Global Go- Getter

Ridgewater graduate Kristin Wegner has packed a lot of living and learning into her 29 years—and she’s just starting to make her mark on the world.

Inside!

Liberal Arts and Sciences Course Guide

Law Enforcement and Corrections at Ridgewater

How to Get Started on a College Education

Win an iPod!
Take our confidential Web survey and get a chance to win an iPod shuffle! See page 4 for details.
Dedicated accountants keep joining our team.
23 Ridgewater College Graduates.

Jennifer Lawnsbury, CPA
Senior Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate
University of Colorado Graduate

Mark Olson, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Larry Stolen, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Renee Mahlow
Accountant, Certified QuickBooks® ProAdvisor
Ridgewater Graduate

Christina Wordes, CPA
Governmental Auditor
Ridgewater Graduate
Southwest Minnesota State University Graduate

Heather Templer
CDSA Employee Benefits Administrator
Ridgewater Graduate
Southwest Minnesota State University Graduate

Brett Aamot, CPA
Managing Partner
Ridgewater Graduate
Gustavus Adolphus Graduate

Valerie Amberg
CDSA Managing Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Kori Johnson, CPA
Senior Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate

James Rudnick, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Lawrence Weppl, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Anita Bjur
Internal Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate

Annette Benson, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Wendy Martin
Accountant
Ridgewater Attendee
St. Olaf Graduate

Ryan Michelson
Accountant, Certified QuickBooks® ProAdvisor and Certified QuickBooks® Point of Sale ProAdvisor
Ridgewater Graduate
St. Cloud State University Graduate

Milan Schmiesing, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Naomi Struck
CDSA Employee Benefits Administrator
Ridgewater Graduate

Sara Livingood
Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate
St. Cloud State University Graduate

Chris Walton, CPA
Financial Officer
Ridgewater Graduate
St. Cloud State University Graduate

Randy Rofslund
Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate
Minnesota State University Moorhead Graduate

Lori Reich
Bookkeeper, Certified QuickBooks® ProAdvisor
Ridgewater Graduate

Melissa Grutz
Receptionist
Ridgewater Graduate

Darrin Ogden, CPA
Manager
Ridgewater Graduate
Southwest Minnesota State University Graduate

Willmar
331 Third St. SW
320.235.3311

Benson
1209 Pacific Ave.
320.843.2302

Morris
401 Atlantic Ave.
320.589.2602
www.cds CPA.com

Litchfield
820 Sibley Ave. N.
320.693.7975

St. Cloud
143 Sixth Ave. S.
320.223.7700

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS
Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP and CDS Administrative Services, LLC are proud to continue to hire Ridgewater graduates as part of our team, including our newest accountant, Sara Livingood.
From the President

How many times have you heard a relationship described as a “two-way” street? Ridgewater’s relationship with the region is one of those two-way streets where the success of the bond depends on both sides of the equation and the benefits truly flow both ways.

On one side, Ridgewater College benefits from the involvement and input of engaged and committed business and community leaders—not just in our campus communities of Hutchinson and Willmar, but throughout the region. We benefit from dedicated faculty and staff who are committed to the success of our students. We benefit from students who are committed to studying and learning. We benefit from a Board of Trustees and a Chancellor committed to the welfare of Minnesota’s colleges and universities and the educational future of all Minnesotans.

On the other side of the street, the region benefits from the graduates of dozens of our quality programs. It benefits from the college’s workforce and customized training programs. It benefits from the volunteerism of our faculty and staff and students—many of whom serve on church boards, school boards, community theatre boards, historical society boards, Chambers of Commerce, civic organizations such as Rotary Clubs, and dozens of other service groups. And finally, the region benefits significantly from the economic impact of our students, staff, and faculty, and the operation of the college itself.

A recent economic impact study conducted by economist Paul Anton quantified some of the value of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU):

- MnSCU’s estimated annual statewide economic impact is $3.5 billion. Of that, about $2.4 billion is from the enhanced productivity of Minnesota workers who received degrees or training at our colleges and universities.

- Every state dollar spent on the MnSCU system returns close to $11 worth of economic benefits.

- Capital expenditures also have a significant impact on the state’s economy. During the last four years, construction spending on our campuses has generated an average of $243 million of economic activity and the equivalent of more than 2,500 full-time jobs per year in Minnesota.

Those are impressive numbers, but they don’t necessarily tell the whole story. This issue features articles on Ridgewater College graduates, and illustrates the various ways that they affect and add to the quality of life here in our region—and beyond. As always, I hope you enjoy the stories, and that you will conclude, as I have, that Ridgewater College’s relationship with the region is vital and strong and goes beyond dollars and cents!

Douglas W. Allen
President
“OUR STANCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT? HOW ABOUT ONE OF THE MOST AGGRESSIVE VOLUNTARY EMISSIONS REDUCTION PROGRAMS IN THE NATION?”

“Our plant emissions already met state and federal air quality requirements. But we saw that we could do more – and began one of the most aggressive voluntary emissions reduction programs in the country. In Minnesota, we will be reducing sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions by 90% from three of our major metropolitan plants while increasing their generating capacity by about 300 megawatts. Xcel Energy is also a leader in wind power – delivering about 10% of all the wind power sold in the U.S. We also have several hydroelectric power plants that run on clean water power, four waste-to-energy facilities that turn potential land waste into useable electricity, and we’re researching other ways to use clean, renewable energy sources. The way we look at it, we’ve only got one planet. We owe it to future generations to take better care of it.”

Mary, Environmental Analyst

Join Windsource® from Xcel Energy, and you’ll be part of developing wind energy in Minnesota. Call 1-800-895-4999 to sign up.

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Every time you flip a switch or turn a dial, you tap into the energy of over 12,000 people working to make your life better. Xcel Energy. You get all of our energy.
Fall 2006

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Tom Anderson has come home to find a new niche for himself, Emily Randall has made a seamless move to a four-year college, and Shane Johnson is thriving in the banking industry.
On the Rebound

With IT workers back in demand, Ridgewater is expanding its Computer Systems Technology program courses to the Willmar campus.

Quick quiz: Can you name one of today’s fastest-growing occupations—both around the country and in Minnesota?

Would you believe that it’s IT/computer support? Despite the common perception that the sector is still suffering from the post-dot-com meltdown blues, demand for IT workers—and particularly skilled computer support specialists—has increased dramatically of late. In an effort to help meet that demand and to make its Network System Administrator program available to a broader range of students, Ridgewater College is now offering Computer Systems Technology (CST) program courses on the Willmar campus this fall.

