Common Ground

Inside!

New workplace safety training options
Ridgewater launches Friends Action Network
2008 Viewbook

Win an iPod!
Take our confidential Web survey and get a chance to win an iPod shuffle! See page 24 for details.

Ridgewater graduate Gregg Aamot explores how immigration is changing Minnesota.
CDS is proud to be part of Ridgewater’s history.

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Member of the Ridgewater College Foundation Board for over 14 years.

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As I write this opening note for our spring issue, snow streams past my window and a flock of 20 or so robins, backs against the wind, sits hunkered down in the trees outside of my office. It doesn’t look or feel like the new beginnings of spring, but as you’ll discover in this issue, new beginnings take many forms.

Ridgewater graduate Gregg Aamot tells the story of Minnesota’s most recent groups of immigrants and refugees; current student Victor Ramirez talks about how his experience at Ridgewater led him to choose a different career path; Lyle and Bonnie Lange talk about weathering several economic challenges before their business blossomed. The issue also contains information about the college’s new building project and announces the Foundation’s latest effort to recognize outstanding alumni.

There is much more inside, but two elements hold this issue together. A focus on how educational opportunity changes people’s lives and the key role that teachers play in that process. Faculty member Sam Nelson, in discussing the history center he created, says: “The most important thing is to engage students. . . .” Sam was talking about involving his students actively in the discipline of history, but notice that in almost every story students mention (often by name) the profound impact of being “engaged” by faculty.

I am proud of the effort our faculty put forth to engage students. It’s clear this commitment is part of the legacy of former instructors as well as current Ridgewater faculty; it’s also clear that the commitment to engage students makes a difference not only in people’s careers but in their lives. As always, I hope you enjoy the magazine.

Warmest regards,

Dr. Douglas W. Allen
President

School’s In For Summer!

Registration for summer courses is underway at Ridgewater. Summer sessions are a great way to take care of some general education courses, or just to learn something new in a topic of interest! You can visit our complete summer schedule at www.ridgewater.edu. Just click on “Course Schedules” on the left side of the home page.

Ridgewater College is published for alumni and friends of Ridgewater College, and for members of our surrounding communities.

Please visit us on the Web at www.ridgewater.edu for more information on our programs and educational offerings.

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Table of Contents

“It really gave me a feel for what it’s going to be like with clients.”

page 13

Spring 2008

4 News & Notes
All the latest from both campuses, including the new Veteran’s Resource Center, safety training options, the Friends Action Network, and more.

10 Cover Story
AP reporter and Ridgewater graduate Gregg Aamot walks the immigration beat.

Feature Stories

13 Designs on the Future
An art project on homelessness put Tyler Dillon’s design skills to the test.

20 Lasting Impact
A MnSCU internship opened Victor Ramirez’s eyes to a new career path.

Alumni Profile

22 Farm Team
Lyle and Bonnie Lange weathered a rough start to build a thriving ag business.

“I had a good history instructor who fueled my interest in things going on all around the world. It sort of sealed my interest in all of the things that go into journalism—history, culture, world affairs, politics.”

—Gregg Aamot, page 10

Front Cover:
Ridgewater graduate Gregg Aamot.
Photo by Patrick Kelly.
Recognizing Excellence

The Ridgewater College Foundation kicks off an awards program to recognize and honor special alumni and friends of the college.

Ridgewater College knows that many of its alumni go on to accomplish great things, but it wants to make sure others know, too.

With that in mind, the college has created the Distinguished Alumni Award to honor the achievements of past students, and the Distinguished Service Award to recognize friends of Ridgewater and their accomplishments. The idea for the awards came from the Ridgewater Foundation Board of Directors, which wanted to acknowledge the successes of past students and thank those who give back to the college. “The Distinguished Alumni Award serves to recognize alums who have worked hard and are doing great things out in the world that people aren’t aware of,” says Bobbie Mattison, executive director of the Ridgewater College Foundation. “If more people see that we have great people out there who have attended Ridgewater College and are doing great things, they will see that Ridgewater is an excellent place to get an education.”

The service award isn’t entirely new. Before Willmar Community College, Willmar Technical College, and Hutchinson Technical College merged to become Ridgewater College in 1996, the schools conferred a similar honor. But Ridgewater hadn’t created an awards program of its own.

Ridgewater will accept nominations for both awards. For the alumni honors, the college seeks people who attended Ridgewater College, Willmar Community College, Willmar Technical College, or Hutchinson Technical College, and who completed two semesters before starting work or using the school as a springboard to further education. Candidates will have distinguished themselves with exceptional accomplishments in a professional career or service. They also may have been recognized by their professional community for leadership or service as a role model, Mattison notes.

