

THE SOUTHWESTER

SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE | FALL 2024

MAGAZINE

SMC Celebrates 60th Anniversary



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THE SOUTHWESTER

MAGAZINE



1994 SMC Graduate Tonya Cosey



Welcome to the Southwester!

The Southwester—written as Sou'Wester early on—was Southwestern Michigan College's newspaper for more than half a century. The paper was developed and distributed by SMC journalism students. In 1994, the paper won first-place national recognition from the Associated Collegiate Press at the University of Minnesota and from the American Scholastic Press Association in New York under 1989-1999 journalism adviser Dr. Chris Robinson. In 1999, color was incorporated into the paper and, in 2013, the paper was transferred into an electronic format. Today, the news stories are distributed on the college's website and shared on social media. To keep the tradition alive, The Southwester was transformed into this bi-annual magazine for the community, alumni, and donors to enjoy.

In this issue of The Southwester, you'll be introduced to SMC alumni who have made a success in their careers by building on their degrees from SMC. You'll also learn about some of the exciting things happening at the college.

To learn more about the college and programs featured in this publication, visit swmich.edu.

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Greetings from Dr. Joe

Dear Alumni and Friends of Southwestern Michigan College,

This month marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of Southwestern Michigan College. On November 3, 1964, the voters of Cass County, Michigan, overwhelmingly supported a community college. A few years later, two townships from Van Buren County, Keeler and Hamilton, joined what now constitutes the college district. The college was born without a name, a location, or an administration. Thanks to the work of our founders, led by the late Dr. Fred Mathews, just 22 months later, amid mature corn stalks, classes began in buildings in which the paint was still drying. The rest, as they say, is history. SMC has grown and developed for the past six decades, proving that our graduates can start here and go anywhere. This has been echoed through our motto, which has remained unchanged since the college's opening, "Knowledge for All."

SMC's perennial success isn't accidental. The college has been blessed with a visionary board of trustees that has always looked ahead and required the administration to produce sound strategic plans for the future. Within this issue you will find our latest strategic objectives. Together, faculty, staff, and students are working to take the college to new heights. We are doing so from a position of strength having recorded a third straight fall of enrollment growth. To meet demand, 36 new residence hall spaces will open by fall 2025 to accommodate the increased demand. Additional capital projects will be detailed in the next issue of *The Southwester*.

We Run as One,
Dr. Joe

There's Always Something to Talk About



Former Roadrunner Annette Hover Weston had wanted to be a journalist since she was 11. She achieved her goal and remains one today, having made her way from coast to coast through print and news broadcasting to reach her specialized perch—talk radio.

Weston's destination was prophesied in high school in Van Buren County, where she graduated with Lawrence's Class of 1987.

As the introduction to her Facebook page notes, she shares, "I talk for a living. Literally all of my high school teachers would have said I'd end up here" on

public radio in North Carolina.

"After my mom died of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) last year," Weston said, "we were poking through old photos and mementos. The one commonality in every report card was, 'Talks too much in class.'"

"I really wanted to be a journalist. The first time I recall thinking that would be me when I grew up, I was watching the Carter-Reagan election returns on television.

"To bring things full circle, I had the immense pleasure of interviewing Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter when they were working at the Jimmy Carter Work Project for Habitat for Humanity in 2005. That project came to pass as the City of Benton Harbor worked to recover from the riot in 2003."

Both her parents, Janice and Gordon Hover, attended SMC. Weston, who has four adult children and two grandchildren, didn't consider other options besides SMC to study communications. It was closer to home and work than any other school, but she did not commute. Instead, she rented a tiny studio apartment in Dowagiac, which she shared with a roommate and a cat.

"I absolutely can't remember exactly where the apartment was, but it was next to a small gas station that was in pretty rough shape even then. My roommate and I shared a pull-out couch bed."

Her first full-time news job was features editor for the *Southeast Georgian*, a weekly newspaper in St. Mary's, Ga. After a year or so she was introduced to radio, WKBX FM, in neighboring Kingsland, Ga., as a deejay in music radio (adult contemporary).

Weston took nearly 10 years off from full-time work after she had children, though in 1991 she covered high school sports as a freelancer in Beaufort, South Carolina. The publisher of the *Lowcountry Ledger* was Bill Rausch, former press secretary for New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

"I had done freelance writing and weekend on-air work for the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, the *Herald Palladium* in Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, and COSY (98.3 at the time) in South Haven for a few years while my children were little. Daycare isn't an option on a radio salary," she said.

Eventually, a reporter job opened at another Midwest Broadcasting station, WSJM in Benton Harbor.

"I moved into that role a few weeks after 9/11," she said. "My youngest child had just entered kindergarten, and that historic event convinced me that I needed to re-enter the news world. Just over a year later, I was promoted to news director. During the 2008 recession the position was eliminated, so I figured why not check out Central Oregon?"

She covered the building of SMC's first residence hall

Weston helped launch a brand-new news station in Bend, Ore., as program director.

"Family concerns brought me back to Michigan about a year later, and I was an agribusiness reporter in Lansing for the Michigan Farm Radio Network for two years before jumping at the chance to help build another new station from the ground up, Michiana News Channel (MNC) in South Bend."

She remembers covering the story of SMC building its first residence hall, Keith H. McKenzie Hall, named for the longtime Board of Trustees vice chairman.

"Casey Hendrickson, myself in the news booth, and the legendary sports god Craig Williams made up the MNC (95.3) morning crew for a time."

Radio "has sent me to a variety of places," she said. "Central Oregon was the longest distance, and it is absolutely beautiful. I was news director for a heritage (three-letter call sign, WMT) station in Cedar Rapids/Iowa City; morning anchor/reporter for a statewide radio news bureau in Minneapolis; and for a locally-owned cluster in Mankato, Minn., KTOE."

Oregon, Minnesota, and now North Carolina

Of her time in the Minnesota River Valley, Weston said, "KTOE was a stellar organization. So much so that I left a much larger market to work there. It was still locally owned, and John Linder was passionate about local news. He died in 2017, and the passion wilted like a flower on the vine. I was there for three years, from 2016-19, and after the combination of the new management structure and the birth of my first grandchild,

it was clear I need to follow my own personal and professional passion, and that led me to North Carolina."

She worked for three years as the digital content manager for a local TV station.

"There are some real horror stories involved with moderating social media comments for a news organization amid the politics and pandemic that were present between 2019-22," she said.

Weston began her current position as news director of the local National Public Radio (NPR) affiliate Public Radio East (WTEB) not quite two years ago.

"My grandchildren are the light in my days. Moving south to watch them grow and learn was one of the best decisions I've made."

Hurricanes like coastal North Carolina

Weston arrived in eastern North Carolina about six months after Hurricane Florence, which "was devastating to the region. Some may remember the videos of people rescued from the roofs of their homes by emergency responders in New Bern.

"Since I've been here there have been two that left behind a lot of damage—Dorian in 2019 and Isaias in 2020. One thing to understand about hurricanes in this region is that they are often preceded by rounds of tornados and waterspouts, which can cause as much or more damage and loss of life as the hurricane itself."

Maysville, where she lives, "is a very small town still working to claw its way back from the devastation of Hurricane Florence."

Public Radio East, located on the Craven Community College campus, is a local NPR affiliate station. *Morning Edition* is one of NPR's flagship programs, with nationwide news and features throughout the morning. Weston anchors local news during this programming, at the top and bottom of the hour.

"We have a very small team—three in the news department and four

on the administrative/fundraising side. I typically interview/gather/write about 90 percent of our content, from local short pieces within the newscasts to 10-minute feature programs.

