November 2021, Milwaukee's Kappa Phi chapter of Omega Psi Phi fraternity named him citizen of the year. In 2022 he received the prestigious IRIS Award for Outstanding Mental Health Professional from the National Alliance on Mental Illness Wisconsin annual conference. In November 2023, the BizTimes honored him as nonprofit executive of the year. In June, he was named comeback father of the year at the third annual Fathers Making Progress Awards.

Still, his greatest rewards for his work usually come as surprises: A man shaking his hand at a cigar bar or a gent stopping him on the street. They are recovering addicts and former clients. Sometimes they break down and become emotional in their gratitude.

"In those moments, I know I'm truly walking in my purpose," Ginlack said.

Ginlack plans to keep walking in his purpose as long as he can. He is thinking about getting his doctorate. He'd like to see Serenity expand and build even more residential units. He'd like to teach at MATC. He'd like to take his grandson fishing.

"I was 30 years old the first time I caught a fish," Ginlack said with a laugh. "I have learned you can always recover. Not just from addiction and pain, but recover the things you have lost, like your family and friends."

Most of all, he'd like to keep passing on the joy, the bliss and the gratitude for life he feels every day since he decided to listen to that voice in 2007.

If you do this, your life will change forever.

He decided not to steal and not to kill. He decided to leave that life behind and try to create a better one.

And he certainly did. ■

Go to serenityinns.org to learn more about the organization's mission.



More than 690 men have gone through the recovery program at Serenity Inns. Their photos appear on the Wall of Fame.



Handling a Handful at Home and at Work

**MATC helps Automotive Maintenance Technician graduate
and young father set an example for his son**

Martin Kennedy’s world completely changed May 17, 2024.

That’s the day his son, Markell, was born.

Suddenly the then 22-year-old MATC student and his girlfriend had a lot more to think about than Kennedy doing well in his automotive maintenance classes and getting to his job at Taco Bell on time.

“I have learned that nothing is about either of us anymore; it’s all about him,” Kennedy said. “I have become a lot more selfless. This has taught me a whole lot about myself.”

Kennedy, his girlfriend and baby boy also received help and support from his girlfriend’s family, from Catholic Charities and from Dr. Reggie Parks, a retention coach in the MATC Drive program, a unique, public-private partnership that offers students support and resources to stay in school and on track to graduate.

“At the college, we know that when you have a child, just getting to class or having time to drop them off at child care can be a real challenge,” Dr. Parks said. “We want to have these fathers involved in their children’s lives, and we’re helping as best we can. These students are receiving guidance on parenting and how to be loving, strong, capable and involved fathers.”

Dr. Parks connected Kennedy and other automotive students with Milwaukee County’s Fatherhood FIRE (family-focused, interconnected, resilient and essential), a program designed to help young parents become more engaged with their children and more prepared for employment.

Fatherhood FIRE serves biological fathers, expectant and adoptive fathers, stepfathers, or persons serving as a father figure for a dependent child or young adult. The program aims to

strengthen the bond between fathers and their children by stressing the value of healthy relationships, responsible parenting and economic stability, said Steve Thomas, manager of the Fatherhood FIRE program.

In 2024, Dr. Parks invited Thomas to tell automotive students about the Fatherhood FIRE program. Thomas spoke at the Al Hurvis/PEAK Transportation Center at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus, and Dr. Josie Veal, MATC’s public health officer, shared medical resources available for infants and toddlers. She also gave students who were young parents books to read to their children.

Kennedy was born and raised in Milwaukee. He attended Messmer High School, then in June 2021 he graduated from Milwaukee Public Schools’ Transition High School, which serves students experiencing educational failure, truancy, expulsion, teen pregnancy and other extreme life circumstances.

Growing up, he became interested in cars for an unfortunate reason: His family never seemed to have any dependable

transportation. “We were always having car problems,” he said. “Something was always breaking down. So I wanted to find a way to help the family out.”

Also, before Kennedy’s mother passed away in May 2023, she encouraged him to attend college. He started classes at MATC in January 2024 and graduated with a technical diploma in December 2024. He is currently working as a tire and battery technician at Sam’s Club.

“The skills I have now thanks to MATC can follow me anywhere,” Kennedy said. “I want to be able to support my family as much as I can and try to be there for my son. Hopefully he sees me going to work every day. I want to be a good example for him.” ■

Learn more about MATC Drive at matc.edu.



Martin Kennedy’s path to graduation (top left) included hands-on work under the hood in automotive classes (right), teaching former WTCS President Morna K. Foy how to change a tire (top right), and introducing his son, Markell, to MATC (opposite).





A CUT ABOVE

CULINARY ARTS GRADUATE,
MILWAUKEE RESTAURANT
OWNER AND SKILLED BUTCHER
KAREN BELL HAS CARVED OUT
AN IMPRESSIVE CAREER

Karen Bell tightly gripped the knife, its scalpel-sharp blade glinting in the light.

She moved forward and thrust. She did it again. And again, slicing the knife through the flesh and the fat.

Then Bell picked up a handsaw. She found a spot, braced herself and rocked the blade back and forth, sawing through bone. When she finished, she was sweating and short of breath. But she smiled at her handiwork.

And then more than 100 people applauded.

Bell, a graduate of MATC's Culinary Arts program and a classically trained butcher, had just finished cutting and carving a whole, 70-pound lamb into an appetizing assortment of chops, shanks, roasts and steaks.

"Ever since I have been doing this, I have loved it," said Bell, a nationally recognized chef who owns Bavette La Boucherie, a restaurant and provisions store in Milwaukee's Third Ward neighborhood. "You start with one thing and you end up with all sorts of other things. It's very gratifying."

In March, Bell demonstrated her considerable butchering skills at her alma mater. Nearly 100 Culinary Arts students and faculty watched Bell artfully slice away while explaining her methods and answering questions about her impressive career.