“People have been discouraged from going into the field,” says Jeff Polman, an instructor in the CST program since 1999. “Now there are all kinds of jobs at the entry level.”

Statistics on both federal and state levels give testimony to the industry’s growth. “When we looked at statistics from both the Federal Bureau of Labor and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development [DEED], they showed that, for graduates of associate degree programs, computer support led the way in both wages and job growth,” says Mike Boehme, dean of instruction for Ridgewater’s technical programs. “DEED sees a 31 percent increase in these jobs between 2000 and 2012; that’s pretty significant. And it shows a 2004 median annual wage of $62,711.”

Meanwhile, Federal Bureau of Labor statistics show a median annual wage of $59,480. “When we looked at that, we thought that this is a program we need to expand,” Boehme says. “We also looked at the number of students coming from Willmar and found that we weren’t serving them as well as we could with the program only being offered in Hutchinson.”

With all of that in mind, the decision to expand the accessibility of courses for the Network System Administration degree was a logical one, particularly since most computers in the business world today are networked, and security is a critical element of those systems. “Security has become a very important part of our program,” Boehme says. “On the Willmar campus we already have a Cisco program [developed by global computer giant Cisco Corp.]; four of those courses are part of the Networking degree.”

CST courses will be offered through a variety of channels and at various times in hopes of making them available to full- and part-time students. Along with traditional classroom instruction, students will have access to online courses, interactive TV, and videoconferencing. Courses also will be offered during the day and in the evenings.

Polman sees a strong future for students earning degrees in Ridgewater’s CST program. “The techs from our program basically have their pick of jobs,” he says.

For more information on the CST program, see www.ridgewater.edu.

—Vicki Stavig

Get a chance to win an iPod Shuffle!

Your opinions matter. Ridgewater College wants to provide a publication that fully meets your needs and expectations. Please take a few minutes to fill out our confidential online survey at www.ridgewatermag.com—and register for a chance to win an iPod Shuffle!

Again, this survey is confidential. Thank you!
Forward Progress

A trio of new program offerings address education and training needs in the community.

The wheels of change continue to roll at Ridgewater College. To serve the needs of our community, we’ve developed several new program offerings. Some of the more notable additions include a new Mobile Crane Operator Certification program, online business and personal interest courses, and a paramedic program.

Mobile Crane Operator Certification
In May 2005, Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed a law that requires all crane operators in Minnesota to be certified by July 1, 2007. Ridgewater College, in partnership with the Minnesota Highway Construction Training Group and in cooperation with the Crane Inspection and Certification Bureau, has developed a program of education and training leading to National Commission for Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO) examinations and certification. The program is a complete package that includes both the written and practical exams, together with the opportunity to prepare for both. Ridgewater is an approved NCCCO Site Coordinator, and has already completed its inaugural program in March with good results. Pass rates for the written and practical exams were 98 percent and 88 percent, respectively.

Upcoming class commencement dates are:
- Dec. 4, 2006
- March 12, 2007

Online courses
Online educational opportunities are continuing to grow in popularity nationwide. The Center for Customized and Continuing Education has been busy developing several online training options for 2006-2007 that will provide an effective and efficient way to train individuals and employees. Specifically, online education allows for flexibility in where the training is conducted, the pace of the training, and when the training occurs. It’s also affordable, and can reduce or eliminate many travel costs involved with training.

Online training programs include:
- Lean Manufacturing (series)
- Supervision and Leadership (series)
- Invest in Your Debt
- SpendSmart
- and many others; see www.ridgewater.edu/customized for more information.

Paramedic program
Emergency care in central Minnesota will undergo some exciting changes this winter with the advent of a new paramedic program at Ridgewater. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) will have an opportunity to expand their skills and become trained paramedics. Paramedics have more advanced skills than EMTs, including intubation and the ability to administer a wider range of medications.

The program will begin in the spring 2007 semester. Classes will meet on Monday and Wednesday evenings, and on one Saturday per month. Interested individuals should contact Bev Hartzburg at 320-222-6063.

—Liz Wolf

From left, Bev Hartzburg, CCCE program coordinator; Russ Olson, CCCE program coordinator; and Brad Hanson, Willmar Ambulance.
Machine Scene

Ridgewater College’s Machine Tool Technology program prepares students for the dynamic and expanding world of precision machining.

When Kenton Schaefer graduated from Ridgewater College’s Machine Tool Technology program in 2003, he was only 20 years old. He was, however, solidly prepared. His Ridgewater training and education helped him quickly land a job at Hutchinson-based 3D CNC Inc., where today he’s a CNC (computer numerically controlled) operator and programmer. “The program touches on all the bases and offers a good head start,” Schaefer says.

He’s not exaggerating. Ridgewater’s program offers hands-on experience, state-of-the art equipment—including CAD/CAM and CNC machines—and experienced instructors to train students for the rigorous demands of the manufacturing industry, says Mike Boehme, dean of technical programs. It prepares students for such high-tech jobs as diemakers, moldmakers, and CNC technicians, all of whom produce precision metal parts used in everyday consumer products.

Boehme adds that the program, which recently relocated to Ridgewater’s main Hutchinson campus, provides students with high-tech CNC and CAD/CAM training as well as fundamental machinery skills, including use of mills, grinders, lathes, and drill presses. “We want to prepare students for the types of jobs available today in the machining industry in Minnesota and beyond,” he explains.

Certification

Ridgewater is also a newly certified Mastercam (state-of-the-art machining software) training facility. “We worked toward the certification for two years,” says Machine Tool Instructor Dan Edwards. “Only six schools nationwide are qualified. When our students apply for jobs, employers will see they’ve had this rigorous training, and it’ll get them ready to succeed right out of the door.”

Dale Bomstad, another Ridgewater machine tool instructor, says placement opportunities for machinists are outstanding. In fact, the National Tooling & Machining Association estimates that there is a shortage of 25,000 to 30,000 skilled manufacturing workers in the United States. Bomstad adds that most companies offer excellent wages and competitive benefit packages. “Our students who graduated in spring 2006 are averaging $15 an hour,” he says, adding that top hourly wages can be $30 or more. “The job market’s there. The pay’s there. The opportunities are unbelievable.”

