



Alpena Community College

Spring 2021

The Lumberjack Link

A Publication for Alumni and Friends of Alpena Community College

Finding Home: Musa's Journey

The story of how an ACC electrical systems technology student plans to bring power to a country largely in the dark starts on another continent.

Born in 1997 at the end of the first Liberian civil war, ACC junior Musa Kabbah took his first breath in the war-torn world of a refugee camp in Guinea, just over the border from his native Republic of Liberia. The Kabbahs had fled their home country to escape the raging war that was fought largely along ethnic lines. Because Musa's mother is Catholic and a member of the Lorma tribe, while his father is Muslim and a member of the Mandingo tribe, his family was at heightened risk in the war. They could not safely return home, so life in a refugee camp, where he got used to hearing gunshots and rockets coming from across the border, became Musa's "normal". The Kabbahs would stay there for the next decade, making shelters out of savannah grasses and palm fronds and always being ready to flee when the rebels crossed the border and raided the refugee camp.

"It was...some of it is indescribable," Musa said. "Sometimes I try to suppress my memories (of the past). I don't want to think about that anymore. I have a really good memory and I can still see (that time) really clearly, but I try not to think about it."

Life as Musa knew it was difficult, but difficult was normal to him. When his family was able to finally move back home to Liberia, Musa never really fit in. His mixed ethnicity made making friends almost impossible, as he was viewed with suspicion by both his ancestral tribes.

"Because of my parents' background, I didn't have lots of friends and I thought it was normal to not be accepted because of differences. That's all I knew," he said of that time in his life. "I thought it was normal to be kicked around and kicked out."

Musa learned to keep to himself and devoted his time to his studies, which paid off. In high school, Musa was recruited to apply to become a Kennedy-Lugar Youth

Exchange & Study (YES) Abroad scholar. A U.S. State Department program, YES facilitates foreign students largely from Muslim countries to come to America and, according

to the State Department website, participate "...to advance the U.S. foreign policy goals of promoting civil society, youth leadership development, and lasting ties between Americans and the people of participating countries."

Out of the thousands of students who applied in Liberia, Musa made his family and city proud by earning the distinction of being one of just eight students in the country to be chosen to participate in the exchange program.

Musa made his way to America, where he was to live with host father Gordon Snow in Alpena. Musa was prepared for the culture here to be vastly different from what he experienced in Liberia. What he didn't expect, however, was how

his differences would be accepted in Northern Michigan.

"When I came to the United States, it was so different—in terms of race, in terms of everything—but I felt more at home than when actually I was at home sometimes," Musa said. "When I came to Alpena, I had lots of friends from high school...it changed my entire personality. Everything I had in mind had changed. All the kids growing up—we were all black, we were all the same race and everything, but still, they kicked me out. But here, everyone is a different race—different everything—but these guys from school were friends to me and accepted me...I loved living here."

Musa gained a lot from his time in Northeast Michigan attending Alpena High School, not the least of which were friends and confidence. The young man who left Liberia as an introvert who kept to himself returned a confident extrovert who had a host of friends in America.

Upon his return home, Musa took the confidence he gained in Alpena and enrolled at a university in Monrovia to study electrical engineering, but longed for the educational opportunities he knew were in America. Musa wanted to come back to Michigan and go to college, but he discovered the cost of getting a degree at a traditional four-year



Musa Kabbah is a junior at ACC.

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Musa's Journey (*continued*)

institution was far beyond what he and his family could afford. Eventually, Musa learned that Alpena Community College had developed a bachelor's degree program in electrical systems technology, which Musa says combines electrical engineering with computer technology—two of his passions. The cost of the program was far less than what a traditional four-year university would charge to get the degree Musa would need to reach his life's goal: to bring affordable, reliable electricity to all parts of Liberia, where the power grid is centralized in Monrovia and doesn't reach the whole country. After meeting with ACC Director of Admissions Mike Kollien, Musa knew where he needed to be.

Like his previous stay in Alpena, it turned out to be just what he needed. When Musa began to take classes at ACC, he realized he had truly found the perfect program for himself and the goals he has for his degree.

"It's a mixture of computers and electrical engineering," Musa explained. "It's not 100% either of those, but I have to take a lot of computer programming and networking classes and then I'm taking power generation and distribution classes. So, I feel like these things (the classes that comprise this degree) are something I've got that I didn't know I needed. (This degree) is just perfect. It gives me the full spectrum of everything that I want to do."

And what Musa wants to do is nothing short of lighting up Liberia, a country in which the U.S. Agency on International Development estimates only about 12% of the population has access to electricity. That 12% did not include Musa's family, until recently, when a gift from his college host family, the Shultzes, allowed his family in Liberia to purchase solar power and refrigeration units.



