World Class

The college’s burgeoning soccer program is bringing in players from around the globe—and helping bring the community together.

Win an iPod!
Take our confidential Web survey and get a chance to win an iPod shuffle! See page 15 for details.

Coach Edel Fernandez and members of the Ridgewater men’s soccer team
CDS is proud to be part of Ridgewater’s history.

Milan Schmiesing, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

First technical college graduate in the State of Minnesota to become a Certified Public Accountant.

Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP is proud of our history with Ridgewater College. We have 23 Ridgewater College graduates as part of our team, including Milan Schmiesing, the first technical college graduate in the State of Minnesota to become a Certified Public Accountant.
As you read this issue of the Ridgewater College magazine, I’m excited to announce the Ridgewater College Foundation’s recent launch of Changing Lives, Strengthening Communities. The initiative is a $4 million capital campaign for the creation of a mobile simulation lab ($2.5 million) and to support student scholarships ($1.5 million).

The state-of-the-art mobile lab—only the third such lab in the country and the first in Minnesota—will provide on-site training and education. What’s more, it will allow students to practice responding to what are often rare but frequently life-threatening situations in a safe and realistic environment. The lab will be used by health care professionals at long-term care facilities, at hospitals and clinics, and at businesses that need to educate their workforce on safety and health issues. It also will be used to reach out to K-12 students to expose them to career options in health care and by firefighters and police to practice responding to emergencies.

For a quick video overview of the mobile lab, go to www.ridgewater.edu and click on the “Mobile Simulation” video link.

In the same way that flight simulators transformed aviation, practicing scenarios that imitate real medical emergencies is fundamentally changing health care education. What’s more, the lab will benefit all of Minnesota by providing the type of quality on-site health care education that hasn’t been available in rural areas. And as part of our role in Minnesota’s Center of Excellence in Healthcare, the scenarios developed in the lab also will be available to other Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

The second phase of the campaign seeks to expand scholarship opportunities for Ridgewater students. You can read more about the Changing Lives, Strengthening Communities campaign on page 7 of this issue. If you have questions about how to get involved, call Bobbie Mattison, executive director of the Foundation at 320-222-6095, or visit with one of our Foundation Board members. As always, I hope you enjoy this publication. Let us know your thoughts, and thank you for supporting Ridgewater College.

Dr. Douglas W. Allen
President

A new year, a new you!

Spring courses start soon at Ridgewater. Take a class you need for a degree, or one that touches on a topic of interest to you.

View our Spring schedule on pages 10-11!
Spring Break in Ireland!

March 14-24, 2008

Full payment deadline is December 6 unless you sign up for a monthly payment plan.

A three-credit, half-semester evening course to coincide with the trip—Hist. 247: International Study—will be offered spring semester on Monday evenings from 6-8 p.m. until trip departure. It fulfills Minnesota Transfer Curriculum Goals 6 and 8. The focus of the course will be on Anglo-Irish relations and Irish emigration.

For more information, contact:
Sam Nelson, Ridgewater College History Instructor
320-222-7527 or sam.nelson@ridgewater.edu
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“[Ridgewater soccer players] seem to be excited to learn from people of other cultures. They’re always trying to encourage and motivate each other on the field.”
—Edel Fernandez, page 18

“We’ve purposefully diversified so we’re not hit by any one individual market sector taking a dive.”
—Gary Boettcher, page 22

Front Cover:
Coach Edel Fernandez and members of the Ridgewater men’s soccer team.
Photo by Patrick Kelly.
Ridgewater’s Management Education programs, which offer a unique mix of on- and off-site instruction, recently celebrated their 50-year anniversary.

The programs are nontraditional but effective. Ridgewater’s 12 Farm Business Management instructors and three Small Business Management instructors don’t restrict their teaching to the classroom. In fact, most instruction takes place at students’ businesses with classroom and seminars mixed in. Students are typically farm or business owners who enroll part time for help with real-life challenges.

**Farm Business Management**

Todd Dybdahl, a corn and soybean farmer in Clinton who graduated from Ridgewater in 1983 (when it was still known as Willmar Technical College), signed on for the Farm Business Management program in 1985. Each year, he attends five or six day-long seminars on such practices as grain marketing and crop production and meets with his Farm Business Management instructor. He views his annual tuition payment as an all-access pass to the instructor’s expertise. “We contact our instructor whenever we need to,” he says. “If you’re trying to decide to buy another farm or expand your operation, the instructor will come out and help analyze the decision. They see a lot of situations, so they can give you good insight.”

Dybdahl also has access to FINPACK, a software application developed by the Center for Farm Financial Management at the University of Minnesota. FINPACK allows students to perform financial projections and compare their [operations] to the businesses of 500 other

Ridgewater students, as well as 2,000 other farm businesses statewide. “You can track your financial progress and see what your trends are and where to improve,” says Dybdahl. “If you were doing your own books, you wouldn’t have a clue where you stack up with the average farm. It’s valuable to know how you’re performing versus your peers.”

Students also will soon have access to MYFINBIN, a program developed by the U of M and Ridgewater Farm Business Management instructors. “MYFINBIN allows them to select the database they will use in their comparison,” says Jim Molenaar, Ridgewater’s regional director of Management Education programs. “It’s interactive and allows them to research and compare their farm to farms of similar size, type of operation, or management practices.”

**Small Business Management**

Ridgewater’s Small Business Management program provides education to more than 100 students looking to start a business or become more efficient in managing an existing one. “Students in the program contribute 60 to 70 new jobs to the local economy each year,” Molenaar says. “If our instruction can help them, we make a contribution to the student and the community.”

“Maybe a cook wants to open a restaurant,” he adds. “We help identify what he needs to be successful so he doesn’t make mistakes and learn the hard way. Sometimes a success story is deciding that you shouldn’t start the business.”

When students do start a business, the results are impressive. “The Small Business Administration suggests that only 20 percent of new businesses survive for at least five years,” Molenaar says. “Students who complete the Ridgewater Small Business Management program have a success rate of 90 percent after five years.”

**On the horizon**

Both programs have exciting projects underway. The Farm Business Management program will give information to farmers considering organic farming. “In the past, an organic farmer might go to a lender for financing,” Molenaar explains. “Lenders like solid information, and there wasn’t a lot available for organic farming. The information will give farmers and lenders greater confidence in their decisions and in knowing what to expect with organic farming practices.”