Students in Ridgewater’s Machine Tool program receive technical skills training to work in industrial machining. Coursework includes introduction to CAM, blueprint reading, computer foundations, and first aid/safety, among other classes. These courses are combined with general education classes, including physics, composition, and introduction to communications, for a well-rounded education.

Ridgewater offers eight career options, including two-year degrees, diplomas, certificates, and customized classes.

Ridgewater grads also work in every area of manufacturing, including machine operation, plant management, and machine tool sales. “This is a hands-on, creative industry,” Edwards says. “They’re not boring assembly-line jobs. It’s fast-paced work.”

For more information on the Machine Tool program, see www.ridgewater.edu.

Instructors Dan Edwards (left) and Dale Bomstad are preparing Ridgewater Machine Tool Technology program graduates for careers in a high-demand industry.
During the past 10 years, Ridgewater College has undergone a number of big changes, evolving into an institution that is meeting the educational needs of an increasing student population and also helping drive the area’s economy. The catalyst for that evolution was the 1996 merger of Willmar Community College and the Hutchinson-Willmar Area Technical Colleges to form Ridgewater College.

“One of the challenges was to create the notion of one college with two campuses out of what was three colleges in two communities,” says Ridgewater President Dr. Douglas Allen. “There were huge opportunities as well. Probably the most significant was that the merger allowed us to offer an associate of arts degree in Hutchinson.”

Ridgewater’s accomplishments during the past decade are numerous and include the creation of two state-of-the-art simulation laboratories for the Nursing program on both campuses. “They have allowed us to better serve the healthcare industry, which is important because we have a lot of people coming to Ridgewater for retraining,” Allen says.

The college also has strengthened its ability to serve students of all ages and backgrounds, thanks in part to a five-year, $1.25 million Trio Grant used to provide tutoring and other services to students who are from low-income families, are the first in their families to attend college, or have a disability. “We’ve increased accessibility to a college education for many students in the area,” Allen says. He adds that Ridgewater students also have benefited from an increase in articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities throughout the state, many of which accept technical, as well as general education, credits.

The merger also changed the mix of educational programs offered on both campuses. “Hutchinson was almost all technical courses when the merger took place,” says Betty Strehlow, Ridgewater’s vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Services. “We’ve added more general education courses, so now it’s approximately 50/50 between technical and general education.”

What will the next 10 years bring? “I can see us expanding in certain areas,” Allen says. “I think we’ll be moving much more broadly into a variety of delivery methods, including online courses. One of the huge things we’ll see, especially in Willmar—which is 23 to 25 percent Latino—is a growing diversity. We’ll need to adapt in order to serve that population and be accessible to it.”

Allen also expects Ridgewater’s role in the area’s economic development to continue to grow. “I see us expanding in what we do in healthcare, for example,” he says. “There will be a huge call to expand in nursing, community health, EMS, early responders, and paramedics to meet increasing healthcare needs. Ridgewater also has the largest agriculture program among two-year colleges in the state. Our region is still very agriculturally driven, and I think we’ll find ourselves growing and adapting to meet the needs of people in that industry, including alternative fuels as the energy crunch continues.”

—Vicki Stavig
One Step Ahead

Ridgewater's membership in the CIHSEP partnership is helping position Minnesota as a healthcare leader.

It's a well-known fact that there's a national shortage of nurses. According to the latest statistics, here in Minnesota alone, 2,400 registered nursing and 1,100 practical nursing positions are unfilled—and the number of vacant positions is expected to double by 2008.

That's just one challenge being addressed by the Center for Integrated Health Science Education and Practice (CIHSEP), of which Ridgewater College is a member. CIHSEP is a joint partnership of education, industry, and community created to transform healthcare education and delivery across the state. CIHSEP was awarded $3 million to help position Minnesota as a leader in healthcare education, research, practice, and innovation.

Taking the lead

Ridgewater, recognized for its progressive work in healthcare simulation, is taking a lead in CIHSEP by heading the organization's simulation study group. Simulation training offers nurses and healthcare teams the opportunity to learn the complete range of likely medical experiences they'll find in practice. “The military and aviation have used simulation for years. Healthcare simulation is up and coming,” says Robert Cannon, Ridgewater's vice president of Customized and Continuing Education. “Ridgewater’s two simulation centers use simulation mannequins and supporting technologies that allow students to work within scenarios they may encounter in a ‘live’ setting in their professional work. Simulation makes for a safe environment to make mistakes and learn practices—without the risks of ‘practicing’ on humans.”

Ridgewater's role in CIHSEP is assessing healthcare simulation in Minnesota—how it's used, who's using it, and how it should best be used. CIHSEP, for example, is examining how simulation technology could help remedy the clinical bottleneck in nursing. “We need to produce more nurses, but the clinical experience is limited to 10 students,” Cannon says, adding that, by some estimates, hundreds of people are on waiting lists for registered nursing and practical nursing programs statewide. “We need to think creatively. One example would be using simulation to supplement the clinical experience, which could as much as double the number of local nurses produced.”

Lynn Johnson, Ridgewater's director of nursing, says CIHSEP is well-positioned to help Minnesota advance the use of healthcare simulation. “We're looking at gaps in its use and making recommendations,” she says, noting that students benefit significantly from the technology. “They do things they'd only observe in clinical settings. You learn by doing and by making mistakes.”

“We need to produce more nurses, but the clinical experience is limited to 10 students.”

—Liz Wolf
Attention Ridgewater Alumni! We want to keep in touch with you.

The Ridgewater College Foundation is trying to locate as many of its alumni as possible. If you are a graduate of our college, we hope you will take a few moments to complete our Alumni Profile Update online at www.ridgewater.edu or fill out the information requested on this page and mail to:

Ridgewater College Foundation
PO Box 1097
Willmar, MN 56201

The information you provide will be made available to classmates planning reunions or just wanting to stay in touch. Ridgewater College and the Ridgewater College Foundation office will also use the information to keep you informed of special events and opportunities at the college.

Although you may have graduated from Hutchinson Technical College, Willmar Technical College, or Willmar Community College before we merged, you are still Ridgewater College alumni. We are eager to connect with you, and are anxious to tell you about the great things happening at your alma mater!

Name ________________________________ Maiden Name __________________________
Address ______________________________________________________________________
City ________________________________ State __________ Zip ___________
Telephone ___________________________ E-mail ___________________________________
*Birthdate or SSN ______________________________________________________________
Employer ______________________________ Address ________________________________
Occupation ____________________________________________________________________
Graduated? Y N Year Graduated ____________
Program Attended ________________________________ Years Attended ____________
Is your spouse a graduate of Ridgewater? Y N Year Graduated ____________
Spouse’s name ________________________________ Program _______________________

To avoid duplication of information, please list others in your household who can be combined with your address.