We make the news more informative

"I really enjoy public radio. In the past, I have only worked for commercial radio stations," Weston said. "I think what we are able to do in terms of coverage is both more informative and entertaining than people would hear on the news otherwise. We focus on things that impact people more directly, and less on car crashes, police chases, and the like.

"Just in the last few weeks, the declaration that gun violence is a public health crisis and following up with a shark expert after a teen was bitten swimming at a local beach, as well as the possibility of 18-foot-long sharks ending up in North Carolina, and tagging along when an injured but rehabilitated sea turtle was released back to the ocean.

"This career allows me to not only be a lifelong learner," Weston said, "but also to have the opportunity to be a teacher of sorts when I pass information along to others."

The one regret Weston has about her time at SMC is that she did not try out for the track team.

Carolyn Murray Became an Accountant

So She Could Keep Enjoying Music

Coming out of Dowagiac Union High School in 1996 with the John Philip Sousa Award, music seemed like the obvious path for percussionist Carolyn Lyons Murray. She received a music scholarship and began studying music education at Southwestern Michigan College but ended up pursuing a different program that also resonated with her.

Today, the Sister Lakes accountant has traveled as far on a musical pathway as she might have had she actually pursued a music career. In fact, she still performs at SMC in the theatre of the building named for her grandfather, Dale, longtime Board of Trustees vice chairman.

"I don't think going to SMC was a given, but it definitely was the path that made the most sense for me," Murray said. "I had been playing in ensembles at SMC since 10th grade. It was affordable and close to home.

"With my experience assisting at local band camps I quickly realized teaching was not my strong suit. Performance seemed like a very uncertain future, and although I enjoyed my music classes, I knew that immersing myself in a four-year music performance path was going to take the enjoyment out of music for me pretty quickly. I love music being my fun hobby/side-gig.

"I have been able to continue to play music my entire life," she said. "I even met my husband through music (Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp). I continue to stay connected to SMC through the Brass Band, as well as subbing with other groups. I don't know if all of that would have happened had I actually pursued a music career."



'Accounting really resonated with me'

After transitioning away from a degree in music, Murray started focusing on general business classes.

Accounting "really resonated with me. I think there are some very specific correlations between being a musician—percussion especially—and numbers. Everything balances. I was able to take

advantage of the Ferris at SMC program and get my Bachelor's in Accounting from Ferris without ever leaving the SMC campus."

She recently marked 10 years at Brammall Industrial Supply in St. Joseph, where she serves as financial controller for Brammall and its sister company, Nemic Industrial Supply in Grand Rapids.

"Like most folks, I didn't have a clear vision of my path when I was in college. I knew I didn't want to do tax accounting. I was definitely drawn to accounting for manufacturing. I am fascinated by production facilities. I'm amazed that people make things, and I like being part of that process. I am fortunate that I love what I do. It was definitely the right path for me."

Her first job was with the family meat market

For a time, Murray and her family, parents Larry and Annette and brother Craig, ran the Olde Town Meat Market, now part of the Cass County COA Front Street Crossing. It was her first job.

"I later bussed tables at Round Oak



for quite a few years. I then worked at McCanse Chiropractic, moving from chiropractic assistant to insurance billing to office manager."

After graduating with her accounting degree, Murray shared that she found herself "in that very precarious position of having a four-year degree but no experience. I began applying for

accounting jobs, but most either wanted someone with a degree and experience or were very entry-level not requiring any degree.

"I finally found a position at Pinnacle Building Systems, a modular home company in Bristol, Ind., doing accounts payable data entry."

She flourished there. "Soon I was doing payables, receivables, and warranty work. When the controller retired I moved into that position. At the downturn of the housing market the company closed. I was the last employee on the books, staying with them through the final auction of remaining assets," Murray shared.

The owner of Pinnacle also owned an ambulance company in Elkhart, and Murray soon began working for SJC Industries, manufacturer of Marque and McCoy Miller ambulances.

She moved into chassis purchasing, the only position open in the company at that time.

"Did I know anything about purchasing or chassis? Absolutely not! But it was fun to learn," she said. "Later I moved into a cost accounting position where I was able to work out in the plant, recording and costing all of the materials going into our products."

After a number of years working with this company, the business was sold and production moved to Florida. Once again Murray found herself among the final crew members helping to serve customers until the company transitioned all services out of state.

"So then I was on the job hunt! I worked with a professional placement agency which referred me to Brammall Industrial Supply. I was very excited to work for a family-owned business with such an amazing history in the community. Plus, it was much closer to home. I transitioned into a position made available as the former controller was retiring. It is the perfect fit."

Like father, like daughter

Murray's father was the outdoors columnist for Leader Publications for many years and typically ended his columns with "carpe diem" (seize the day). She credits him for her wide range of interests—from raising goats to roller derby.

"He was one to follow his heart when pursuing new careers, hobbies, and experiences," she said. Her husband Ryan is also very supportive of trying new things.

"We met through music," she said.

"And we both still play," Ryan on trombone.

"He has become very involved in Beckwith Theatre as actor, director, leader of their improv group, and director of their summer youth camp" with SMC's Educational Talent Search.

"I have done a little bit of acting on stage," Murray said, "but it's not really my thing. I do really enjoy playing in musical pit orchestras, though, and have been doing quite a bit more of that the past few years."

Her musical path intersects with her mother

Murray plays snare drum with bagpipe bands and all manner of percussion, including timpani, marimbas, xylophone, and bells.

She performs regularly with the SMC Brass Band, occasionally subs with the St. Joseph Municipal Band, and plays for various musical theatre performances at the Ghostlight Theatre in Benton Harbor.

"I sub occasionally with the SMC Symphonic Band, where my mom plays clarinet," Murray shared. "Mom's a two-time SMC alum. She went to SMC after high school and met my dad. Then we both attended SMC simultaneously while I was getting my accounting degree and she was pursuing a degree in nursing. We actually graduated at the same time. I don't remember when she started playing her clarinet again, but she really enjoys playing in the Symphonic Band. It's always fun when we get to play concerts together."

Someday she might sing again

As a Roadrunner, Murray played in all of SMC's instrumental groups, Symphonic Band, Brass Band, and Jazz Ensemble. She also sang with the Concert Choir and Show Choir.

"I have decent pitch," she said. "Probably all those years tuning timpani. But I've never really trained my voice to sing. Someday I might like to do that."

"My favorite memories of SMC are from before I was an official SMC student," Murray said. "I was in high school, searching out additional playing opportunities. (Band Director) Dr. (Jonathan) Korzun took me under his wing, and I started playing in the bands. There was a special group of vocal and instrumental folks at SMC at that time."

"They all just allowed me to be a part of it, which made me feel so amazing at the time. The confidence boost was out of this world! And I'm still friends with some of them."



A proud Chieftain, 1988 Dowagiac Union High School graduate Tonya Cosey still calls Dowagiac home.

"I had no idea what direction I wanted to go in as a first-generation high school graduate," she said. "I had no clue about the college process, nor did I have references of historical experiences within my family prior to graduating from high school. I just knew I wanted to go to college and become 'something.'"

Cosey got her wish. She started attending Southwestern Michigan College soon after graduating from DUHS. It's now been 30 years since Tonya Cosey graduated from SMC, and she has become a very special "something" to so many of her friends and neighbors.

She worked as an outpatient therapist for 22 years and is currently clinical supervisor for adult outpatient, adult case management, children's outpatient and adult peer support services for Cassopolis-based Woodlands Behavioral Healthcare Network.