The Diversity Small Business Management pilot project is a new effort made possible by initiative funds provided to the program. Roberto Treviño Jr. was hired as a bilingual instructor in the fall of 2006. Education is delivered in a similar manner to the regular Small Business Management program, but it also has the goal of helping students overcome cultural and language barriers.

Given the success of both programs and how they meet students’ needs, it’s a good bet they’ll be able to celebrate plenty of anniversaries in future years.

—Phil Bolsta

For more information on either the Farm Business Management or the Small Business Management program, go to www.ridgewater.edu, click on “Current Students” and then on “Academics.” From there, click on “Technical Programs.”
Hire Power

Ridgewater adds three new administrators.

Some recent key administrative additions here at Ridgewater College:

**Jenni Swenson** is the college’s new dean of instruction for Liberal Arts and Sciences. Jenni, who has been serving as Ridgewater’s interim dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences since September 2006, is working on her dissertation from the University of Minnesota for her PhD in Rhetorical Theory and Scientific and Technical Communication. She has an MA in Rhetorical Theory and Scientific and Technical Communication, an MS in Soil Science, and a BS in Natural Resources and Environmental Studies—all from the University of Minnesota. She also has an AA in Liberal Arts from Inver Hills Community College.

She has held positions as an instructor, lecturer, education specialist and director within the U of M, including at the Department of Rhetoric; Department of Bio-Systems; and Agricultural Engineering; and the Department of Soil, Water, and Climate. For nearly four years, she was also a co-owner of a Minneapolis-based Web design consultancy.

**Jodi Knaus** is the college’s new chief human resources officer. Jodi comes to Ridgewater from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system’s Northeast Higher Education District, where she had responsibility for personnel across five institutions and six individual campuses. Jodi has a BS degree in Applied Psychology from Bemidji State University, and 15 years of personnel management experience, including 11 within the MnSCU system. In her new role, she will direct all HR functions across both campuses of Ridgewater College, including administrative oversight and supervision of employment, payroll, and labor relations. She also will oversee HR information systems and reporting, benefits, staff development and safety, EEO and Affirmative Action, and performance management.

**Bob Haines** has been hired as the college’s new vice president of finance and operations. Bob comes to Ridgewater from the Willmar Public Schools, where he worked as the director of business and finance since 2001. He has a BA in Business Administration/Hospital Administration from Concordia College in Moorhead, an MBA from the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management, and certification as an employee benefit specialist from the Wharton School and the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans. His new duties will include management of the college’s financial operations, providing vision for physical plant operations, and leadership for the institution’s operational and strategic planning process.

“I’m extremely pleased to have Bob, Jodi, and Jenni join the Ridgewater management team,” says Ridgewater President Douglas Allen. “All three are key leadership positions for the college and each person brings a commitment to higher education and significant skills to those roles. I look forward to working with them all as the college continues its focus on students and learning.”
The Next Stage

The curtain rises on a host of new developments in Ridgewater’s Theater program.

Thanks to some dramatic changes, the Theater program is taking center stage at Ridgewater. A popular instructor now offers classes on both campuses. An award-winning playwright has come on board. An assortment of new courses—including online options—are in the works. And students may soon have the opportunity to earn an Associate of Fine Arts (AFA) degree in Theater. The degree would provide students with 20 to 24 credits specific to theater.

Jenni Swenson, dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences, is optimistic about the AFA initiative. “We must go through the program application process and be approved before we can offer the AFA to students,” she says. “Our theater faculty have a wealth of talent and knowledge to offer students and I hope their efforts to bring the AFA to Ridgewater will come to fruition. Ultimately, student interest is what will be needed to grow and sustain the program.”

Popular instructor Jason Gonzalez, who moved from the Willmar campus to the Hutchinson campus this fall, is excited about all the positive changes. “With the introduction of online courses and the AFA initiative, it’s going to be a great opportunity for us to grow the department in terms of what we can offer students, what they can learn, and how they can develop,” he says.

For the first time, Hutchinson students will be able to take the Beginning Acting class. Last year, no productions were staged on the Hutchinson campus. This year, students can participate in two minor productions in Hutchinson and two major shows on the Willmar campus.

New instructor Jayme McGhan comes to the Willmar campus with an impressive resume. He holds an MFA in playwriting from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and has been involved in more than 150 productions as a playwright, actor, director, designer, and technician. He’s also the regional representative of The Dramatists Guild for the Twin Cities and surrounding region, as well as a columnist for The Dramatist magazine.

McGhan, who moved to Minnesota to support his wife’s career, taught at Ridgewater as a sabbatical replacement while also teaching at Dakota State University in Madison, S.D. When both schools offered him a teaching load, he chose Ridgewater. “The AFA will be pretty amazing,” he says. “We’ll try to split it down two paths—a performance path and a technical path. We should be offering six new courses and draw new students from all over.”

Ridgewater’s first new Theater class, Scriptwriting and Analysis, is being offered now. A second new course, directing, will be offered in the spring, followed by a few more in the fall of 2008.

Betty Strehlow, vice president of Academic Affairs & Student Services, couldn’t be more pleased with all the developments in the program. “My kudos to our theater faculty for their enthusiasm, initiative, and collaborative efforts toward expanding our theater offerings at both campuses of Ridgewater College,” she says. “This is an exciting venture that should result in new opportunities for our students and surrounding communities.”

To find out more, go to www.ridgewater.edu, click on “Programs and Courses” and then click on “Speech and Theater Arts.”

—Phil Bolsta
**Critical Care**

The Ridgewater College Foundation has kicked off an effort to bring a powerful new learning tool to the college. You can help.

The lab, which will be only one of its kind in the state (and only the third of its kind nationally), will be mobile and capable of traveling wherever it's needed. It will feature an ambulance bay that will mirror the interior of a working ambulance, allowing emergency medical personnel to undergo hands-on training. It also will have an emergency bay room that will simulate an emergency room environment. The two sections will be linked by a computer- and audio/video-equipped control center that will function as the heart of the lab, allowing students and instructors to monitor activities in the bays, and even for virtual reality simulations and real-time streaming of training sessions.

"The mobile simulation lab will provide the college with a unique training model," says Bobbie Mattison, executive director of the Foundation. "It also will allow Ridgewater to focus on improving patient care outcomes and clinical learning experiences. And it will boost the readiness of the college's graduates to practice in rural and specialty settings."