Nominees for the Distinguished Service Award should be friends of Ridgewater College who have served the school and the community while also achieving in their profession. Recipients will be honored for their professional accomplishments, leadership, and service. “We’ve got many people who give back to the college every day—people who donate their time and provide their insight to Ridgewater,” Mattison says. “We hope the award will bring attention to their commitment and the fact that we have great people doing great things to support Ridgewater College.”

While the deadline has passed to nominate people for this year’s awards, the college will accept nominations throughout the year for the 2009 honors. To find out more, contact Mattison at bobbie.mattison@ridgewater.edu.

—Suzy Frisch

Bringing the Past to Life

Ridgewater’s new History Center is helping lay the foundation for educational inquiry.

Sam Nelson’s vision is becoming a reality. A History instructor on Ridgewater’s Willmar campus, he wanted to create a History Center—which he did last spring in a former chemistry computer lab. “I’ve thought about it for the last seven or eight years,” he says. “It became more an issue of space, and that space became available last year.”

Why a History Center? “History lays the foundation for the study of any discipline,” says Nelson. “It is the bedrock of all intellectual inquiry. You can’t begin studying any discipline without understanding its history.”

The center has three computers that Nelson obtained through a grant and which students are using to create oral histories—approximately 50 of them to date. The projects include histories (some with video) on veterans, grandparents, and the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (ELC) in Spicer. “We’ll partner with the national Veterans History Project to do oral histories with vets, and they will be catalogued with the Library of Congress,” Nelson says.

His students also are working on the history of Sibley State Park in New London, which will be completed by September, in time for the 150th anniversary of Minnesota’s statehood. “The most important thing is to engage students in history in an active way, where they’re immersed in the moment in history with someone who actually lived it, and that they are sharing in that experience up close and personal,” Nelson says. “It’s invaluable in helping students to understand that history isn’t just something that was—it’s a part of who people are.”

Some of those oral histories are catalogued in Ridgewater’s library and are available to be checked out. Each includes a written transcript. The Prairie Woods ELC oral histories also are available at the Willmar Public Library and the Kandiyohi County Historical Society. “I also would like to get some of these histories online so people could access them through the Ridgewater website,” Nelson says.

—Vicki Stavig
Workplace safety is an ever-present issue for a lot of companies these days. On one hand, it makes sense to think about it—lost time and productivity always accompany an accident. There’s also government oversight to consider; as any company owner knows, employees have the right to file complaints about workplace safety and health hazards, and OSHA can show up for inspections at any time.

Ridgewater’s Center for Customized and Continuing Education offers several training programs that focus on workplace safety. “There’s a big need for this,” says Bev Hartzburg, an EMS/OSHA project manager with Ridgewater. “Every business deals with injuries at some point. And if a company is audited by OSHA, the fines can eat away at the bottom line. The truth, however, is that many injuries and OSHA fines can be prevented if companies know more about workplace safety issues.”

**Training options**

Hartzburg and her colleague, Russell Olson, will work with companies to conduct free walk-through safety inspections. “Companies can use us as a resource,” says Hartzburg. “We can visit a plant and do an on-site inspection to help identify safety issues. From there, the companies can decide if they want to work with us.”

When companies do decide to work with the college, they find a wide range of workplace safety-related training choices. For example, the Center for Customized and Continuing Education offers several emergency medical services options. One is the First Responder course, which covers practical, on-the-scene procedures such as CPR, treatment of fractures, control of bleeding, patient examination, hazardous materials, blood-borne pathogens, environmental emergencies, and more. As Hartzburg notes, the course has grown in popularity in recent years. “A lot of larger manufacturers are looking at training employees as first responders to provide basic care,” she notes. “Doing so can be a tremendous help for injured workers. At the same time, if there’s an accident, OSHA will examine whether you’ve trained your employees to deal with it properly. If you can demonstrate that you’ve taken that step—along with other proper safety precautions—it can reduce the amount of any potential fines.”

Hartzburg adds that it pays to work with OSHA—and to know how to work with the government agency. To that end, the center offers a 10-hour program that covers industry safety and health issues such as introduction to OSHA inspections; inspections citations, penalties, and recordkeeping; fire prevention plans; machine guarding; flammable and combustible liquids; and more. Another of her colleagues, Dave Schutz, works with clients on construction industry-related OSHA topics.