Growing up in Dowagiac, "I found myself being the one a lot of my friends came to when they were experiencing problems, or just needing to talk," Cosey said. "I also held that same role within my family. Gravitating towards social work just seemed

to be a natural fit for me. "Working several years at the Berrien County Juvenile Center also reinforced my desire to help young children and families develop strategies to improve their chances of succeeding in life by way of better understanding factors contributing to personal and familial hardships, including better understanding generational, social and environmental factors impacting both physical and mental health outcomes. I also had a strong desire to break generational cycles within my own family."

Cosey commuted back and forth to campus, using Dial-a-Ride or walking when her car broke down. "I was thankful for SMC being in Dowagiac, and I encourage everyone to take advantage of such a valuable academic and community resource.

"I have fond memories of SMC," she said. "There was no on-campus housing during the time I attended; however, I remember meeting students from all over the United States. I attended school dances, sporting events, and was active in the Collegiate Organization for Minority Awareness. I also remember all the excitement on campus when (Vice President) Dan Quayle visited in 1992. I was influenced by professors such as Dr. Naomi Ludman and many others who helped expand my world view."

After graduating from SMC in 1994 with an associate in arts degree, her mother and family

friends encouraged her to visit Andrews University in nearby Berrien Springs to continue her education.

"I declined initially as Andrews was a private university and finances were an issue," Cosey said. "With the help of my associates, I later became employed at the Berrien County Juvenile Center, which was near Andrews.

"I decided to enroll in Andrews' social work program and attended while working full-time. I was able to transfer several credits earned from SMC, which helped tremendously. I went on to receive my bachelor's in social work and, later, my master's in social work degree in 2001."

Transitioning from Andrews student to Woodlands mental health therapist

In September 2001, Cosey was hired as a limited licensed mental health therapist at Woodlands. While at Woodlands, she completed all state requirements to become a fully-licensed mental health therapist (LMSW).

"As a mental health therapist, I provide therapy for children, adults, and families who present with severe and persistent mental illness and/or co-occurring addiction concerns.

"As a community mental health provider, Woodlands serves individuals and families all throughout the Cass County area. As an outpatient therapist, I would meet with individuals on a weekly to bi-weekly basis for the purpose of providing clients with tools needed to handle life stressors in healthier and more effective ways," she said.

In her current role, Cosey supervises "a team of wonderful, empathetic, and competent professionals and interns who work diligently to meet the needs of clients who look to Woodlands for support.

"I find it very rewarding to mentor new therapists, as well as help develop innovative ways in which to help support and enrich the lives of Cass County residents.

"In 2016-2017, I had the privilege of partnering with SMC and United Way to start the college's first on-campus counseling program. I am so happy that the counseling program continues to support SMC students," she said. "Prior to partnering with SMC, I also had the privilege of partnering with Cass Family Clinic

to initiate its integrated health care services. I'm also happy that Cass Family Clinic has expanded its integrated health care services."

Staying close to home and family

Cosey chose to stay in Dowagiac "because it's a great place to live. I am very close to my family, who also live in Dowagiac and the surrounding area. My sister Danielle (Lucas) also graduated from SMC and just celebrated her 20-year work anniversary as SMC's financial aid analyst. My nephew, Deyonte, graduated from SMC and went on to graduate from the University of Michigan. My nephew, Donovan, recently returned from Florida, and is now enrolled and planning on completing his business degree at SMC. I have other family members and friends who have also benefited from attending Southwestern Michigan College.

"Family has always been my top priority," she said. "I am a part of a big, beautiful, blended family. I was raised with four other siblings. I was born second in a sibship of five. I love spending time with my siblings, nieces, and nephews, and think spending time with family has become so much more important to me, especially since we lost my sister, Ronda, who passed away in 2023.

"I wind down by reading, listening to music, attending church, and taking long drives in my car. My family also started the Ronda Lucas Sullivan Legacy Foundation in my sister's name. This past year, we were successful in raising money to give away scholarships to two DUHS seniors. This has been most rewarding."





Following Her Bliss TO A Picture Perfect Career



Morgan Adams, a graphic designer/photographer with Midwest Energy and Communications (MEC), grew up in Dowagiac at the height of the Dogwood Fine Arts Festival in an arts-rich atmosphere that enveloped the community and its schools. But the salutatorian of Union High's Class of 2014 probably would have gravitated to art anyway.

Coming out of high school, Adams was accepted to Michigan State and Western Michigan, but decided to stay close to home. She chose Southwestern Michigan College to "get as many courses as possible under my belt at a community-college rate."

Adams joined the SMC marketing office as a student intern, doing graphic design, often for the *Toilet Paper* and the *Napkin*. She did social media and helped plan and market student events. She also received recognition for her graphic design and drawing abilities, including the Presidential Award at the 2016 student art show.

The first in her family to graduate from college, Adams did it in style, graduating from SMC in 2016 with straight A's.

From SMC, Adams moved to Grand Rapids for Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University (KCAD). When she left for KCAD, Adams intended to pursue interior design.

"I did (interior design) for a semester, but realized I missed graphic design. Realistically, I didn't want to be in college for five more years, and I already had my graphic design associate degree. So I reapplied to Kendall for its graphic design program and got in. Thankfully, about 50 percent of my BFA was made possible through SMC's classes being so transfer-friendly with Ferris.

"All of those scholarships I received to use at SMC made it a no-brainer to attend there, and they allowed me to save money while I worked when I attended to be able to pay for two years of my housing while at KCAD. This allowed me to focus on my schooling and not have to work multiple part-time jobs. I completed my graphic design BFA in fall 2018."

So, how did she end up at an electric utility?

"The way I look at it, you can hate what you do for a living and make lots

of money, you can love what you do and make hardly any, or you can find a happy medium. And sometimes people get lucky and love what they do and make lots of money. I knew I couldn't pay for the medical degree, which was my other passion; I had wanted to be a chiropractor.

"Art and medicine are very opposite. But I knew whatever I set my mind to I would succeed. I just needed to pick a path that wouldn't break me financially. Once I graduated from KCAD, I came home. I loved the city but it's not where I wanted to live.

"I had to bartend/waitress and do freelance work for several months until I found a job that actually utilized my degree. That was a very scary and self-doubting period of my life," she said.

"But then a job opened up for me in Elkhart at MORryde, a company that made suspension systems for trailers that towed recreational vehicles, and I worked there for several years."

During her time at MORryde, she purchased a house with a Niles address that was equally close to Dowagiac and Cassopolis.

"I would drive by MEC and told myself if I ever got an opportunity I would apply. The community spoke very highly of the company."

When a position opened, she applied and beat out dozens of other applicants.

"I've always wanted to have less of a commute and be able to utilize my degree and work for my local community. MEC was the perfect fit," she said.

Adams loves MEC's "community, how it impacts people I know and family who utilize the co-op. My grandma put postcards I made to market fiber internet on her refrigerator until they finally signed up for the service.



"I also love the variety of projects I get to work on, the resources at my disposal, and the opportunities to continue learning. They have great benefits and take good care of their employees, too."

Art garnering more attention

Since returning to the area, Adams' artistic eye has noticed distinct changes.

"Local chambers are putting more effort into prettying up downtowns like Stone Lake (Cassopolis) and Dowagiac. Now you have murals on buildings, fresh new architecture, and new, innovative public elements people can interact with for recreational purposes.

"I hear from co-workers their kids are showing interest in art careers and how many camps are available at such a young age to broaden their education and skills.