As Mattison adds, the lab also will showcase Minnesota as a national model in health care education and stimulate economic development by addressing the needs of students, faculty, and employers in health care, technology, science, and business. In fact, it will have a number of tangible benefits, including better access to rural health care providers, improved quality of care, increased readiness for graduates to practice in rural and specialty settings, and door-to-door delivery of specialized resources such as advanced cardiac life support.

**Partnership**

While the simulation lab will deliver a host of advantages for Ridgewater and the surrounding community, it won't come cheap. The project requires a three-year, $2.5 million funding plan, which is the core element of the campaign. (The second element will raise $1.5 million in scholarships for Ridgewater students.) The Foundation is working with 9 key partners on the project: Affiliated Community Medical Centers, the Center for Integrated Health Science Education and Practice, Glencoe Regional Health Services, Hutchinson Area Health Care, the Kandiyohi County/City of Willmar Economic Development Partnership, Rice Memorial Hospital, the Willmar Public School District, and Workforce Centers in Willmar and Hutchinson.

The support of those partners has been invaluable to the project. But the Foundation needs more help to make the lab a reality. To find out more about the Changing Lives, Strengthening Communities campaign and how you can contribute, contact Mattison at 320-222-6095, bobbie.mattison@ridgewater.edu.

This artist’s rendering depicts the mobile lab’s ambulance bay, emergency room bay, and control center.
Buddy System

Ridgewater’s Center for Customized and Continuing Education helps a group of New Ulm manufacturers team up for an innovative learning initiative.

Anyone who has had a New Year’s resolution fade by January 15 understands the challenges businesses face with continuous improvement programs. Projects start out strong, but employees move on or a crisis occurs, and before you know it, the initiative is firmly seated on the back burner.

Avoiding the back burner was one reason Keith Pryor, organizational development manager at New Ulm’s Kraft Foods milk-processing plant, was excited about a learning consortium of manufacturing firms in New Ulm. The consortium—organized and trained with the help of Ridgewater’s Center for Customized and Continuing Education—is providing local firms with training in Lean manufacturing systems, which use analytical tools to help companies operate more efficiently. To be most effective, systems such as Lean manufacturing and Six Sigma require long-term commitment to the effort, says Pryor, whose firm has achieved about $500,000 in reduced costs through the efforts. Involving other companies would help Kraft stay on task and committed to the project.

To help fund the effort, the consortium, which also includes Parker Hannifin Corp., a manufacturer of computer motors, and Windings Inc., which makes electrical motor components such as flywheels, stators, and rotors, received a three-year, $350,000 grant from the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership. So far, about 150 managers and supervisors at the companies have been trained, and up to 500 employees will receive training eventually, says Pat Lang, the Ridgewater project coordinator who has been working with the companies. “The companies wanted a form of training that could provide a large number of employees with high-end analytical skills in manufacturing systems,” says Lang.

The New Ulm firms took things a step further when they formed a Community of Practice, a local group that meets monthly to discuss best practices. They have also toured each other’s plants and shared ideas on common problems. According to Pryor, involving more than one company in the project “provides a richer, more diverse learning environment. It takes the theory beyond just theory and into the practice area.”

The group has been so successful that three other New Ulm firms have joined the Community of Practice. Ridgewater’s involvement was a “cornerstone of this effort,” Pryor adds.

Lang and other members of the customized training staff helped arrange the grant with the state and have assisted with the training. For Lang, the project provides a chance to work with exciting companies on real-world business problems. “These companies are so creative and innovative; it forces us to be on the cutting edge, too,” she says. “It’s really interesting work.”

—Mary Lahr Schier
Smart Money

Worried that you can’t afford college? Stop worrying—there are a lot of financial aid options out there. But it pays—literally—to plan ahead and act quickly.

Of all the reasons people will give for not attending college, money usually tops the list. And that’s a problem. Why? For starters, a college education is one of the best investments you’ll ever make. U.S. Census Bureau statistics note that a person with an associate’s degree will earn more than $1.5 million over his or her career, and someone with a bachelor’s degree will earn more than $2 million. The average lifetime earnings for the average high school graduate: around $369,000.

Nonetheless, making the jump to attend college is a big step, particularly when you have to factor how you’ll pay for it. From the outside, financial aid can look confusing. What types of aid are available? How do you get it? Can you still work while you’re in college? What about paying for child care? And what happens if you need to take some time off?

Those sorts of worries don’t have to hold you back, however. Navigating the world of financial aid is far easier than you might think, and there are numerous sources of money to help you earn a degree without going broke. In fact, more than 80 percent of all Ridgewater students receive some form of financial aid each year. Let’s take a look at the basics.

Types of aid

Generally speaking, you can break financial aid into four categories:

1. Loans

These are typically low interest and are given based on an individual student’s need. Examples include the Federal Stafford Loan, the Federal Perkins Loan, and the Minnesota Student Educational Loan. The key condition is that you must stay enrolled on at least a half-time basis (six or more credits). You’ll also need to start repaying the loan after you graduate or if you drop to less than a half-time schedule.

2. Grants

Grants are also based on need. The big difference: They don’t have to be paid back. Examples include the Federal Pell Grant, which offers up to $4,050 per year, and the Minnesota State Grant, which helps students from low- and moderate-income families. Students who face child care costs because of the need to attend classes may qualify for the Minnesota Child Care Grant, which offers $2,200 per year for each eligible child.

3. Work study

In a nutshell, this is pay that you earn by working on campus. Students who qualify for federal or state work study programs can take a job that provides up to 20 hours a week of employment. Each year, more than 500 Ridgewater students take work study jobs.

4. Scholarships

Scholarships are actually independent of financial aid, and are based on such factors as your degree program, academic achievement, leadership, service, and more. Each year, the Ridgewater College Foundation gives out more than $200,000 in scholarships.

Steps to success

The bottom line: There are plenty of financial aid options out there. At the same time, a lot of money goes untouched each year around the country. According to a recent study by the Washington, D.C.-based American Council on Education, more than 800,000 students who qualify for a federal Pell Grant each year don’t fill out the required forms—and thus don’t get any aid.

The first step is to apply for aid and see how much you qualify for. Ridgewater’s Financial Aid department can help you fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA; see: www.fafsa.ed.gov). The form has seven steps that ask about your school plans, your family size, financial information, and the like. You also may need to complete some other paperwork, which Ridgewater’s Financial Aid department can help you with. Once your application is complete and accurate, your financial aid eligibility is calculated and an award letter gets mailed to the address supplied on your application.