For more information on health and safety training options, contact Hartzburg at 320-222-6063, bev.hartzburg@ridgewater.edu, Russell Olson at 320-222-6065, russellolson@ridgewater.edu, or Dave Schutz, at 320-222-6081, david.schutz@ridgewater.edu.

You can also go to www.ridgewater.edu and click on the “Customized & Continuing Ed” link at the top of the home page to find information on the full range of the center’s training options.

**Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives.**

Ridgewater launches new branding initiative.

Competition for potential college students is getting fierce. The methods used to reach them are becoming more diverse, seemingly on a daily basis. Not only are these college hopefuls being reached in more ways, they’re being sent messages more often, and by more institutions.

In this new era of e-mail marketing, instant messaging, personalized websites, and e-marketing, Ridgewater is reviewing some of the basic marketing techniques that are still vital to effective messaging. The college’s Marketing Department took on the task of developing a new brand slogan. The importance of a good slogan or tagline can’t be understated. Successful marketers use them everywhere. You might remember “Have a Coke and a Smile,” or Target’s latest, “Goodbuy.” An effective tagline serves the purpose of reinforcing what the organization delivers in a meaningful and memorable way.

After using many brand messages over the past several years, the college recognized a need to develop a new tagline or brand slogan that communicates exactly what Ridgewater delivers. We also wanted one that would ring true for years to come. After gathering input from many constituent groups, including staff, faculty, students, administration, and community members, the college’s Marketing Advisory Committee recommended “Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives.” The new slogan captures the essence and explains everything that we do at Ridgewater College for our students, employees, and communities.

Watch for the new tagline being used in Ridgewater publications and advertisements. More importantly, think about the ways that we are delivering on the message. The pages of this magazine offer dozens of examples!

—Sam Bowen
Up until 2006, veterans who returned from duty and enrolled in colleges and universities often found themselves somewhat isolated from other students. That year, however, the Minnesota Legislature mandated that every college in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system establish a Veterans Resource Center, a place where returning vets could gather to connect with each other and have access to resources specific to their needs.

More than 110 veterans and family members of veterans are enrolled at Ridgewater and are finding a wide range of resources and connections through the Veterans Resource Centers on both campuses, according to Heidi Olson, dean of Student Services. “We want to do what we can as an institution to help make their experiences at Ridgewater College great,” she says. “We also recognize that their needs vary from those of other students in ways that are not always easy for others to understand. The Veterans Resource Center is another example of how we reach out to our students based on their needs and wants.”

Jon Stein, a veterans’ resource coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs, staffs Ridgewater’s centers. He also is a vet, having served four years in the U.S. Air Force and 11 years with the Minnesota Air National Guard, and describes himself as an advocate for vets. “My job has three focus areas: to work with the school to provide veteran-friendly policies and procedures, to create vet centers that are a one-stop resource, and to create a space for veterans to hang out and talk,” he says.

That “hanging out” is particularly important for vets whose life experiences are vastly different from, for example, those of an 18-year-old high school graduate or a homemaker who is returning to school after raising children. “Sometimes it’s hard to relate to students who haven’t had similar experiences,” Stein says. “We also provide resources for everything from educational funding to health issues to how to transfer military credits.”

Education is particularly important to Minnesota vets, according to Stein. “About 80 percent of returning Minnesota vets want to use their education benefits to go to school,” he says. “That figure is about 50 percent in other states that survey returning vets.”

Stein stresses that Ridgewater’s Veterans Resource Center also is available to others. “We’re here to meet the needs of our vets,” he says. “We’re also here for retired vets, dependents, and staff and faculty who are vets.”

Adds Olson: “Along with the creation of dedicated space for these centers on both of our campuses, we have made efforts to educate staff and faculty about issues unique to veterans. Those who have attended sessions have been very moved and very understanding of the unique needs of this population.”

—Vicki Stavig
A Fresh Start

Kathy Schwantes returns to Ridgewater as the college’s new dean of Customized and Continuing Education.

A familiar face has returned to Ridgewater. In January, the college named Kathy Schwantes as its new dean of Customized and Continuing Education.

For the last four years, Schwantes served as the assistant director for the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission. Prior to that, she taught business-related courses on both Ridgewater campuses as an adjunct faculty member. “It feels great to be back,” she says. “I love the energy of the students and the college environment. I feel right at home here.”

