On the Fast Track

Working with NASCAR’s fastest cars and hottest drivers is no fantasy for a pair of Ridgewater alumni.

Win an iPod!
Take our confidential Web survey and get a chance to win an iPod shuffle! See page 5 for details.
We’re always proud to add more Ridgewater attendees to our team of accountants.

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

Mark Olson, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Larry Stulen, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Renee Mason
Accountant, Certified QuickBooks ProAdvisor
Ridgewater Graduate

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

Heather Temple
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

Kari Johnson, CPA
Senior Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate

James Rudnick, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Lawrence Wegolo, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Anita Bjur
Internal Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate

Anette Benson, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

Wendy Martin
Accountant
Ridgewater Attending St. Olaf Graduate

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

Nan Struck
CDSA Employee Benefits Administrator
Ridgewater Graduate

Kathy Schmiesing, CPA
Partner
Ridgewater Graduate

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

Randy Refsland
Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate
Minnesota State University Moorhead Graduate

Lori Raich
Bookkeeper, Certified QuickBooks ProAdvisor
Ridgewater Graduate

Sara Livingood
Accountant
Ridgewater Graduate
St. Cloud State University Graduate

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

Melissa Gratz
Receptionist
Ridgewater Graduate

Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP and CDS Administrative Services, LLC are proud to continue to hire Ridgewater attendees as part of our team, including our newest accountant, Kelly Demuth.

Willmar
331 Third St. SW
320.235.3311

Benson
1209 Pacific Ave.
320.843.2302

Morris
401 Atlantic Ave.
320.589.2602

Litchfield
820 Sibley Ave. N.
320.693.7975

St. Cloud
606 25th Ave. S.
320.252.7565

www.cds CPA.com
From the President

Greetings. In this month’s issue you’ll read about a number of Ridgewater graduates who used the education they received here as a launching pad to pursue their dreams. For some, it was a ticket to further education, for others it was the ticket to a career they dreamed of since they were young. Regardless of their path to those dreams, they all made the most of their opportunity for an education.

Providing that opportunity is what lies at the core of our mission—to provide quality learning opportunities in an affordable, accessible, and supportive environment. If you talk to our teachers, they’ll tell you that helping students learn and achieve their goals is what motivates them. Our staff also will tell you that the opportunity to help students succeed—whether by helping them secure financial aid, helping them select a major, or ensuring that our facilities are clean and up to date—is what gives them satisfaction.

This May, another group of Ridgewater College students will walk across the stage to receive their degrees. There will be family and friends in attendance; and for those of us at the college, whether we are handing out degrees or sitting in the audience, we’ll be joining in the applause, offering our congratulations and best wishes to the class of 2007. This graduating class, like those who’ve come before them, will have some time to reflect on their accomplishments before they move on in pursuit of their dreams. On behalf of everyone at the college, we wish them the best and hope they feel like they got a great start at Ridgewater College.

As always, I hope you enjoy reading about the achievements of our graduates.

Douglas W. Allen
President

Learning Never Stops!

Summer courses start soon at Ridgewater, and are a great way to pick up a few college credits during the summer. Take a class you need for a degree, or one that that touches on a topic of interest to you.

View our summer schedule on pages 10-11!
Our Commitment To Community...
Making Hutchinson a better place to live, work, and do business!

- 330+ Members Strong
- Visitor Information
- Networking Opportunities
- Community Support
- Relocation Information
- Website Community Calendar
- Community Events
- Business Education
- Tourism Promotion

The Hutchinson Area Chamber of Commerce, Convention & Visitors Bureau is dedicated to making your time in Hutchinson a successful experience! Get information on community events, local businesses, and membership on our website at www.explorehutchinson.com.

800-572-6689
320-587-5252
2 Main Street South
Hutchinson, MN 55350
info@explorehutchinson.com

Contact us Today!
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“3D is really popular now, because gaming is so hot. The Web Design degree is more programming, more technical, learning to do graphics and how to make Web pages from scratch. Many of our students like to earn both degrees.”

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“When people change their behaviors, it will change a process company wide—and that’s where the maximization of efficiency and minimization of waste will occur.”

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“I got to know [my instructors at Ridgewater], and they got to know me. That was a big advantage.”

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At the Top

Ridgewater’s volleyball team captures a national championship.

For the second time in five years the Ridgewater College volleyball team is the best in the nation. The Willmar-based squad won the National Junior College Athletic Association Division III national tournament in November, capturing the title after a victory over Edison Community College of Pique, Ohio.

It was a thrilling national tournament, with the Lady Warriors advancing to the championship match after defeating the number-one seeded team, Central Lakes College of Brainerd. The tournament was held in Rochester, Minn.

It’s the first national championship for head coach Joe Sussenguth, who took over this year for longtime coach Val Swanson (who led the team to its first national championship in 2002). Sussenguth came to Ridgewater from Minneota High School, where he was the coach for three years, and he previously served as an assistant coach at Ridgewater and at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall. “The team has been extremely competitive at a national and regional level for many years,” says Ridgewater Athletic Director Todd Thorstad. “The 11 women on the team put a great amount of time and hard work into this season.”

Thorstad says a combination of factors led to the Lady Warriors’ successful season, which saw them post a 35-4 record. “It was a very good combination of first- and second-year players, with everyone accepting their positions and roles on the team,” he says. “Joe did a nice job of channeling personalities and transitioning the team from the philosophy of last year to this year and incorporating the first- and second-year players.”

Ridgewater has a long tradition of both volleyball success and family legacies. Of the 11 students on the team, six had a sibling or parent who attended the college. Coach Sussenguth also is a Ridgewater graduate. Thorstad predicts continued success for the team. “The program is solidified with Joe taking over and bringing in a championship in his first year,” he says. “Ridgewater College volleyball will be a force to be reckoned with down the road.”

—Suzy Frisch

Sound Effects

Ridgewater College students display their vocal talents at a prestigious national showcase.

A group of Ridgewater College students showed off their vocal talents to a national audience this spring after they were selected to join the honor choir of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). The association created the honor choir for students who attend two-year colleges, and it featured nearly 250 singers from 46 colleges around the country.