Old-world craft

A native of Whitefish Bay, Bell was 15 when she started working as a waitress at Heinemann's, a legendary restaurant chain in the Milwaukee area. After graduating from MATC in 1998, she studied at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and then moved to Chicago, where she worked as head line cook at Vong Restaurant and as a pastry cook at prestigious Charlie Trotter's.

And, Bell learned about the butcher business. "I was interested in what many people thought was a dying craft," she told the crowd at MATC.

She watched other butchers, including an old-world artisan from Germany. She read books, watched videos and tried things out for herself. "I was always learning," she said. "Even when I opened a restaurant, I was always learning new things."

She headed cross-country and worked as a sous chef at San Francisco's Farallon for three years. "I was pretty burned out, and I needed a life change — maybe even a career change," Bell



MATC Culinary Arts students
(inset) watched as Karen Bell) expertly
butchered a 70-pound lamb.

told Milwaukee restaurant writer Lois Fredrich in 2014. “So, I decided I wanted to spend some time abroad.”

In 2003, she ventured to Madrid, Spain, with her sister. This was their plan: teach English and explore the culture and countryside. But Bell’s teaching gig fell through. Then she heard about an American with a restaurant in Madrid and that inspired her to get cooking again.

“People kept telling me about this American who owned a restaurant and how I should check it out,” she told Fredrich. “So, after a few weeks, with money dwindling quickly, I went back to the kitchen.”

She eventually opened a California-inspired restaurant called Memento.

With only seven tables and a tiny kitchen, the small restaurant had a big impact on Bell’s future.

“It renewed my passion for cooking,” she told Fredrich. “I’d always worked in large fine dining restaurants, and this was small and hands-on. I went to the market. I prepped. I did dishes. And after a year came and went, I didn’t feel I’d had enough time. I wanted to stay and continue the process of learning the language and immersing myself in the culture.”

Coming home

The restaurant was a success, but after six years in Madrid, Bell decided to come back to the Midwest. In 2013, she opened Bavette, a modern take on an old-time butcher shop that included a restaurant.

In 2018, she was a finalist for the prestigious James Beard Foundation award for best chef in the Midwest. She also has been a semifinalist in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

Bell accomplished all that in a mostly male field: In 2023, only 28% of all butchers and meat, poultry and fish processing workers in the United States were women, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“Being a woman in this industry has never been a challenge for me,” she said. “I’ve always been a person who is going to do what they’re going to do. Having my own place helps. It’s more of a challenge being a mom. Time has become more precious.”

She added, “I feel pretty fortunate that I have had the experience I have had. I had the mentality that I can do whatever they’re doing — that I can do it better and that I’ll show them.”

The total number of butchers in the United States is projected to decline in the next decade, labor statistics showed, but there will be job openings as older butchers retire or leave the field.

“Hard work and hard work,” said Bell when asked how to succeed in the culinary business. “Being flexible. You need to stay your course and stay true to your core values, but also be ready and willing to change. Maybe some luck.”

She added, “You need to love it or really, really enjoy it. For me, every day is a challenge, but that’s why I love what I do.” ■

“I had the mentality that I can do whatever they’re doing — that I can do it better and that I’ll show them.”

KAREN BELL, Owner of Bavette La Boucherie



Karen Bell is one of the 28% of women working in the U.S. meat processing industry.



All You Need Is Love

Web and Digital Media Design graduate Yeng Tha Vue found a place to belong at MATC.

As a minority within a minority, Yeng Tha Vue struggled to be seen.

Vue grew up in Milwaukee, the son of Hmong parents who immigrated to the United States from Thailand in 1994. At 17, he came out as gay. His family was confused and struggled to understand. While their love for him never vanished completely, he said, it began to feel more distant and out of reach.

“I felt invisible. I navigated silence, hid parts of myself and tried to find spaces where I truly belonged,” he recalled. “I spent lonely years searching for purpose.”

Vue, also known as Cloud, found acceptance, support and direction at MATC.

He enrolled in the college’s Front-End Web Developer program and earned a technical diploma in 2024. He stayed at the college and, in only three semesters, completed his associate degree in Web and Digital Media Design.

He made the college’s honor roll, and he served as vice chairperson of the District

Student Association and as president of the Asian Student Association for two semesters.

“It’s about showing love and support at all times. At the end of day, I chose kindness.”

YENG THA VUE, Web Designer

For his perseverance, his academic excellence and his community involvement, Vue was recognized by the college at its Spring 2025 Commencement as the outstanding associate degree

student, an award that came with the honor of delivering the student address at the ceremony. In his speech, Vue shared how MATC helped him appreciate the positive things in his life, rather than dwell on the negative things that made him feel invisible.

“It’s about showing love and support at all times,” he said in his speech. “At the end of day, I chose kindness. If I had chosen anger and revenge, I would have lived a life of misery.”

He added, “You need to have the heart to serve, even when the work is quiet and unseen. When we serve others, we begin to heal the parts of ourselves that once felt unworthy. I carry that lesson with me always, and I know now that even in small acts, we have the power to change lives, including our own.”

Vue attended Milwaukee Public Schools, but he struggled to learn proper English. After high school, he worked in fashion design. “But I quickly discovered that pursuing my passion wasn’t paying the bills,” he said.

He thought about being a truck driver, but he decided to study web design at MATC. “Web design stuck out to me,” he said. “It was a creative outlet, and I could work behind the scenes.”

Vue liked the web developer program and the college so much, he stayed to complete his associate degree.

“I have been consistently impressed by Yeng’s design and coding skills,” said Antonio Garza, one of Vue’s instructors. “Yeng’s ability to quickly learn and apply new skills in web coding, responsive design, user experience and interactive design demonstrates a keen eye for aesthetics and a deep understanding of user-centered design.”

Vue wants to use his web design and digital storytelling skills to empower underserved communities, including the Hmong.

