

# THE Lumberjack

A Publication for Alumni and Friends  
of Alpena Community College

# LINK

SUMMER 2024



## Shining On: Taylor's Legacy

Story on page 3.

**ALPENA**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
**FOUNDATION**

# You Made Dreams Come True

**70**

Alpena Community College celebrated its 70th commencement ceremony May 9 inside Park Arena. Donors made the defining difference for so many students this year.

**299**

This year ACC graduated 299 students, people from different backgrounds and different places who all have one thing in common: they are Lumberjacks for life.

# Shining On: Taylor's Legacy

The great songwriter Leonard Cohen said, "There is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in."

Taylor Agius' parents and brother describe her as having been sunshine. Many of her coworkers at Children's Hospital of Michigan (CHM) commented on Taylor's bright light and infectious smile. In her career as a nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU), Taylor tended to children whose lives had been cracked open by life-threatening medical conditions. Her light shined brightly for those children and their families, guiding them through unimaginable struggle.

"Taylor absolutely loved kids and from the beginning, there was never a doubt that pediatrics was her calling," her parents, Phil and Pam said. "Even before she was a nurse, it was common for Taylor to babysit on a weekend night instead of going out—her love for children was amazing."

Taylor had big plans for herself, too. She graduated from Northern Michigan University's nursing program in May of 2023 and signed a two-year contract in September of last year to work at CHM. Even in a stressful environment like the pediatric ICU, Taylor thrived, forming tight bonds with her coworkers because of the intense level of care needed on the unit. Honing her skills and gaining knowledge, the sky was the limit for Taylor.

"She had dreams of travel nursing out west, fueled by her love of the mountains, the great outdoors, exploring, and adventure," Pam and Phil said.

We will never know where her life and career would have led her. Tragically, Taylor Agius died in a car accident on April 13. To say that her family, friends, and coworkers have been grief-stricken by her loss is an understatement.

"Taylor's passing has left a huge hole in our family, as anyone could expect," Phil and Pam said.



Mitch, Phil, Taylor & Pam Agius

Perhaps it is through that hole that Taylor's light continues to shine through. At her memorial service at CHM, t-shirts were sold in her honor that said "Stay Bright", which was a reference to the light her coworkers felt she brought to the unit. The funds raised from t-shirt sales went toward a scholarship Taylor's family established at the ACC Foundation in Taylor's memory. The scholarship will assist ACC students pursuing a degree in nursing.

"A nursing career was her true calling," Taylor's parents shared. "Taylor worked hard to accomplish her BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing), dedicating many hours throughout the week and weekends studying. We were fortunate to be able to help Taylor financially through college; our hope with her scholarship is to assist someone with her same drive and desire to help others reach their full potential as a nurse--ideally a PICU nurse."

Taylor's story has inspired many to contribute to her legacy. Within days of her passing, donations to the Taylor Agius Memorial Nursing Scholarship at Alpena Community College started pouring in. Her coworkers, friends, family, and people who were touched by the story of a beautiful young woman they never met added to the scholarship fund. To date, well over \$80,000 has been contributed to ensure Taylor will continue to help others for decades to come.

"She was a friend to all and wanted to know everything she could about people she met. She was an incredible daughter and sister and helped whenever and wherever she could," Taylor's parents said. "Taylor always placed other people's interests in front of her own. In honor of her giving spirit, our hope is that something positive can grow out of our tragic loss and that her light, spirit, and love will live on in the years to come."

*Donations to the Taylor Agius Memorial Nursing Scholarship at Alpena Community College can be made through the ACC Foundation.*



# Faculty Spotlight

## The Irreplaceable Instructor: Steve Lewis Retires

ACC math and engineering instructor Jim Berles describes him as one of the most brilliant people he's ever met.

Roy Smith, ACC utility technology instructor, says, "No instructor spends more one-on-one time with their students."

Attorney and former student Emily Bruski Rysberg commented on what she called his "profound dedication to teaching", saying, "I've never had a college instructor put in the time and effort he did to help me pull off a decent grade... the dedication he taught me impacts me every day."

