

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**UW-Stout Alumni Awards to recognize outstanding leaders during homecoming weekend special event Oct. 25**

*Recipients celebrated will be credit union CEO, international bridalwear designer, luminary artist, graphics and plastics philanthropists*

[2024 Alumni Award recipients](https://www.uwstout.edu/alumni-awards)

Photos attached

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 18, 2024

Menomonie, Wis. – Four outstanding University of Wisconsin-Stout alumni and an alum-owned and operated business are recipients of the [2024 Alumni Awards](https://www.uwstout.edu/alumni-awards).

They will be recognized during [homecoming weekend](https://www.uwstout.edu/uw-stout-homecoming) at the Alumni Association’s celebration on Friday, Oct. 25, in the Memorial Student Center ballrooms. The evening will begin with a social hour at 5 p.m., followed by the awards program at 6 p.m. and additional social time, concluding at 8 p.m.

[Tickets are available for purchase](https://www.uwstout.edu/uw-stout-alumni-awards-celebration).

The recipients shared their professional accomplishments as leaders in their industries and their significant impact on the lives of UW-Stout students, alumni, the university and their communities:

* [Distinguished Alumni Award: Lora Benrud (’87)](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/news-center/distinguished-alumni-award-lora-benrud-87), *WEST*consin Credit Union chief executive officer, retired
* [Trailblazer Alumni Award: Mara Dietrich (’16)](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/news-center/trailblazer-alumni-award-mara-dietrich-16), founder of Mara Marie Bridal
* [Luminary Alumni Award: Wade Lambrigtsen (’00)](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/news-center/luminary-alumni-award-wade-lambrigtsen-00), owner and proprietor of Vintage Sign Shop
* [Chancellor’s Alumni Award: Bill Flesch (’81)](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/news-center/chancellors-alumni-award-bill-flesch-81), Gordon Flesch Company Inc. chief development officer and treasurer
* [University Partnership Alumni Award: EVCO Plastics](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/news-center/university-partnership-alumni-award-evco-plastics), under the leadership of CEO and Chairman Dale Evans (’73)

**Distinguished Alumni Award: Lora Benrud (’87)**

Recently retired *WEST*consin Credit Union Chief Executive Officer **Lora *Helixon* Benrud** represents the values of UW-Stout in her strength of character, philanthropy, willingness to serve and commitment to the university and *WEST*consin’s communities.

Benrud began at *WEST*consin in 1984, when the organization had 54 employees, six offices and $54 million in assets.

Recognized by Forbes as the No. 1 credit union in Wisconsin in 2024 and listed by Forbes as one of 300 of America’s Best Small Employers in 2023, *WEST*consin now has about 430 employees at 15 offices and nearly $2 billion in assets.

“Both of these studies are a testament to *WEST*consin’s focus on creating an engaging and caring workplace that attracts, hires and retains respectful, kind and accountable employees who focus on helping our members and communities achieve financial wellness,” said Benrud, who is most proud of being part of the credit union industry that focuses on people helping people.

An M.S. management technology alum, Benrud believes her UW-Stout education helped her make an impact in her career and in the community.

“Growing up in Menomonie, I have always seen the positive impact Stout has had on our community,” said Benrud, who brought her belief in philanthropy and service to her position as CEO, where she encouraged employees to be involved in charitable activities that improve the communities they serve.

Benrud has served on several local boards, including the UW-Stout Foundation, Greater Menomonie Area Chamber of Commerce and Community Foundation of Dunn County.

**Trailblazer Alumni Award: Mara Dietrich (’16)**

Apparel design and development alum **Mara Dietrich’s** creativity, talent and vision set her apart in the fashion industry.

Upon graduation, she founded [Mara Marie Bridal](https://www.maramariebridal.com/blog/london-flagship-grand-opening/) in her Minneapolis studio apartment. Her brand has since grown, and she celebrated her flagship boutique’s grand opening in the heart of London in February 2024, servicing brides from all over the world.

With a focus on bespoke design, Dietrich’s custom-made gowns and accessories showcase her exceptional technical skill and carefully considered details, providing each bride with a unique luxury experience.

Dietrich, originally from River Falls, is receiving international accolades for her work, including being named one of WedVibes’ Top 13 Bridal Designers in the United Kingdom. She plans to showcase her gowns in five boutiques across Europe by 2025, and within five years acquire a second retail flagship in Minneapolis.

“Stout made a large impact on my career and my place in my career field. Gaining my education from Stout inspired me to dream big, think outside the box and gave me the skills needed to make my mark in the fashion industry. These experiences inspired me to dream big and encouraged me to pursue my own company.

“I hope that my story can inspire current and future students that with determination, a dream and hard work Stout students have the skills to showcase their work on a global scale,” Dietrich said.

**Luminary Alumni Award: Wade Lambrigtsen (’00)**

For 23 years, **Wade Lambrigtsen’s** hand-painted signs, murals and marquees have raised the Chippewa Valley’s expectations of high-quality public art.