According to Ridgewater Director of Financial Aid Jim Rice, it’s critical to apply as early as possible. While you can apply for most programs using the FAFSA form at any time during the school year, some programs have limited financial aid funds—and they’re typically given out on a first-come, first-served basis. Rice also notes that it’s equally important to plan thoroughly, and to factor in all of the costs of attending college. “Tuition costs are the first ones that people think about,” he says, “But you’ll also need to consider books and supplies, room and board costs, and other fees and expenses.”

Help at hand

Rice is quick to add that his department can help you with that planning process—and with any other financial aid-related questions. The college regularly holds financial aid planning sessions on the Willmar and Hutchinson campuses and at area high schools throughout the school year. What’s more, the Financial Aid department’s website features information on everything from application instructions to types of aid to online resources and much more. “Financial aid can be confusing when you first start looking into it, but it doesn’t have to be a barrier for someone who wants to get an education,” Rice says. “We can help students through the entire process from start to finish, help them plan things out, and walk them through their options. We’re here to help.”

For more information, go to www.ridgewater.edu, click on “Future Students” and then on “Financial Aid.”
Here are night, online, and general interest courses for the 2008 Spring Semester. For the full schedule, go to www.ridgewater.edu.

### General Interest and Night Classes—Willmar Campus

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<th>Dept.</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sec.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANTH</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Introduction to Cultural Anthropology</td>
<td>6–9 pm</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Park-Smith</td>
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<td>ART</td>
<td>125</td>
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<td>Digital Photography</td>
<td>10 am–12 pm</td>
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<td>BUS</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Financial Accounting (ITV)</td>
<td>5:30–9:30 pm</td>
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<td>ENGL</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td>6–9 pm</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>ENGL</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>College Composition I</td>
<td>6–9 pm</td>
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<td>Janicki</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENGL</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scientific and Technical Communication</td>
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<td>ENGL</td>
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<td>Honors Composition</td>
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<td>Karsten</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENGL</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>Introduction to Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENGL</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gender and Sexuality in Literature</td>
<td>10–10:50 am</td>
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<td>HIST</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>International Study (ITV)</td>
<td>6–8 pm</td>
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<td>Nelson</td>
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<td>HSER</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Case Management</td>
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<td>Hoffman</td>
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<td>(class meets Feb 8, 9, 29, Mar. 1, 7, 8)</td>
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<td>HSER</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Chemical Use Assessment and Intervention</td>
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<td>Voice Class</td>
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<td>Baseball/Softball Skills and Officiating</td>
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<td>PUBH</td>
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<td>Drug Education in Contemporary Society</td>
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<td>Keaveny</td>
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<td>SOC</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Sociology of Aging</td>
<td>5:30–8:30 pm</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Hoffman</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPAN</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Spanish II (ITV)</td>
<td>4–5:30 pm</td>
<td>M W F</td>
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<td>THTR</td>
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### General Interest and Night Classes—Hutchinson Campus

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<td>Beginning Acting</td>
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**Online Classes**

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For more information on any of these programs, contact Ridgewater at 800-722-1151, or go to www.ridgewater.edu.
This time next year, Jon Radtke will be living and working in Oahu, Hawaii. As a longtime manager for Target stores around the Twin Cities metro area, the Ridgewater grad has made a name for himself within the corporation, and he emerged as the best person to head up the Hawaiian venture. “Target is going to open stores in Hawaii and Alaska, and I’ve been asked to go to Oahu and start setting up the store there and get the team hired,” he says, with some understatement. “I’m excited to be part of the rollout of that store.”

While the move is an honor, it’s only the latest in a long list of accomplishments for Radtke. A Target employee for nearly 15 years, he’s earned a host of awards, overseen the openings of numerous stores, and now manages the Minnetonka store, which is a company flagship. Considered a showcase operation, the store often draws reporters writing about Target for such publications as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and Fortune magazine.

For as far as he’s come, however, Radtke hasn’t forgotten where he got his start. His retailing roots stretch back to small-town Minnesota—and are tightly linked with Ridgewater.

**Retailing roots**

Radtke’s retailing career got off to an early start. “I graduated from Lester Prairie High School in 1980 and started working in a grocery store when I was 16—stocking shelves, carrying out groceries, and cashiering,” he notes.

When his high school counselor suggested that Radtke was well suited to a career in sales and marketing, the new grad enrolled in the Marketing and Sales Management program at Ridgewater. The decision made sense. “I love working with people and the public and I’m pretty outgoing,” Radtke says. “I had worked in retail and liked it. Plus Ridgewater was close to home and I felt it could provide me with a great education—and it did. Money was a factor, too, because I have seven brothers and sisters, so it fit for financial reasons, as well.

“It was an awesome experience,” he adds. “The class size was great. There were 50 students in my high school graduating class, so I was nervous about going to a huge college and getting lost in the crowd. At Ridgewater, instructors took an interest in me and helped me to be a success in life.”
While in school, Radtke began working part time at a Kmart in Hutchinson. He liked it so much that he began planning to work with a major retailer once he finished school. He took the first step immediately after graduation, when Kmart offered him a position as an assistant manager. Thirteen years later, Target came calling. For Radtke, working for the Minneapolis-based retail giant has offered a steady diet of variety, along with a wealth of challenges and opportunities. “I love my job,” he says. “It’s exciting to come in every day. I’m a store team leader, which is like being a football coach. We have about 370 team members at the Minnetonka store, and it’s my job to lead the troops, to coach the team. I also go to colleges and recruit.”

Radtke started his Target career at a store in Chanhassen, and then moved to locations in Plymouth, St. Paul, West St. Paul, and Edina, before opening the Minnetonka store, which, he says, is referred to as the “moonshot store.” That designation, Radtke says, refers to “shooting for the moon” for ideas in everything from products to fixtures. “You start with an empty aisle and it’s like putting a puzzle together,” he says. “Then senior leadership comes in and looks at it and either approves or disapproves of it.”

