

ALPENA COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION

LUMBERJACK LINK

SUMMER 2026

ALL-AMERICAN AND NATIONAL
CHAMPION EXCELLENCE AT ACC



Lumberjacks Climb Higher

Recognizing the achievements of ACC students and supporters who rise above, lead with purpose, and inspire Lumberjack pride.

STUDENT NEED

Changing Lives

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CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

Valerie Binge & Charlie Best

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DONOR IMPACT

Stories of Generosity
and Gratitude

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ALPENA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION

*Empowering students,
strengthening our
community*



New Fund Addresses Overlooked Needs



When a student I'll call Oliver finally came to me for help affording the textbooks he needed for class, it was already over a month into the fall 2025 semester. A student athlete in ACC's business program, **Oliver didn't have the money to purchase the books he needed for his classes**, a fact reflected in his poor grades on assignments.

After listening to Oliver's story, we went to the College bookstore to see how much it would cost to get him the required books for his classes. The total was \$945.62 - and that was just for one semester!

Unfortunately, Oliver wasn't unique. **During the 2025/2026 academic year, the ACC Foundation provided well over \$5,000 to cover the cost of textbooks** for students who faced having to drop out of school because they couldn't afford the books they needed to learn.

When people think about the cost of college, tuition usually comes to mind first. But for many students, **the real barriers to success are the required materials that come after enrollment**: a nursing student's scrubs and stethoscope, a utility technology student's tools, or the textbooks needed to succeed in class.

Now, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, ACC students facing financial hardship will have help overcoming those barriers through the new **Building Blocks of Learning Fund**.

Established through the Alpena Community College Foundation, **the fund provides support for required course materials not covered by tuition**. Assistance may include textbooks, tools, uniforms, scrubs, stethoscopes, art supplies, and other essential items students need to fully participate in their programs.

The fund was created with a simple but powerful belief: students should not have to choose between continuing their education and affording the required materials necessary to succeed. **The Building Blocks of Learning Fund ensures students have access to the resources they need to build their future - one course, one semester, and one book at a time.**

Your gift will help give students walking into class with nothing but the desire to learn the basic tools they need to succeed. **Can they count on your help?**

With gratitude,

Mary Eagan
Executive Director

ACC FOUNDATION INVESTS IN BASIC STUDENT NEEDS

Providing support where students need it most

\$23,972

TOTAL PROVIDED TO ACC STUDENTS



TEXTBOOKS

\$6,105



HOUSING ASSISTANCE

\$6,936



FOOD PANTRY

\$5,348



TRANSPORTATION
& VEHICLE SUPPORT

\$2,943



To donate to the Building Blocks of Learning Fund, scan the QR code or send a check to the ACC Foundation, 665 Johnson Street, Alpena, MI 49707.



Not Our First Rodeo: ACC Earns National Recognition

When a team of Alpena Community College Utility Technology students traveled to South Dakota this spring for the College Lineman Rodeo, they carried more than climbing gear, tools, and safety equipment.

They carried months of preparation, countless hours of practice, and the support of donors who helped make the trip possible.

The national competition brings together some of the top lineworker programs in the country, challenging students to perform the same skills they will rely on throughout their careers. For ACC students, it was an opportunity to measure themselves against the best, and they confidently rose to the challenge.

ACC Team 1—Carson Green, Charlie Best, J.J. Schulz, Silas McCarty, and Isaac Dailey—captured first place in the obstacle course team event and third place in the crossarm changeout team event. ACC Team 2—Ryan Cook, Luke Delong, Hunter Kuusinen, Landen Wray, and Tristan Wood—earned first place in the crossarm changeout team event.

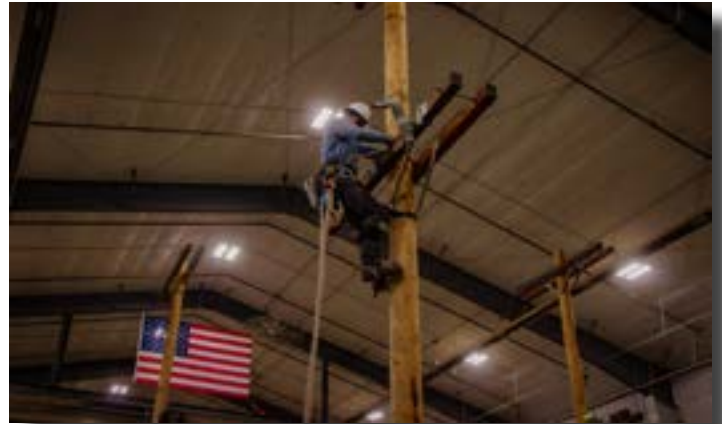
“This group was especially determined to show their skills off at the rodeo,” said instructor Roy Smith. **“Numerous hours were spent on their own time practicing and finding ways to be faster and more efficient.”**

While the competition tested technical ability, what impressed Smith most was the character of the students representing ACC.