Other ____________________________________________________________________
Year Graduated ________________

*Ridgewater is asking for information that is private and/or confidential, which you are not required to provide under state/federal law.
Ready, Set, Go!
How can you get started at Ridgewater College? Read on for a step-by-step guide.

One of our goals at Ridgewater is to make it as easy as possible for you to attend college. With that in mind, check out the following information, which details what you need to know and do to get started at Ridgewater College.

Learn about Ridgewater
Experiencing Ridgewater firsthand is the best way to learn about all the college has to offer. Schedule a campus visit and we’d be happy to show you around, introduce you to instructors, and answer questions. If you can’t make it in person, visit our Website, or call 800-722-1151 for more information.

Apply
It’s easy! All you have to do: Fill out and submit an application along with the $20 application fee. You will also need to make arrangements to forward your high school or college transcript to Ridgewater.

FAQs
Will my credits transfer?
Ridgewater College bases its general education programs on the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC). This program enables a student to receive credit for all lower-division general education upon admission to any other Minnesota State Colleges and Universities institution. The University of Minnesota also recognizes the MnTC as fulfilling the lower-division general education component of its degree programs. Many private and out-of-state public colleges also regularly accept Ridgewater general education credits on a case-by-case basis. Ridgewater College has many resources to help students with the process of transferring credits to another institution.

Can I afford college?
Yes, you can! People often think that college is out of their reach. This is simply not true. While you may not be able to pay for your college education “out of pocket,” there are many financial aid options available to those in need. Ridgewater strives to be an affordable option for achieving quality higher education.

Will I get to work “hands-on?”
The curriculum in Ridgewater’s technical programs features a large amount of hands-on activity. More importantly, that activity takes place using the latest technology and equipment that is the same as what’s being used in industry today. It’s this type of training that has made Ridgewater College a great recruiting ground for potential employers.

What grades do I need in high school to be admitted?
Ridgewater College has an “open door” admissions policy. If you have graduated from high school or obtained your GED, you are eligible for admission to the college. You are not required to have graduated high school with a minimum GPA, or to have finished with a specific class rank.

What if I don’t know what I want to major in?
No problem! You are not required to select a certain major to begin taking classes at Ridgewater. In fact, this is a great place to get exposure to different areas of study to help determine where your future interests lie. If you do know what you want to study, we can get you started down the right path: taking classes that cover general education requirements, but which are also relevant to your major.

Can I take just a few classes?
Yes. Many people take only one or two classes each semester. You can either work on a part-time basis with the goal of graduating with a degree, diploma, or certificate, or you can take individual classes that interest you from a personal or professional development standpoint.

www.ridgewatermag.com
Investigate financial aid and scholarship options
Ridgewater College offers many different forms of financial assistance to those in need, including grants, loans, and scholarships. Visit www.ridgewater.edu to examine your options and apply for aid.

Attend an Orientation-Advising-Registration (OAR) session
All new students attend a Ridgewater OAR session. This is the real start to your college experience at Ridgewater. During these sessions, you will become familiar with Ridgewater, determine what courses will meet your goals, and register for your first-semester classes. Most students seeking a degree, diploma, or certificate also will need to take a basic skills assessment test prior to enrolling in the College.

Start classes!
For more information, go to www.ridgewater.edu or call 800-722-1151.

Important Terms
Admission
You are admitted to the college once you have successfully met all of the admission requirements, which then allows you to take classes and work toward a degree, diploma, or certificate. Some programs, however, require additional criteria before you are allowed to enter them and take classes, and some programs have limited admission space.

Community college
Community colleges offer lower-division instruction, usually two years or less, in academic and occupational programs, many of which transfer to four-year universities.

Enroll
Once you have registered for courses and paid your tuition and fees, you are enrolled at the College.

Liberal arts and sciences
Liberal arts and sciences courses address knowledge of the important concepts and principles of the natural sciences, mathematics, history, social and behavioral sciences, and the arts and humanities. These classes focus on developing students’ general knowledge and reasoning ability in such areas as critical thinking, communication, and inquiry. They also foster an appreciation of diverse people, cultures, and life roles. These courses, according to Minnesota state statute, must transfer to a four-year university.

Technical college
Technical colleges offer lower-division instruction, usually two years or less, in technical and occupational programs that are typically used to gain immediate employment.

Transfer of credits
This is an official process supervised by a college transfer specialist to advise in the transfer of credits earned at one college or university to a degree, diploma, or certificate program at a different college or university. Transfer of credit is determined by the receiving institution.
Ridgewater College
Liberal Arts
and Sciences Programs

Get your first two years of a four-year degree here!

Ridgewater offers a wide variety of course options in liberal arts and sciences. These general education programs are based on the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) to ensure easy transfer to any public university in Minnesota. Students who are undecided on a major can take a variety of courses to explore their interest, all while working toward a liberal arts degree. Individuals who know what they want to major in can build a schedule to get them off to a strong start in a specific field of study. Ridgewater can help you on your way to any of the following majors:

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<th>Accounting</th>
<th>Law Enforcement/Corrections</th>
<th>Pre-Medical Technology</th>
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<td>Art</td>
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<td>Pre-Nursing</td>
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<td>Biological Sciences</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Pre-Occupational Therapy</td>
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<td>Pre-Optometry</td>
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<td>Computer Science</td>
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<td>Speech/Theatre Arts</td>
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<td>History</td>
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For more information on any of these programs, contact Ridgewater at 800-722-1151, or go to www.ridgewater.edu.
Ridgewater College
Technical Programs

These programs, which range anywhere from nine months to two years, are designed to provide detailed, focused training for quick entry into a specific career field. Technical programs at Ridgewater College give students the opportunity to learn in a hands-on environment, using state-of-the-art equipment and technology. Our instructors are experienced both inside and out of the classroom, so you'll know what to expect when you begin your career.