Schwantes, who has a BS in Business Administration and an MS in Management from Southwest Minnesota State University, adds that her economic development experience is proving useful in her new role. “During my time at the economic development commission, we worked with a lot of area businesses in the realm of workforce development; companies today are concerned about finding qualified employees,” she notes. “Ridgewater’s Center for Customized and Continuing Education is a tremendous asset to businesses and individuals throughout Central Minnesota—in 2007 alone, we served more than 14,500 clients. We are excited to continue that pace and to help companies and individuals position themselves for the future.”

One of her first tasks has been to work on the development of the Ridgewater College Mobile Simulation Laboratory, a state-of-the-art learning tool designed to improve health care education and access in outstate Minnesota and bring a host of other benefits to the college and its communities. The lab, which is scheduled to be operational by late summer or early fall of this year, will feature simulated ambulance and emergency bay rooms linked to a computer- and audio/video-equipped control center that will allow for virtual reality simulations and sophisticated training options. In addition to providing better access to rural health care providers and preparing graduates to practice in rural and specialty settings, the lab also will stimulate economic and workforce development.

Ridgewater’s Center for Customized and Continuing Education offers traditional types of customized education such as computer training; health care, workplace safety, and emergency training; leadership development; and childhood development. It also provides highly specialized training in such areas as Lean manufacturing and Six Sigma, nondestructive testing, and heavy equipment/crane operation.

—S.M. Pederson

For more information, go to www.ridgewater.edu and click on the “Customized & Continuing Ed” link at the top of the home page. You can also contact Schwantes directly at 320-222-5206, kathy.schwantes@ridgewater.edu.
The Ridgewater College Foundation is trying to locate as many of its former students and graduates (alumni) as possible. If you attended and/or graduated from Ridgewater College—or Willmar Technical College, Willmar Community College, or Hutchinson Technical College at any time before these colleges merged—WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Please go online to complete our Alumni Profile Update form at www.ridgewater.edu, then click on “College Foundation and Alumni.” Or take a few moments now to complete the form provided here and mail it to:

Ridgewater College Foundation  
P.O. Box 1097  
Willmar, MN 56201  

The information you provide on this form (with the exception of DOB and SSN) may be made available to classmates planning reunions or just wanting to stay in touch. Ridgewater College and the Ridgewater College Foundation will also use the information to keep you informed of special events and opportunities at the college. We are excited to connect with you and tell you about the great things happening at your alma mater!

“In order for legislators to be supportive of Ridgewater, they need to understand the importance of the college in the community and more importantly, to know that their constituents support it,” says Ridgewater President Douglas Allen. “A college president is just one person. Legislators are much more impressed when they hear from many of their constituents.”

During the 2008-2009 biennium, MnSCU is requesting a budget increase of $177 million for technology infrastructure improvements, recruitment and retention of underrepresented students, and academic innovations—all of which will benefit students and strengthen the state’s competitive edge. Those dollars are a wise investment. Every dollar in state appropriations to MnSCU returns $10.87 in economic activity to the state. That amounts to a total statewide economic impact of $3.5 billion each year.

MnSCU is critical to the state’s economy, supplying 80 percent of Minnesota’s new nursing graduates, 92 percent of the state’s law enforcement officers, 91 percent of mechanics graduates, 53 percent of the state’s new teaching graduates, and 42 percent of new business graduates.

Ridgewater is encouraging everyone to get involved in FAN and help to support the college’s needs. To learn more, log onto www.ridgewater.edu and click on the “Become a Fan” icon.

—Vicki Stavig

**Attention Ridgewater Alumni!**

**We want to keep in touch with you.**

The Ridgewater College Foundation is trying to locate as many of its former students and graduates (alumni) as possible. If you attended and/or graduated from Ridgewater College—or Willmar Technical College, Willmar Community College, or Hutchinson Technical College at any time before these colleges merged—WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Please go online to complete our Alumni Profile Update form at www.ridgewater.edu, then click on “College Foundation and Alumni.” Or take a few moments now to complete the form provided here and mail it to:

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The Minnesota State Legislature provides Ridgewater with an investment in its infrastructure.

Ridgewater College officials are grateful that their $3.5 million bonding request was recently approved by the governor and the Minnesota State Legislature. That funding, they say, is necessary for the college to continue to prepare students to meet workforce needs in a global economy.

The money will fund the first half of a two-phase project to improve the college’s Willmar campus and benefit students and faculty, as well as the State of Minnesota. Phase II’s $14.5 million bonding request will be made in 2010. “The Willmar campus hasn’t had a significant capital improvement project for many years,” says Ridgewater President Douglas Allen. “It has some older buildings in need of serious repair.”