Radtke says that working with each store’s employees is perhaps the most rewarding aspect of his job. “One of our leadership responsibilities is developing people,” he says. “We don’t manage people—we lead them. Each store has its own unique challenges, including getting the right team members in the right positions.”
He’s been successful in meeting those challenges. Since joining Target, he has earned a number of honors, including a “Best Team Player” designation at the company’s national sales meeting last August, the third time he has earned that honor. He also has earned seven Golden Contribution Awards for meeting financial goals, and five Guest Service Awards, which are the result of customers’ ratings of service for individual Target stores. “I also got the Best People Developer Award—that’s one of the best,” Radtke says. “It’s for assisting other teams. We do a lot of support, helping other teams open new stores. My current boss used to work for me; I’m proud of that. The vice president of operations used to work for me, too. It’s a great feeling to see people who worked for you—people who you helped develop—move up in the company.”

Radtke also works to ensure that Target’s customers—the “guests,” as Target refers to them—are well served. It’s an ever-shifting task. The retail environment has grown increasingly competitive in the last few years, and customers have a variety of shopping options to choose from. They demand low prices, big selections of goods, clean stores, and top-notch service. Radtke is constantly tracking changes in customers’ desires, including a big one these days: the need for speed. “They want to get in and out as fast as they can,” he says. “They don’t want to wait in line, so we [analyze] the fastest way to get them in and out of the store. For example, we promote that we’ll answer call boxes in 60 seconds. And the lanes are one-plus-one: One person being waited on and one person in line. If there is more than one person in line, we’ll call for backup. Service is a huge part of what we do. I want to make sure we’re delivering great guest service, because consumers go where they get the best service.”

Target, the second-largest general merchandise retailer in the United States, has been delivering on that front. The company is consistently recognized for everything from store design to social responsibility. Last year BusinessWeek named it one of the World’s Most Innovative Companies, while Fortune recognized it as one of America’s Most Admired Companies. The business isn’t resting on its laurels, however. It plans to have 2,010 stores open throughout the United States by the year 2010. The company currently has 1,550—meaning it will need to open more than 150 stores per year to hit its goal.

Welcome to paradise

Radtke is excited to be part of the process. Last summer, Target flew him and his wife, Colleen, who is a paraprofessional working with special needs students in Victoria, to Oahu so they could get an idea of where they would be living and working. “When you land, they say, ‘Welcome to paradise’—and it’s true,” he says. “I absolutely love Hawaii. When we were looking for housing and people found out I was with Target, they were ecstatic about us opening a store there.”

Radtke notes that the timing is right for the move. He and Colleen have two sons: Michael, a sophomore at St. John’s University, and Matthew, who recently graduated from the University of North Dakota’s aviation program and has started his career as a commercial pilot. With both sons firmly set on their college and career paths, there will be little upheaval in the household.

Looking back on his career, Radtke credits Ridgewater with the educational foundation that has led to a successful career in retailing. “The speech classes in particular helped me immensely,” he says. “They really helped me to be comfortable standing up in front of people and to communicate effectively, to get my message across. One thing we look
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The knowledge that Radtke gained while attending Ridgewater, combined with his enthusiasm, his people skills, his keen sense of consumer needs, and the ability to develop his team members have all earned him high praise within Target. Where will he go after Hawaii? His immediate career goal, he says, is to open the Oahu store “with a huge success. I’ll open that store in March 2009. We will be out there for two to three years. Then I will look at where I want to be within Target.

“I will do this until I retire,” he adds. “Store team leader is a good niche for me; I have no aspirations to work my way up to headquarters. My niche is working with people and coaching the team.”

Vicki Stavig is a Bloomington-based freelance writer.
David Beckham may have chosen Los Angeles over Minnesota, but the Ridgewater community couldn’t be more excited about soccer these days. “Our home games were very well attended last year,” says Edel Fernandez, head coach of Ridgewater’s men’s soccer team. “We saw a lot of students and faculty and administration coming to the games. We seem to have genuinely sparked interest within the college and throughout the community.”

Through aggressive recruiting, Fernandez, who hails from Guanajuato in the central highlands of Mexico, also seems to have brought the world together at Ridgewater. The team includes players from Serbia, Mexico, Venezuela, Somalia, Bolivia, Honduras, and Liberia, as well as homegrown U.S. talent. “Everyone meshes together well,” Fernandez says. “They know that we are a team and that we are all wearing the same colors. That is a very valuable lesson that they can bring into the classroom.”

Indeed, Fernandez’s mission extends far beyond how many goals are scored. As the college’s director of Multicultural Affairs, he also provides guidance to students of color and envisions a more inclusive environment that helps ensure students of all colors and backgrounds feel comfortable on the Ridgewater campuses.

Starting out
When he took the job as Ridgewater’s first-ever soccer coach in April 2006, Fernandez’s primary challenge was to assemble a team that was at least somewhat competitive. Given that he had to build a team from scratch, and find and buy the uniforms, equipment, and goals,
that was no small task. “Most of the players who wanted to try out had never played soccer on a team before,” he says. “In fact, some had never played soccer at all. My biggest challenge was taking a team of kids who had the will but not necessarily the skill, and trying to bring them all to the same level.”

Although Fernandez managed to round up 18 players, he rarely saw more than 14 to 16 at any given practice or game due to classroom commitments. “I tell my players that the main reason they’re students at Ridgewater College is to focus on their education first,” he says. “But with any luck, they can use soccer as a tool to further their education through a scholarship at a four-year college.”

The team’s travel schedule was also a challenge. The Minnesota Community College Conference (MCCC) doesn’t offer soccer as an intercollegiate sport, so Ridgewater had to join the Iowa Community College Athletics Conference (ICCAC). The only other Minnesota team in the ICCAC is Dakota County Technical College in Rosemount. “Since we’re playing teams from Iowa, the travel [can be] ridiculously tiring,” Fernandez says. “You’re sitting in a bus for seven hours to get to a game and then another seven hours back. That’s why we are pushing the MCCC to start a conference in Minnesota.”

That goal looks increasingly possible. “More colleges in Minnesota are interested in offering soccer,” Fernandez notes. “Hibbing Community College has replaced football with soccer, Century College just added soccer, and we have scrimmages scheduled against the University of Minnesota-Morris, Pillsbury Baptist Bible College in Owatonna, and Crossroads College in Rochester.”

The Ridgewater men’s soccer team kicked off its second season on August 25 against Iowa Western Community College. The ICCAC conference has eight teams, which means that each team plays 14 games—seven home and seven away.