(H)—offered on the Hutchinson campus
(W)—offered on the Willmar campus

Automotive
Auto Body Collision Technology (W)
Advanced Collision Services (W)
Auto Mechanics Technology (W)

Manufacturing
Machine Tool Technology (H)
Welding Technology (H)(W)
Computer-Aided Drafting and Design (H)(W)

Computers
Business and Computer Systems
Management (H)
Computer Programmer (H)
Computer Support Technician (H)
Network Systems Administration (H)

Technology
Audio Technology (H)
Automated Systems Engineering Technology (H)
Calibration Engineering Technology (H)
Electronics Technology (W)
Wireless Communications Technology (W)
Nondestructive Testing Technology (H)

Health Services
Health Information Technician (W)
Medical Administrative Secretary (H)(W)
Medical Assistant (W)
Medical Coding Specialist (W)
Nursing (H)(W)
Radiologic Technology (W)
Nursing Assistant (H)(W)

Human Services
Activity Director/Activity Assistant (H)
Educational Assistant (H)
Universal Care Assistant (H)
Law Enforcement (W)
— Corrections
— Professional Peace Officer
Occupational Skills (W)

Agriculture
Agri-business (W)
Agricultural Education (W)
Agronomy Technology (W)
Dairy Management (W)
Farm Operations/Management (W)
GPS/GIS Technology for Agriculture (W)
Veterinary Technology (W)
Farm Business Management (H)(W)

Business
Accountant (H)(W)
Accounting Technician (H)(W)
Administrative Assistant (H)(W)
Marketing and Sales Management (H)(W)
Marketing and Design (H)
Legal Administrative Assistant (H)(W)
Insurance Claim Representative (W)
Small Business Management (H)(W)

Construction
Carpentry (W)
Electrician (W)

Visual Arts and Communications
Professional Photography (W)
Computer Art and Publishing (W)
— Creative Emphasis
— Technical Emphasis
Multimedia Design Technology (H)
Web Design Technology (H)
Computer Publishing (W)

Health and Beauty
Cosmetology (W)
Nail Technician (W)
Estheology (W)
Massage Therapy (W)
Outward Bound

Ridgewater graduate Kristin Wegner has packed a lot of living and learning into her 29 years—and she’s just starting to make her mark on the world.

By Vicki Stavig
Photographs by Michael Morin
“It’s been an amazing journey.”

So says Kristin Wegner, a Willmar native who earned her associate of arts degree in liberal arts from Ridgewater College in 1997. Since then, she not only went on to earn a master’s degree, but also spent two years as a volunteer with the Peace Corps in the Eastern European country of Moldova.

Today Wegner is a visiting instructor at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Mich., where she teaches in the Department of Movement Services. The road that led to that position has been both fascinating and exciting—and the journey isn’t nearly over.

First steps
Active throughout high school in everything from gymnastics to cheerleading to the National Honor Society, Wegner brought that energy and commitment to Ridgewater. She was involved in a range of activities, including membership in Phi Theta Kappa and the Ridgewater College Peer Helpers, and served as volunteer coordinator for the college’s Native American Awareness Gathering. “I got involved in many things and met people from outside the area,” she says. “It was great for finding out who you are and trying to reach your dreams.”

Wegner credits the college with setting the stage for her future accomplishments. As early on as her elementary school years, she says knew that she and her two brothers, Joe and Jon, would attend Ridgewater (then known as Willmar Community College). “My parents believed we would get a good foundation there, which turned out to be true,” she says. “It was an awesome foundation. I learned to step outside the box, to think for myself.”

After graduating with honors from Ridgewater, she enrolled at Minnesota State University–Moorhead, with a goal of finding a career that would allow her to work with children. She eventually settled on physical education, and in 1999 graduated cum laude from Moorhead with a bachelor of science degree in physical education and a minor in coaching. Along the way, she also took special education classes at Minnesota State University–Mankato and earned a license in developmental and adapted physical
education. “Phy-ed was a natural fit,” she says. “I loved working with kids; I have a passion for it. I’d also had the opportunity to work with children with disabilities. My mother is a teacher and had taught adapted classes, and throughout high school I had volunteered with disabled kids.”

Her first post-graduation stop was in New London-Spicer, where she taught physical education and health education for a year while coaching gymnastics. She liked the job, but admits that it wasn’t entirely fulfilling. “I knew I was missing something,” she says. “I was attracted to different cultures and wanted to work abroad.”

Not long after that realization, she came across an ad that would radically change her direction. “I got an e-mail about the Peace Corps,” she says. “I sent in my application the next day. It usually takes from three months to a couple years to process the application and get accepted, so I decided to stop teaching. I didn’t want to leave in the middle of the school year if I got accepted.”

Needing to support herself, however, Wegner headed to the Twin Cities, where she worked as a mortgage analyst for Wells Fargo Home Mortgage. “I told them that when and if the Peace Corps called, I’d be leaving,” she says.

Chapter two
When the call came in May 2001, Wegner plunged into a new chapter in her life. “My recruiter said, ‘I have the perfect spot for you: Moldova,’” she recalls. “He said I would be working as a health education volunteer.”

It was an exciting time, and Wegner was eager to get started—perhaps a little too eager, as it turned out. “I had a friend who tutored me in Russian for two months,” she notes. “Then I found out that in Moldova, the national language is Romanian, although some people do speak Russian.”

The next step was an intense 11-week training program that immersed her in the country’s language and culture. By August, she was sworn into the Peace Corps, flown to Europe, and placed smack in the middle of Moldova, working in the communities of Draguseni, Dachnovici, and Bobeaica.

“I knew I was missing something. I was attracted to different cultures and wanted to work abroad.”

“I had to assess each community’s needs, implement a health education curriculum in the schools, and teach courses,” she says. “I was the first Peace Corps volunteer there and worked with a local counterpart. Everything we did we wanted to be sustainable, so the counterpart could carry on after I left.”

It was not an easy job. “More than half of all of the parents in the communities were working somewhere else and weren’t there for their children,” Wegner says. “So they needed to be taught life skills, along with health education that addressed issues such as HIV, AIDS, hygiene issues, smoking, and alcohol.”

One of the most disturbing issues Wegner encountered, however, was human trafficking for purposes of prostitution or slavery, which has emerged as a serious problem in the poorer parts of Eastern Europe over the last decade. It was an unsettling realization for her, and she says she was driven to do what she could to alert children to the dangers of trafficked, she says. “I was attracted to different cultures and wanted to work abroad.”

“Then other Peace Corps volunteers asked me to come and teach teams for them. We traveled throughout the country and trained these teams. These were bright kids; they could speak Romanian, French, and Russian.”