A former Air Force radar base, the Willmar campus has several structures built in the 1950s. One is a cement block building the Air Force used as a gym and movie theater and which now houses Ridgewater’s Cosmetology and Massage Therapy programs. The building will be demolished and a new space will be created for the two programs. Another older building houses the Electrician program; it will either be demolished or sold and moved.

Phase I will renovate 5,500 square feet of space, demolish 8,250 square feet of space, and create 10,000 square feet of new space that will result in greater efficiency and new programs. Phase II will renovate 70,000 square feet, construct 9,500 square feet of new space, and demolish 25,000 square feet of outdated and inefficient buildings.

Identifying specific facility needs began with a comprehensive study completed in the spring of 2006. Once identified, the project was sent to the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, where it was evaluated and scored, along with funding requests from other system institutions.

“The project will improve instructional space in program areas that serve about 56 percent of students in technical programs on the Willmar campus,” says Allen. “The average placement rate for programs that will be affected by the project was 98 percent during the past years—and in many of them it was 100 percent.” The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development also notes that many of the affected programs have a very strong employment outlook in the region.

The project will eliminate such problems as outdated windows and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, as well as poorly designed storm water management methods. It will also improve indoor environmental quality by using recycled or renewable green products and materials with high post-consumer recycled content and low levels of volatile organic compounds. The new spaces also will feature energy-efficient mechanical, electrical, and water-saving devices.

Several other problems will be addressed, including outdated facilities that don’t meet the Americans with Disabilities Act. Classrooms will be upgraded to meet the needs of current and future technical programs and to focus on such emerging fields as fiber optics, renewable energies, and agriculture-related biotechnology.

Allen notes that the project is a sound investment for the college and for the state. “The bonding bill is designed to support the state’s infrastructure,” he says. “If you don’t change the oil in your car, pretty soon your car won’t run. We don’t want to see that happen to our higher education system in Minnesota. For every $1 of investment made, it’s estimated the state sees an ROI of about $11. You’re not going to find a better investment than that.”

—Vicki Stavig

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EEO/AA

Drug Free Workplace

EEO/AA
It was almost by happenstance that journalist and Ridgewater College graduate Gregg Aamot, 39, fell into writing about Minnesota’s burgeoning communities of immigrants and refugees. As a young reporter at Willmar’s West Central Tribune in the early 1990s, he began covering a new phenomenon among seasonal migrant workers from Mexico: Many had taken to remaining in western Minnesota instead of traveling back to their home country during the agricultural off-season.

The subject of immigration resurfaced in his career when he worked a summer job at the Minneapolis Star Tribune in 1997, a time during which he covered a series of protest rallies by Hmong immigrants in Washington, D.C. The refugees from Laos were demanding that the federal government make good on promises made to them when they were helping the United States fight covert operations against the Communists during the Vietnam War. By the time Aamot signed on as a reporter for the Minneapolis bureau of the Associated Press, he had developed a special interest in Minnesota’s immigrant and refugee populations.

Based partly on his AP reporting, Aamot wrote a book, *The New Minnesotans: Stories of Immigrants and Refugees*, which has become required reading in college classrooms all over the state. Ridgewater College magazine recently sat down with Aamot to discuss the issues raised in his book. The Willmar native also described his days as a Ridgewater student, and shared his opinions on the contribution that colleges such as Ridgewater can make as immigrants work their way through the assimilation process.
Ridgewater: Let’s talk about what got you motivated to do the book.

Aamot: When I joined the AP, one of the first stories I did was about Kosovars who were living here while NATO was bombing Kosovo. They were refugees. At the same time I started meeting more Hmong and writing about their issues. Then, all of a sudden, I started writing about Somalis and Ethiopians, and pretty soon what I took on as one of my main beats at the AP was the immigrant/refugee influx into Minnesota. It was this new thing that was happening.

The stories I was writing were inevitably about assimilation, about fitting in. They were about new groups suddenly finding themselves in Minnesota and struggling to overcome cultural barriers. They were trying to get over that and yet retain the heartfelt traditions and heritage from their cultures. I had enough stories that they kind of fit into that theme, so I pulled them together into a book.

Ridgewater: Was it a big breakthrough to get people to talk about those experiences with you?

Aamot: I think they’ve been eager. I interviewed dozens and dozens of people for this book, and most of them were eager to tell me their story. They want the public to know who they are, how they think about things, why they’re here. They’re all very enthusiastic about living in this country, and they want people to know that. They want people to know that they are grateful for the help that they’ve received.