Seven Ridgewater students auditioned, and four made the cut. Students Kayla Bothun, Grant Sharstrom, Laura Thrasher, and Ed Zempel traveled to Miami in March for the ACDA’s national convention, where they joined the honors choir. “I’m very proud of these students, and I think it shows that there are as talented singers at two-year colleges as there are at four-year colleges,” says Darcy Lease Gubrud, a music instructor and choral director at Ridgewater. “It’s an incredible opportunity for them.”

It’s also a rare opportunity. The ACDA holds its national convention every other year, and the directors create honors choirs for different age groups each time. In its 48-year history, the association has initiated an honors choir for two-year college students only one other time, in 1997. That year, two Ridgewater students participated.

To make the choir, the students faced a rigorous taped audition process in which they were evaluated on tone quality, pitch, musicianship, and vocal maturity. Their choir director also needed to recommend them. During the convention, the honors choir rehearsed every day with a guest conductor. The students learned challenging music in different languages that they probably wouldn’t get to sing in their regular choirs. Then they performed for the 4,000 conventioneers, including choral directors—their toughest critics.

There were other benefits to attending the convention. “They were able to work with other students from other parts of the country, which is a really unique opportunity,” says Gubrud. “They also heard what programs are like across the country and met some of the other students.”

—Suzy Frisch
Quality Matters

Ridgewater’s Center for Customized and Continuing Education brings together a diverse group of employers for a joint training program.

The city of New Ulm doesn’t always come to mind as a hotspot for employee training on such topics as efficient manufacturing and quality management. But in an increasingly global business world, efficiency is more important than ever—no matter where you’re located.

With that in mind, Kraft Foods, the largest employer in New Ulm, recently contacted Ridgewater College to see if its Center for Customized and Continuing Education could help with some training needs. Center staff recognized an opportunity to apply for a Minnesota Jobs Skills Partnership grant that could fund the development of training for Kraft and other New Ulm employers.

Their winning idea was to create a “community of practice” in which employees from several New Ulm businesses would train together on creating lean operations (a management approach that focuses on eliminating waste and boosting efficiency). They also would master Six Sigma practices, a methodology for systematically improving processes.

Ridgewater put the word out to other New Ulm companies, inviting them to join the collaborative training program. Two businesses jumped at the opportunity: Parker-Hannifin Corp., a Fortune 500 manufacturer of motion and control technologies, and Windings, a custom manufacturer of stator and rotor assemblies. “The goal is to maximize efficiencies within these organizations,” says Robert Cannon, vice president of Customized and Continuing Education at Ridgewater. “The training will teach them to address problems from a 20,000-foot view and to gain efficiencies they might not have considered.”

Ridgewater received a $350,000 Minnesota Job Skills Partnership grant to train about 600 employees from the three companies over a three-year period. There will be a variety of sessions available to employees. Under the community of practice theory, the training program will develop subject-matter experts who can share their knowledge within all three companies, says Pat Lang, project manager for the center.

“These companies are coming together with a shared understanding that it’s necessary to invest in their people and training,” Cannon adds. “When people change their behaviors, it will change a process company wide—and that’s where the maximization of efficiency and minimization of waste will occur.”

In the long run, that means more competitive Minnesota businesses operating nimbly in global markets.

—Suzy Frisch

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.ridgewater.edu/survey—and register for a chance to win an iPod Shuffle! Again, this survey is confidential. Thank you!

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**Smart Start**

*Thanks to some high-tech equipment, Ridgewater veterinary technology students are getting in-depth training on emerging surgical procedures.*

When veterinary technician students from Ridgewater College start their careers, many will work with veterinarians who do laser surgery for declawing cats. Thanks to the efforts of Veterinary Technology Instructor Dr. Al Balay, Ridgewater students can observe the surgery first-hand.

This winter the college acquired the laser surgery equipment used for declawing cats. Now students taking the required course on surgical nursing and anesthesia can observe the technology during surgery. They also learn how to clean and calibrate the equipment, tasks that would be part of their jobs in a clinic.

And it’s not only the students who benefit from the new equipment. The cats also are far better off when their claws are removed by a laser instead of a scalpel. “I have been aware for many years that there is a lot of concern that declawing is a painful procedure,” says Balay, an experienced veterinarian who has taught at Ridgewater for 13 years. “Within the last five to 10 years, it’s become evident that there are many advantages to laser surgery.”

For one, it causes less pain and bleeding for the cats. That’s because the laser beam seals nerve endings and causes less hemorrhaging than the standard techniques. Cats also generally recover from laser declawing much faster, Balay adds.

Balay was able to buy the equipment by securing a federal Perkins Improvement Grant to cover nearly $14,000 of the $23,000 cost. The rest of the funding came from Ridgewater. These are well-spent dollars, he notes, because the laser equipment makes Ridgewater the only public school in the state to offer training in laser surgery to its vet tech students. And with 18 percent of all clinics in Minnesota now using laser surgery, students will need to know how to handle the equipment.

“This is something we chose to go after because it was the right thing to teach our students,” adds Balay. “But it also helps us to stay on the cutting edge.”

—Suzy Frisch

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**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**

P.O. 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 excited to tell you about the great things happening at your alma mater!

**Name ________________________________ Maiden Name ____________________________**

**Address _______________________________________________________________________

**City ________________________________________ State __________ Zip _______________

**Telephone ___________________________ E-mail ____________________________________

**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.*
The Best of Both Worlds

Not sure if you should pursue a bachelor's degree or earn one that gets you into the workforce quickly? Ridgewater can help you make the right choice and get you started on your way.

By nearly any measure, deciding what college to attend can be a daunting task. Of all the factors to consider, one of the most important is whether you should start at a community and/or technical college or at a four-year university.

In a sense, Ridgewater offers the best of both worlds. Because we are a comprehensive community college, we offer liberal arts education intended to transfer to universities and technical education for individuals to help you learn a trade and move directly into the workforce. Not sure if an associate's degree or diploma is right for your future? No problem. Every associate's degree at Ridgewater can transfer directly into a four-year university program. Even many diploma programs are set up to transfer, giving you a wide range of options.

Here's a look at the degrees offered at Ridgewater, and the options they provide.

**Associate in Arts degree—Liberal Arts**
This is what is often referred to as “taking your generals.” Students pursuing this degree often have decided that they want to transfer to a university and earn a baccalaureate degree. All students completing an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree will complete the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, a package of credits that fulfills general education requirements and allows you to transfer to any public university in Minnesota. You can register for courses related to specific majors or specific transfer institutions, or take a variety of courses to determine your niche.