There were, of course, other accomplishments along the way. One was Wegner’s co-coordination of Odyssey of the Mind, an international creative problem-solving competition for students from kindergarten through college. Wegner also had the opportunity to do some traveling on her own, visiting much of Europe during her breaks.

Wegner says the experience helped her grow as a person. “Whatever I put into it, I got more out of it,” she says. “It was the relationships and the people that were important. It helped me see that we all come from different backgrounds, but we’re all part of the human race. It also reinforced that we have so much here [in the United States].”

When Wegner returned to the United States in 2003, she was eager to continue her education. She earned a master of science degree in human development at the University of Maine in 2005, while also working in the college’s kinesiology department. These days, she continues to teach and works part-time in marketing for an engineering firm. As for next steps, she says she hopes to continue her studies and earn a Ph.D. and again work with children. The possibilities, she says, are endless and could include one day working as dean of a community college, a country director with the Peace Corps, or as a manager of an international youth service foundation. “My life is based on callings,” she says. “Everything I’ve done has led me to something I didn’t imagine. I am so intrigued with culture and people and exploring.”

Vicki Stavig is a Bloomington-based freelance writer.
Just four months into his first job as the only police officer in Walnut Grove, a 30-mile drive southwest of Marshall, Mike Zeug faced a serious law-enforcement challenge. A Walnut Grove man had slain his ex-girlfriend, an extremely rare crime in a town where only 600 or so people live, and Zeug was quickly thrown into his first major criminal investigation.

Operating off what he learned in peace officer classes at Ridgewater College just a few months earlier, he made calls to the Redwood County sheriff and the state’s Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) to alert both parties to the fact that a murder suspect had fled the scene. As other officers arrived from different departments in the area, a manhunt began and soon afterward a local tri-county emergency response unit found the suspect in a patch of trees next to the apartment where the shooting occurred. The man surrendered without a struggle just four hours after the shooting and was later booked for the crime in Redwood County.

“The BCA field agent and the other police personnel spent six hours after the arrest getting all this stuff down,” says Zeug of the 2006 murder case. “They told me, ‘Mike, you did a great job, there’s no other way you could have handled it.’ Usually suspects are on the run a reasonable amount of time, but in this case we got him quickly.”

The Walnut Grove police chief and solo officer credits his 2005 law enforcement/professional peace officer degree from Ridgewater, along with a summer skills course at Alexandria Technical College, for preparing him for a job that involves cases as extraordinary as a murder and as common as traffic tickets and domestic disturbance calls. “The skills course taught me how to handle a scene and what not to touch,” he explains. “At Ridgewater I learned more technical stuff and how to apply common sense to different situations.”

Diversity matters
Ridgewater offers several different law enforcement-related degree programs that have provided police departments throughout the state with hundreds of police officers over the past several decades. (See “Degree Options” at right for more information.)

Criminal justice system jobs range from probation and parole officers to community corrections and corrections’ counseling positions. “There’s a real growth in jobs for students on the corrections track,” says Mike Kutzke, the Law Enforcement program coordinator and a 1986 Ridgewater graduate. “As society gets tougher on criminals, we’re finding that the field is growing exponentially.”

The courses aren’t only about law enforcement, however. “We have a nice mix of liberal arts courses, to give students a background in that area, along with law enforcement courses,” Kutzke says. “For example, we’ll have a course such as Psychology of Law Enforcement to help students prepare for the day-to-day activities in law enforcement and get them ready for the more serious psychological and emotional challenges they will face.”
The information in this course is the kind they’ll use throughout their career.

As Minnesota’s population has grown increasingly diverse in recent years, police officers and corrections personnel have had to learn how to deal with a wide range of different cultures. Ridgewater has addressed that trend by requiring students to take a sociology course called Race and Cultural Minorities. The emphasis has proven particularly useful for officers working in both cities and small towns. Zeug points out that more than one-third of the residents in Walnut Grove are Hmong, and the murder he dealt with involved a Hmong suspect and victim. "When the murder happened, we reached out to the Hmong community and got help from it," he recalls. "That's how we were able to find [the suspect] in only four hours."

In the pipeline

Willmar Police Chief Jim Kulset graduated from Ridgewater, then known as Willmar Junior College, in 1976. After a brief stint in Morris as a police officer, he joined the Willmar force and moved up the ranks, serving as a uniformed officer, detective, and detective sergeant ("pretty much everything but dog catcher," he says with a laugh) before being appointed chief seven years ago. He still remembers a course he took taught by Willmar City Attorney Richard Ronning. "It was a criminal law course, and it was tough," he says. "But I learned a lot of practical applications of the law in that course that I have used many times."

Kulset regularly looks to his alma mater when hiring new employees for his 19-officer department. "The last time I checked I found that a little over 50 percent of our licensed police officers were Ridgewater graduates," says Kulset, who has also taught at Ridgewater as an adjunct professor. "The graduates of the college’s law enforcement program have had a huge impact on our workforce."

Although a year or two usually goes by without any job openings on the Willmar Police Department, Kulset says he had six positions to fill in 2005. Three of his hires for those positions were Ridgewater graduates. What’s more, Kulset’s department also established an apprentice program with Ridgewater that allows four students to work part- and full-time as "community service officers" for two years while handling such issues as animal control, parking violations, and other work that does not necessarily require the skills of licensed police officers.

Willmar’s not the only police department loaded with Ridgewater alumni, either. Kandiyohi County Sheriff Dan Hartog says his department has "hired quite a few graduates from the Ridgewater program. They come with a good, solid education." At least half the department’s 33 officers have Ridgewater degrees, adds Hartog, a 1980 Ridgewater graduate who serves on an advisory board for law enforcement programs at the college.

According to Hartog, the strength of the college’s program lies in its use of real police practitioners as adjunct professors to speak to what police officers in the field face on a daily basis. The program is coordinated by Kutzke, who has a rich background in police work, says Hartog. Students prefer taking courses from instructors who have seen recent action in the field, rather than from those who rely on memories of what it was like years ago to work in the field.

Another Ridgewater advantage is the small learning environment, notes Hartog. The classes are small, professors get to know students, and vice versa. "It’s small enough where if you want to interact with instructors there is time to do that, which makes a difference," he says. "You can get one-on-one help if you need it."

Justice Is Served

A new program allows students to take SCSU Criminal Justice courses on Ridgewater’s Willmar campus.