They also want people to know that when [immigrant-related] problems come up in the media, it shouldn’t paint the community with a broad brush. They want people to know that they are getting over some of these difficult cultural barriers, and that it’s also understandable for them to want to hang onto some of those parts of their heritage. That’s what the book is about—those kinds of stories.

Ridgewater: What is it about Minnesota that makes it particularly attractive to immigrants?

Aamot: We’ve historically been a real welcoming state when it comes to newcomers. I think that stems out of our churches and our religious traditions. Some of our early refugees and resettlement groups in Minnesota, going back 100 years, were the Lutheran and Catholic churches. The federal government only had maybe a dozen
agencies that it used to resettle people in the whole country. Two of them are right here, Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Charities. So that religious sphere sort of created the first resettlement push, and now it’s kind of formalized; it’s part of the structure that the country uses.

Ridgewater: What areas of assimilation remain difficult in Minnesota?

Aamot: If you look at the earlier wave of immigrants from 100 years ago, everyone was mostly white, everyone was mostly Christian, and most everyone was here because of economic hardship back in the home country.

In addition to the language barriers, these new groups have different ethnicities and different religions. Those are huge hurdles to overcome. And that makes for some of the bigger problems with the cultures bumping up against each other.

Ridgewater: Talk about your time at Ridgewater, and how it helped you to get where you are now.

Aamot: I was there from ’87 to ’89. I graduated from Willmar High. My dad, Paul Aamot, had been an English instructor at Ridgewater from 1963 to 1985, and also served on the college newspaper for many years. My brother and my oldest sister went to Ridgewater, and my other sister took some classes there too. It was very familiar to me growing up.

The college is inexpensive. The class sizes are small. The teachers are there to teach—there is not a research branch, so the teachers are the ones who are in front of you every day.

I had some really enthusiastic, excellent instructors in a lot of the areas that fueled my interest in journalism. In the English department, there were some good instructors who helped me learn how to write and learn how to appreciate literature. I had a good history instructor who fueled my interest in things going on all around the world. It sort of sealed my interest in all of the things that go into journalism—history, culture, world affairs, politics.

I also worked at the student newspaper there. I wrote articles on sports, and then wrote news articles about events on campus and things involving professors. I tried my hand at some op-ed pieces. They probably weren’t very good, but at least I got a chance to do it and learn. That gave me a little bit of an idea that journalism was something I could do.

Ridgewater: You could have chosen to go to a four-year university. You chose not to. Why?

Aamot: I could have. I think that the experience of my siblings having gone to Ridgewater and enjoying it, and my dad having taught there for more than two decades—I really respected that about him—made it feel like a good place. I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do, or what my major was going to be. Ridgewater seemed like a good place to start.

Ridgewater: It’s been noted that some Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system schools are providing customized training services and help companies deal with language barriers. Ridgewater, for instance, has worked with Jennie-O to provide an icon-based training system that helps immigrant employees understand proper work and safety procedures. What do you see as the role of community colleges in helping bridge the remaining divides?

Aamot: The biggest role that community colleges can play in some of these communities such as Worthington and Willmar, for instance, is to provide access to college—which a lot of low-income communities need. I think they have to find a way to open these doors to these new groups to get them into the higher educational system.

That’s the big thing that community colleges around the state can provide. They can all reach out to these new groups and say: “We’re here, our doors are open, it’s inexpensive, and if you come here, there is good teaching. It’s a great experience and you can move on from here.”

Note: The New Minnesotans is published by Syren Book Co., and is available through Amazon.com and at retail stores.

Kevin Featherly is a Bloomington-based freelance writer.
Second-year Ridgewater College student Tyler Dillon is a self-described school nut. He likes doing research. He likes writing papers. He enjoys dabbling in a variety of subjects, from psychology to literature.

But he came to Ridgewater with a purpose: “I knew I wanted to work with graphic arts,” he says. “Since high school, when I tinkered around with Adobe Photoshop, I knew I wanted to do something creative with art, but I also wanted to have a job.”

After looking at the courses available in the college’s Multimedia Design Technology (MMDT) department, and seeing classes that focused on working with Adobe’s Illustrator and Flash software, he signed up as a full-time student for the 2006 fall semester. Little did he know that within a year, he would participate in a project that would test his skill with software-based crop tools and color palettes. He would not only design an original piece of art for an exhibit on homelessness, but also spend nearly 150 hours during his fall semester creating a comprehensive interactive CD.

Real-world experience
“’I was pretty excited,’” says Dillon as he recalls starting classes at Ridgewater. “I got to take the Photoshop class right away. I started going, and I really liked my instructor, Amy Maher, who is also my advisor.”