“The moment that stood out to me most was how our students had each other’s backs,” he said. **“Whether it was cheering on teammates or supporting students from our other team, their sportsmanship was noticed by spectators and other teams as well.”**

Experiences like the Collegiate Lineman Rodeo are possible because of donor support for ACC’s Utility Technology program. Those gifts help provide opportunities that extend learning beyond the classroom, allowing students to gain confidence, build professional skills, and represent ACC on a national stage.

For the students who made the trip, the rodeo was more than a competition. It was a chance to see firsthand that the skills they are developing at ACC can stand alongside the best programs in the country—and that they are ready for the careers ahead of them.



Congratulations to Charlie Best, Ryan Cook, Isaac Dailey, Luke Delong, Carson Green, Hunter Kuusinen, Silas McCarty, J.J. Schulz, Tristan Wood & Landen Wray.



A Scholarship Opened the Door for Valerie

For most college students, a short walk across campus is routine. For **Valerie Binge**, attending college would have meant a daily commute from Atlanta, Michigan.



Valerie Binge with Besser Company COO Candie Dombroski.

Instead, thanks to the **Early Middle College Housing Assistance Scholarship from the ACC Foundation**, she was able to live on campus, immerse herself in student life, and take full advantage of the opportunities available at Alpena Community College.

That opportunity changed everything.

“When I first moved into the CPA housing, it all felt so real and foreign to me,” Valerie recalled. **“But that first night on campus was when I realized how thankful I was for the opportunity. It allowed me to truly become part of the ACC community.”**

Living on campus gave Valerie more than a place to stay. It gave her the freedom to participate fully in college life, build friendships, attend events, and develop relationships with faculty and staff. It also allowed her to focus on her studies and grow into a campus leader.

Valerie’s achievements include:

- Perfect 4.0 GPA
- Vice president of ACC’s Phi Theta Kappa chapter
- Selection to the Phi Theta Kappa All-Michigan Academic Team
- Recognition as a member of the 2026 Coca-Cola Academic Team

She was also named the recipient of the prestigious **Anna Besser Award**, recognizing the graduating female ACC student who most contributed to a culture of excellence on campus through her academic achievement, leadership, and involvement in ACC life.

This fall, she will transfer to Saginaw Valley State University to study mathematics education, with plans to pursue a career in school leadership.

For Valerie, the Early College Housing Assistance scholarship provided more than financial assistance—it provided belonging, opportunity, and security.

Donor support doesn’t simply help students like Valerie attend college. It helps them become part of a community where they can thrive.



Valerie Binge at this spring’s Honors Breakfast.

“Having this kind of support makes students feel seen and cared for. I will forever be thankful for the opportunity ACC gave me.”

– Valerie Binge (‘26)

The Kind of Student Every College Hopes For

Charlie Best spent his time at Alpena Community College living up to his name.

Whether he was pitching for the Lumberjacks, competing at the national lineman rodeo, or helping ACC capture a national esports championship, **Charlie seemed to have a knack for bringing out the best in himself and the people around him.**

When Charlie arrived at Alpena Community College from Farmington, Michigan, he could have focused on any one of his interests. Instead, he pursued them all. **By the time he graduated, he had become a standout athlete, a skilled utility technology student, a national esports champion, and one of the most recognizable student leaders on campus.**

For his accomplishments, Charlie was honored with the **Jesse Besser Award** as the graduating male student who most positively contributed to excellence in campus life.

On the baseball field, Charlie was a **pitcher for the Lumberjacks**, helping represent ACC while balancing the rigorous demands of academics. In the classroom and lab, he immersed himself in the Utility Technology program, a field that requires technical skill, precision, and a strong work ethic.

That dedication took him all the way to South Dakota, where he represented ACC at the **College Lineman Rodeo**, competing against students from some of the nation's top utility programs. But Charlie wasn't finished.