**Associate in Science**
Associate in Science (A.S.) degrees may be awarded for completion of a program designed for transfer to a baccalaureate major in a related scientific or technical field, or may be designed for immediate employment. Although students may not complete the entire Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, this degree will allow them to transfer to one or more universities as a junior. The degree is composed primarily of liberal arts and sciences courses.

**Associate in Applied Science**
Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees are generally 60 to 72 credits in length and are typically considered a technical program degree. This degree provides excellent preparation if you're planning to look for a job immediately after you graduate. At the same time, it also includes at least 20 general education credits from three of the 10 Minnesota Transfer Curriculum goal areas. Every A.A.S. degree will transfer to at least one university for credit toward a related bachelor’s degree; some may transfer to several universities.

**Diploma**
Diplomas are awarded for successful completion of a program intended to provide specific employment skills. Diplomas are typically not designed for transfer and are awarded to students who complete a specific program's technical and general studies requirements. However, some diplomas will transfer to institutions awarding a related baccalaureate degree.

**Close to home**
Another option: Not interested in traveling or relocating to obtain a bachelor's degree? You can earn one on Ridgewater's Willmar and Hutchinson campuses. Southwest Minnesota State University and Ridgewater have partnered to offer Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Business Administration, Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.S.) in Management, B.A.S. in Marketing, or a B.S. in Early Childhood Education degrees.

Students who have completed, or are in the process of completing the A.A. degree or the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum are eligible to apply for the B.S. degree. Students who have completed, or are in the process of completing the A.S. or A.A.S. degree or a two-year diploma are also eligible to apply for the B.A.S. degree in Management. Students interested in the Early Childhood Education B.S. degree must complete Ridgewater's A.S. degree in that field. And students who have completed an A.A.S. degree in Marketing Sales Management are eligible for the B.A.S. in Marketing. These programs are conducted over a three-year cycle, with courses offered primarily in the evenings and/or on weekends.

The bottom line: Ridgewater gives you plenty of options. So, if you are unsure whether to pursue a degree that gets you into the workforce quickly or to strive for a bachelor's degree, Ridgewater can get you started on your way. We also allow you to make the decision when you are ready—not when you have to.

—Sam Bowen

**Articulation:** Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

**definition (a) the action or manner of jointing or interrelating (b) the state of being jointed or interrelated.**

**The Next Step**
Ridgewater has articulation agreements on file with 11 different transfer institutions, offering 28 baccalaureate degrees. The universities are:

- Argosy University
- University of Minnesota-Crookston
- University of Minnesota-Duluth
- South Dakota State University
- Southwest Minnesota State University
- Minnesota State University-Moorhead
- Bemidji State University
- Minnesota State University-Mankato
- Winona State University
- St. Cloud State University
- Metropolitan State University

—S.B.
It used to be that if students enrolled in Ridgewater College to study welding, that’s mostly what they learned, in addition to other required courses. Same went for drafting, machining, and other technical programs. But in the workplace, welders don’t work in isolation—there usually is back and forth between the drafters, welders, machine shop workers, and others to complete a project.

For years Ridgewater instructors have wanted to provide real-world, cross-discipline experiences to students, and this year they made it happen. They’ve launched the Collaborative Industrial Project, in which seven students majoring in machine tool, welding, drafting, and automated systems engineering technology are working together to create an automated can crusher from scratch. “In school, students don’t often get a taste of working together, collaborating, and teambuilding—which is a big part of industry these days,” says Daniel Edwards, an instructor in the college’s Machine Tool Technology program. “Now they will get that experience.”

Students in the Collaborative Industrial Project are earning credits by manufacturing an aluminum compactor that turns metal into pucks for reuse or recycling. Meeting once a week, the students are designing the device and collaborating through the drafting, welding, machining, and engineering stages. Five faculty members are advising them during the project.

As Stacey Nass, an instructor in Ridgewater’s Computer Aided Drafting and Design program, sees it, the students are learning how to communicate with other workers and have realized their work isn’t done in a vacuum. “This forces them to talk to one another about the best way to design,” she says, “and they see that none of us are stand-alone during a project.”

Ridgewater hopes to turn the pilot project into an advanced option for students, which would add an extra semester or year onto their original program. That additional training in collaboration and teamwork will make graduates much more valuable to employers. “They already will have experience in teambuilding, and that’s important in industry,” notes Edwards. “They’ll have a leg up on students who have never done that before.”

—Suzy Frisch
The Fantastic Five

Want to help your high school junior get a jump on his or her future? Here are some important steps to take now.

If you are the parent of a high school junior or soon-to-be junior, there’s no time like the present to start preparing for your child’s post-secondary future. While seniors generally mail their college applications in the fall and winter, the junior year is the time to lay the groundwork for deciding where to apply and what to apply for. Here are five important steps to take now.

Step #1: Begin the conversation
Start talking with your high school student about what he or she wants to do after graduation. It’s not too early to find out what interests your student most and figure out how to turn his or her passion into a field of study or career. One way to narrow ranges of interest is to help arrange for a career day in which he or she shadows someone on the job. “People are generally proud of their jobs and would love to show someone what they do,” says Sally Kerfeld, director of admissions and career services at Ridgewater College.

Step #2: Visit schools
The best time to start looking at colleges is during the student’s junior year. If your student finds the program of his or her dreams, it’s important to find out when the school starts accepting applications. Some technical programs take applications at the start of a student’s senior year in high school, and very popular programs tend to fill up early, Kerfeld says.

When you’re visiting, ask about the cost of the school and about its community, class sizes, and the ratio of instructors to students. Find out the job-placement rate for programs and check into financial aid or other scholarship funding.

Step #3: Take the test
The fall of a student’s junior year is the best time to take the preliminary SAT (also known as the PSAT, the test many colleges use to judge students’ college readiness). It’s a great practice test for the SAT, and its results pass on knowledge about a student’s areas of weakness so he or she can better prepare for the SAT. While most two-year colleges don’t require the SAT or ACT, it might be necessary for those who want to pursue degrees at four-year institutions.

Step #4: Meet with the school guidance counselor
Counselors can aid in narrowing the fields of study students want to pursue. They also can review academic records and pinpoint any precollege requirements students have missed. Additionally, counselors are generally knowledgeable about a variety of college programs and can help students find the ones that match their interests.