Maher has been with Ridgewater for more than 10 years. She describes Dillon as a particularly motivated, driven student. “You can tell he really likes what he’s doing,” she says. “He did a lot of research in the lab, subscribed to a lot of podcasts about technique. I tell students...
there are a lot of things out there they can [use] as references other than their textbook and me.”

Maher recalls how Dillon took it upon himself to attend a design seminar in the Twin Cities he’d heard about. “It was a really great choice for him to do that,” she says. “He goes on the hunt a lot for things.”

Dillon says that Maher not only improved his design knowledge, but also provided a well-rounded creative environment. “She’s always there to answer questions I have on specific things in Photoshop and Illustrator,” he says. “She also talks about the creative process and how to come up with new ideas.” And, he adds, she encourages students to envision how they can use their degrees in the field.

Which is one of the reasons she invited a Twin Cities photographer named Michael Allen, proprietor of Medaglia d’Oro Studio, to her Image Editing class in April 2007. Allen was the art director on a project that aimed to explore misconceptions and examine the stereotypes of homelessness. “I’m real big on these real-world projects,” says Maher. “We do a lot of things for the community and college itself. It teaches the students to work with a client; they have real deadlines. Real-world projects are extremely beneficial.”

Allen explained what the project was about. He had interviewed and taken photos of nine homeless individuals, and collected their signs asking for help. His project, he explained, would be for a group of artists to reinterpret those signs, incorporating elements about their lives and experiences into the finished artwork. He held up a cardboard sign from one of his subjects and asked for volunteers. Dillon raised his hand.

“There are not too many opportunities to work on stuff outside of school, so that was the immediate appeal,” Dillon explains, adding that the topic matter also intrigued him. He recalls idealized views of the homeless as people who just want to drop out of society, to live as vagabonds and wandering musicians. “I almost romanticized that part of homelessness. [But] I had an understanding that for some people it was a choice, but for other people it wasn’t.”

Allen, he said, wanted to dispel the fear and the images of the homeless as lazy, self-indulgent social dropouts. And he wanted to do it through art. Dillon signed on.

A vision of a vision

When Dillon met with Allen to discuss ideas for the artwork, Allen laid out eight of the eventual nine signs that would be included in the final display, and discussed their makers. Dillon picked a sign on which was written: “Vision of a Cheeseburger.” Its creator, a homeless 18-year-old young woman who called herself TC, had run away from home at the age of 14. Since then, she’d been riding the rails and roaming with her dog. 

Dillon spent 20 hours developing the piece above. The project eventually mushroomed into a much larger and highly rewarding interactive CD that was featured at a major show.
By the time Dillon could assemble the material and get started, he would have only about six weeks to complete the CD. Plus, fall classes were just starting and he’d have a full course load. On top of all that, he was also holding down a night job working security at a manufacturing facility.

“I knew that it was going to be a huge time commitment,” says Maher. “Some of the skills he was going to need would be taught in more advanced classes than he had taken. I knew he’d have to be a self-learner.”

He’d also have to be a whiz at time management. Dillon checked in with his instructors, telling them what he was doing. Thankfully, he notes, the instructors were supportive and flexible, helping him balance the CD project with his school workload.

He also needed help mastering the technical programs—especially those aspects he hadn’t yet learned. “I talked to Amy about how to make things look a little nicer in Photoshop, what design worked better,” he says, adding that he also got help from MMDT Adjunct Instructor Vaughn Anderson with the Flash application, which was used in the slideshow part of the CD. “That ended up being a huge help,” he says, describing a problem getting the photos to stream across the screen without a disruption called “screen tearing” occurring. “He showed me a technique to make it work well and look nicer.”

“He asked a lot of questions like: ‘How should I do this—this way or this way? What would be better?’” says Maher. “He just needed a little boost. He needed to keep the fuel going, because it’s so easy to get burned out on something this big.”

“There was a lot to do,” admits Dillon. “The last two weeks of October, I did nothing but eat, sleep, and breathe the project. The day that Michael drove to Hutchinson to pick up the CD, I’d been up [working on it] for 38 hours.”

A successful show
Dillon did catch up on his schoolwork (and his sleep) in time to attend the exhibit’s November 15th grand opening at the Minneapolis Public Library. Guests at the event, titled “I Exist,” received a program for the festivities. Inside were the CD and a booklet describing the exhibit. The slide show from the CD was shown at the opening, where attendees could view the artwork as well. Dillon’s piece was one of nine triptychs that each showed a portrait of one of the homeless participants, his or her cardboard sign, and the artwork inspired by that sign.