“My aim is to create inclusive, accessible websites that promote cultural identity, mental health awareness and workforce development,” he said. “I think that would be a great way to help my community.”

After years of feeling alone, Vue found a belonging, welcoming place at MATC.

“The college is very helpful and full of resources,” he said. “I appreciate the culture the college has. The employees here are clearly taught to treat people with dignity and respect. They understand and they listen. And many times that makes all the difference.” ■



Emerging Leaders

A unique program gives MATC employees who want management experience the confidence, knowledge and skills to be leaders

Helping people always came naturally to Janell Berry. At MATC, she discovered she can lead them as well.

After graduating from high school, Berry planned on being a nurse. She took classes at MATC but stopped out. She returned to take business classes and earned an associate degree. Berry worked as a corporate trainer for 10 years. “I found out you can help people in all sorts of ways,” she said.

In 2015, she took a job at the college’s call center and then became an academic advisor in 2020. Last fall she was among the first group of MATC employees to complete Emerging Leaders, a yearlong program that prepares full-time staff to be supervisors and managers.

“The program was amazing,” Berry said. “The college has built a platform that teaches you how to be a leader anywhere. In the program, you learn so much about yourself professionally and personally. A lot of it was really eye-opening. I learned I have

a voice, that my voice matters and that I can use it to bring about change.”

Laquitha “Elle” Bonds-Jones, the college’s vice president of human resources, recognized that MATC needed to develop new leadership voices, like Berry’s. “This was a vision that has lived in my belly for 20 years,” Bonds-Jones said.

Bonds-Jones envisioned an institute for existing leaders to sharpen their skills and then started to brainstorm with her team to create a program to train new leaders internally: Emerging Leaders.

“If you wanted to move into a supervisory role at the college and didn’t have any experience, you had to leave the college to get that experience,” said Michelle Wild, the college’s director of training, development and credentialing. “We wanted to retain talent.”

In the program, developed and led by Wild, participants complete 325 hours of developmental activities over a 12-month period. The training includes monthly workshops, application

activities, learning from leaders on best practices, a 360-feedback assessment and completion of a six-month practicum to develop experience and confidence in supporting, engaging and driving high-performance teams.

In the last six months of the program, participants work with a mentor who guides and supports their development.

When they complete all the requirements, participants earn an Emerging Leaders credential, which serves as an equivalent to two years of supervisory experience that they can use to apply for positions at the college that require it.

“We want participants to have the confidence, skills and experience they need to be in that role,” Wild said. “We developed something very accelerated and very robust.”

The college launched Emerging Leaders in October 2023. The first cohort had 11 employees, including Berry, who were chosen from 44 applications. The second cohort began in October 2024, and the third started in October 2025. To participate in the program, employees must be full-time and have worked at MATC for at least two years.

Interested employees submit a completed application, a resume and two letters of recommendation. Also, their current supervisors complete an approval form that assesses the employee’s strengths.

Human resources staff score the applications and a committee of the MATC Executive Leadership Team reviews them to select the participants. Once selected, participants agree to complete all pre-work, attend all workshops and finish all coursework.

Berry said she liked her job as an advisor but thought she could be doing even more to help students.

“I always wondered how I could expand my impact beyond my office walls,” she said.

She found out about Emerging Leaders, applied and was accepted. She learned how to have crucial conversations, how to navigate different working styles, how to give feedback, how to run effective meetings, and how to be transparent, authentic and accountable.

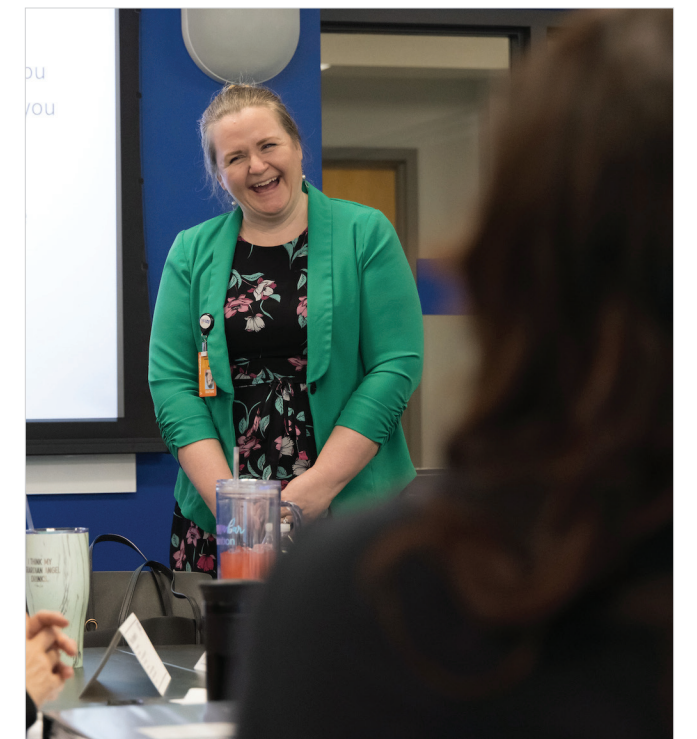
At the same time she was working and participating in the program, she was finishing her bachelor’s degree in business administration from Lakeland University.

“I won’t lie; it was a lot of work,” she said.

In October 2024, she was one of five participants who earned two years of supervisory experience. In February, Berry was one of three participants to be either promoted or reclassified, along with Peter Couto, who is now a supervisor in retention, and Megan Hamilton, who is now the manager of online learning.

Participation in the program does not guarantee promotions, Wild cautioned.

Berry now leads a team of 12 employees. Thanks to the program, she felt completely prepared to accept her new role. “The tool box of what you learn in Emerging Leaders is huge, and you will use all those tools,” she said. “MATC invested in me and gave me an education I can use my entire life. One of my goals now is to help someone get to where I am.”