Step #5: Work as a team
Make sure to involve the student in all decisions about his or her future. Have him or her make some phone calls and request information online. And don’t take over the college preparation process or your student will lose interest. At the same time, don’t have your high schooler be solely in charge of the process. Chances are good that he or she will need your knowledge, experience, and perspective.

“It can be an emotionally charged event as each child leaves to go and start their own life,” says Kerfeld. “Share the experience with your child. Go over information together.”

—Suzy Frisch
Summer Course Schedule

2007 Ridgewater College

Here is a list of the Summer schedule offerings from Ridgewater College.
For full schedule information, go to www.ridgewater.edu

Class # | Sec | Class Title | Cr | Meeting Dates | Days | Time | Instructor | Campus | Session
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Accounting
ACCT1816 30 Principles of Accounting II 4 06/11/07-07/12/07 MTWH 7:30 am – 11:30 am Anderson, James Hutchinson 2
ACCT1816 31 Principles of Accounting II 4 06/11/07-07/12/07 MTWH 7:30 am – 11:30 am Anderson, James Willmar 2

Administrative Support Careers
ADS1006 20 Keyboarding for non-Business majors 2 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1007 20 Keyboarding 2 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1016 20 Excel I 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS101720 Excel II 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1028 20 Excel III 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1032 20 PowerPoint I 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1034 20 PowerPoint II 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1043 20 PowerPoint III 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1
ADS1045 20 Computerized Accounting Basics 1 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 8:45 am – 12:00 pm Baron, Cheryl Willmar 1

Art
ART106 91 History of Modern Art 3 07/05/07-08/08/07 T H 5:30 pm – 9:30 pm (NIGHT) Nilssen, Marjorie Hutchinson 2
ART107 91 Women in Art 2 07/05/07-08/08/07 M W 5:30 pm – 8:15 pm (NIGHT) Nilssen, Marjorie Willmar 2

Biology
BIOL210 2 Human Anatomy 4 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 7:30 am – 9:50 am Anderson, Lori Hutchinson 1

Chemistry
CHEM101 2 Survey of Chemistry 4 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 7:30 am – 9:50 am Haraldson, Ronald Willmar 1

Economics
ECON206 41 Principles of Microeconomics 3 05/30/07-07/03/07 MTWH 7:30 am – 9:50 am Haraldson, Ronald Willmar 1

English
ENGL94 1 Pre-College Composition II 3 07/05/07-08/08/07 MTWH 10:00 am – 11:50 am Karsten, Margaret Willmar 2

History
HIST111 41 United States History I 3 07/05/07-08/08/07 Arranged Nelson, C Online 2
HIST222 31 Modern European History 3 07/05/07-08/08/07 M W 5:30 pm – 9:30 pm (NIGHT) Grinde, Gerald Hutchinson 2

www.ridgewater.edu
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<th>Class #</th>
<th>Sec</th>
<th>Class Title</th>
<th>Cr</th>
<th>Meeting Dates</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>Beginning Algebra</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>05/30/07-07/03/07</td>
<td>MTWH</td>
<td>8:00 am – 9:50 am</td>
<td>Oswood, Paul</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>07/05/07-08/08/07</td>
<td>MTWH</td>
<td>8:00 am – 9:50 am</td>
<td>Stone, Gayne</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>07/05/07-08/08/07</td>
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<td>8:00 am – 9:50 am</td>
<td>Heim, Douglas</td>
<td>Hutchinson</td>
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<td>10:00 am – 12:30 pm</td>
<td>Sieve, Michael</td>
<td>Hutchinson</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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For more information on any of these programs, contact Ridgewater at 800-722-1151, or go to www.ridgewater.edu.
Running
Down a Dream

Working with NASCAR’s fastest cars and hottest drivers is no fantasy for two Ridgewater grads.

By Mary Lahr Schier

When Kevin Hulstein was a freshman at Willmar High School, a guidance counselor called him in for a heart-to-heart talk. What kind of career do you want, she asked? He replied honestly, “I told her I wanted to work in professional auto racing,” recalls Hulstein. “That’s all I’d ever wanted to do.”

The counselor put aside her skepticism and helped Hulstein design a program that allowed him to spend his senior year of high school taking classes at Ridgewater College, pursuing a degree in auto mechanics. From there, a NASCAR career would require only a leap of faith and a little luck.

It took fellow Ridgewater grad John Rannow a few years longer and a near collision with his own mortality, but like Hulstein, he has used his college education and his own determination to build a career working on the world’s fastest cars.

Hulstein and Rannow not only have dream careers, but they’re also in the middle of one of the country’s hottest entertainment industries. NASCAR’s popularity exploded in the 1990s. In 2006, an average of 5.4 million households watched a typical NASCAR race on television, up 43 percent from 10 years earlier, according to Nielsen Media Research. The sport attracted $42.3 million in advertising revenues on top of billions in sponsorship fees. Two reasons for the growth: America’s enduring fascination with cars and the “average Joe” appeal of its drivers. “Dale Earnhardt was a good example,” says Rannow. “People could identify with and cheer for him because he was an average guy.”

Family connections

Hulstein’s fascination with cars and racing started at Willmar-area go-kart tracks. His father, Wayne, was a psychology instructor at Ridgewater. (His brother, Jason, currently works in the college’s information technology department.) For

Above: Kevin Hulstein
Inset: The Kyle Busch team celebrates a March win at the Bristol Motor Speedway race (Hulstein is in the back row, second from left).
fun, the family raced go-karts on the weekends. “I started racing with my family when I was about 6,” recalls Hulstein, “and between ages six and 14, I raced about every chance I got.”

Things changed, however, when his father died. “After that, go-karts just weren’t fun for our family anymore,” he notes.

Hulstein’s mother encouraged Kevin and his brother to continue racing, however, and agreed to sponsor a stock car that he would drive. Hulstein’s love of speed and machines resurfaced, and for several years he was a regular at Central Minnesota race-tracks, including the KRA Speedway in Willmar and Viking Speedway in Alexandria. Through his family’s involvement in racing, he got to know Roger Canon, an instructor in the auto body department at Ridgewater. It was Canon who advised Hulstein that if he wanted to pursue NASCAR seriously, he would have to move to North Carolina. “About 90 percent of NASCAR teams are based in and around Charlotte,” Hulstein says. “To get these jobs you almost have to know someone.”