For someone who grew up never wanting to be a teacher, Steve Lewis ('83) turned out to be a supremely gifted educator who leaves big shoes to fill in his retirement from Alpena Community College after 32 years of teaching.

The son of two retired teachers, Steve's time at ACC began when he was a senior at Alpena High School and took calculus as a dual-enrolled student. He enjoyed ACC so much that he decided to stick around and earn an associate degree before transferring to the University of Michigan, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering.

Steve took an engineering job in Ann Arbor after graduation and was happy, but back when he was a student at ACC, he got an inkling that he might enjoy teaching someday—but only at ACC. "The first opening at ACC that I would have been qualified for came available after just six-and-a-half years of being an engineer, and my wife encouraged me to apply," Steve said.

He got the job and moved home to Northeast Michigan. In what would become a theme in Steve's life, he buckled down and got to work learning a new skill: teaching.

"Both of my parents were teachers. Both of my wife's parents were teachers. My sister and brother-in-law were both teachers. I had two aunts and an uncle that were teachers. I thought I should know what it means to be a teacher," Steve said. "I had no idea."

Steve worked hard to learn how to teach and not only became a great instructor, but a gifted educator who brought subjects alive. Students trusted him with their education. For the next 23 years, he taught engineering and math classes.

In 2014, Steve was presented with the opportunity to make a second major career change. ACC had developed a bachelor's degree program that straddled the gap between utility technology and electrical engineering. ACC's Electrical Systems Technology (EST) program focuses on building and maintaining the electrical power grid. As Steve looked at the curriculum, he noticed a lot of math classes that, combined with the electrical studies he'd had in college, he knew he was qualified to teach. When he offered to help cover some of the math classes in the program until they found an EST instructor, Steve was approached with a proposal: Would he consider going back to school to learn more about electrical systems so he could take over as the lead instructor?



Steve Lewis recounts numerous days in the classroom.

"I agreed to do that. I did some industry training for the electrical knowledge, but the majority of my training was in the form of 18 graduate credits in Power Systems Engineering from Iowa State University. I was awarded a graduate certificate for that work, and I am way prouder of that certificate than any of my degrees," Steve shared.

Steve helped pioneer a new advanced degree program at the college, and changed lives along the way.

"The difference Steve has made in my life is hard to overstate," recent EST graduate Mason Rogers ('23) expressed "He is the most dedicated teacher anyone could ever meet. I will never forget the many hours he spent working with me on my homework for both his classes and others. My success in the program is a direct reflection of his dedication to his students and their learning."

Nine years after taking a chance and changing departments and 32 years after his first day of teaching, Steve Lewis is ready for another adventure: retirement. He doesn't have anything specific planned other than to do some traveling and soak in the freedom to explore what life has to offer.

One thing is for sure: Steve's legacy at ACC will endure. His dedication to lifelong learning, his belief in the power of education, and his willingness to embrace change have left an indelible mark on the institution and the countless lives he has touched.

# Academic Spotlight

## Welding Opportunities and Manufacturing Excellence at ACC

What used to be crowded into one windowless footprint divided by a thick concrete wall, Alpena Community College's renovated welding and manufacturing technology labs have spread out into two state-of-the-art spaces across campus.

The college, along with the ACC Foundation, invited donors on April 18 to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Holcim Industrial Education & Welding Center and the Besser Company Center for Manufacturing Excellence. Each lab allows students to stretch out over 7200 square feet filled with the upgraded equipment, HVAC systems, and lighting.

The project was made possible by a grant from the United States Economic Development Administration, Besser Company, Holcim, Besser Foundation, Star Cutter, and the late Edward Grezlak.

Andrew Paad, lead instructor of the manufacturing technology program at ACC, looked around the new machine shop and said, "We're building our community. We're working with the businesses. That's what we're here for. This gives us the room and space to continue to grow."