Dionne Green-Prophet (left) thrived in Emerging Leaders, MATC’s professional development program led by Michelle Wild (opposite and above).

MATC SPOTLIGHT

Programs Hone Leadership Skills

MATC has several programs designed to sharpen the leadership skills of current employees.

Building Your Professional Brand:

Available to all employees, this program builds and reinforces the knowledge and skills necessary for successful career management, both in current positions and for future career advancement opportunities.

Management Essentials: This seven-part series, for new supervisors with previous supervisory experience, serves as the foundational training for supervisors of people, whether promoted internally or hired externally, to introduce and reinforce effective supervisory and management approaches to support, engage and drive high-performance teams

The program assumes that a participant has already completed in-depth training and focuses on the MATC forms, handbook and processes of how to supervise at MATC.

Vicki J. Martin Institute

for Advanced Leadership: This 10-month program for supervisors who completed Management Essentials, or came to the college with management experience, serves as an in-depth development program for existing supervisors at the college to further their development, drive high-performing teams and achieve a series of leadership and organizational culture outcomes for college success. The program is named after the former MATC president who helped create it.

Sarah Koch, a media designer in the college’s marketing and communications department, was in the program’s second cohort. She always wanted to manage people but didn’t have any experience. “Emerging Leaders was the opportunity I needed to gain that knowledge,” Koch said. “I enjoy the topics we are covering. And we put what we are learning into action. I’m so grateful for this opportunity.”



“We put what we are learning into action. I’m so grateful for this opportunity.”

SARAH KOCH, Media Designer

MATC is the first and so far the only technical college in the state to have a leadership development program like this one, Bonds-Jones said. But that could soon change. Wild presented details of the program to the Wisconsin Technical College System’s Human Resources Leader Group, she said.

“A lot of mouths dropped to the floor,” Bonds-Jones said. “Many of the colleges have been asking us for more information about it. We’re very, very proud of what we have been able to do with this program.” ■

To Elle Honerbaum, nursing is an extremely active word.

To her, nursing means not only helping to heal the sick, but also battling discrimination, fighting indifference and calling out suffering.

“Nursing is advocacy,” said Honerbaum, a Spring 2025 Registered Nursing graduate. “We need to recognize when something is wrong and stand up and say something. Nurses are in charge of a lot of healthcare policy. A lack of food and a lack of aid is a lack of healthcare. We have a duty to care.”

And Honerbaum is more than ready to lead the way. At the college’s annual nurse pinning ceremony on May 20, she received a Future Nursing Leader Award from the Wisconsin Nurses Association (WNA).

The award recognizes outstanding students who embody the ethics and values of nursing and exemplary leadership qualities. Each nursing school in the state submits one nominee, and the WNA Awards Committee selects up to five winners each semester, said Christopher Wojnar, a WNA board member and MATC nursing alumnus who presented Honerbaum with her award.

“You represent the best of what our profession strives for,” Wojnar said at the pinning ceremony.

Growing up in southwestern Wisconsin, Honerbaum wasn’t sure what she wanted to do. She thought about being a doctor, a lawyer or a diplomat. After graduating from high school in 2020, she attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studied Spanish and international relations.

Still, Honerbaum felt unfulfilled. She took almost two years off and traveled, staying at youth hostels. She worked on an avocado farm in Peru. She reflected on her life and kept coming back to memories of her grandmother and her aunt. Both served as hospice nurses.

“They loved their jobs,” Honerbaum said. “I began to see that nursing was an area where I could make an impact right away.”

In the fall of 2022, she enrolled at MATC. She chose the college because of its high-quality nursing program and her love of Lake Michigan. She completed her prerequisite courses and started the Registered Nursing program in the fall of 2023.

“I severely underestimated it,” she said with a laugh. “It was hard. But I made some great friends with my classmates and instructors, so I had great support.”

In the fall of 2024, Honerbaum launched a MATC chapter of Nursing Students



Elle Honerbaum

A Legacy of Caring

Registered Nursing alumna Elle Honerbaum leads the way by blending healing with advocacy

Without Borders, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1999 to empower underserved communities through health education.

The organization is loosely modeled on Doctors Without Borders. “I have always admired their mission,” Honerbaum said. “They go where there is a need.”

Honerbaum recruited members and served as president. Under her leadership, the chapter collected hygiene products for community groups, volunteered at events, created donation boxes around campus to collect clothing for victims of sexual assault, and distributed tie-dyed welcome T-shirts to new nursing students.

“I am very happy with how the group will continue,” Honerbaum said. “We have great leaders ready to make sure the chapter grows and continues to serve the community.”

In June 2025, she began her professional career as a case manager at a home hospice firm in the greater Milwaukee area,

following in her grandmother’s and her aunt’s footsteps.

“Most of us want to die comfortable at home surrounded by people who love us,” Honerbaum said. “If I can help a family be comfortable during that time, I feel it’s such a mercy to be doing that.”

She plans to take online classes at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to earn her bachelor’s degree in nursing. Someday Honerbaum might get her master’s degree in midwifery.

“I am so happy,” Honerbaum said. “I wish I had come to MATC right away out of high school and saved myself some money. But everyone has their own journey. I’m just glad I made my way here.” ■

Learn more about MATC’s Registered Nursing program at matc.edu.



During an icebreaker activity, Christopher Mallas, a career development coach, described an object in a photo to his classmate so she could draw it.



Growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin gave Alyssa Cahoon the skills to succeed.