Musa receives his Academic All-American award.



Musa competes in cross-country for ACC.

Musa wants other families in Liberia to have access to affordable, reliable energy, too. Deeply invested in the development of his country, he wants to be a part of the solution to Liberia's energy inequality problem, using his degree in electrical systems technology from ACC to help accomplish that goal. Musa believes that hydroelectric power plants could be the answer to bringing power to Liberia on a large scale. On a micro level, however, he would like others to benefit from solar energy like his family has. He knows that change won't happen overnight, though, which is why Musa would like to stay in America after graduation and gain knowledge and experience by working in the power industry until he has the expertise needed to effect real change in his home country.

Musa's pursuit of the knowledge he needs to realize his dream of building the massive infrastructure needed for affordable, accessible power in his home country of Liberia brought him back to Alpena. Whether he can now gain the experience he needs to realize his dream by working in his adopted hometown in America remains to be seen. But if his career takes him away from Northeast Michigan, however, one thing is for certain: he will always have a home in Alpena and Alpena will always have a home in his heart.



There is much more to Musa's incredible story that couldn't be covered in a brief newsletter article. To discover the details of Musa's journey, visit the ACC Alumni page on ACC's website: <https://discover.alpenacc.edu/foundation/alumni.php>. You'll learn:

- How the Ebola epidemic played a part in Musa coming to Alpena.
- About the nonprofit organization Musa founded following his return to Liberia after completing high school in Alpena.
- How that nonprofit brought Musa back to the United States.
- How an Alpena couple played an integral part in helping Musa's family get electricity.
- How access to electricity at Musa's family home led to the employment of dozens of people.

You'll also find past issues of the Lumberjack Link print newsletter on the Alumni page of ACC's website, as well as the Campus Crosscut, the monthly e-newsletter from the ACC Office of Alumni Relations.



Host mother Denelle Shultz & Musa celebrate Independence Day.



*ACC President
Dr. Don MacMaster*

President's Message: Number One in the Nation

The Alpena Community College cross country team earned National Junior College Athletic Association Academic All-American honors for the sixth consecutive year this year. Additionally, with a cumulative team GPA of 3.85, the Lumberjacks placed first in the nation out of all community colleges with cross country teams. There are approximately 200 cross country teams at community colleges across the U.S.

Six ACC student athletes received individual Academic All-American honors: Connor Bagnell, Rony Demirkol, Musa Kabbah, Yuki Nishibashi, Teddy Peters, and Duncan Ross. In order to receive Academic All-American honors, a team must attain a cumulative GPA of 3.2 and individuals must maintain a 3.4 GPA.



The ACC Men's Cross Country Team receives their Academic All-American awards.

In a conversation I had with ACC Cross Country Coach Mark Jacobs, he spoke with pride about the athletes he coaches.

“Cross Country is not an easy sport and to balance high achievements on the course and in the classroom speaks volumes of these young men. They do things the right way all of the time. Every single one of these young men has a very bright future ahead of them!”

Coach Jacobs and his team of remarkable scholar-athletes reached an historic goal this season—academic all-Americans for a sixth straight season and first in the nation in grade point average. They focused on this most important goal on day one, put their hearts into it, and made it happen. The community should be immensely proud of this great group of young men. Coach Jacobs proved once again that he is one of the finest coaches in America, and a true credit to ACC. Thanks to all these fine athletes for doing the right thing the right way. Congratulations from all of us at ACC!

Get Tee'd Off and Scramble for Scholarships

“Success in this game depends less on strength of body than strength of mind and character.” -Arnold Palmer

Skilled in strengthening minds and character, Alpena Community College now hopes to strengthen your golf game by offering some inspiration to make par. The Robert M. Granum Scramble for Scholarships golf outing, which raises vital funding for ACC students, will be held August 21 at River's Edge Golf Club in Alpena. Prizes will be awarded to the top-performing teams, but the real winners will be ACC students.

Well over \$420,000 has been raised by generous golfers and sponsors the past 25 years in honor of Robert Granum, who was an ACC Foundation trustee and community leader who worked hard to promote education and cultural enrichment in our community. Because almost 90% of ACC students receive some sort of financial aid to help pay for school, scholarship funding is always needed—even in the best of times. But these are not the best of times, as we all know. How can you help?



ACC students volunteered at the 2020 Scramble.

This year's 26th edition of the ACC Scramble for Scholarships will be a special event we hope you'll participate in as a golfer. However, even those who don't golf can be a part of the scramble and show their support by donating a gift in any amount to our general scholarship fund by August 1, 2021. To express our appreciation, the ACC Foundation will include your name on a banner displayed at the event. Donating is easy! Simply send in the tear-off form with payment to the ACC Foundation at 665 Johnson Street in Alpena or securely give online at alpenacc.edu.