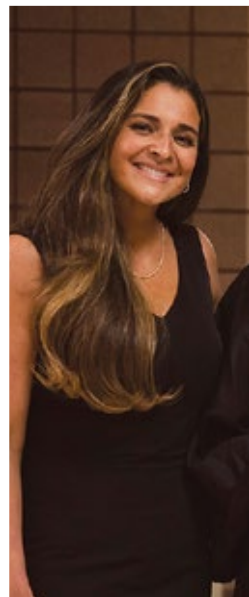
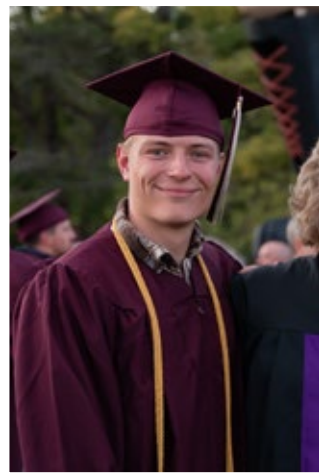
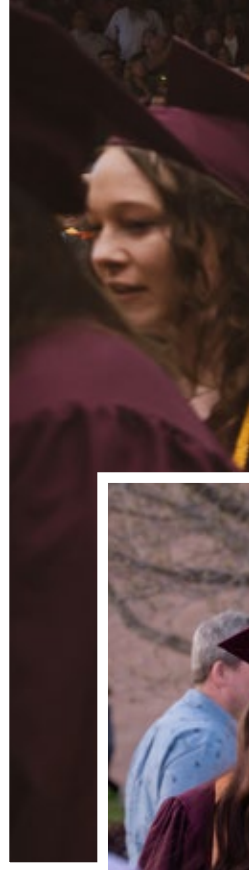
Lead welding instructor Tim Ratz's lab more than doubled in space and is now outfitted with cutting-edge equipment.

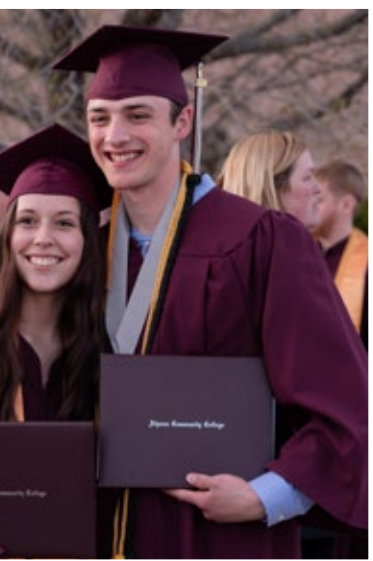
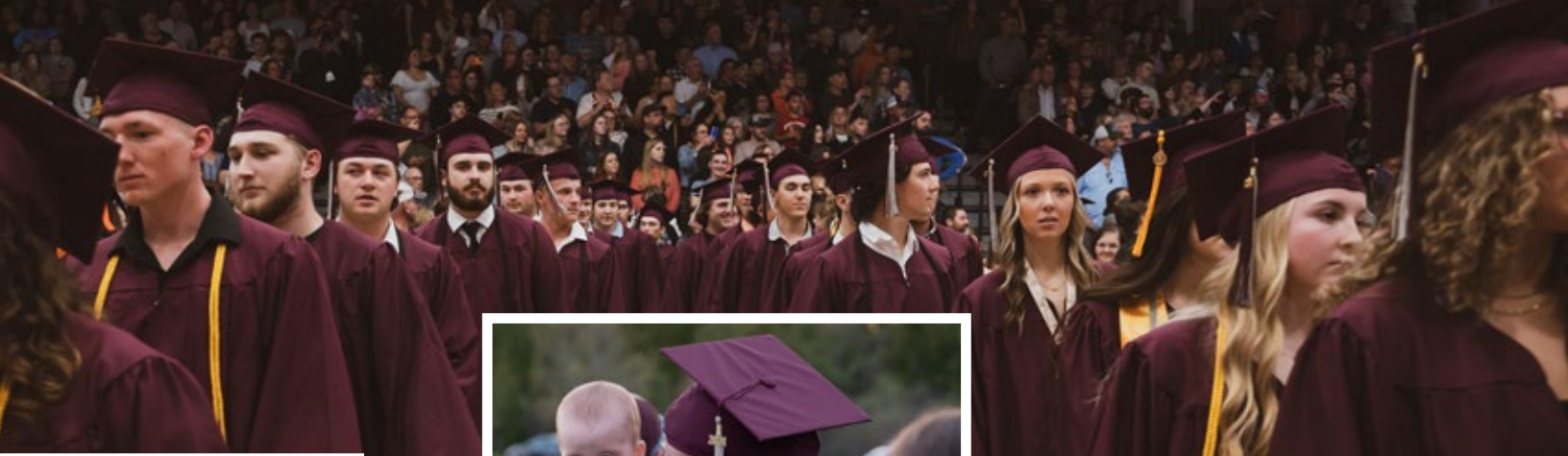
"I've been here 21 years and this is the most special day I've had in my time (at ACC)," he said. "We are able to offer training just as good as anybody. I can't believe this is the space I get to come into to work every day."