After graduating from Ridgewater’s Auto Mechanics Technology program at age 19, and after an 18-month specialty course in race car mechanics in Houston, Hulstein moved to Charlotte. He did some racing in the area and through a friend of a friend, landed an interview at Hendrick Motorsports, which owns four NASCAR teams (Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson, Kyle Busch, and Casey Mears). Hulstein started out “basically sweeping floors,” but soon got a chance to use his mechanical skills. “At Ridgewater I developed a strong mechanical background,” he says, “I learned the basics and was able to adapt that to the work I do here.”

While race cars are more advanced than street cars, there are similarities between the vehicles. “A race car is much more precise, but a lot of the safety features built into regular cars were developed in racing,” says Canon. “That’s one reason car companies put so much money into sponsorships. They learn a lot from racing.”

Hulstein now works as a road mechanic for the No. 5 Kellogg’s/Carquest Chevrolet vehicle driven by Kyle Busch in the Nextel Cup Series races. The job keeps him out on the road about 180 days a year, attending most of the 36 races held during the February-to-November season. As a road mechanic, Hulstein takes care of “everything underneath the car.” He also works with the data acquisition systems on the cars. These are used to download information from more than 75 sensors measuring performance and stresses on the cars. Hulstein credits his training in auto electrical systems at Ridgewater with giving him the skills to operate the more complicated data acquisition systems.

While Hulstein attends all the races and is often under the car when it is off the track, NASCAR fans are not likely to see him during any of Busch’s pit stops. “The car chief says I’m too valuable for that,” says Hulstein, only partly joking. “Pit crew jobs are dangerous.”

Race cars run somewhat differently from regular cars, despite NASCAR’s roots as racing for street cars. The car bodies and their engines are built essentially from the ground up, with every component designed to maximize speed or keep the driver safe. The engines are tweaked constantly and matched against the complicated set of rules and specifications that NASCAR requires. Engines on super-speedway cars, like the ones driven in the Daytona 500 and other large-track races, run at more than 750 horsepower, without turbochargers and superchargers. They can run that fast because the engines themselves are big—V-8s that are 5.87 cubic liters in size compared to between 1.6 and 4.5 cubic liters on a typical sedan. The engines are also designed to move air and fuel through the car with as much speed and power as possible. The engines do not have mufflers, catalytic converters, or fuel injectors.

As car engineering has progressed, competition among race teams has gotten tighter. “On any weekend, with 50 teams in a race, 30 of them could win,” says Hulstein, adding that the competitiveness of NASCAR appeals to him the most. “At the level we are at, the little things matter most. It takes meticulous preparation to have everything running right.”

No more hesitation
John Rannow came to NASCAR later in life than Hulstein, but with no less intensity. A 1993 graduate of Ridgewater’s Auto Body Collision Technology pro-
gram, he had always been interested in NASCAR, but didn’t think he had time to pursue that dream. He finished school, got a job at Swenson Motors in Willmar, was married, bought a house, and had kids. Then, at age 28, he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Over the next year, he endured four surgeries and other treatments for the disease. When the cancer went into remission, he and his wife, Jenni, talked about what to do next. The answer: NASCAR. “The cancer makes you realize how simple life is,” says Rannow, who has been clear of cancer for six years. “It could be gone tomorrow.”

The two began looking for work in the Charlotte area so Rannow would be close to NASCAR’s vortex. Five years ago, Jenny got a job as a preschool teacher; John in a body shop. They sold their house, pulled their kids out of school, and moved to North Carolina. “It was the best thing we ever did,” says Rannow. “We love it out here.”

It took about a year—and a little help from Kevin Hulstein, who Rannow had met through Roger Canon—before Rannow was able to get on a NASCAR team. He also works at Hendrick Motorsports, doing the body work on cars driven by Jimmie Johnson and Jeff Gordon.

Each NASCAR team builds about 15 cars for use in different types of races, Rannow says. His job involves doing body work as well as painting the cars. Even the exteriors of NASCAR automobiles are built to tight specifications, which have been translated into about 30 templates for various parts of the body. The cars get to the paint and body department as bare steel. Rannow’s first job is to build out the templates and make sure they fit properly and that the spaces between them are filled. The body is primed and then painted with the distinctive number and sponsor-logos of each driver. There are five people in the paint and body department and it takes them about four to five days to go from bare steel to paint.

People skills
Rannow and Hulstein are typical of Ridgewater students in their love of racing, says Canon. About half of the students studying auto mechanics or auto body are involved in some kind of racing. “They’re all car people,” he says.

But Rannow and Hulstein have exemplary skills working with people as well as cars. “They both were good students and good people,” says Canon. “They’re personable and outgoing. We try to teach more than just technical skills and knowledge. We want students to know how to be good people and good employees, too, because that’s how you keep a great job.”

Rannow admits that if it had not been for cancer, he might never have pursued his NASCAR dreams—and that would have been a loss. “Some days, you go to work and it feels like just a regular job,” he says. “Then they fire up one of those motors and the floor shakes and you realize where you are and what you do.”

Mary Lahr Schier is a Northfield-based writer.
What comes to mind when you think of RIDGEWATER COLLEGE?

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Tim Haas considers himself more than a little fortunate. He was, he says, in the right place at the right time—and with the right group of people. The right place was Ridgewater College, the right time was 2002 when he was 39, and the right group of people consisted of Ridgewater’s instructors. Haas, who earned two Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees in 2004, one in Multimedia and Design Technology, the other in Web Design Technology, today owns and operates Haas Consulting, a Hutchinson-based marketing firm.

With so many career choices available to students today, it can be difficult to identify those that offer the potential of being professionally satisfying and financially rewarding, while at the same time offering a good long-term outlook. Haas found what he was looking for in multimedia and Web design. Other grads have found great careers as drafters, computer publishers, and educational assistants—and they credit Ridgewater’s programs and faculty with laying the foundation for their success.

Multiple choice
In 1986, Haas earned a degree in photography from
Ridgewater (when it was still named Willmar Vocational/Technical School). After working as a portrait photographer for three years, however, he decided it wasn’t what he wanted to do. He went on to work at a series of jobs before he identified his real interest. “Ridgewater had the programs I was looking for,” he says. “It was a great experience; I was very impressed with the quality of the instructors—they’re top notch.”