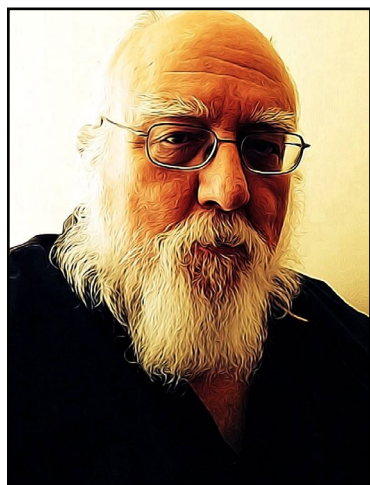
Last year's scramble was so popular with golfers that we had to turn teams away. Be sure to secure your spot as soon as possible for the event by picking up a registration form at River's Edge Golf Course, the ACC Foundation office inside Better Technical Center at ACC, or visiting the ACC website.

If you're interested in sponsorship opportunities, contact ACC Foundation Executive Director Brenda Herman at hermanb@alpenacc.edu or 989-358-7297.

2021 ACC Distinguished Graduates:

Keith S. Titus & Christin Kauffman Bennett

Each year, the Alpena Community College Foundation selects an outstanding alumnus to honor as an ACC Distinguished Graduate. While at two different stages of life and decades between their respective graduation from ACC, both honorees share a commitment to excellence in their chosen career paths and in their service to others. The ACC Foundation presents Keith S. Titus and Christin Kauffman Bennett with the 2021 ACC Distinguished Graduate Award. This prestigious award honors graduates of ACC who have contributed to society through building successful careers. The productive, meaningful lives honorees have led demonstrates how an ACC education provides the foundation for a lifetime of achievement.



*Distinguished Graduate
Keith S. Titus ('59)*

Keith S. Titus: ACC Titan

Born in Cheboygan, Keith Titus' family soon moved to Alpena, where he spent the majority of his life. In 1959, Keith graduated from Alpena Community College with an Associate in Arts degree before moving on to Central Michigan University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in speech arts in 1962 and a Master of Arts in communications arts in 1963.

Keith returned to Alpena in 1966 and spent the next 30 years as an instructor of both theater and communication at Alpena Community College, where he served as the department head of fine arts and foreign languages for four years. Keith was elected ACC faculty council president in the 1960s, sat on the curriculum committee at ACC in the 1970s, and served on the regional council for the Michigan Education Association in the 1990s.

Saying that Keith was active in the community during his years teaching at ACC is an understatement. He was one of the founders of Thunder Bay Theatre, serving in both creative and leadership roles there for over 20 years. Keith was also a three-term Alpena County Commissioner from 1974 through 1980, chairman of the Alpena County Democratic Party, and active in both Trinity Episcopal Church and First Congregational Church. He is the author of 12 theatrical productions, three books, and several short stories.

Upon retirement at ACC, Keith earned a Master's of Divinity degree at Western Theological Seminary in 1997 and, along with his wife Virginia, became an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. The Reverends Titus shepherded numerous churches in Michigan over more than twenty years while also serving as the "clergy couple" of the Northeast Michigan Marriage Encounter program. In 1998, Keith founded the nonprofit organization Re-Member, which works to improve the quality of life for the Lakota people living on the Pine Ridge Reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota through building and maintaining relationships, utilizing shared resources, and recruiting and deploying volunteers. Re-Member welcomes people from all over the country to Pine Ridge to immerse themselves in Lakota culture by taking week-long "working vacations" on the reservation, where they

learn about the Lakota and labor alongside them doing such things as building bunkbeds for children, repairing homes, securing and delivering firewood, and building outhouses. Keith served at the executive director of Re-Member for eight years and is still its ambassador-at-large.

Keith and Virginia, who was also a graduate of Alpena Community College, parented eight children together and retired to Alpena several years ago. Sadly, Virginia recently passed away after a courageous battle with cancer.

Christin Kauffman Bennett: Proven Excellence

After graduating from ACC in 1986 with an associate degree in general science, Christin Bennett moved on to Ferris State University and earned an associate degree in plastics technology and a bachelor's degree in business in 1989.

Christin then began a long career at the Amway Corporation, starting as a quality engineer in 1990. Thirty years later, she is now the principal research scientist for compliance for multiple Amway manufacturing facilities, a job that has taken her all around the United States, as well as India and Europe.



*Distinguished Graduate
Christin Kauffman Bennett ('86)*

The foundation Christin laid for her career started with her education at ACC, which has served her well.