# Commencement

NOVA





# Alumni Spotlight

## 2024 ACC Distinguished Graduate: Arthur H. Knechtel

How does a first-generation college student from Alpena's North Side end up traveling the world representing a major multinational corporation?

For 2024 Alpena Community College Distinguished Graduate Arthur Knechtel ('57), it was all about education. Both his parents had been raised on farms and neither one of them had any formal education. In fact, Art's parents couldn't read or write. It was the teachers in his life that encouraged Art to pursue the education he needed to unlock opportunity.

When Art was 15, his father died of stomach cancer and his mother supported the family by making and selling aprons. A good student, Art continued his schooling and got a job at the A & P grocery store. He graduated from Alpena High School in 1955 and then went on to Alpena Community College, which became the first step in his journey to becoming a globetrotting executive.

A member of ACC's fourth graduating class, Art completed an associate of science at ACC, then transferred to University of Michigan and earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering.

Right out of college, Art went to work for Hercules Incorporated, a major chemical and munitions manufacturing company. He steadily rose in the organization and eventually became the director of purchasing, flying all around the world buying raw materials for the company.

A small-town boy, Art moved eight times in his career. When he relocated to San Francisco, he moved into an apartment building that housed 26 women and two other men. The odds in his favor, Art met his wife Mary Ann, then a flight attendant, and they married, eventually having two children and settling for good in Pennsylvania.



Art Knechtel '57 with his wife Mary Ann (left) and daughter Christine Grove (right).

*My education took me to the University of Michigan and my professional career took me around the world. I am proud to be from Alpena and having graduated from ACC.*

— Art Knechtel '57

Art's career with Hercules ended with retirement after 38 years. Free to do whatever he wanted—including nothing at all—Art devoted himself to helping others.

He began a volunteer project to provide affordable housing for senior citizens. This resulted in a 28-year labor of love helping to plan, construct, and manage *Luther House*, a four-building complex consisting of 256 apartments for seniors. Art has forever changed the lives of the 800 senior citizens that have lived there since it was constructed.

If that weren't impressive enough, Art also began delivering Meals on Wheels to homebound adults, something he has done for 26 years. In addition, Art has served for 15 years on the finance committee for an after-school program for at-risk kids called *After the Bell*. The program has served over 5,000 children since its inception 25 years ago.

While life has taken Art to Pennsylvania, he hasn't forgotten his roots in Northern Michigan or the people among whom he was raised. Several years ago, Art and his wife established the Arthur H. & Mary Ann Knechtel Scholarship through the ACC Foundation to assist students pursuing a degree in engineering or science.

"Giving back to people is important," Art said. "God has been nice to me. I've had a happy career. I had a happy childhood. I had a great college career, first at ACC and then at U of M. I wanted to give back to the community."

Art's accomplishments, both in his career and in service to others, are worthy of recognition. He serves as a remarkable example of what graduates can build on the solid educational foundation laid at ACC.