Ridgewater College is teaming up with St. Cloud State University (SCSU) to make courses in Criminal Justice available on the Willmar campus. Instead of attending classes in St. Cloud, students can get junior-, senior-, and graduate-level course instruction from SCSU faculty at the Ridgewater campus, and through interactive television and online options. Students have SCSU identification cards and pay SCSU tuition. The program is ideal for law-enforcement and corrections students and for people who want to advance their education but who don’t want to move or commute to St. Cloud.

The program is also the first of its kind in Minnesota. “Ridgewater President Doug Allen and Vice President Betty Strehlow have been instrumental in bringing the program to Ridgewater,” says Sheree Morgan, an adjunct SCSU faculty member and the program’s coordinator. “They have provided SCSU with technology support, classrooms, and office space at Ridgewater. We’re pleased to be able to work together and help meet the educational needs for the people in this region.”

For more information about the program, contact Sheree Morgan at 320-222-7612, or sheree.morgan@ridgewater.edu.
Zeug was one of those older students. He drove semi-trailers for more than a decade before deciding, at the age of 34, to change careers and get into law enforcement. He saved $5,000 for tuition, took out loans for another $10,000, and earned some money on the side working as a mechanic while he attended Ridgewater.

Today he’s living just nine miles from where he grew up. He enjoys a position where he meets new people every week and faces different situations every day. He’s also committed to doing proactive policing by keeping in close touch with community members to deter crime before it happens. “Like anyone else, you complain about things once in a while,” he says. “But you’re helping out your community in a job like this, and that’s what I like about it. It’s much different than the other jobs I’ve had.”

Frank Jossi is a St. Paul-based freelance writer.

One challenge for Ridgewater law enforcement candidates has been the desire by many to achieve a bachelor’s degree but the reluctance to relocate to attend a four-year institution. The nearest four-year college, Saint Cloud State University (SCSU), is 60 miles away. This issue has begun to change, however, with the arrival of Sheree Morgan, a Ridgewater grad who recently received a master’s degree in criminal justice from SCSU.

Morgan, who worked for years as a state probation officer in Chisago County, is creating a distance-learning program that will connect Ridgewater students with courses on the SCSU campus through on-site lectures, videoconferencing, and other means.

The relationship is on the edge of a growing movement toward linking community college graduates with opportunities at four-year institutions in their regions, says Bob Prout, chair of the criminal justice program at SCSU. “On the whole, our best students are older, they’re working, they’re not 18 years old,” he says, noting that the description fits many of Ridgewater’s students. “They’re trying to get a degree done and they work hard at it.” (For more information on the program, see “Justice Is Served” on page 19.)

“[Ridgewater] is small enough where if you want to interact with instructors there is time to do that, which makes a difference.”

Dan Hartog

“[Ridgewater] is small enough where if you want to interact with instructors there is time to do that, which makes a difference.”
Back to the Future
After working in a variety of industries at different places around the country, Tom Anderson has found a niche—right back where he started.

By Dan Heilman

If Tom Anderson's story is any indication, you can go home again. Since graduating from Ridgewater College, the Willmar native has worked in some diverse industries and spent several challenging but rewarding years on the East Coast. These days, however, he's back in his hometown, working as an attorney with Willmar-based Johnson, Moody, Schmidt & Kleinhuisen PA (JMS&K), and particularly pleased to be on familiar ground again.

“It’s a great part of the state to grow up in,” he says. “I always wanted to return to this area because I enjoy hunting, fishing, and golfing—activities that are readily available here.”

Anderson practices in the area of civil litigation, personal injury, and criminal law for the six-attorney firm, which he joined in December 2005. And like his decision to return to central Minnesota, his path to a legal practice had roots in his upbringing. “I had an uncle and a grandfather who were attorneys in the southern part of the state, in Le Sueur,” Anderson says. “I always knew I was going to pursue it, since the two things I was really good at were writing and talking, and this job requires plenty of both.”

Roundabout
Anderson’s route back to Willmar was a circuitous one. After studying at Ridgewater and eventually earning a bachelor’s degree from Concordia College in Moorhead, he worked in radio, helping with the conversion of Willmar’s KKLN-FM (94.1) from a classic country format to classic rock. From there, he was accepted into the law program at the New England School of Law, where he earned his juris doctorate degree in May 2005. While in Boston, he made ends meet by working in the insurance business and as an IT consultant.
After earning his J.D., Anderson got in touch with the late Bill Thompson, who was a partner at JMS&K, and once the ball started rolling, it was an easy decision to come to work for the firm. “I knew the firm had a solid reputation with a proven ethical background, as well as very sharp attorneys,” Anderson says.

As for the ups and downs he experienced on his road back to Willmar, Anderson says it was all worthwhile. “I wouldn’t trade it for the world,” he notes. “It was a challenge. The firm I worked for in Boston, Darwin Partners, specialized in getting tech startups off the ground. At that time, IT was a declining market—it was right when the balloon popped. We were unproven, but you have to sell yourself and work really hard to get people excited about it.”

Anderson, 30, has fond memories of Ridgewater, and appreciates the nudge he received from many of the faculty there. Among memorable mentors at Ridgewater, he says that Sam Nelson in the History department, Lori Park-Smith in Sociology, and several others helped ignite a passion for learning and a desire to excel. “It was a great place to get started,” he says. “I was an underachiever in high school. That changed when I went to college—I became interested.”

As for his current work, Anderson describes it as “basic criminal and personal injury cases—not anything groundbreaking, just trying to help people who need help.”

One memorable case he worked on involved a hunting club that was trying to resist a residential development adjacent to its property. “We didn’t get the outcome we wanted, but I got to see how law and politics intersect on issues like this,” he says. “We went before the county board, dealt with the zoning administrator, and filed a writ of mandamus [a judicial order directing a government official to perform a duty of his or her office], which was somewhat extraordinary. We were trying to compel a public body to do something we felt it had to do. There wasn’t a lot of precedent [for that].”

Anderson lives in Willmar with his wife, Jessica Falk, who’s a dentist. In his free time, he does everything he can to take advantage of the outdoors. “Golf takes up all my free time in the summer, and hunting in the fall,” he says with a laugh.

Dan Heilman is a St. Paul-based freelance writer.

### Smooth Sailing

Emily Randall credits Ridgewater with preparing her for a seamless move to a four-year institution.

By Jenny Sherman

As a five-year-old, Hutchinson native and recent Ridgewater College graduate Emily Randall (now 21) aspired to be a cheerleader. In grade school, her career choice was to be a teacher, and by high school she was toying with the notion of becoming an actress.