Like his fellow players, Lakeville native Ben Rients is excited to be playing college soccer again. Rients, 24, enrolled at Ridgewater in part because he could stay at his family’s cabin while attending classes. He grew up playing in Minnesota’s top divisions of youth soccer, played at Hamline University for a year, and was in the U.S. Olympic Development Program from 1997-2001. “I haven’t played in four years,” Rients says. “I couldn’t believe how out of shape I was. I thought I was done playing competitive soccer, so having a team at Ridgewater is awesome!”

Global influences
Before coming to Ridgewater, Fernandez, 33, spent four years at the Minnesota WorkForce Center in Willmar, first as an unemployment coordinator, then as the center’s migrant labor representative. He had arrived in the United States in September 2000 after teaching conversational Spanish to foreign students for four years at a university in his native Guanajuato. “I was hoping to find something closer to my career in the university environment,” he says. “So I jumped at the chance to come to Ridgewater.”

Fernandez had been a soccer player, referee, and coach in Mexico, so the head coaching position was a perfect fit. And his bachelor’s degree in communications and public relations, coupled with being
bicultural and bilingual, made him an ideal candidate for director of Multicultural Affairs. “It has been a really great change so far,” he says. “With my background in education, I enjoy helping students further their education and giving them the tools they need to complete a degree. It’s very rewarding work.”

Since soccer was considered a club sport for the 2006 season, students qualified to play with as little as one credit. This year, it’s a Division 1 varsity sport, so players must be full-time students with a minimum GPA of 2.0. Players are taking that academic requirement seriously. “You have to get your homework done if you want to play soccer,” says Bolivian native Dickson Centellas. “If you get bad grades, you cannot play.”

Centellas, who’s studying law enforcement, didn’t choose Ridgewater because of the soccer program, but he’s thrilled that it’s available. “I’ve played soccer since I was three or four,” he says. “I’ve played almost every day in Willmar, and I’m in a men’s league that plays on Sundays. Soccer is one of the best sports ever.”

But Ridgewater’s soccer program is more than just an enjoyable diversion. Two-thirds of the 24 players on this year’s team enrolled at Ridgewater specifically to play on the team. “[We recently got] a player from Serbia,” Fernandez notes. “I received an e-mail from him, telling me he was in Serbia and that he had gone to Long Prairie High School. He saw that we were offering soccer and wanted to play for us.”

Jose Solis agrees that Ridgewater has become more appealing to potential students. “Soccer is attracting more people to the school,” says the Texas-born Solis, who was raised in the Willmar area. “It offers members of the Hispanic community a sport they love to play, so it gives them another reason to come to college.”

More local people are also interested in enrolling at Ridgewater because of the soccer program. “Soccer is the world’s most popular sport,” Fernandez says. “David Beckham’s signing by the L.A. Galaxy has boosted interest in the United States tremendously. Soccer has been an important part of the athletic department in schools in California, Texas, and New York, and the Midwest is finally catching up.”

The players seem to enjoy the attention. “Soccer is that mysterious sport that no one knows about,” says Solis, who is planning a career in human resources. “People are curious about it, so it’s kind of cool to be on the team.”

Kids are the future of soccer, and Fernandez is taking every opportunity he can to interest them in the game. “Through Willmar Community Education & Recreation, we offer a four-week soccer program in the fall for grade school kids,” he says. “I’m helping with it, but it’s not affiliated with Ridgewater. I have seen a growing interest in soccer from kids in kindergarten to sixth grade. It’s great to see these young players trying to become the new Beckham.”

The team’s multicultural identity gives Fernandez the opportunity to expand his influence. “In this state, it seems like we put up with each other, but we are not necessarily welcoming of people from different cultures and backgrounds,” he says. “The ideal outcome is not just understanding these new cultures, but accepting them. We would then be a community in which neighbors would be talking to each other and kids would be playing with each other. We would also learn that everybody has the same potential when given the opportunity.”

Fernandez is encouraged by the way his team is embodying his ideals. “I have always encouraged my players to respect one another, their opponents, the referees, and themselves,” he says. “They seem to be excited to learn from people of other cultures. They’re always trying to encourage and motivate each other on the field.”

That spirit of cooperation can’t help but spill over into everyday life. “I hope it translates into the classroom as well,” Fernandez says. “Some of your best friends come from this time of your life, and a few of the players are now really good friends. They are all trying hard to make a difference for the team and for the college.”

Not only is soccer entertaining, it’s having a unifying effect. “Traditionally, we had seen low interest from the college and the Willmar community in attending college events,” Fernandez says. “At our games, we’re seeing many people from Willmar, especially if they have friends or family members who are playing.”

“The people from the community who know the rules and have played soccer enjoy our games very much,” Fernandez adds. “Others who don’t have much exposure to the sport want to know more about it. They ask me questions like ‘What does offside mean?’ or ‘What does a free kick mean?’ or ‘What does a yellow card mean?’ And the kids want to talk to the players and be just like them.”

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**Phil Bolsta is a Blaine-based freelance writer.**
Gary Boettcher’s career has seen him work for six different electronics companies in 30+ years—and he’s still in the same building he started in back in 1974. It’s a tale of industry change and the lasting power of a solid education.

Gary Boettcher works in the same plant where he started his first job 33 years ago. A sign of stability in the business of manufacturing electronic components? Hardly. Boettcher’s company has been bought and renamed numerous times during his career.

But an electronics degree from Ridgewater College (back when it was still known as Willmar Area Vocational Technical Institute), which helped him land his first job, also has helped him adjust to the many changes in the field.

Courses as diverse as mathematics and economics gave him insights into electronics, manufacturing, and business. “That they were as diverse as they were actually paid off,” says Boettcher, the plant manager of the Montevideo plant of Micro Dynamics, an electronics design and manufacturing firm with headquarters in the Twin Cities. “I think that’s played into my career here, especially now that I’m running this show.”

Solid Foundation

Boettcher grew up in Appleton. His father died when he was young, and his mother worked long hours to support the family. “We learned to get along pretty much by ourselves because she was working multiple jobs to keep us all going,” he says. “It was a good life. A nice, simple background. We lived in a small town. I worked odd jobs throughout high school, and worked on the farms all summer long.”

In high school he hadn’t thought much about electronics. “I was tinkering more mechanically than I was electronically,” he says. “But just like every other high school student, I was trying to figure out what the heck I was going to do with my life. You didn’t really do an awful lot of planning prior to the day you graduate.”