One of those instructors was Amy Jo Maher, who has been with Ridgewater’s Multimedia Design program for eight years. Earning a degree in Multimedia Design, she says, opens up job opportunities in various types of illustration, including animation used on Web sites, and in interactive training programs. “3D is really popular now, because gaming is so hot,” Maher says. “The Web Design degree is more programming, more technical, learning to do graphics and how to make Web pages from scratch. Many of our students like to earn both degrees.”

Jobs are plentiful for students who earn either or both degrees and involve a myriad of industries. “I have a student who graduated last year and who is now working for a company that creates online training for the medical industry,” Maher says. “We also share a degree with our Marketing Department—a Marketing and Design degree—because in a lot of small companies, people are responsible for marketing and Web design.”

Starting wages for graphic designers, Maher says, range from $20,000 to $30,000 a year, while starting wages in Web or multimedia design are closer to $40,000. “This is just developing,” she says. “There are good opportunities.”

In just three years, Haas has grown his company from a one-person, home-based business that focused on Web development to a five-employee marketing firm. “We do marketing and marketing development, which includes graphic design and developing and managing marketing plans for businesses,” he says. “We develop Web sites, design logos, and do graphics for direct mail and brochures. Most of our clients are local businesses, but we also have a client in Germany.”

Computer and Graphic Design Programs at Ridgewater

Ridgewater offers several design programs that can get you started on a variety of computer publishing and/or Web-related career tracks.

**Computer Publishing/Computer Art & Publishing**
Students can choose from multiple options, including a nine-month, 32-credit program on the fundamentals of desktop and computer publishing. The college also offers Computer Art & Publishing—Creative Emphasis and Computer Art & Publishing—Technical Emphasis programs, which have A.A.S. degree and diploma alternatives. For more information, go to www.ridgewater.edu, click on “Programs and Courses,” and then click on “Computer Publishing” or “Computer Art & Publishing.”

**Multimedia Design Technology**
Two options: a 65-credit A.A.S. degree and a 52-credit diploma alternative. Students work with sophisticated computer equipment and such programs as Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator; Macromedia Director, Dreamweaver, and Flash; and 3D Studio Max, among others. Future careers include multimedia development, video editing, Web site development, 3D design and animation, and more. For more information, go to www.ridgewater.edu, click on “Programs and Courses,” and then click on “Multimedia Design Technology.”

**Web Design Technology**
This 66-credit A.A.S. degree program covers Web site design and implementation. Students learn how to develop Internet business applications and master HTML, PHP, MySQL, Javascript, Flash, Macromedia Dreamweaver, and Adobe Photoshop, among other programs and languages. For more information, go to www.ridgewater.edu, click on “Programs and Courses,” and then click on “Web Design Technology.”
Back to the future

Like Haas, Kate Tucker earned A.A.S. degrees in both Multimedia Design Technology and Web Design Technology. And, like Haas, she was a nontraditional student, having enrolled at Ridgewater when she was 40, married, and had grown children. Unlike Haas, however, she has found a successful career working for someone else.

Tucker’s interest grew out of a personal Web site she had designed, combined with the need to find a new job when the company she was doing administrative work for downsized and she found herself out of a job. “Everyone said, ‘Go back to school,’” she says, and so she did, enrolling at Ridgewater in 2003 and graduating two years later.

Shortly after graduation, she landed a job with the same company that had let her go two years earlier: Marketing Concepts, a marketing and Web hosting firm in Spicer. This time around, however, she is putting her new skills to work, handling such duties as Web and graphic work, and earning a better paycheck. “If I hadn’t gone back to school, I don’t know what I’d be doing,” says Tucker.

“Our students learn to lay out pages, do graphics, and work with printing processes,” says Duane Ryks, an instructor in Ridgewater’s Computer Art & Publishing program. “They can earn a diploma or an A.A.S. degree with either a creative emphasis or a technical emphasis.”

Many students who turn to the technical emphasis find good careers in the manufacturing industry. “Everything manufactured today comes with instructions on how to use the product—and almost every large company has a publication department, as do churches, hospitals, banks, and school districts,” Ryks says. “Also, printing is a huge industry—the second-largest manufacturing segment in America. Minnesota ranks in the top five of all states in printing production, and many of our students find jobs working in some sort of printing-related business.”

In general, the outlook for design and computer publishing jobs is good—and growing. “The number of jobs exceeds the number of grads,” Ryks says. “One of the job titles our students find is graphic designer. In looking at employment from 2002 to 2012, the number of designers is expected to grow by 29 percent in Minnesota and by 21.9 percent nationally. From 2004 to 2014, employment growth for desktop publishers is expected to be 23 percent nationally, graphic designers 15 percent, and multimedia and animation 14 percent. Entry-level salaries tend to be between $30,000 and $35,000 a year. There are many people at the top of the industry who make well over $100,000 a year. It’s a very exciting area.”

One reason for the increasing demand: rapid growth in the information and video entertainment markets—which encompass everything from Web sites and video games to cell phones, personal digital assistants, and other forms of technology. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), graphic designers with Web site design and multimedia- and animation-related experience will be the people in the highest demand.

Another point to consider: In recent years, some computer, printing, and publishing firms have outsourced basic layout and design work to overseas design firms. While the BLS predicts that the outsourcing trend will continue to take some work away from lower-level graphic design workers, it also notes that most high-level graphic design jobs will remain in the United States. One reason why, according to the BLS: Design clients will continue to need communication strategies—or “strategic design,” as it’s often termed. While offshore designers can crank out inexpensive (and often very good) designs, strategic design work requires close proximity to customers to identify and target their needs and interests.

In short, the more versatile you are, the better off you’ll be. Matt Woltjer can attest to that. Woltjer, who earned a degree in Computer Art and Publishing from Ridgewater in 1999, is a technical illustrator/3D artist with Graco, a Minneapolis-based manufacturer of fluid-handling systems and components. In fact, the company was so enamored with him that it hired him even before he had finished his Ridgewater coursework. “My main role is to support the technical writers with illustrations for our manuals,” Woltjer says, adding that he also creates animation and videos for the company’s training department.