But, by the end of high school, she was no closer to being settled when it came to deciding what step to take next. “I wasn’t really prepared, didn’t research a lot of different schools, didn’t know the processes,” says Randall, who also didn’t like the idea of going to a big state school with a reputation for hard-partying students. “I wasn’t looking to go to a university at that point in my life.”

So she took a year off and worked at a department store near Hutchinson while she mulled over her options. Before the year was out, she knew she had to continue with school. “I didn’t want to get caught working paycheck-to-paycheck,” Randall says. “And I didn’t want to work at a department store my entire life. I was very, very, very ready to get back into school.”

She also had clearer ideas about which school to attend. “I wanted a smaller school where the instructors knew my name,” she says. “Ridgewater was right there.”

She enrolled in 2003, and initially considered going down the graphic design track. A conversation with her mother led her to opt for an English curriculum, so she sampled a semester’s worth of classes in the liberal arts. Before the end of the term, she knew she’d found her direction.

With the fire for literature lit, Randall started investigating how to pursue a four-year English degree. A professor at Ridgewater who had attended Augsburg College lauded that school’s English offerings and encouraged Randall to find out more. For the first time, she says, she thought about transferring and completing an associate’s degree in order to do so.

“I was already taken a handful of courses. I had a list of courses that were transferable. I started taking those classes and thought: Why not just earn a two-year degree and transfer in as a junior?”

So Randall signed up at Ridgewater as a full-time student pursuing an associate’s degree in liberal arts and sciences. She also participated in the school’s work...
study program. “I don’t know if I could have done college without work study,” she says. “It was a great deal.”

In spring of 2006, she graduated from Ridgewater with a high GPA and as a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. This fall, she seamlessly transferred to Augsburg, where she was awarded a special $12,500 Phi Theta Kappa scholarship specifically for transfer students. She’ll again be participating in a work study program, this time as a circulation assistant in Augsburg’s library. “I’m going to climb the education ladder as high as I can go,” she says, noting that she’ll be focusing on literature and dabbling in creative writing. “I’d really like to do both, but until I can make time to talk to an advisor, I’m heading down the lit path.”

Her career goals are still varied, but now focus on English-related fields: magazine editing, writing, perhaps even teaching as a college professor. She credits the new direction she’s discovered for her career—as well as the foundation for that path—to Ridgewater. “I spoke at commencement when I graduated,” she says. “I told the audience and all the students who graduated with me that I thought Ridgewater was a really solid stepping-stone for students who might not be ‘traditional students’—maybe they took some time off, maybe their parents got laid off. It was an excellent experience.”

Jenny Sherman is a New York City-based freelance writer.

Close to Home
Timely advice and hometown support helped launch Shane Johnson into a successful career in the banking industry.

By Dan Heilman

It’s typical for banks to advertise themselves as customer-focused these days, but that’s a claim Shane Johnson makes on behalf of Bremer Bank of Willmar with absolute certainty. Johnson, the branch manager of the Bremer Cash Wise Grocery location, makes a point of being service-oriented, and says he can’t imagine any other way of doing business.

“Banking is a very competitive industry,” Johnson says. “One way to stay competitive is to offer competitive product to our clients. We’re always striving to meet our customers’ needs. We’re not just order-takers.”
Johnson, 30, has been with Bremer since 2001. At its Cash Wise location, he oversees nine employees and coordinates the branch’s everyday business, which includes insurance and investment planning along with the usual deposits and loans.

Johnson’s route to this point wasn’t a direct one. A Willmar native, Johnson was typical in that he wasn’t certain where his career path would lead once he was out of high school. All that changed when he went to Ridgewater.

Transition

“I had a guidance counselor at Ridgewater named Arlen Sjerven,” Johnson says. “He gave me the idea of going into a business-related field. Banking was something that had always interested me anyway—the idea of working with a lot of different facets of the business world—so his suggestions had a strong impact on me.”

Johnson also says his experience at Ridgewater made the process of leaving the nest much easier. “The college helped me make the transition because it was in my hometown,” he says. “Some of my friends also went there, and so I was able to make that step. It gave me time to discover what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. The comfort level was there so I could take time and figure out what I wanted to do without having to move away from home.”

Johnson earned an associate of arts degree from Ridgewater, then a bachelor’s degree in finance (with a marketing/economics minor) from Minnesota State University–Mankato. “Ridgewater was perfect for my situation at the time, and it’s also good for people going back to school,” he says. “If I had it to do over again, I’d go right back.”

After college, Johnson spent two and a half years working for the Willmar branch of CitiFinancial, starting as a lending officer before moving up to branch manager. From there he moved over to Bremer. “For me, it boiled down to how much work I wanted to put into it,” Johnson says. “I came here working with loans and deposits, and worked my way into a management role by going above and beyond, and showing interest in other opportunities that came up. I took the time to learn the business and how the bank worked. When other roles opened up, I made it clear that I wanted to try new things.”

Johnson’s stewardship over the Cash Wise branch has helped Bremer Bank of Willmar continue as a strong presence in the community. Today, the bank, which recently moved its main offices from its longtime downtown spot to a new 3 1/2-acre location on the east side of town, boasts assets of more than $225 million and a proud local history. Bremer Bank of Willmar opened in 1876 as the Bank of Willmar, and is the longest continuously running business in Kandiyohi County. The Otto Bremer Foundation, the bank’s charitable arm, is also active in the area.

Away from work, Johnson enjoys fishing, spending time with his family, and following Minnesota sports teams. His wife, Linnae, is program director for a human-services organization in Willmar, and they have two daughters, 10-year-old Hailey and baby Myah, who was born early in 2006. Johnson also volunteers for Habitat for Humanity of Western Minnesota and serves on the Willmar Fest board, in addition to coaching Hailey’s basketball team at the YMCA. “I also just got into playing the guitar,” he says. “Hailey is learning along with me, and she’s already better than I am.”

Elsewhere in this issue, Dan Heilman profiled Ridgewater graduate Tom Anderson.
Willmar was named an All-America City in June of 2005. This highly-acclaimed award recognizes communities for civic excellence, especially in the areas of collaboration and local problem solving.

Willmar is the only city in the U.S. with the dual distinction of being an All-America City in addition to being selected one of the Top 100 Micropolitan Communities nationwide. Over 18,000 cities applied for this prestigious recognition.

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