Lambrigtsen, a graphic design alum and owner and proprietor of [Vintage Sign Shop](https://www.vintagesignshop.com/) in Menomonie, has painted murals across the country and signs for businesses and organizations across the region, including at UW-Stout’s Memorial Student Center, Leinenkugel’s, the Silver Dollar Saloon and the Mabel Tainter Center for the Arts.

He offers paid apprenticeships, serving as a role model and mentor for students, guiding them through the mural installation process. He has collaborated with students on several murals in Menomonie, including at Town and Country Antiques, C&J’s Candy Store and Ted’s Pizza.

As a guest lecturer in the School of Art and Design, he elevates the visibility of students’ public art through student-designed murals in the Graffiti and Street Art course, which has installed three murals on campus since 2022.

“Art will bring people in, pique their curiosity, increase business and teach our town’s history. Not to mention giving students something to be proud of and bring their family and friends here to show what they helped create and understand that they can make a good living creating murals and make a positive impact in our world,” said Lambrigtsen, who grew up in Northfield, Wis.

Lambrigtsen’s contribution to public art will continue in summer 2026, when he will act as project leader and events coordinator for the Menomonie Open [Walldogs Festival](https://thewalldogs.org/), when more than 200 international artists will complete 15 large-scale murals representing the community’s history, culture, values and stories.

**Chancellor’s Alumni Award: Bill Flesch (’81)**

**Bill Flesch**, chief development officer and treasurer for [Gordon Flesch Company Inc.](https://www.gflesch.com/) based in Madison, believes UW-Stout puts students on a straight road to success.

“As a polytechnic, there’s something to be said about teaching with real-life experiences,” said Flesch, a business administration alum.

His impact on students is tangible, as he’s supported the next generation of graphic artists and print professionals to bring their work to life with the finest print production available today.

Flesch’s in-kind gift in May 2022, valued at $100,000, supported the expansion of the university’s Digital Process Lab with new state-of-the-art printing equipment. The 3,000-square-foot lab, in the Applied Arts Building, is used by more than 1,000  [School of Art and Design](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.uwstout.edu%2Facademics%2Fcolleges-schools%2Fschool-art-design&data=04%7C01%7Cpolingj%40uwstout.edu%7C72920ca9ef8b4279447e08d913b9fa29%7Cb71a81a32f9543819b89c62343a66052%7C0%7C0%7C637562511754259235%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=eogQm17%2BO2fQXFcV9TkVCqrgwOs1O5Hdo%2BtU9hPTQmw%3D&reserved=0) and other related degree students each year.

Flesch also served as a member of the Pathways Forward Campaign steering committee and contributes to the Chancellor’s Fund for Teaching Excellence and Student Success.

“I have always believed in giving leadership the flexibility to enhance and apply resources where they feel it could have the most impact,” Flesch said.

Flesch believes UW-Stout impacted his career.

“At the time, I had no idea what a polytechnic education was and how well it would suit me,” Flesch said. “With the opportunity to apply what I was being taught, I flourished. It brought meaning to why what I had learned was significant. I will always be thankful to UW-Stout and my professors for the commitment to my future.”

**University Partnership Alumni Award: EVCO Plastics**

EVCO Plastics, under the leadership of CEO and Chairman **Dale Evans**, has a deep understanding of the high-quality education UW-Stout provides, employing about 40 alumni and offering internship opportunities, ensuring students gain hands-on experiences in the plastics industry.

“EVCO hires UW-Stout students and graduates alike because they arrive with real world sensibilities and offer practical solutions to problems. They’re eager to learn and collaborate, continuing to push for what’s next in plastics,” Evans said.

The Wisconsin-based international company has supported UW-Stout’s [plastics engineering](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bs-plastics-engineering) program for nearly 15 years. In 2022, EVCO contributed $100,000 to the program to support students’ sustainability research and project materials, the first donation that specifically focuses on plastics recycling.

“We choose to support Stout students in various ways because we value what they bring not only to our company but to our industry as well,” said Evans, an industrial technology alum.

Evans joined EVCO after graduation 51 years ago, when it was still a small company. He started the engineering and product design departments from the ground up and designed and oversaw construction of new plants. Headquartered in DeForest, it has more than 2,000 employees at 12 facilities throughout two states, China and Mexico.

“My goal looking ahead is to transfer management to the next generation and become a women-owned business, as both of my daughters are in senior leadership roles in the company,” said Evans, of Windsor.

*UW-Stout is*[*Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University*](https://www.uwstout.edu/about-us/our-polytechnic-advantage)*, with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the*[*FOCUS2030*](https://www.uwstout.edu/focus-2030-plan-initiatives)*strategic plan.*

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**Photos**

*WEST*consin Credit Union chief executive officer Lora Benrud, Distinguished Alumni Award recipient

Mara Dietrich, founder of Mara Marie Bridal, Trailblazer Alumni Award recipient

Vintage Sign Shop owner Wade Lambrigtsen, Luminary Alumni Award recipient

Gordon Flesch Company Inc. chief development officer and treasurer Bill Flesch, Chancellor’s Alumni Award recipient

The University Partnership Alumni Award recipient is EVCO Plastics, under the leadership of CEO and Chairman Dale Evans, pictured with his daughters Kate Bashir and Anna Bartz.