# Community Support

## Dr. Henry and Florence Stibitz Named Fellows of the College

There are people who appreciate Alpena Community College for what it brings to the community—and then there are Dr. Henry and Florence Stibitz, who have each in their own way helped to nurture the seeds of growth at ACC. For their efforts, the couple has been named Fellows of the College.

The Stibitzes moved to Alpena in 1967 after Henry was hired as Alpena General Hospital's first doctor of internal medicine. Since that time, the couple has not only become a treasured part of our community, but helped shape Northeast Michigan into what it is today through their service to the people and institutions of the region.

Henry and Florence have been involved in a wide range of community and ACC activities in the nearly 60 years they've called Northern Michigan home. Their service in projects and activities great and small have greatly enhanced the educational, cultural, and economic lives of the citizens of Northeast Michigan.

Henry coached hockey for over 20 years for both the Alpena Hockey Association and Alpena High School. His love of flowers and gardening inspired him to create the ACC Gardeners group and install greenhouses on ACC's Alpena campus. Professionally, Henry was cherished by the people he treated and worked with, and he made a positive difference in many lives.

Florence's commitment to service in our community is demonstrated through a rich history of personal involvement in numerous community groups, including the Alpena Farmers Market board, the Alpena Lions Club (as a member and 2004 president), the READ program at the Alpena County Library, ringette hockey, Leadership Alpena, the League of Women Voters, the Alpena General Hospital Tray Club, the Community Concert Association, and the Alpena Hockey Association. She was voted the Zonta Club Woman of the Year in 1998, and was nominated for the Athena Award. She currently serves on the executive committee of the Association of Lifelong Learners Board of Directors.



Henry and Florence Stibitz receive recognition for their contributions to Northeast Michigan.

Florence's many contributions to Alpena Community College begin with her long-standing service on the ACC Board of Trustees for the past 40 years. She has represented ACC on the statewide Michigan Community College Association board of directors, including acting as MCCA board president in 1999.

She was the founder and chair of the ACC Spotlight Series and helped to organize the ACC College Day for Women. Florence has volunteered for the Christmas Wish program through the ACC Volunteer Center and participated in ACC's strategic planning and budgeting committee.

Because of Henry and Florence's efforts in enriching the educational, cultural, and economic lives of the citizens of Northeast Michigan, Alpena Community College proudly conferred upon them the title of Fellows of the College during the 2024 ACC Commencement, held May 9, 2024. The honor, created in 1972 by ACC President Herbert Stoutenburg, recognizes those who make outstanding educational, cultural, or economic contributions to Northeast Michigan.

### Service above self – Henry and Florence Stibitz have made NE Michigan a better place by their involvement with the following:

ACC Board of Trustees  
ACC College Day for Women  
ACC Gardeners Group  
ACC Spotlight Series  
ACC Volunteer Center  
Alpena County Library READ Program  
Alpena Farmers Market  
Alpena Hockey Association  
Alpena Lions Club

Association of Lifelong Learners  
Hospital Tray Club  
Leadership Alpena  
League of Women Voters  
Michigan Community College  
Association Board of Directors  
Ringette Hockey  
Zonta Club Woman of the Year

# From The Director

Dear Friends,

Education can unlock a world of opportunity, but what happens when our region's students don't have the means to access education? **Can you imagine the difference in a student's life you could make by giving them the means to get a college degree?**

Evan Fairbanks will tell you about the impact Alpena Community College scholarship donors made on his life. His educational journey at ACC began after he graduated from Rogers City High School and enrolled in the welding program at the college. Evan initially sought a certificate in welding, but kept eying the associate degree in welding technology. The cost of staying in school another year was daunting, even with the help of state and federal financial aid and the small athletic scholarship he received from playing first base on the ACC Lumberjacks baseball team.

In the meantime, ACC Foundation donors established a sizable scholarship that was a perfect match for Evan. At the end of the fall 2023 semester, Evan was awarded the new scholarship, unlocking the opportunity to continue his education and pursue his associate degree.