"I believe the opportunities I experienced at ACC would not have been the same had I gone to a bigger school right away," Christin shared. "Starting out at ACC was a perfect fit for me and played a huge role in my success. The smaller class size made learning easier as I did not have to make appointments to ask questions, it could all take place in class. I had some amazing instructors that helped me along the way and were available to answer questions and offer advice. I often felt I received a better education and was more prepared for higher level classes, as I frequently helped others. The two years I spent there also allowed me to mature a bit more before moving away and, of course financially, it was a benefit to me as well."

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Distinguished Graduates (continued)

While Christin may have majored in science at ACC, it's not the chemistry or physics classes she took at the college that have most stayed with her all these years. No, it's the gym elective she had to take: golf.

"I played weekly with two ACC instructors as part of the class," Christin said, referring to Jim Miesen and Elbridge Dunckel. "I got to hear all their stories and gained lots of knowledge during those weeks. They were definitely interested in what I wanted to do, and always challenged me to do more. Those weekly updates and encouragement were invaluable. Some of that advice I remind myself of even now, and share with the numerous individuals I have mentored over the years, including my own children."

Three of the most profound pieces of advice Christin got from her golfing buddies at ACC were:

- Never sell yourself short. There are plenty of others to do that for you.
- If you think you can do the job, go after it even if you have to embellish a little to get there.
- Take every opportunity offered. At the very least, you will learn what you don't want to do.

"When I am in doubt, I remind myself of these words and move forward; it has worked well for me and I know these words have encouraged a few of my interns as well," Christin said.

Outside of work, Christin remains busy donating her time and talents to her community. A volunteer for the United Way Day of Caring, Bethany Christian Services, the Children's Museum of Grand Rapids, River Bank Run, and Special Olympics, Christin has also helped out at her children's elementary school and been a board member of the American Youth Soccer Organization.

Christin and her husband Dan, who is also an Alpena native she started dating at ACC, live in Jenison and have three grown children: Sydney, a pediatric occupational therapist; Kelsey, a tax and billing specialist; and Ryan, a controls engineer.

In being named the 2021 Alpena Community College Distinguished Graduate, Keith and Christin join a prestigious fraternity of 26 other alumni upon whom the college has bestowed its highest honor.



Pour & Paddle



ACC concrete tech instructors beat their students in this year's concrete boat race. Send pictures of past concrete boat races to alumni@alpenacc.edu.

Will you please help support ACC students by making a gift today?

Mail to:

Alpena Community College Foundation
665 Johnson Street, Alpena, Michigan 49707

For more information, contact:

Brenda Herman
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Dr. Elbridge Dunckel (1931-2021)

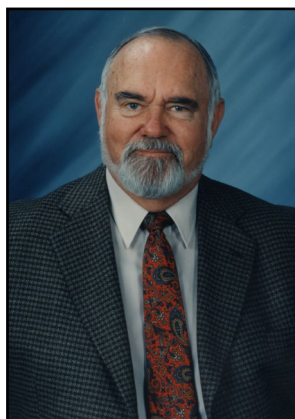
The Alpena Community College family is mourning the loss of retired instructor Dr. Elbridge Dunckel, who taught generations of students at ACC over a career that spanned nearly three decades.

Dr. Dunckel, a veterinarian, started a successful fish hatchery program at ACC in the late 1960s that was responsible for populating the area with Chinook salmon, as well as brown and rainbow trout. He was a leader not only on ACC's campus, but also in statewide higher education. A May 1967 article in the Timber-Cruiser, ACC's student newspaper at the time, noted that Dr. Dunckel, then an instructor of biological science and anatomy, became the first president in the history of the Michigan Association of Higher Education who hailed from a community college.

By retired ACC instructor Roger Phillips' estimation, Elbridge Dunckel's presence in ACC's faculty was unforgettable. "Dunck" warmed any room with his convivial banter. Faculty and staff knew him as always quick-witted, with a wry, yet jovial, humor and often given to practical jokes.

"One never knew what might come out of his mouth. He loved being with people, and people returned the favor."

Dave Dierking, another ACC instructor of that era, notes, "Dunckel was a big deal in Alpena when I came here in 1968, and as an instructor, he was a tough act to follow."



Dr. Elbridge Dunckel

Dr. Dunckel graduated from Michigan State University in 1956 with a B.S. degree and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 1958. He began work as a full-time instructor at ACC in 1964 and retired in May of 1992. He was married to Marion Dunckel and had three children, including son Matthew Dunckel, who himself is a longtime instructor at ACC.

Dr. Don Newport, former ACC president, reflects, "Dunck was an independent spirit. He will be missed."

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