When Duty Calls

Alyssa Cahoon, director of MATC’s Emergency Medical Services programs, prepares frontline workers to serve southeastern Wisconsin

Alyssa Cahoon has fought fires, responded to thousands of emergencies, treated patients and taught college courses. If that makes her a role model, she’s cool with that. “On the job, I always wanted to show I could do the work, and maybe that came from feeling like I had to show others that I could,” said Cahoon, the program director and instructional chair of MATC’s Emergency Medical Services (EMS) programs. “I never want anyone thinking I couldn’t save them.” Cahoon’s gritty determination, professional success and educational accomplishments make her an ideal role model for women interested in protective services careers, said Janell Jones, associate dean of the college’s Community and Human Services Academic and Career Pathway, which includes EMS and other

first-responder programs. “Alyssa can show young ladies the opportunities available in the profession,” Jones said. “By putting eyes on the women we employ, like Alyssa, we hope to welcome new students and recruit more women instructors.” Before she became an instructor, a firefighter, a paramedic and a role model, Cahoon wanted to be a game warden and work for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. She grew up on a dairy farm in southeastern Wisconsin, milking cows, baling hay and fixing equipment. She headed off to college but returned after her father suffered a life-altering accident during her first year. He was in intensive care and rehabilitation for more than a year, which required her

mother’s full attention. That left her and her brother to run the farm. Her neighbors and others in her hometown pitched in to help, so, in gratitude for their care and compassion, she joined the local volunteer fire department. “Being raised on a farm set me up for success,” Cahoon said. “I knew all about hard work, mechanics, hydraulics and pneumatics. I had a solid skill set going into this, and I think that gave others confidence in me.” When she returned to college, Cahoon entered the fire science program at Fox Valley Technical College and earned an associate degree in 1999. She received a paramedic technician degree from Gateway Technical College in 2004. A few months later, at age 27, she joined the North Shore Fire Department in Milwaukee County as a firefighter/paramedic. “I found out that this had become my profession,” she said. She also continued her formal education, earning an associate degree in registered nursing, a bachelor’s degree in EMS administration, a master of public health degree in community health education, and in May 2024, a doctorate of education in leadership, innovation and continuous improvement from Concordia University Wisconsin. In 2015, she was hired by MATC to elevate the college’s Paramedic program, which at the time had 11 students. She worked to accredit, expand and improve the program. Her role as program director has expanded to include the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and EMT Advanced programs. She is dual-credentialed as a fire instructor and assists the fire program administratively.

This year, the Paramedic program has more than 100 students, and the EMT program has nearly 300 students annually, who are taught by 16 full-time and 87 part-time instructors, Cahoon said. “We’re the largest EMS program in the state and the top 2% in the nation by size,” she said. “We have a dedicated team of very well-educated and highly credentialed educators supporting our students in reaching their goals.” And there’s no better time to get into emergency response professions than right now, Cahoon said. Job openings are plentiful, and the social dynamics within the fire and EMS community are changing. As the previous generation retires, the door is opening wider to women and others who may have not been wholeheartedly welcomed in the past. She has only one question for them: Can you do the work? “We need people of all kinds to do this work. I believe in the value of diversity and everyone meeting the same performance standards. Safety is our top priority. The community needs to trust in its emergency responders in the same way our co-workers need to trust we have their back when it matters most.” Cahoon said. “When duty calls, duty calls. You need to do your job.” ■

[Learn more about EMS at matc.edu.](https://matc.edu)

MATC SPOTLIGHT

Training the Next Generation of First Responders

The college’s Emergency Medical Services program is the largest in the state and among the biggest in the nation, offering four associate degree and diploma programs.

Paramedic Technician: Paramedics provide the top level of advanced emergency and nonemergency medical support, primarily in prehospital settings and emergency departments.

This associate degree program is related to the EMT-Paramedic technical diploma program. Students in the latter can apply the 41 credits earned in their program toward the associate degree. The two related programs offer students flexibility and

opportunities to gain the skills and knowledge to advance in their careers.

Emergency Medical Technician: EMTs work with other healthcare professionals to deliver critical, prehospital emergency medical care. This program also is designed to enhance existing skills of individuals working in the field.

Emergency Medical Technician – Advanced: This program builds upon the skills acquired in the EMT program. Students learn advanced patient assessment skills and technical skills such as IV access, fluid therapy and administration of dextrose and

naloxone, the medicine in Narcan. Advanced emergency medical technicians perform emergency patient care, basic life support and limited advanced life support in the field, transporting injured and ill patients to hospital emergency rooms.

Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic: EMT paramedics are integral members of a prehospital emergency care team, providing medical intervention to the ill or injured and continuing that care during transport to a medical facility.





Discover Mequon Campus

From Milwaukee, venture north on I-43 to MATC’s Mequon Campus, and you’ll see horticulture students digging and planting, arborists cutting, automotive students on the track, and future line mechanics climbing electrical poles.

“The whole campus is a learning tool,” said Jonathan Mies, executive director of the Mequon Campus. Established in 1976, the Mequon Campus serves MATC students and communities north of Milwaukee. With its small-town atmosphere, the campus is definitely worth the drive, Mies said. “Our scenic setting offers a calm, focused learning environment and has been known to inspire students to engage more deeply in their studies and appreciate the more relaxed pace,” Mies said. In addition to the small-town atmosphere, students will find

the same amenities, including tutoring, financial aid, cashier, CareerHub and advising, offered at the other campuses. Plus, the Mequon Campus serves nearly 2,000 students studying some 27 programs, including popular programs in healthcare, business, aesthetics, automotive and other trades. Businesses will appreciate the campus’s strong relationships with local government, economic development organizations, local chambers of commerce, rotary organizations and nonprofits. “As a member of local chamber and rotary organizations, our partnership provides local businesses a direct view of our mission and an opportunity to collaborate,” Mies said.

At Mequon Campus, community members help train students by purchasing plants grown in the greenhouse (top and above) and receiving spa treatments from students at Skyn, The Spa (center). Opposite: Electrical Power Distribution get hands-on experience in restoring power lines at the training facility created in partnership with We Energies.