Math had always been a strong suit, and his high school counselor suggested “something up and coming that he thought really had a future, you know, something stable,” Boettcher recalls. “He suggested electronics. I started to think about it.”

Because his family didn’t have much money, the value of a two-year college appealed to him. So in 1972 Boettcher enrolled in “electronical engineering” at Willmar Area Vocational Technical Institute. He expected to be studying math and circuitry. Instead, he also found himself taking courses in economics and technical writing. “There were numerous classes that kind of surprised me,” he says now.

He graduated in 1974 and went to work as a test technician for a Montevideo company called Data 100. The company made peripheral devices of the day, such as magnetic tape readers, punch card readers, and high-speed line printers—products no longer in existence. His testing equipment would seem positively Stone Age today: Some still contained vacuum tubes. “That kind of ages you, doesn’t it?” he says.

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Even though the technology that Boettcher studied was rapidly changing, the fundamental math and electronics education he received provided a solid foundation to understand and weather changes. And there were many changes.
In 1980, one of Data 100’s biggest clients, Northern Telecom (now known as Nortel) bought out the smaller company to acquire a manufacturing facility. Then, six years later, Nortel consolidated its holdings in Texas. Boettcher had a chance to transfer, but he and his wife decided to stay put in Minnesota. For the moment, he was out of a job.

But he and several other former employees decided there might be demand for what in the trade is known as “electronic manufacturing services”—contracting with clients to manufacture their products, such as circuit boards and other components. So they formed their own company at the Montevideo plant. Known first as Databar, the company was sold and renamed National Electronics Resources. Despite the changes, the company continued to prosper. It could compete with firms in the Twin Cities because wages were lower in southwestern Minnesota.

Then it happened again—one of the company’s customers bought them up. This time it was Micro Dynamics, a Twin...
Cities electronics design firm. “One of the problems that Micro Dynamics was experiencing back in those days was that customers were asking, ‘Where are you having this built?’” Boettcher explains.

“The company was bouncing things back and forth to various places and their customers didn’t care for that. They wanted to know where it was being built. Micro Dynamics thought they should get into manufacturing, so they bought us in 1990. We’ve been Micro Dynamics ever since.”

Boettcher’s Montevideo plant “is strictly the manufacturing arm,” he explains. Micro Dynamics assembles, tests, and packages products and ships to its client or the client’s customers. The company makes products for heavy industry, the medical device industry, communications, and aerospace. “We’ve purposefully diversified so we’re not hit by any one individual market sector taking a dive,” he notes, adding that the firm competes with companies in Minnesota, around the United States, and—more than ever before—with foreign manufacturers in countries such as China.

MOVING UP

As his company evolved, so did Boettcher. He advanced from test technician to lead technician. Then he became a quality engineer, designing the procedures and methods for testing products to make sure they met standards. He became a manufacturing engineer for military contracts as the company moved into that sector.

As Micro Dynamics made an offer for the Montevideo plant, “my boss at that time approached me and said, ‘When these guys buy us out, we’re going to look for somebody to run the place. Would you be the plant manager?’ So I took the opportunity there.”

That was 17 years ago. Even though his company’s ownership and name would change, Boettcher is still in familiar surroundings. “The name of the place has changed about five or six times,” he notes. “But it’s the same building I have worked in since 1974.”

Boettcher’s Ridgewater education not only helped him land his job, but it also helped him adjust to changes in the business. “The math has certainly been helpful in the quality-control end of it, and certainly in the engineering and manufacturing too,” he says.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

A sound foundation is exactly the kind of preparation students still receive at Ridgewater College, says Mike Parker, a Ridgewater Electronics and Wireless Communications instructor. The program still emphasizes math and basics that will help students cope with an advancing industry. “Even though the technology is changing, we’re still teaching foundational electronics,” he says.

Students have a choice of two programs: Electronic Technician or Wireless Communications. Either way, the first year they will take the same basic mathematics, including algebra and trigonometry. They also study circuits, schematics, digital electronics, and semiconductors. In their second year, students will choose their program and take courses specialized to their field.

Students pursuing a standard diploma will also study oral and written communications, and take a class for writing resumes and conducting interviews. They will also take a class in CPR. Students pursuing an AAS degree also will study English, science, arts and social sciences—subjects that will prepare them for further study in college or for a variety of jobs in industry.

Students studying electronics and wireless communication at Ridgewater want to complete their education and enter the world of work, says Parker, himself a graduate of Ridgewater. “They are looking to go to school for a couple of years and then go out and get a respectable job, a way to start their career. The thing about electronics is that they can find jobs indoors or outdoors. They can find jobs in the Twin Cities or outstate.

 “[The program is] flexible,” he adds. “We give them the foundation. And when they leave here they’re not trained to do just one job—there’s a whole realm of things they have the knowledge and skills to do.”

Boettcher and Micro Dynamics continue to have a relationship with Ridgewater College. Micro Dynamics sits on the college’s advisory board for the electronics program. Company engineers make recommendations for the curriculum and help evaluate graduates’ performance in the field. “They help guide the program,” Parker says. Students take field trips to the company and sometimes shadow technicians to learn about their work. The company, like several others working with the college, provides potential employment for graduates. “We have a number of industry contacts across the state,” Parker says.

Today, despite his advancement in the business of electronics manufacturing, Gary Boettcher finds much that is reassuring and familiar. He lives with his wife and daughter in Montevideo, but he also owns a 230-acre farm, raising corn and soybeans, not far from his boyhood home in Appleton. “I do a little farming because I can afford to and because I have the opportunity,” he says. “And I enjoy it. That gets in your blood, and it kind of sticks with you.”

And he reports to the same office he has worked in for 33 years. Actually, there are two buildings now, and one of his goals is to combine the facilities into a single building. “It was easier to manage when we were under one roof and my goal is to get us under one roof again,” Boettcher says. “Logistics-wise they’re only 150 feet apart, but it seems like worlds apart from time to time.”

Greg Breining is a St. Paul-based freelance writer.
Right Place, Right Time

Four years ago, Karen Skaggs was running out of options. Today, she’s got a new career, a new home, and a fresh outlook on life. Was it divine intervention, good timing, or the fruits of hard work?

Karen Skaggs was scared. At 38, with three young daughters, her options seemed to be drying up. She had just been laid off from a part-time marketing job in Willmar. Farming with her husband in Pennock was a struggle. So was the marriage, which would soon end in divorce. The future looked bleak.