"I feel like there are more opportunities now for art careers than ever. Even technology is a huge help. Creative people can do anything they set their minds to. We are problem-solvers, storytellers, and makers."

Photography

Adams' MEC design duties include quarterly campaigns marketing fiber and propane services. She creates emails, print, digital, ads, helps with social media, and billboards—a variety of media.

"Part of my job involves taking pictures during outages to explain to customers what's going on. I take employee pictures to market our services or to highlight specific people for transparency and reliability. I take photos for our *Country Lines* magazine and capture our community involvement as well.

"Going with an art degree is very scary," she admitted. "You are constantly doubted by people in your life and society. 'Starving artist' is no joke. KCAD had a food pantry students were allowed to utilize because it was so hard to make ends meet, and they also had winter coat drives. It was a risk to 'follow my bliss,' as my high school English teacher called it."

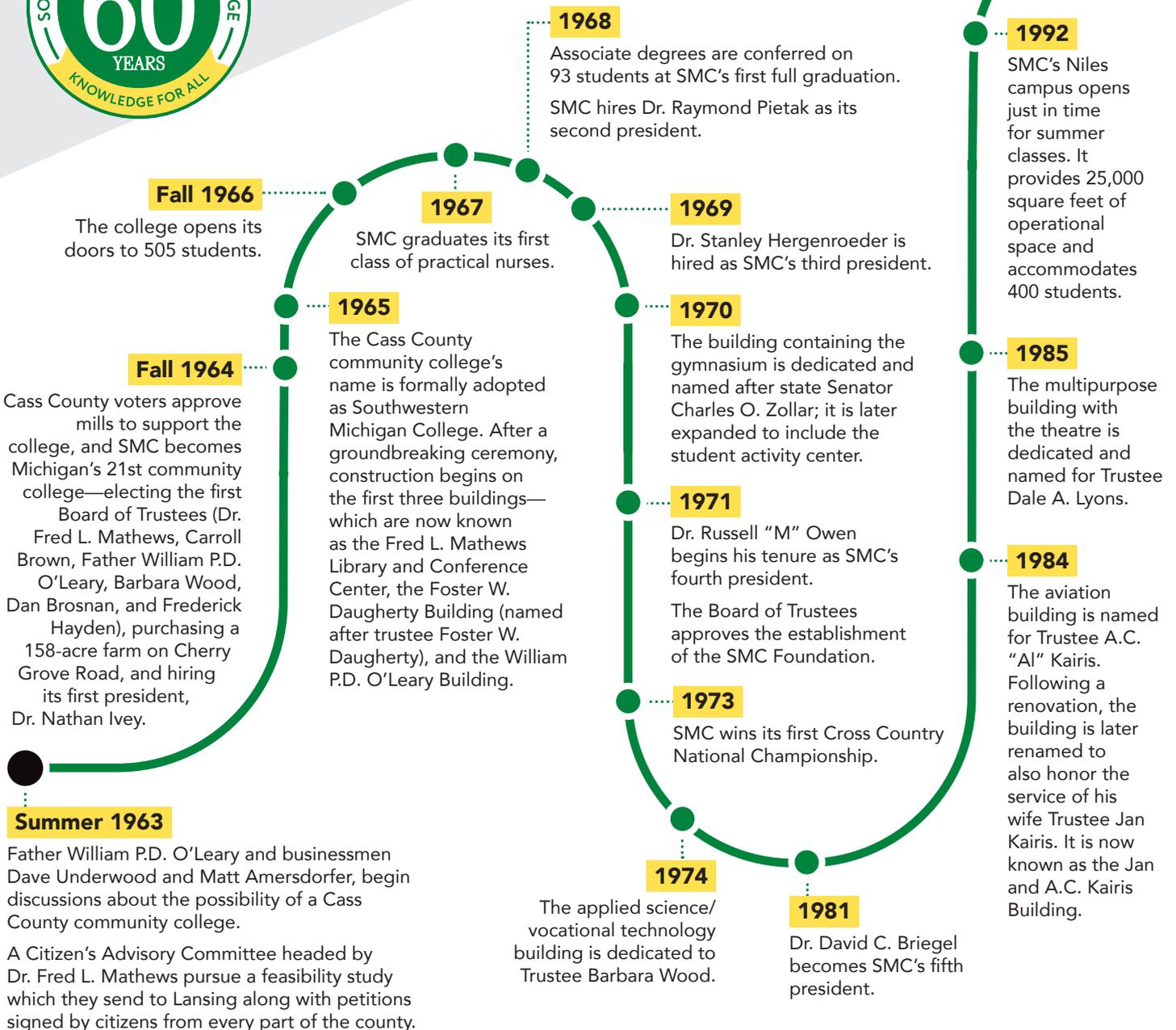
But Adams is so glad she did. "I've been able to do graphic design for a metal manufacturing company and now a utility. It's comforting to know my degree can be so widely utilized and provides me with job security and even remote opportunities."

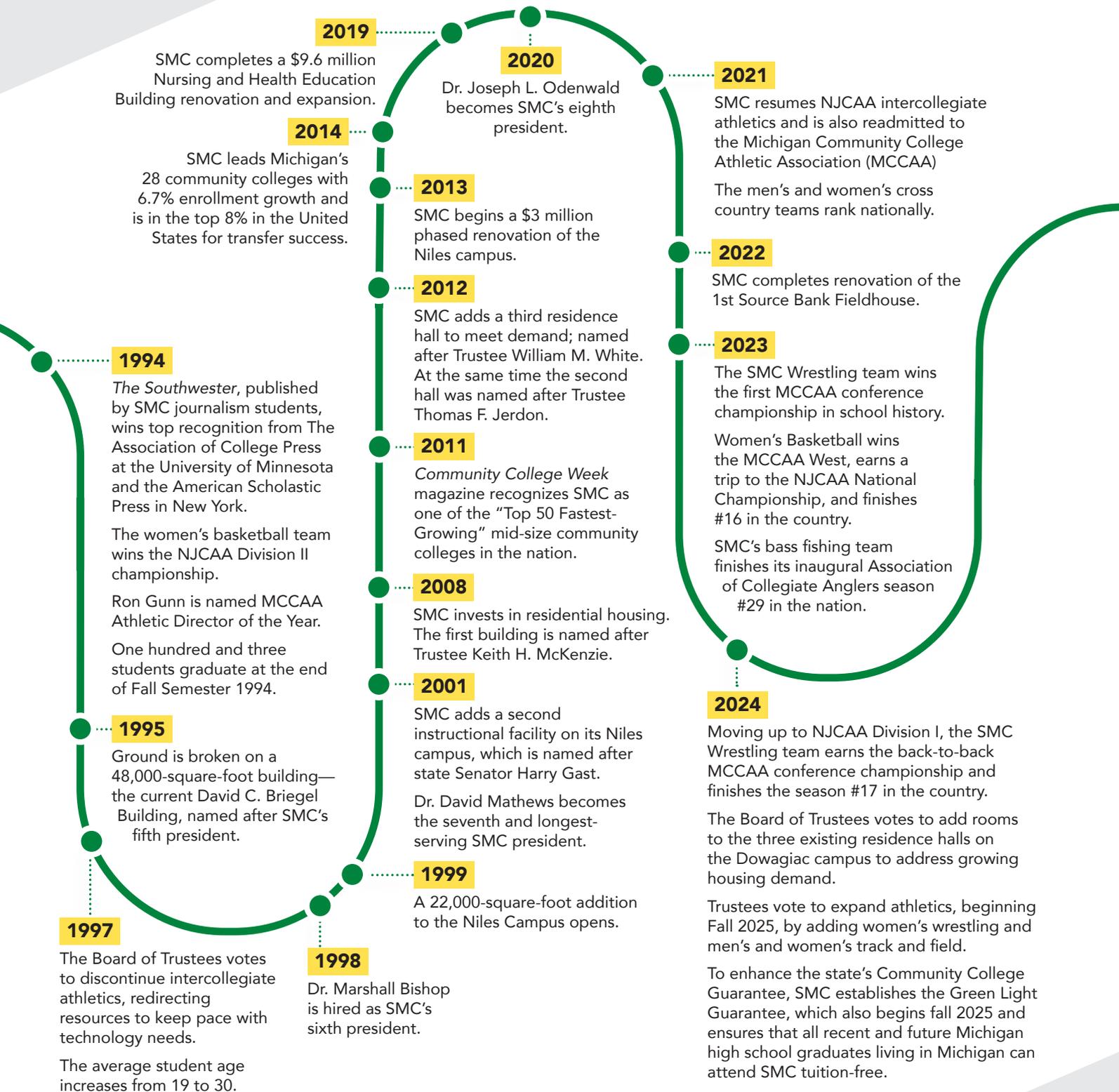
Cornfield of Dreams:

The SMC Story



Every big endeavor, a place or event that impacts thousands of people, starts with the smallest, simplest notion: to fill a need. That's how the SMC story began. It was a glimmer of an idea—that everyone should have access to affordable and quality education, but when shared with citizens from every part of Cass County, it began to shine... then blaze. This year, we celebrate 60 years in the pursuit of excellence in academic quality and the student experience as we continue to help students achieve their educational goals without draining their pocketbooks. Here's a quick overview of what happened during our first six decades.





The truth is, an entire issue of *The Southwester* could be devoted to the people and events that have helped SMC grow over the last 60 years. The dedication and commitment of SMC's Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff

in serving students and helping them achieve their dreams, the persistence of students in following those dreams, and the generosity of donors and sponsors who help fund the scholarships that make it all possible...there are so many

wonderful stories that can be written about what has been achieved. But what is most exciting is that the best is yet to come. Here's to the next 60 years and what we can continue to accomplish together!



Quentin Cave, DAT, LAT, ATC



Between completing his Doctor of Athletic Training (DAT) degree last October and moving to Nevada for the 2024-25 school year, it's been a busy year for Quentin Cave.

"I've just started a new job with Dignity Physical Therapy in Las Vegas, where I am the athletic trainer for Las Vegas High School," Cave said. "It's the very first high school to open in the city of Las Vegas way back in 1905."

Cave graduated from Southwestern Michigan College in 2016 after serving as a Resident Assistant in William M. White Hall.

He said relocating developed after he finished his doctorate and wanted "to find an organization that provided me with growth opportunities. Making such a big move was terrifying, but I've been here since mid-July, and it's getting better every day."



Last school year, at Goshen Orthopedics, Cave provided athletic training services for student athletes in grades 7-12 for the Fairfield Junior/Senior High School Falcons in Goshen.

Cave is licensed in Nevada and in Indiana. "Forty-nine out of the 50 states require state licensure to practice as an athletic trainer," he said. "California hasn't quite gotten on the wagon yet."

The other credentials behind Cave's name, LAT and ATC, represent Licensed Athletic Trainer and Certified Athletic Trainer.

Cave graduated from Elkhart Memorial School in 2009 but had a difficult finding the right college fit.

"I chose SMC after several failed attempts at college," he said.

"I don't know what it was exactly, but when I came out to SMC for a tour, I felt that it was going to be a good fit for me."

He had a similar experience when seeking his bachelor's degree; he landed at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind.

"I went down there, spoke with the athletic training program director and took a tour," he shared. "I felt the same things I did about SMC. It just felt right."

Cave played soccer and basketball as a high school athlete. Frequent injuries exposed him to athletic training.

"I spent a lot of time with my high school athletic trainer with my array of injuries. I knew I wanted to help people, but I wasn't sure which route to go," he said. "Now, I get to take care of people and watch sports as a career! How crazy is that?"

"My favorite part of the job," Cave said, "is getting to know the athletes under my care. I get to support them through some of their toughest times and watch their triumphs after they return from an injury."

He describes what an athletic trainer is this way:

"Athletic trainers are the most versatile medical professionals out there. We are capable of diagnosing, treating, and rehabilitating orthopedic injuries and conditions. You'll find us in the traditional athletics settings (high school, college, and professional sports), but what a lot of people don't know is that you'll find us in industrial, performing arts, clinical, surgical, and military and public safety settings as well. We work closely with orthopedic physicians and physical and occupational therapists," he said.

According to Cave, the capabilities of an athletic trainer are often overshadowed by the title. "We get confused for personal trainers or strength and conditioning coaches all the time.

Those of us who stay in this profession forever are people who are passionate about making a difference in our patients' lives and continuously fighting to make our profession better for the next generations."

As for what a typical day is like, "No two days are the same," Cave said. "Depending on what's going on, I could be running around like a chicken with my head cut off, or I might actually have time to sit and finish my paperwork in one sitting for a change. I spend most of my time between games and practices doing paperwork or setting up for the next thing."

"I do like working with high school athletes," he said. "Yes, there are always going to be those kids who drive you crazy, but for the most part getting to watch these kids grow into adults is pretty fantastic."

Cave said, "There's a lot to do over the summer. With this new job, I could be working alongside my PT counterparts, covering summer workouts at the school, and even covering special events and tournaments going on in and around the city."

Why is SMC so special to Cave? "I discovered who I was at SMC," Cave reflects. "I met great people whom I wish I was still as close with. I think my favorite memories surround helping backstage on SMC's productions of 'Into the Woods' and 'Oklahoma.'"

"My favorite part of the job is getting to know the athletes under my care. I get to support them through some of their toughest times and watch their triumphs after they return from an injury."

—QUENTIN CAVE



Timing Is Everything

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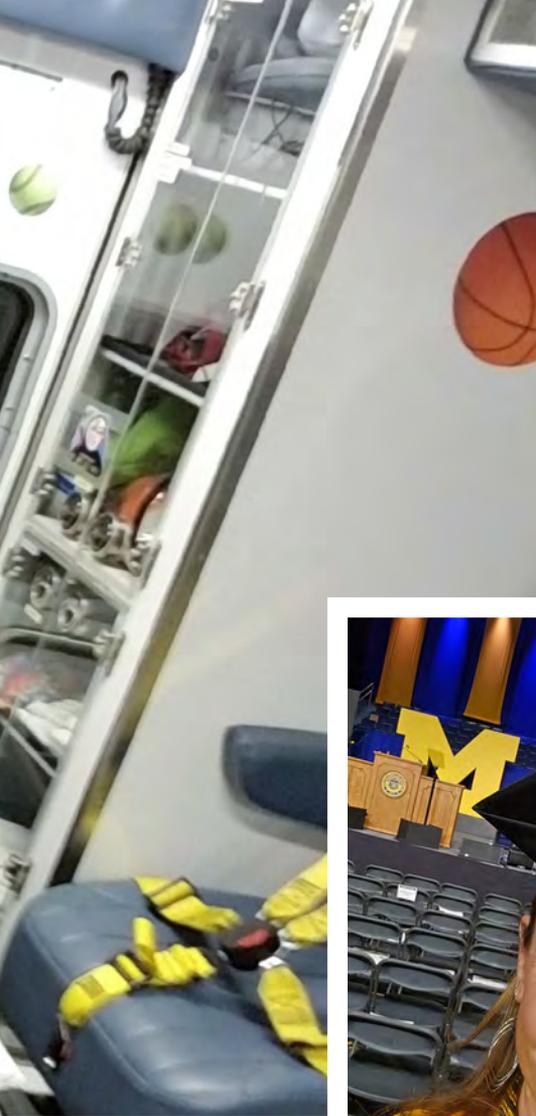
Transport Nurse

Melissa "Lissa" (Hollis) Borders of Niles ('03) never intended to become a nurse. She thought it was "gross." Today, she's a pediatric critical care transport nurse who has been with Beacon Health System for 22 years.