When teammates needed him in **ACC's esports program**, he stepped into a completely different arena. The result was a moment few students ever experience: **scoring the game-winning point to win ACC's first national championship.**

What makes Charlie's story remarkable isn't that he excelled in one area - it's that he excelled in so many. ACC gave him the opportunity to explore his interests, challenge himself, and grow in unexpected ways. Charlie embraced every one of those opportunities.

Faculty and staff came to know him as the student always willing to work hard, support his teammates, and represent the college with class and pride. Whether in the classroom, on the pitcher's mound, atop a utility pole, or competing on a national esports stage, he approached every challenge with

determination and enthusiasm.

Students like Charlie remind us what makes a college community special. They bring energy to campus, elevate the people around them, and leave a lasting impression long after they graduate.



Charlie Best with Besser Company COO Candie Dombroski.



Esports National Champions - Charlie Best, Max McCarty, Isaac Zocco & Coach Aaron Guitar.

From Nurse Aid to Nursing Home Owner

When **Sally Jean Smith** walked through the doors of Jamieson Nursing Home in 1966, she wasn't thinking about awards, leadership positions, or owning a business. **She simply wanted to care for people.**



As a young nurse aide, Sally spent her days helping residents with the important tasks that bring comfort and dignity. **What she discovered was more than a job—it was a calling.**

Determined to grow in the profession she loved, Sally enrolled in Alpena Community College's Licensed Practical Nurse program as part of just its **second graduating class**. The education she received at ACC opened doors to new opportunities and launched a career that would change countless lives.

Over the years, Sally worked her way from nurse aide to charge nurse, then director of nursing. In 1982, she achieved something few people could have imagined when she first started her career: she purchased the very nursing home where she had once worked as an entry-level caregiver.

For decades, Sally led Jamieson Nursing Home with the same compassion that first drew her to nursing. Residents became family. Families became friends. In many cases, she cared for multiple generations, earning the trust of people throughout northeast Michigan.

Today, at 82 years old, Sally continues to serve as a nursing administrator while mentoring future healthcare professionals. Through nursing scholarships and nurse aide training programs, she has helped countless others begin their own careers.

This spring, **ACC honored her with the 2026 Florence Nightingale Award**, recognizing an alumna whose career reflects excellence, leadership, and compassion in nursing.

For those who know Sally, the award feels especially fitting. After all, she has spent nearly 60 years doing exactly what first brought her to Jamieson Nursing Home: caring for people when they need it most.



Nursing graduates celebrate the completion of their program during ACC's May 2026 Nursing Pinning Ceremony.

A Lifeline to a Bigger World

Growing up on a family farm in Northeast Michigan, **Dr. Donna Belusar** learned early the value of hard work. As one of seven children and a first-generation college student, she also learned that dreams sometimes have to compete with reality.



For Donna, attending a four-year university immediately after high school simply wasn't financially possible. Instead, she enrolled at Alpena Community College.

That decision changed her life. **"ACC was a lifeline for me,"** Donna said.

At ACC, she found more than an affordable education. She found instructors who believed in her and the confidence to see possibilities beyond what she had imagined for herself.

After transferring to Michigan Technological University on a full scholarship, **Donna went on to earn both an MBA and a Ph.D.** Her career would take her far beyond Northeast Michigan—from executive leadership roles at IBM and CTS Corporation to serving as CEO of a nonprofit organization supporting individuals with developmental disabilities.

Along the way, she managed billion-dollar operations, worked internationally, testified before Congress, and earned one of Indiana's highest civilian honors.

Yet when Donna reflects on her journey, she often thinks back to the place where it began.

The support and opportunity she found at ACC helped her realize that her future was not limited by starting off at a community college—in fact, it gave her the foundation to build an incredible future.

Today, Donna has returned to Northeast Michigan, restoring her family's farm and sharing a message with the next generation of students:

"There is so much out there. Students just have to be willing to go explore it."

~Dr. Donna Belusar ('80)

At ACC's Spring 2026 Commencement, **Donna was recognized as the College's 2026 Distinguished Graduate**—a fitting honor for someone whose remarkable journey proves that extraordinary futures can begin in ordinary places.



Family, friends, faculty, and graduates came together to celebrate student success during ACC's May 2026 Commencement Ceremony.

LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

Honoring Dr. Donald Newport's Bold Leadership



Some leaders leave an impression, while others leave a legacy that shapes generations.

This May, ACC proudly honored former president Dr. Donald Newport as a Fellow of the College, recognizing his extraordinary contributions to the educational, cultural, and economic life of Northeast Michigan.