Things have changed. Today, as an office claims representative for Auto-Owners Insurance, a Fortune 500 company, Skaggs, 42, is riding high. “I have a car and a house, and I’m taking care of my family,” she says. “It’s been an amazing gift. It’s exciting to be 40 years old and be able to turn your life around.”

Skaggs’ turnaround can be summed up in two words: Ridgewater College. Desperate, with her bills and stress levels mounting, Skaggs consulted with a counselor at the college, which she had first attended 20 years before when she was fresh out of Willmar High School. While she had earned an AA degree from...
Ridgewater and a BS degree from the University of Minnesota, going back to school wasn’t an easy decision. “It was overwhelming, even to take one class,” she says, explaining that she finally decided to enroll after being awarded a scholarship for returning female students.

**Falling into place**
After exploring the radiologic technology and computer programming fields, Skaggs stopped by the counseling office and asked Heidi Olson, the college’s dean of Student Services, if there was still a long waiting list in the Insurance Claims Representative program. A few minutes later, Olson returned, stunned. “I can’t believe it,” she told Skaggs. “There are three spots open.”

The two-semester class had started that morning, but instructor John Dobbelaere welcomed her into the program, with a warning that most of the graduates end up having to relocate. Skaggs remembers thinking, *Everything seems to be falling into place. If I need to relocate, I will.*

Indeed, she viewed it as no accident that the stars were aligning in her favor. “I had a pretty strong belief it was divine intervention,” she says. “I had been trying to run my own life and make my own decisions for so many years; that spring I just gave up and handed it over, and that’s when these coincidences started happening.”

Nine short months later, Skaggs had four job offers and opted to enter the workforce rather than seek an internship through the school. She chose a St. Cloud-based company and agreed to eventually relocate to Detroit Lakes. There were many days when she drove to St. Cloud to pick up her assignments, drove to Detroit Lakes to execute them, and arrived back in Willmar at 10 p.m. “I just did what I had to do,” she says.

Two months later, sensing that a better opportunity was out there, she revisited an offer she had from Auto-Owners Insurance. To her amazement, there was an opening in the company’s Willmar claims office. “It was one of the places where I had initially applied, but they hadn’t hired anyone in three years,” Skaggs says. “It turns out they had been asking about me but had written me off because I already had a job. It was only by my own motivation that I happened to call at just the right time.”

Skaggs is thrilled to be working for a great company so close to home. “The hours are set and my kids always know where to find me,” she says. “Plus, because of my experience at Ridgewater and my time out in the field, I started at a very advantageous level of pay.”

Skaggs loves her new career and has nothing but fond memories of her time at Ridgewater. “It was very intense and very difficult, but you get out of it what you put into it,” she says. “There were many long nights and I’m not sure how I survived it. A friend of mine said, ‘If you have to eat an elephant, you just do it one bite at a time.’ The program is geared toward people who need to get back in the workforce, and it worked perfectly for me.”

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**Southern Exposure**
After more than a decade in the sun (and occasional storm), Ridgewater grad Joel Jacobson has come home.

After spending several years rubbing elbows with the rich and famous at a ritzy Gulf Coast country club and casino, Joel Jacobson has returned to his Willmar roots. These days, the Ridgewater grad is the head PGA professional at the Eagle Creek Golf Club, a semiprivate club just north of Willmar with 300 members.

Jacobson played basketball and golf and graduated with an AA degree from Ridgewater (back when it was still known as Willmar Community College), then went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in physical education from Arizona State University. In 1994, after managing the Little Crow Country Club in New London/Spicer for 13 years, he was approached by a club member who had been instrumental in getting gambling legalized in Mississippi. Jacobson jumped at the chance to join the management team behind The Bridges, an Arnold Palmer-designed golf course, and Casino Magic, a riverboat casino, in Bay St. Louis, Miss.

Casino Magic, which by law had to be on the water, was positioned on a huge barge. “You’d never know you were on a little inlet bay,” Jacobson says. “We had entertainment galore. My wife played golf with Engelbert Humperdinck and Johnny Cash—you name ’em, they all played. Tim McGraw and Faith Hill played in one of our tournaments, and Mike Ditka and Brett Favre held their own tournaments there.”
The Jacobson family enjoyed life in Mississippi. “We lived right on the bay,” Jacobson says. “The fishing was great—plenty of speckled trout, the walleye of the south. We could stand on our back deck, cast out a net and catch our own shrimp.”

Still, life on the coast had its own challenges. A hurricane scare in the midst of a 20-team college All-American golf tournament was an ominous harbinger of the damage that Hurricane Katrina would wreak just a few years later. “When we left for the Sunday-night meeting before the tournament, the tide was just coming up,” Jacobson recalls. “By the time we came home three hours later, it had risen 4 feet and the water was ready to come in our front door. I had to carry my wife to the house because the water was up to my chest. If my son hadn’t been home to move my wife’s car, it would have been wrecked. During the eight years we lived there, we rode out a couple of other hurricanes that did damage to our house.”

When the casino was sold in 2002, Jacobson took a job as golf pro for a private club in Longview, Texas. Two years later, he and his wife knew it was time to move back home. “My parents, my wife’s parents, all our family is here,” Jacobson says.

**Coming home**

Despite what some people will say, you can go home again, although you might feel like you’ve entered a time warp. “I had worked at Eagle Creek during the summer in both high school and college, and some of the old-timers I worked with in high school are still here,” Jacobson says. “It seems like nothing’s really changed.”

Willmar might be more laid back than the Gulf Coast, but you wouldn’t know it by Jacobson’s schedule. “It’s a very intense seven-and-a-half-month season here,” he says. “My plate is really full for a short season. I give a lot of lessons in the summer. We’re actually open year ‘round; in the winter, I keep the shop open a few hours each day. I also do a little substitute teaching in the winter, although I do more ice fishing than teaching.”

Jacobson knows that Willmar is the place to be right now, but the Gulf Coast is in his blood. “There was a lot of action on the coast,” he says. “Besides golf and the casino, it was a shrimping area. I think we miss the fresh seafood, Cajun food, and entertainment the most. It was a quaint little coastal town and we made some of the best lifelong friendships we’ll ever have. I’m not ready to retire by any means, but when the time comes, I think we’ll end up down in that area.”

Elsewhere in this issue, Phil Bolsta profiled the Ridgewater men’s soccer program.
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