Coming out of Galien High School in 1992, her original plan was to become a marine biologist "I was going to get my prerequisites through SMC and transfer to Florida State," Borders said. "I thought it was what I was 'supposed to do' but soon learned it was not the right path for me at that time. I did poorly and was not dedicated, so I quit after one semester."

But Border's connection to SMC was far from over.

Her daughter was in the NICU when she was born, and Borders relied heavily on the nurses there. "They made what was by far the most difficult time of my life bearable," she said. "When we were being discharged, one of the nurses asked me if I was a nurse. At that time



questions or needs, but I was considered the patient's nurse," she said.

"I thought this area would help prepare me for after graduation when I wanted to work as a labor and delivery nurse; however, I ended up discovering that I did not want to go into that area. So I took a position in the Intermediate Care Unit. This was a great floor to learn how to be a nurse. It taught me time management and critical thinking skills."

After working in the ICU, Borders spent the next seven years in ER and one year in Interventional Radiology. Following that she worked in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, gradually transitioning to the pediatric critical care transport team.

Borders added a RN bachelor's degree from Goshen College in 2011. She also served an SMC adjunct nursing instructor in 2011.

What does a transport nurse do?

"When I say 'transport nurse' it is very common for people to assume that means in a helicopter. My mode of transportation is an ambulance; however, I do fly when I am needed, which isn't very often.

"I have been a pediatric critical care transport nurse for more than 10 years. Memorial Hospital is the only hospital in northwest Indiana that has a PICU and pediatric unit," she said.

Since COVID, many hospitals have closed their general pediatric units. The Memorial team is the only critical care transport team specializing in pediatrics in northern Indiana. "We work 24-hour shifts and are staffed with a nurse, paramedic, and basic EMT as a driver, and, when needed, we grab a respiratory therapist to take with us. We also have a living space in the hospital where we can rest on downtime," Borders said.

"When we start our shift, we check our ambulance to make sure we have all our supplies and medications. We check all our equipment to make sure everything is working properly, including our ambulance. We attend the daily PICU rounds, provide any needed assistance

on the pediatric/PICU units, provide IV assistance throughout the hospital, and respond to all pediatric emergencies throughout the hospital including the ER.

"When a patient needs to be transferred to our facility, we are dispatched to go get them. Our transports can be to another hospital 15 minutes away or two hours away."

According to Borders, when a patient requires resources that Beacon is unable to provide, the team transports them to a larger facility in Indianapolis, Chicago, Fort Wayne, or Ann Arbor. This averages out to about two transports per day, which can take anywhere from an hour to eight hours from start to finish. Team members are allowed to sleep if they are not needed but must always be ready to transport a child at any time during their 24-hour shift. They also use "downtime" to complete required education.

LAI degree provides more options

In 2023, Borders earned her master's degree in nursing leadership, analytics, and innovation (LAI) from the University of Michigan.

"Obtaining my master's degree from the U of M is the degree I am the most proud of," she shared. "I always said that when my kids were grown I was going to obtain my master's, so when the LAI master's became available as an online program I jumped on it. As a lifelong Wolverine fan, I didn't think becoming a U of M graduate was ever going to be possible.

"The LAI degree provides more options. As a nurse, innovation is near and dear to my heart as is good leadership. The leader sets the tone of the department both negative and positive. I am wanting to find a job as an administrator or Director of Nursing. My degree allows me to fit into a managerial position, like a unit manager, director, or administrator. I am hoping to find a job working with the very young or very old."

As stressful as her job can be, it's not surprising that many of Borders' SMC memories involve stress as well.

"Nursing school is hard," she said. "During nursing school, I had two very small kids, a husband, and a mortgage, so I didn't have a lot of extra time to spend on campus.

"My favorite aspect of nursing school at SMC is that I met my soul sister there. We are still best friends today. I finished school a semester before she did, so I was able to attend her nursing pinning and pin her. That is a memory I will never forget."



I had absolutely no medical knowledge whatsoever, and to this day I have no idea why she asked me that question, but it got me thinking.

"When my daughter was 3 months old, I enrolled in my first class. This time I was ready and wanted to succeed," she said.

"I chose SMC because of its reputation of having one of the best nursing schools in the area. I have many friends, some who are like family, who have graduated from SMC throughout the years, and it just so happened that my high school best friend and I graduated together, but she went into a different field."

Associate nursing at Memorial Hospital

During school, Borders worked in Memorial Hospital's post-partum unit.

"At that time they had 'associate nurses,' which were basically nursing students. I was allowed to carry my own patient load and care for healthy moms and babies. I did have an RN that I worked under should I have any



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Full College Experience.



its beautiful campus and the housing opportunities it provided.

"In all honesty," she added, "SMC was my first choice in starting my college career. I knew transferring was an option, so I hit the ground running in a place that made me feel comfortable, confident, and cared for!"

'RA was one of the best decisions I ever made'

"Becoming an RA was one of the best decisions I ever made," Flowers said. "It was an amazing way to connect more with the college and so many new students. This opportunity gave me a sense of responsibility that I had not experienced prior. In many ways, SMC shaped me and my work ethic."

Early in her time at SMC, Flowers "must have had a premonition of the future because my goal was to acquire a degree in either communications or marketing and use it at a local organization or company in some sort of marketing-focused role."

She majored in communications and continued that path at Western Michigan University, transferring after graduation and earning a bachelor's degree in communications with an event management minor.

"Today, I live to tell the tale! I am working at a local credit union that works hard to serve its members and community members while providing excellent growth opportunities for employees."

Flowers utilized her degree across internships and side jobs and in her role at Arbor Financial Credit Union, where she was community and social media specialist.

She was responsible for hosting community events, credit union events, overseeing sponsorships and managing social media for the organization.

More digital responsibilities

Recently, she transitioned to a new specialist position as the digital marketing and content specialist.

"In this role I am responsible for more digital aspects," Flowers said. "I work closely with our digital marketing partners on advertisements and email campaigns while still managing and maintaining the organization's corporate social media accounts. My new role also comes with fun

perks like working closely with other departments to create campaigns, testimonials, videos, and more to increase brand awareness."

In August, she marked five years with Arbor Financial Credit Union, which has 12 locations across southwest Michigan, including Three Rivers, Lawrence, Paw Paw, Kalamazoo, Portage, and Otsego.

Flowers had lived in Portage, but was in the process of buying her first home with her husband and moving to Kalamazoo.

'I love trying new Kalamazoo restaurants'

For fun, she still plays tennis. "I played in high school and never want to lose that skill," Flowers said. "I also love running, trying new restaurants in the ever-growing Kalamazoo area, exploring our great state, and spending time with my family and friends."

Flowers knew Kyra DeLoach, the McKenzie Residence Hall Manager who followed her who is also from Sturgis. Both worked in SMC's marketing office while at the college.