Her Future Burns Brightly

With training from MATC, Hallee Tretow turned her passion for welding into a career

Sparks flew the first time Hallee Tretow held a welding torch. Tretow was 16 and a sophomore at Ozaukee High School. The welding tank was switched on, the nozzle heated up and a hot jet of gas started searing metal. She was gobsmacked. “I had seen welding being done in videos and television, but at that moment I realized that it was me actually doing it,” Tretow recalled. “I felt like it was the coolest thing.”

Since then, welding has forged success after success for Tretow. She spent her senior year of high school taking welding courses at MATC’s Mequon Campus through a dual enrollment program developed by the college and the Northern Ozaukee School District. In 2023, she graduated with a technical diploma the same day she earned her high school diploma.

She got a full-time job welding at Wisconsin Stamping & Manufacturing in Germantown, received three scholarships from the American Welding Society, and in May, earned an associate degree in Welding Technology from MATC.

Tretow, who turned 20 in April, left college debt-free, with a job and unlimited career possibilities in her chosen field. “The amount of career opportunities really expands when you get that extra schooling,” Tretow said of her associate degree. “Demand for welders is very high, and job security is a big thing for me.”

She added, “It’s kind of scary how much debt you can run up going to college. The cost of living is stressful. I don’t have a lot of those worries, and I think it gives me a lot more freedom.”

For the most part, Tretow has found that freedom by herself. Since high school, she has been one of the few women, if not the only woman, in her shop classes, MATC courses and her workplace. In 2010, 6.7% of professional welders in the United

States were women, according to federal labor statistics. By 2022, the number had increased to 7.7%. Tretow was raised by a single mother who has cheered her daughter’s choices all the way. “My mom has always been very supportive of my studies of welding,” she said. “She always pushes me to take all of the opportunities I am given and to always try my best.”

To earn her associate degree, Tretow attended classes two days a week at MATC’s Downtown Milwaukee and West Allis campuses, and worked 10 hours a day, from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m., three days a week welding parts used to build electrical components and farm machinery.

“I can work in my own headspace,” she said. “You develop a rhythm. I listen to music and do my work. They also are supportive of the fact that I want to try new things and learn as much as I can.”

At MATC, she made the honor roll in the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 semesters. She credited her instructors, Bill Peterson, Darrel Iwanski and Lee Cervený, for her welding success. “They have all helped me so much to continue my

education and have all talked with me one-on-one about what I can do to advance my career,” Tretow said. “Hearing about how long they have been in this field and how far it has taken them in life really is special to me as someone who is just starting out.”

In recognition of her accomplishments, Tretow was featured in the January 2025 issue of the American Welding Society’s Welding Journal. Tretow is a student member of the national welding society.

“Being featured in a globally recognized publication is a remarkable achievement and a testament to Hallee’s dedication, hard work and the strong network she has built along the way,” said Peterson, the college’s lead welding instructor. “Her future in the welding industry looks incredibly bright.” ■

“I had seen welding being done in videos and television, but at that moment I realized that it was me actually doing it. I felt like it was the coolest thing.”

HALLEE TRETOW, MATC Welding Technology Alumna



At MATC, Hallee Tretow learned to weld using a robotic arm and traditional techniques (inset).



Nutritionist Troy Luengen counsels clients that small changes can make a big difference.

Making a Difference, One Plate at a Time

Nutrition and Dietetic Technician alumnus Troy Luengen teaches Milwaukee residents to eat healthier

For Troy Luengen, transforming an empty plate into a nutritious, delicious meal is part science, part persuasion and part art.

“We like to say ‘eat the rainbow,’” said Luengen, a registered dietitian nutritionist who graduated from MATC in May 2024. “We all need to have color on our plates. Think of the dish as the canvas and what we eat as the art.”

For the past year, Luengen has tried to create that art every day as one of five community nutritionists at Milwaukee Health Services Inc., a nonprofit health center with two locations in Milwaukee.

He helps low-income residents make healthy choices about how they eat and what they eat. He counsels pregnant women and parents with children under the age of 5. He answers questions about eating habits, physical activity and overall health. He crafts individualized plans for clients so they can make nutritious, healthy meals using their state benefits.

He also celebrates successes when they happen.

“I take joy in seeing small milestones. In nutrition, changing small habits can make a big difference,” he said. “I love when parents feel empowered to make a difference for their families.”

Nutrition certainly made a difference for Luengen’s family. In 2017, his mother was diagnosed with colon cancer.

“She had always been a very healthy person, so this was shocking to us,” he recalled. “She was way too young to be living out of a pill box.”

Luengen watched as his mother worked with nutritionists to create healthy meal plans to help fight the cancer, resist side effects of medication and build her strength. “I saw the overall positive impact all that had on her, and it sparked my interest at a real gut level,” he said.

A better way

Growing up in Slinger, Luengen struggled to find a career he felt passionate about. He considered sound engineering and audio production. “But when you live in rural Wisconsin, your choices

for that are local radio or you move to Los Angeles, New York or Chicago,” he said.

After graduating from high school, he attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and studied communications. His family had a history of military service, so he joined the U.S. Army while at UW-Whitewater.

He was assigned to logistics management. He traveled the globe, spending time in Ukraine, Germany and other European countries.

“

“I was set up for success by instructors who challenged me; they harnessed the strengths of each student to make us do better.”

TROY LUENGEN, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

When his mother fell ill and his interest in nutrition began to grow, Luengen noticed how Europeans cooked, using fresh, locally sourced ingredients and a variety of cooking techniques, and how they savored their meals.

In America, many people convince themselves they are too busy to cook and enjoy proper meals, he said.

“We are always rushing. It’s all about being fast. Fast food. Frozen food. Processed food. Microwaved food,” he said. “We treat 30 minutes like three hours.”

Luengen started to research nutrition and dietitian careers, discovering there was a real need for those positions. A February 2025 analysis of employment data from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York showed that workers in nutrition were in high demand and had an unemployment rate of only 0.4% — the lowest in the healthcare field. Nursing was 1.4% and pharmacy was 3.2%.