For many alumni and community members, Dr. Newport's impact may already feel familiar. **Much of the ACC we know today took shape during his presidency from 1988 to 2003.**

The Oscoda campus, World Center for Concrete Technology, College Park Apartments, Madeline Briggs University Center, and the Center Building—now named the Donald L. Newport Center in his honor—were all conceived during Dr. Newport's presidency. Each structure reflects a period of bold growth and forward-thinking leadership that expanded the campus and student opportunities in our region.

Yet Dr. Newport's remarkable story extends far beyond his years at ACC.

He played semi-professional basketball in Europe, including a game before Queen Elizabeth II. He raced cars competitively for Porsche International, earned three degrees from the University of Michigan, studied at the London School of Economics, and served as a visiting professor in China. Plus, he is a proud community college graduate.

Even his career path in higher education was extraordinary. **At just 26 years old, Dr. Newport became the youngest community college president in the nation.** Over the course of his career, he led five community colleges before bringing his experience and vision to Alpena Community College.

Under his leadership, ACC embraced innovation and growth. Following the closure of Wurtsmith Air Force Base, the College expanded educational access through development of the Oscoda campus, turning a regional economic

challenge into opportunity. Technology advanced as email, voicemail, and interactive instruction arrived on campus, innovations that required foresight and a willingness to invest in the future.

Dr. Newport also strengthened student life, athletics, and community engagement. **He helped launch the Association of Lifelong Learners**, guided ACC through its first successful stand-alone millage, and helped lead the College's first capital campaign.

His service extended far beyond campus. Dr. Newport served as president of the Alpena Area Chamber of Commerce, held leadership positions within Rotary International, and became a charter member of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. **In 2003, he was named Alpena's Citizen of the Year.**

What distinguished Dr. Newport most was not simply the breadth of his accomplishments, but the vision behind them. He believed in investing in possibilities before they were obvious to everyone else, ensuring educational opportunity existed close to home.

Today, Dr. Newport's legacy lives beyond the building that bears his name. It lives in every student whose future was expanded through increased access to education, every new educational pathway created through institutional growth, and a community strengthened by a college willing and able to meet its changing needs.

Because of Dr. Donald Newport, Alpena Community College—and Northeast Michigan—are stronger for generations to come.



Grand Opening of World Center for Concrete Technology



Dr. Newport in front of Kaiser Paul (in Grayling), ca. 2015



ACC's Oscoda Campus



Dedication of the Donald Newport Center Building, ca. 2002

Quiet Generosity Inspires Public Honor

More than 60 years ago, **Richard and Jeannine Boyce** began their respective educational journeys at Alpena Community College. At the time, ACC consisted of a single building. Neither could have imagined that decades later, they would help provide a home for future students.

This spring, **ACC honored the Boyces as Fellows of the College**, recognizing lives defined by service, leadership, and generosity.

After leaving ACC, Dick built a distinguished legal career as a prosecutor, attorney, and circuit court judge. Jeannine continued her education and devoted her career to social work, helping people through some of life's most difficult challenges. Together, they spent more than three decades serving northern Michigan.

Yet one of their most meaningful contributions came after retirement.

During an ACC class reunion, Jeannine reflected on how fortunate she and Dick had been to complete their education—including law school—without the burden of student debt. Today's students, she realized, face very different obstacles.

That realization inspired the Boyces to support the ACC Foundation through an unrestricted gift, trusting the ACC Foundation to direct their generosity where it could do the most good.

Their gift helped launch the Early College Housing Assistance Scholarship, providing housing support for 13th-year Early College students who often travel long distances to attend ACC but are not yet eligible for traditional financial aid.

The impact of their gift reaches far beyond rent. Students gain time to study instead of commute, greater stability, and the knowledge that someone they have never met believes in their future.

When Jeannine learned how their gift was helping students, her response was simple: she and Dick made another gift.

That quiet generosity reflects a belief that education changes lives. Because of the Boyces, more ACC students will have the opportunity to discover just how true that is.



Thanks to generous donors like the Boyce's, students will have the opportunity to live on campus. This fall our new apartments will open to students.