"I found myself working in marketing when I began looking at on-campus employment opportunities," Flowers said. "In my search, I had reached out to my residence hall manager for insight. He proceeded to share with me that marketing may be hiring and recommended I reach out. From there, it was history. I was introduced to Whitney (Lents) and Michelle (Orlaske), who were amazing leaders and taught me so much in that short amount of time."

Professors made students feel valued

Finding excellent friends and leaders is one of the things Flowers remembers most from her time at SMC. "I also felt like opportunities were abundant, whether it be extracurriculars, work opportunities, or the education provided. I did not have a favorite professor; however, I valued them all. The professors on campus made students feel welcome and valued. I am spoiled enough to know that it is not a common occurrence for many young people experiencing college for the first time."

When Katelynn Flowers left Sturgis, she didn't consider attending college anywhere except Southwestern Michigan College.

"I felt SMC was a great start to my college career and would assist in acclimating me to life away from home while also providing a close-knit educational experience. Turns out, I was right!"

Flowers, who attended SMC from 2014-16 and served as a Keith H. McKenzie Hall resident assistant her second year, selected SMC because of

Making an Impact



through Music

Before he became an award-winning choir director in Washington state, Niles' James Jones was associated with Southwestern Michigan College theatrical productions for a decade, first as a student, then as an adjunct instructor. His job fulfills a lifelong ambition.

Earlier this year Jones won Richland School District's 2024 Crystal Apple Award, which recognizes one outstanding educator in each of nine local

public school districts for their teaching excellence and impact. He also took a group of high schoolers to Ireland for a week on a performance tour.

When he joined the Richland School District as Hanford High's choir director, the school only had one choir. Now, Jones is entering his 11th year helping students discover their musical passions, and his program—one of the largest in the Tri-Cities area—features six choirs.

Jones works tirelessly with 200 choir students daily. He has the rare talent of letting students know he deeply cares and values them while also holding them accountable for their attitudes and efforts.

"Through the inclusion of many different musical cultures and styles, and just the person he is, Mr. Jones cultivated my love for music and continues to be a positive influence in my life," said Hanford High graduate Jesse Gervais. "I am just so grateful."

But his devotion to students doesn't stop with high schoolers. Every summer, Jones spends two weeks directing 60-80 eager middle school students at Hanford High School's musical theatre camp.

During the school year, he invites middle schoolers to perform alongside his high school students during concerts, increasing their musical confidence and passion.

"Mr. Jones' legacy will span the generations," said Hanford High teacher Matthew Leggett. "He not only invites middle schoolers into the world of musical theatre, but mentors high school students into becoming coaches, several of whom have decided to become music educators."

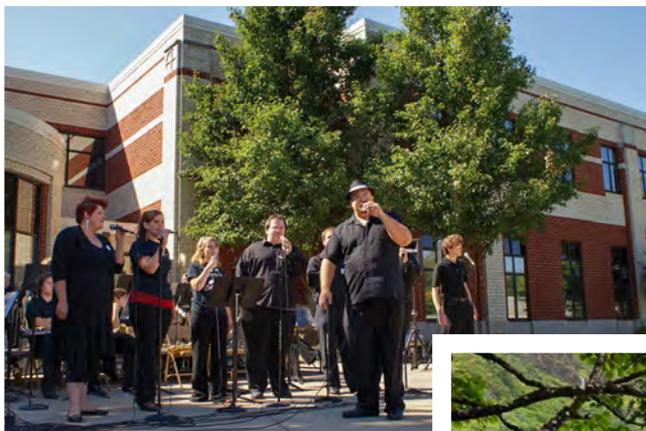
Since Jones joined the staff at Hanford High, he not only transformed the choir program but also made a lasting impact on the school's performing arts. He has directed four musical productions, most recently "Hello Dolly," and has served as the vocal director for several drama performances.

In 2017, Jones was honored with the Outstanding Music Direction award by the 5th Avenue Theatre for his work with Hanford's production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific." His choirs and students have also received countless awards for their musical talents.

Despite such recognition, Jones' focus stays on his students—something noticed by his colleagues, students, and their families.

"Mr. Jones knows how to form meaningful connections with his students," says Hanford High parent Katie Geldmacher. "He has been a major contributor in building my children's confidence, teaching them the value of hard work and expanding their musical skills and knowledge."

Jones graduated from Niles High School in 2000, so David Carew's predecessor, Dr. Robert Briggs, who composed SMC's Alma Mater, was his director for Concert Choir, Chamber Choir, and Center Stage, the show choir.



"My parents were able to pay for community college, and SMC was close to home. I got my bachelor's degree in choral music education at Central Michigan University, and I also have a master's in choral music education from Central Washington University," Jones said.

"I started singing and working with Dave Carew in 2007, when I started teaching adjunct at SMC," he said. Jones taught voice part-time for SMC for four years. He also directed SMC's show choir and choreographed the musicals.

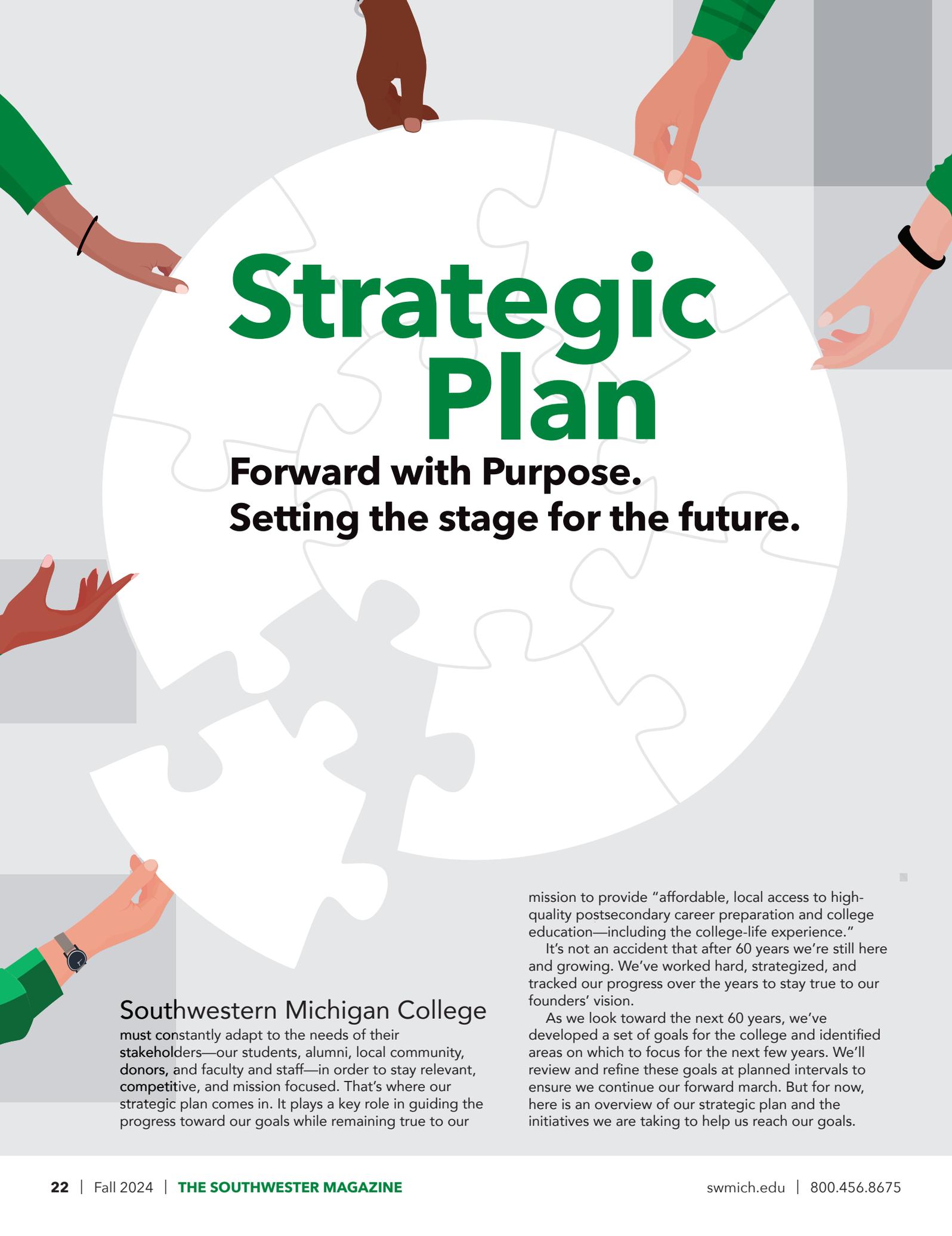
"When it was time to look for a full-time teaching job," Jones said, "I was picky about where I applied. There weren't a lot of good options in Michigan at the time, so I looked all over the country."