That was enough for Luengen. He could use his Army benefits to pay for school and looked into several colleges in Wisconsin. He read all about MATC's Nutrition and Dietetic Technician program and met Heidi Katte, chair of the program.

"She was very open about what I was looking for, and she was very realistic about the job market," Luengen said. "After attending, I felt I could enter the job market fairly quickly. Also, MATC was local. It all made sense. It offered me the exact credential I needed to do what I wanted to do."

He enrolled at MATC in 2022 and made the honor roll while working as a dietitian clerk at Froedtert Pleasant Prairie Hospital. He graduated in the spring of 2024 with scholastic honors. Shortly after, he passed the national exam and became certified as a registered nutrition and dietetic technician.

"Troy was an incredibly hard-working student, going to school and finding work in dietetics while with us," Katte said. "He put forth good work and completed the program and his credential quite quickly upon graduation."

Luengen said that MATC prepared him well.

"I was set up for success by instructors who challenged me; they harnessed the strengths of each student to make us do better," he said. "They engaged us, recommended books and helped us home in on a specialty in the field."

"They provided us with access to networking. They brought in employers to meet us and talk about what was going on in the real world."

Looking for a challenge

After graduating from MATC, Luengen took a job as a sports nutritionist at Balance Personalized Nutrition in Milwaukee. He worked with athletes, creating personalized nutrition plans to help them meet their goals.

"That position helped me hone my one-on-one skills with people. Working with athletes was cool, but it wasn't pushing me to where I wanted to be. I have always liked being challenged."

He found that challenge at Milwaukee Health Care Services. In September 2024, he took a job as a nutritionist for women, infant and child (WIC). The work can be stressful, but it's fulfilling, he said.

"In this position you need patience and understanding. I understand that I can't solve every problem. People can be frustrated, but I realize they're not frustrated with me; it's their situation," he said. "I always want the people I work with to be optimistic, to be looking forward."

Luengen himself is looking to the future. He wants to serve five more years in the Army, which would give him a 20-year career. He also plans to get his master's degree in public health, or an associated field, and would like to work in community health at the county or state level.

"I will always like addressing nutrition at an individual level," he said. "But I would love to take that to an even greater level. I think that's where I could make a real impact." ■



MATC SPOTLIGHT

Nutrition and Dietetic Technician Program Trains Vital Healthcare Workers

Graduates of MATC's Nutrition and Dietetic Technician associate degree program help the rest of us make healthy choices.

Students learn how the science of managing food and nutrition promotes good health, and they are trained to deliver safe, culturally competent, and quality food and nutrition services. MATC's program includes supervised clinical and field experiences.

Graduates who pass the national exam receive the credential Nutrition and Dietetic Technician, Registered (NDTR), and become an integral part of healthcare and

food-service management teams. They might work in a hospital setting or independently, providing general nutrition education.

Dietetics is a vital, growing field. Employment options include hospitals, school lunch programs, nutrition programs for the elderly and food service management firms.

Scholarship Recipients Are Three Times More Likely To Graduate

"That scholarship helped me so very much. It helped me pay for food and keep a roof over our heads. It was just a lifesaver, and I cannot thank the people who gave that to me enough."

MONIQUE STEWART EJIMBE,
Edie L. Somerville & Eddie Myrtle Skinner
Nursing Scholar and Nursing Graduate

Monique Stewart Ejimbe

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Your gift changes lives. Donate today.

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.

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.



BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Amy Ullsperger, Marketing Management and Small Business Training, is now a strategic account director at RJ Schinner Co., a national redistribution specialist based in Menomonee Falls.



COMMUNITY & HUMAN SERVICES

Joe Flick, Fire Science, was promoted to fire captain at the Milwaukee Fire Department in May 2025. In June 2025, he earned a bachelor's degree in fire and emergency response from management from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. He wrote on LinkedIn, "Working towards this degree at this 'advanced' stage of life was not easy, but it was most definitely worth it. I could not have done it without the support of my family and encouragement of my leadership in the Milwaukee Fire Department."



Tim Heiman, Fire Science, was appointed fire chief for the city of Oshkosh. Chief Heiman has more than 20 years of fire and emergency management experience, including 10 years as a command-level officer and supervisor.



Tokara Henry, Human Service Associate, was recognized by U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin for her work with Sickle Cell Warriors of Wisconsin, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by sickle cell disease. The loss of a loved one inspired Henry to become an advocate and raise awareness about the disease.



Shauna Morris-Patterson, Human Service Associate, won the President's Award, a districtwide recognition that honors academic achievement, college contributions and community involvement, at the 2024 Winter Commencement. She took courses at MATC while raising her daughter and establishing her nonprofit, Faith in Humanity Inc. "It has been a journey," she said. "I have had a wonderful

experience at MATC. The college has done an amazing job hiring accommodating and understanding staff, and they should be commended for that."



CREATIVE ARTS, DESIGN & MEDIA

Kimberly Adams, Baking and Pastry Arts, will be on one of six teams competing against Duff Goldman, pastry chef and former "Ace of Cakes" star. Adams, a Milwaukee cake artist and the owner of Signature Sweets, received recognition as one of BizTimes' 2023 Women of Influence.



Hannah Castaneda, Animation, was hired as a drone show designer at Northern Lights Drone Shows, a company based in Caledonia, Wisconsin, that blends "cutting-edge technology, artistic creativity and a deep passion for aerial entertainment" to produce custom shows.

HEALTHCARE

Aida Malaveci, Registered Nursing, was awarded the Maxine Mann Leadership Award at MATC's nursing pinning ceremony in May 2025. Malaveci works in a progressive care unit at Columbia St. Mary's and volunteers at a clinic in Walker's Point. "I'm so glad I went down this path. This is my calling," Malaveci said. "It's so important to be happy with what you do. And I am happy and proud to be an MATC graduate."