**"The scholarship changed my whole life,"** Evan said. "It really gave me a chance to further my education and give me breathing room to come back for a second year. **It 100% changed my plans for school...it meant the world to me and gave me a chance to really enjoy college.**"

For Evan, like many students, the financial burden of pursuing higher education seems like an insurmountable obstacle. That's why **the ACC Foundation is seeking your help** to increase our general scholarship fund to give us the flexibility to assist individual learners with their individual financial needs.

**Will you join us in opening doors of opportunity for students who, like Evan, aspire to reach their full potential?** Your donation to the general scholarship fund, no matter the amount, has the power to change the trajectory of a student's life.

Together, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of students and the future of our community.

With gratitude,



Brenda Herman  
Executive Director

**ALPENA**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
**FOUNDATION**



Evan Fairbanks steps up to bat for the ACC Lumberjacks baseball team.



**"The scholarship changed my whole life."**



*“Providing financial support for educational opportunities is a gift that will inspire not only the student who receives it, but it will be a lasting testament to the college. Giving back is the ultimate gift we can make to help those that will make a difference in the world.”*

August Matuzak, '75, long-time supporter of ACC through time, service, and financial giving.



**YOU CAN  
POSITIVELY IMPACT THE LIVES  
OF ALPENA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS**

To learn how a planned gift can support the Alpena Community College cause of your choice and meet your personal financial needs,

scan the QR code with your phone's camera, email [foundation@alpenacc.edu](mailto:foundation@alpenacc.edu), or call 989-358-7359.





## From The Desk of the President



ACC President Dr. Don MacMaster (middle) receives the 2024 Shirley K. Gordon award at the Phi Theta Kappa annual conference in Orlando, Florida, on Friday, April 4, 2024. Presenting the award was Amanda Karpinski Gorman, Alumni Representative from Bergen Community College (left), and Dr. Lyn Tincher-Ladner, President and CEO of Phi Theta Kappa (right).

### Attaching Wings to Dreams

by Dr. Don MacMaster, ACC President

Many thoughts crossed my mind as I waited backstage at the Gaylord Conference Center to be announced as a 2024 recipient of the Shirley K. Gordon award at the Phi Theta Kappa annual conference in Orlando, Florida, on Friday, April 5. The Gordon award honors community college presidents who demonstrate commitment to student success with written nominations provided by current or former Phi Theta Kappa students. Not knowing who supplied the nomination or what they said made the award in some ways sweeter, a common theme among the other 15 presidents from the nation's 1,150 community colleges across the country receiving the Gordon award.

Standing backstage my thoughts landed on a visit early in my presidency from a vibrant senior citizen from Black River who had my dad as principal in 1960 at Alcona High School. I was born in 1959 so the stories she told I'd never heard before — I never had my dad as either a teacher or an administrator. She brought along a black and white photo of my father in his office at a point in his life and career when he was younger than I was at the time of her visit. Despite the decades, I recognized the look. It's framed in my

office, looking over my shoulder keeping tabs on things. Your dad could be a stern disciplinarian, she recalled, but she liked him and respected him. What she liked best, she said, is that no matter what you did that landed you in his office, he had a way of making you feel he was in your corner.

Then my name was called and out I went. It felt great to represent Alpena Community College in this setting, with approximately 6,000 Phi Theta Kappa honorees and their advisors applauding with brightness and enthusiasm. I doubt most of them knew where Alpena is. Looking out, what I saw was youth, vitality, and the diversity of this nation. Picture ACC's recent Phi Theta Kappa honorees — Megan Wright, Olivia Hemker, Todd Graham, Morgan Esch, Yuki Nishibashi, to name just a few — in a group of 6,000 young people radiating similar brainpower and positive energy. That's how it felt to me. A wise man once noted that community colleges attach wings to dreams. It takes hope and energy to lift off, to focus on the present with the future in mind. That's what ACC does and it was a career highlight to represent this fine institution and the communities it serves.