From the Desk of the President

By Dr. Don MacMaster, ACC President



Contrary to biological intuition, the end of June is the end of the year at Alpena Community College. Our new fiscal year begins July 1. Looking back, we had a very good year. Here are some highlights:

- For the fifth consecutive year, our graduation rate among first-time fulltime degree and certificate-seeking students was first among Michigan's 28 public community colleges and three tribal colleges.
- We earned Opportunity College distinction from the Carnegie Institute, one of the top 9.8% of public and private colleges and universities nationwide to receive this honor and the only community college in Michigan. Carnegie devised a scoring matrix around affordability and average graduate earnings post-attendance compared to the average overall earnings in the community the college serves. Schools that scored well in both categories were named Opportunity Colleges.
- ACC was honored as one of the top 200 community colleges in the U.S. by the Aspen Institute, one of only three community colleges in Michigan to receive this recognition.
- The Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), a state post-secondary education database, rates Michigan community colleges over a six-year cycle on a combination of graduation rate and successful transfer to a four-year school. CEPI rated ACC first in the state in year 2, first in year 3, second in year 4, fifth in year 5, and fourth in year 6.
- We hosted Governor Gretchen Whitmer on a visit to campus, as well as Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist, Senator Hoyt, and Representative Cavitt.
- Our Utility Tech line workers won team and individual awards at the National College Lineman's Rodeo in Mitchell, South Dakota.
- Our Nursing department received unqualified accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing.
- Our Esports team won the national championship in Rocket League competition.
- Forty-six of ACC's 112 student-athletes earned a 3.0 grade point average or higher with 22 posting 3.5 or above.
- We hosted the state history conference in September, an event that brought more than 200 history buffs from around the state to learn more about Alpena and ACC.
- We provided a bucket truck for tree service experts to help the community dig out after the most recent devastating ice storm.
- We hosted the awards ceremony for the Marine Advanced Technical Education (MATE) International Remote Operated Vehicles (ROV) competition, an event that brought 79 teams from 18 countries to Alpena to compete in an underwater robotics competition. ACC's Aquajacks finished third in the world in the Pioneer class, the category for two-year colleges.
- We built apartments for 34 students to add to the capacity of 64 beds currently available on campus.
- We began developing down Woodward with a six-acre solar array to benefit our 4-year Electrical Systems Technology students and secured resources to build a Next Generation Climbing Range to support our UTT line worker students with steel infrastructure.
- We landed a \$3.5 million federal earmark through U.S. Representative Bergman to renovate the Natural Resources Center.
- We planted a small fruit orchard on the sloping high ground between the Madeline Briggs University Center and the back of MyMichigan Alpena.
- Our corrections officer training program delivered up to 15 hours of credit coursework to 286 corrections officers statewide.
- The ACC Foundation offered \$233,275 in scholarship support to 193 students in FY26.
- Fall semester enrollment was up 4%, the 1604 headcount the highest since fall 2017.

Many things have to connect at the right time in the right proportions to germinate good outcomes. At ACC we like to see things grow. With July right around the corner, we're working hard to make FY27 another good growing season.



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THE ACC FOUNDATION CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATIVE SUPPORT

Colleges are operating in a time of evolving student needs, rapid technological change, shifting workforce demands, and increasing expectations for flexible learning options. Alpena Community College continues to adapt in thoughtful and meaningful ways to serve students and the broader community.

The ACC Foundation plays an important role in this ongoing work, helping create opportunities for innovative support. It helps the College respond to changing needs, support new opportunities that bridge student support with institutional interests and donor wishes, and secure additional resources that advance the College's mission at critical moments as our society and economy evolve.

In many ways, the Foundation helps ACC adjust and grow, reaching students where they are and supporting high-quality 21st-century education that strengthens student success by encouraging donor support when traditional resources are not enough to do so as well as we can.

Students today often face challenges — transportation, housing, food, textbooks, and other day-to-day needs that can determine whether they remain enrolled and complete their studies. Support that addresses these barriers helps students stay focused on their education and their goals.

The same is true in the learning environment. Preparing students requires ongoing attention to instructional technology, online learning systems, software, and other tools that define modern education. Investments in both physical and virtual infrastructure ensure students learn in well-equipped environments that meet current needs.

The Foundation provides innovative giving opportunities to help support innovative learning opportunities. It brings together students, alumni, staff, donors, and community members who care to ensure that ACC is as strong, responsive, and accessible as it can be through contributions of all kinds, large and small, financial and otherwise.

I invite you to join this effort to create opportunities for innovative support. To learn how you can help, contact the ACC Foundation to explore meaningful and impactful ways to contribute.

~ Tim Kuehnlein, ACC Foundation President



discover.alpenacc.edu/foundation/index.php



foundation@alpenacc.edu