Woltjer is pleased, both with the work he is doing and the salary he is making. “When I graduated, Ridgewater’s job
placement office said I was one of the highest-paid people—if not the highest-paid person—to graduate and get a job in this field,” he says with justifiable pride.

That is particularly impressive considering the fact that he enrolled at Ridgewater while he was still a senior in high school. “I had more than enough credits to graduate from high school” he says, explaining that he enrolled at Ridgewater through the college’s Post Secondary Enrollment Option, which meant that he received his first year of college at no cost to him or his family.

Woltjer has high praise for Ridgewater’s program and its instructors, who work as a team and are very accessible to their students. “I got to know them, and they got to know me,” he says. “That was a big advantage.”

Putting skills to work
Drafting is another intriguing career that offers a range of potential employment options. In a nutshell, drafters create the technical drawings and plans that are used to build everything from toys to household appliances to industrial machinery, office buildings, and oil and gas pipelines. According to the State of Minnesota, there are nearly 5,000 people employed in the profession in the state. Entry-level wages start at around $15 per hour, and top-level drafters earn more than $30 per hour. “There are a lot of good opportunities in Minnesota, because it’s big in manufacturing,” says Stacey Nass, an instructor in Ridgewater’s Computer Aided Drafting and Design program. Students can earn either a diploma or an A.A.S. degree and go on to successful careers. “Our placement rate is pretty much 100 percent,” Nass says. “There are jobs everywhere, even in small towns in Minnesota. Some of the things our graduates will be doing include designing products, processes, equipment, and tooling. If you’re making a molded plastic part, for example, someone has to design that part and the mold the plastic is injected into.”

Sri Schweikert will graduate in May with an A.A.S. degree in Computer Aided Drafting and Design and already is using her skills at Hutchinson Technology Inc., a disk drive suspension manufacturer. She started working part time in that company’s production area.
eight years ago but decided to earn a degree in hopes of improving her position and her salary. She did both.

Late last year, Hutchinson Technology promoted Schweikert to phototool design tech. “I went back to school so I could get a higher salary and be more professional,” she says, adding that Ridgewater was appealing because of its location to her home and her work and because of the quality of its program. “Drafting is an exciting program with a good career future. I am pleased with the education I got at Ridgewater and, because of this education, I got a better job.”

Learning matters
Lisa Page turned to Ridgewater because she wanted to work in education. While her husband was at work and her two children were in school, she was earning her A.A.S. degree as an educational paraprofessional, a goal she achieved in 2000. “I wanted to work with kids with different needs,” she says. “I’ve worked at Hutchinson Middle School for five years in the Alternative Learning Center with grades six through eight. It is challenging and invigorating.”

As an education assistant, Page works closely with the classroom instructor. “Whatever he decides the lesson plans are, I find something the kids can do that’s hands-on,” she says. “We teach math, reading, language arts, social studies, and science. I branch off from the lesson plans to see what else we can do, something other than a worksheet.”

Page has high praise for Ridgewater’s program. “It really prepares you well for what to expect in the school,” she says, noting that she’s now taking online courses through Grand Canyon University in Arizona as she pursues a teaching degree. “I love what I do—I love my job and the people I work with. I don’t mind waking up in the morning.”

Joyce Evenski, an instructor in Ridgewater’s Education Paraprofessional Program, has seen many changes in that program and in the field. The program offers two degrees: an A.A.S. for education assistants and a Title I A.A.S. for education paraprofessionals. The latter, she says, is the result of federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

Career opportunities also have evolved over the years, growing to include a variety of options. “It’s a pretty open market,” Evenski says. “With the Educational Assistant degree, you can work in preschool or daycare as an assistant teacher or operate a licensed day care/school. As a paraprofessional in K-12, you can work in a regular classroom, in special needs, or one on one, or in Title I. Yet another career option is that of job coach, working with adults in a sheltered workshop environment.”

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, almost 29,000 paraprofessionals are employed in the state. “There are tons of jobs in preschool, and you can work up to the head teacher position, or you can work with adults with varying abilities,” Evenski says. “Wages vary by environment. Daycare would probably be $8 an hour, while the Department of Education says the median wage in the public schools system is $21,760. Special education in the [Twin Cities] metro area is $20 to $22 an hour, and working with adults is $12 an hour.”

Vicki Stavig is a Bloomington-based freelance writer.
Working at the mall. In manufacturing. As a nursing assistant. During her teens and 20s, Kristine Otte tried out several types of jobs and quickly became disillusioned with nearly all of them. Sure, the mall job had extremely flexible hours, but it didn’t lead anywhere. She made great money at the 3M factory, but the work didn’t appeal to her. And her eight-month stint as a nursing assistant? “I think I was too emotionally connected,” she says. “It was too hard for me.”

Instead of becoming frustrated, however, Otte found that her attempts at different types of work helped lead her back to her true passion. “My mother was a home daycare provider for pretty much my entire life,” she says. “I knew it was something I wanted to do, to work with kids. But I didn’t know if I was going to be in a daycare or a school district.”

She also didn’t know how she would decide. The Hutchinson native describes herself as an average high school student who graduated a semester early, in January 1994. She started working at 3M to get a jumpstart on saving for college. As she was realizing that manufacturing wasn’t her cup of tea, her fiancé was taking classes at Ridgewater, and by the fall, Otte decided that the school might be a good option for her, too.

While checking out the college’s offerings, she toured the campus and met potential instructors. “I remember them giving us a calendar with different types of classes and different credit loads, and you could pick and choose the credit load,” she says. “They walked you through each class, gave you a highlight. That stands out in my mind. The counselors, too, made enrollment a breeze.
They walked you through things, they helped you out.”

Two years at Ridgewater resulted in an educational assistant diploma. “At that time in my life, I was engaged and thinking about moving,” she explains. “I thought I should at least get a diploma before getting anything else.”

She and her husband-to-be moved to Hastings, where Otte finished her program with an internship, arranged by her instructors at Ridgewater, at a daycare center called Kids Kare. The internship, she says, was excellent, and she was hired at Kids Kare full-time.

Chapter two

After four comfortable years at Kids Kare, and after starting a family, Otte’s husband was laid off. They moved back to Hutchinson to be closer to family in 2000. “That’s when I tried the nursing assistant [position],” she says, noting that she completed a three-week training program through Ridgewater and was immediately hired at a local hospital.