He finally settled in Richland where he lives with his wife, Rebecca, whom he met at SMC, two daughters, a yellow Labrador retriever, and a black cat.

"SMC was my home for many years, both as a student and as a teacher. I made some awesome friends that I still keep in touch with and had some awesome teachers who really made an impact in my life," he said.

One of those memories was the Nathan's-style hot dog-eating contest that was the centerpiece of Campus Bash when he was a student. Jones not only remembered the contest, he shared that he finished third.

"I needed ketchup," he laughed.



Strategic Plan

**Forward with Purpose.
Setting the stage for the future.**

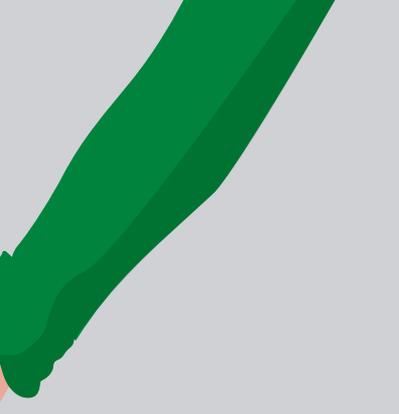
Southwestern Michigan College

must constantly adapt to the needs of their stakeholders—our students, alumni, local community, donors, and faculty and staff—in order to stay relevant, competitive, and mission focused. That's where our strategic plan comes in. It plays a key role in guiding the progress toward our goals while remaining true to our

mission to provide “affordable, local access to high-quality postsecondary career preparation and college education—including the college-life experience.”

It's not an accident that after 60 years we're still here and growing. We've worked hard, strategized, and tracked our progress over the years to stay true to our founders' vision.

As we look toward the next 60 years, we've developed a set of goals for the college and identified areas on which to focus for the next few years. We'll review and refine these goals at planned intervals to ensure we continue our forward march. But for now, here is an overview of our strategic plan and the initiatives we are taking to help us reach our goals.



COLLEGE GOALS

Student Growth and Success—

The academic success of our students has been an expressed college-wide goal for more than two decades. Our motto, dating back to 1964, is “Knowledge for All.” Today, this means more than just local access to college education and postsecondary preparation. In addition, “total college-life experience” requires a commitment to student development inside and outside the classroom.

Internal Quality Improvement—

The college’s core values beckon us to provide students with 21st century services, to ensure high quality in all activities, and to wisely steward resources. Continuous improvement in all departments, whether academic, service, or support is a self-expectation.

Organizational Growth and Success—

The college is made up of people: students, faculty, and staff. Our core values require us to manage all our resources, including our human resources, by promoting growth, satisfaction, and empowerment.

Financial Stewardship—

The college is the recipient of direct fiscal resources from tuition and fees, state assistance, and, thanks to the generosity of the district’s payers, property taxes.

INITIATIVES

Develop and sustain purposeful academic programs to support enrollment

We will continually monitor our degree and certificate programs to make sure they remain cutting-edge and convenient, provide the optimum training for immediate job placement, and easily transfer to a university. Examples include increasing the number of online options, offering new programs for health services students who opt not to pursue a traditional nursing degree, developing a more defined general studies pathway, and engaging with industries to ensure our technical programs remain state-of-the-art.

Enhance community engagement

Although we have a close-knit community on-campus, maintaining those relationships takes commitment and nurturing. Additionally, we want to maintain, even grow, our ties to our off-campus friends and family, including local high school students, donors, and alumni. “We Run As One” does not stop at the entrances to our campuses, and we are dedicated to championing the bonds that link us together.

Grow enrollment

The college cannot expect to achieve, or fund, our goals without increasing enrollment of degree-seeking applicants in all areas within and outside of our district, including traditional students, adult students, and dual enrollment students. Several initiatives will help us achieve our goals in this area, including the development of data-driven recruitment plans targeting specific audiences, the addition of new academic, athletic, and club activities to attract students, and the growth of collaborative efforts with local high schools to encourage young people to take advantage of earning their associate’s degree as part of the college’s dual degree program.

Maintain financial stability

It’s all about stewardship. We are responsible for the monies we receive, and that’s never been more important, especially as we look toward the next 60 years. As we plan new programs and activities to meet students’ needs; as we renovate, maintain, or add to our infrastructure; and as we set fees for tuition and housing to keep a college education affordable and attainable,

we will continue to maintain a close link between the strategic plan and budget process to ensure we stay on track and budget for both the capital and operating budgets of the college.

Increase student retention and success

Ultimately, the college must help all of the students who begin their educational journeys at Southwestern Michigan College complete their programs successfully. It is our job to identify gaps in instruction, advising, and other campus services that might impede a student’s progress and adjust programs as needed...including offering more targeted services for at-risk students. To this end, we work closely with students and have several initiatives in place to cover each student’s progress at the college year-round from before they set foot on campus until the day they graduate.

Maximize operational efficiency

In order to meet the needs of our students, faculty and staff, and our community, and ensure quality instruction and physical safety, we must also be good stewards of our infrastructure—brick-and-mortar facilities, information technology devices and capabilities, communication delivery systems (telephones, wi-fi, and instructional and informational websites), and more. For this reason, we will continue to monitor and maximize our IT and physical offerings, such as computers dedicated for instructional and administrative functions, telephones for offices and residence halls, as well as the tools and equipment necessary to keep the structures and grounds in top working order for safe and effective use.

Value human capital

Organizations show employees they are valued by offering competitive salaries, equity increases, and development opportunities. We continually assess our policies to support the dedicated individuals serving our college and students. Additionally, we aim to foster a culture of trust, transparency, collegiality, and professionalism that goes beyond compensation, creating a collaborative community focused on common goals. This positive culture will benefit both current and prospective employees, positioning the college as a safe and welcoming workplace.

For more information visit swmich.edu/strategicplan.



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As a Michigan public community college, Southwestern Michigan College operates under the supervision of a locally elected board of trustees. The board members serve six-year terms and represent a broad range of backgrounds and geographic locations within the college's service area. Members of the board serve their constituents without compensation.



Thomas F. Jerdon
Chairman



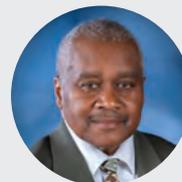
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