CREATIVE ARTS, DESIGN & MEDIA

Stephanie Bartz, Photography, showed her work in "Breaking Barriers: Women in the Workforce," an exhibit on display at MATC during Women's History Month. The show featured 18 black-and-white portraits of women in all kinds of occupations, including firefighter, pilot, aircraft maintenance technician, bus driver and plumber.

"I have a long, long list of people I'd love to shoot," Bartz said. "I'm also working on getting some funding because right now I'm self-funding the project. It would be great to get some support for a project like this."



Jaquawn Gaston, Audio Production, realized his lifelong dream of performing at Summerfest when he played an hour-long set on opening day. "This is a big day for me," Gaston, who performs under the stage name Rap J, told the crowd before starting his set. "I knew I could make it here someday, and today I did." Gaston was featured on Fox Channel 6 and WISN Channel 12.



GENERAL EDUCATION

John Goelz, Associate of Arts and Sciences, was named vice president of digital strategy and portfolio at HP. Previously, he was vice president of global logistics at Rockwell Automation.



Eleazar Lopez Jr., Associate of Arts, joined Thrivent, a financial services company, as market director.



Warren Murphy, Associate of Arts, won the President's Award at the 2025 Spring Commencement. He served as managing editor of the MATC Times, helping the student newspaper win six awards from the College Media Association.



MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSPORTATION

Johanna O'Boyle, Landscape Horticulture, competed at the 2024 International Tree Climbing Championship. The MATC alumna and part-time Landscape Horticulture instructor finished 25th at the event, which drew climbers from all over the world. Her first-place victories in the

2019, 2021, 2023 and 2024 at the Wisconsin Arborist Association female state championships earned her a spot in the international competition. She is the owner of Ursa Minor Tree Care.



STEM

Danielle Johnson, Information Technology, was promoted to the position of Associate Director at Safe & Sound Inc., a nonprofit organization that works to improve Milwaukee neighborhoods.



Welcome Class of 2025 Alumni

Join the MATC Alumni Network

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- ✓ Unlimited job-seeking services – resume review, interview tips and more
- ✓ Social and invitation-only alumni opportunities

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In Memoriam

We honor and celebrate the lives of the following alumni who passed away in the last year, as reported in obituaries in local newspapers. If you’d like to start a scholarship in memory of an MATC alum or honor an alum in the In Memoriam section, please contact Bob Holland at hollanrj@matc.edu.

A
Dean Adams, 78,
August 21, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

B
Kathleen Boening, 72,
October 24, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.
Joanne Bonin, 81,
July 24, 2024, Chicago, Ill.
Judith Borchert, 83,
March 18, 2025, Rio, Wis.

C
Gregory Sidney Conard, 76,
December 22, 2024, Manitowoc, Wis.
Brenda Joyce Crawford, 69,
August 21, 2024, Norfolk, Virginia
Leonard Crego, 35,
April 29, 2025, West Allis, Wis.
Barbara Helen Roberts Crox, 77,
May 14, 2025, Cleveland, Tenn.
Joy Cruz-Ninham, 51,
May 5, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.

F
Paul Franecki, 65,
July 19, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.
Victor Frank, 70,
December 11, 2024

H
June Rose Hagen, 90,
February 5, 2025, Hartford, Wis.
David Lynn Hatlestad, 77,
February 28, 2025, Medford, Wis.
Peter Charles Hayward, 48,
August 25, 2024, Alma, Mich.
Timothy Ludwig Hertel, 83,
May 5, 2025, Chilton, Wis.
Mary Kay Hoffman, 82,
January 21, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.

J
Arnold Jenks, 77,
February 28, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.

K
John “Johnnie” Keller Jr., 59,
March 7, 2025, Port Washington, Wis.
Melissa Klitzke, 48,
May 5, 2025, Racine, Wis.
Gerald Frank “Jerry” Kopydlowski, 81,
July 15, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.
Steven Kral, 68, February 23, 2025,
Hinsdale, Ill.
David Noah Krolnik, 53,
November 14, 2024, New Berlin, Wis.

L
James Vernon Lancour, 76,
February 1, 2025, Marquette, Mich.

M
Troy Major, 84,
August 30, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.
Richard “Dick” Manders, 80,
April 17, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.
Judy Maresca, 73,
April 18, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.
Katherine Coffen Martinovich, 48,
February 18, 2025, Racine, Wis.
Brenda Modrak, 68,
July 8, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.
David Mrotek, 62,
May 2, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.

N
Matthias William Nolder, 33,
May 5, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.

P
Thomas Pavlons, 74,
April 30, 2025, Peoria, Ill.
Robert Pelczar, 84,
November 12, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

S
Gerald Severson, 76,
December 23, 2024, Richfield, Wis.
Michael William Shaw, 68,
August 25, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.
David A. Smith, 73,
March 1, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.
Karen Ann Spaulding, 66,
October 28, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.
Jerome Steele, 71,
January 6, 2025, Tomah, Wis.
Nicholas Sterr, 36, May 23, 2025,
Menomonee Falls, Wis.
Richard Strand, 90,
July 7, 2024, Milwaukee, Wis.

T
Gwendolyn Templer, 73,
November 2, 2024, Alton, Ill.
Timothy Thompson, 74,
January 30, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.
Bruce Tonkin, 68,
August 15, 2024, Marquette, Mich.

V
Raymond Vogt, 85,
March 26, 2025, Milwaukee, Wis.



Raising the Pride Flag

“Our hope is that this flag raising provides a sense of community and pride for everyone who sees themselves and their identities in its colors and that this paves the way for other communities to feel this same sense of representation,” said Sara Cappaert, co-leader of the college’s LGBTQ+ and Allies employee affinity group.



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