But she couldn’t leave daycare behind. In between hospital shifts, she filled in part time at Ridgewater’s daycare center as an assistant teacher. When an outside vendor called Kids Express bought it and took over operations, Otte left her nursing assistant job and accepted a full-time position as assistant director at the daycare. And, when that entity was bought out by Beans Plus Inc., Otte received another promotion.

Today, the 31-year-old mother of two is director of two Beans Plus Inc. child care centers, one of which is still located on the Ridgewater College campus in Hutchinson and the other in Mankato. She says she loves her job—she is working with kids, after all. She also credits the college with guiding her into a career that works for her. “It’s just a great college all around,” she says.

Wired for Success

Seven years ago, Kenneth Renner realized he needed a change. Ridgewater helped him reroute his career path.

Farm life—whether it’s tending vegetables, cows, or, in the case of the Renner family, a few thousand mink—is pretty similar wherever you go. Days start early. Everyone works.

This scene was all too familiar to Kenneth Renner, one of eight children growing up (and helping out) on the family mink ranch in Detroit Lakes. “We lived out in the country,” he says. “You couldn’t do sports. I would have liked to play basketball.”

In retrospect, he also wishes he had been pushed to go straight into college after high school. Though not interested in farm life at the time, “there really was no pressure at all to go college,” he says. “My parents not enforcing college made it even easier for me not to go to college at the time. I wish they would have.”

Eventually, Renner, who had been a high school honor student with a 3.6 GPA, signed up for a two-year course in electronics at Northwest Technical College (now Minnesota State Community and Technical College) in Wadena. After earning a diploma in 1986, he found a job in Buffalo, working on cable TV transmitters out in the field. But after just two years, he started feeling restless. “I could see there wasn’t a lot of future in the job,” he says.

So he quit and went back to Wadena again for an 11-month course to become an electric line worker. He moved to Litchfield and took a position with Meeker Cooperative working on power lines, scaling poles, and pulling wires into place with ropes and figuring out how to keep the juice flowing. For almost 17 years, Renner’s career was also flowing. “It was a great job; it paid really well,” he says. “But when you get up there in age, well, it’s a really physical job with a lot of long hours. That’s what pretty much drove me out of it. It took a physical toll.”

A new path

He was still keenly interested in staying in the tech field, though he knew he’d have to get more education to change paths. He looked no further than Ridgewater College. “I had a wife and a three-year-old and a newborn,” he says. “It wasn’t an option to just quit work and live at the same time.”

What made up his mind that Ridgewater was the answer, he says, was the option to take classes at night. He signed up in 2000, at the age of 36. “The teachers were really flexible on when I could meet with them and get work handed in,” he says.

His advisor, Jim Martinson, a faculty member in Ridgewater’s Computer Programmer program, also went out of his way to make things easier for his advisee. “He came in times when he didn’t normally have to be there to meet with me,” says Renner.
For two years, Renner focused on computer networking; but one class on computer programming piqued his interest. He soon knew that he preferred building programs for computers to rewiring them. After five and a half years attending part time, he received his associate of arts degree in computer programming.

Today, the 42-year-old is a computer programmer with Star Energy Services, an Alexandria-based electrical engineering company. He develops software applications that can access information from equipment embedded with GPS coordinates. “Things just fell into place for me,” he says when asked how his career goals have worked out. “Right now, I can’t imagine what else I could go into. I’m really enjoying what I’m doing. It is a great thing that I decided to go back to school.”

Last January, Heidi Olson, a Ridgewater alum and the college’s current dean of student services, was in the hospital visiting her new niece. She recognized a couple of the nurses on shift that day as Ridgewater graduates. That same week, she brought her son in for some X-rays; the technicians were students in the college’s Radiologic Technology program. “I still get hugs in the grocery store,” says Olson, noting that she often runs into current and former students. “It’s a true testament to what we do here. To be part of that is something special.”

The Willmar native has been part of that special Ridgewater community since 1986, when she enrolled as a PSEO (Post-Secondary Enrollment Option) student at what was then called Willmar Community College. At the time, she was a senior at Willmar Senior High School.
School looking for opportunities, though unsure what they would look like when she found them. “Neither my mom nor my dad had gone to college,” says Olson, but “high school wasn’t really the right fit for me anymore. I came out here and tried it and really started to see potential and opportunities. There was a point during my education at Ridgewater where I knew this was a great place to be.”

As Olson recalls, things seemed to fall naturally into place. She found a job on-campus through a work-study program. After graduating with an Associate of Arts degree in the spring of 1988, she worked in intermittent clerical support roles at the college while also working her way through higher education. By participating in the 2+2 program—at that time a cooperative agreement for St. Cloud State University to provide classes at Ridgewater—she earned a bachelor’s degree in the spring of 1991 with a double major in psychology and speech communication. (The 2 + 2 program is offered these days primarily in conjunction with Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall.) “All of my credits transferred with ease and I felt very well-prepared for my undergraduate and graduate programs,” she says. “Besides that, I saved tons of money and was able to stay in Willmar where I had family, a job, and a support system in place.”

Next steps
During that time, she not only got married, but she accepted a full-time position as a support person and an evening receptionist at Ridgewater, giving her the option of furthering her education using professional development dollars. “My supervisors and coworkers through that time were supportive of me continuing,” she says.

More encouragement came from her former professors, who “supported me even after I wasn’t in their classroom,” she says. “I still have relationships with those people.” Another example of a champion who helped her along her path is her advisor, Arlen Sjerven, who was a counselor for the community college when Olson started out as a PSEO student. “He was a mentor, guide, and inspiration all the way through grad school,” she says. “He’s really why I pursued the degree in counseling, what pushed me to go to grad school.”

So after about a year of full-time work and with plenty of support, Olson entered the graduate program at St. Cloud State University as a part-time student. She completed her master’s degree in applied counseling psychology in August of 1998, doing an internship for the program through Ridgewater. That same year, she was appointed to a faculty counseling position at the college. “This institution has provided me with opportunity after opportunity after opportunity,” she says, noting that the latest was her appointment two years ago to her current position. “It’s really quite an amazing journey when I think about the seat I’m sitting in now, as dean of student services.”

In her current role as dean, the 38-year-old oversees the majority of services for students on both campuses. “I feel blessed to be a part of the Ridgewater family and community,” she says. “After 20 years of living and breathing this institution, I’m still learning.”

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