Was it worth it? “I’d totally do it again,” Dillon says. “At the time I might not have said that—it was so stressful, those weeks—but I’m happy that I did. It really gave me a feel for what it’s going to be like with clients.

“I definitely wouldn’t have been able to do anything like this at all before the classes at Ridgewater,” he continues. In fact, his experience at the school was so positive that after he graduates this spring with his AAS degree, he says he may return to get a degree in Web design.

“Having this as part of his portfolio is a huge benefit,” says Maher. “He definitely showed the commitment of someone who’s going to succeed in this area.”

__Jenny Sherman is a New York City-based freelance writer.__
OVERVIEW
Ridgewater College is a comprehensive community and technical college offering education designed for transfer to a university as well as technical programs intended for direct entry into the workforce. Located in central Minnesota, Ridgewater has campuses in Hutchinson and Willmar. We are one of outstate Minnesota’s largest public colleges, and are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Vision
Ridgewater College will be recognized as an educational leader that exemplifies innovation and excellence within a student-centered learning environment.

Mission
Ridgewater College provides quality learning opportunities for students in accessible, affordable, and supportive settings.

Academic Year 2007 Enrollment Stats
- Enrollment (Full Term Equivalent): 3,196
- Total number of students served: 5,615
- Female: 55.5%
- Male: 44.5%
- Students of color: 6%

Largest Programs
Liberal Arts, Health Services, Business, Agriculture, Veterinary Technology

Housing
Ridgewater College does not provide college-owned or supervised housing. The communities of Willmar and Hutchinson do, however, have many housing options for students within close proximity to campus. It is common for students to room together so they can share the rental cost. Costs vary, but are generally very reasonable. Housing lists are available at www.ridgewater.edu.

Campus Tours
There is no better way to find out if a college is right for you than to visit in person. Regularly scheduled campus tours are available M-F at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on the Willmar campus, or by appointment in Willmar or Hutchinson. We’ll see you on campus!

ACADEMICS

Degree Options
Associate in Arts (AA) Degree: An AA degree is awarded to students for the successful completion of a degree with a liberal arts and science focus. It is intended to constitute the first two years of a four-year degree and meets the general education component for the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) guidelines. Ridgewater students can tailor their AA degree for dozens of specific majors.

Associate in Science (AS) Degree: This degree is awarded for the successful completion of programs that have highly structured, professional-level technical requirements and require a college setting. Recipients of the AS degree will be prepared for transfer to baccalaureate institutions in the same field. AS programs are degrees with courses approved by both Ridgewater College and four-year colleges and universities.
Associate in Applied Science (AAS) Degree: An AAS degree provides excellent preparation for students planning immediate job entry at the end of their chosen program. This degree requires a combination of technical and general education credits. It is not primarily intended for transfer to four-year colleges or universities, although some institutions do accept it.

Diploma
A diploma is awarded to students who complete the technical and general studies requirements pertaining to their chosen program. The credit range for diploma programs is 30–72 semester credits. To qualify for a diploma, students must complete the entire curriculum with a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0 (C).

Certificate
A certificate is issued to qualified students for the recognition of training in areas that are fewer than 30 credits in length.

Transferring to a four-year university
AA and AS degrees are based on the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, a group of courses guaranteed to transfer to any public college or university in Minnesota, and likely to transfer to most private and out-of-state schools as well. Meet with an academic advisor or counselor to make sure your credits transfer. Our graduates have successfully transferred to public and private colleges and universities within Minnesota and nationwide.

PSEO
High school juniors and seniors have the opportunity to enroll at Ridgewater under the Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program. The program allows students to earn college credits while completing their high school graduation requirements.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE
Cost Estimator
Example tuition and fees:

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*Based on 2007-2008 tuition
**Books and supplies costs are estimates only and may vary
Special Costs
Some programs may have additional tool/book requirements ranging from $250–$1,200. Some programs also charge a lab fee which may range from $30–$165 per year. Some courses may also require students to lease a laptop computer through the college. Please check with a college counselor for individual program details.

Financial Aid
Ridgewater's financial aid program provides financial assistance to students who need help in meeting educational costs. For most programs, student eligibility and award amounts are determined by need. To determine need, the Financial Aid Office takes into account the financial support from the student and all other resources available to the student. Types of aid include scholarships, grants, loans, and work study programs.

Payment Plans
Payment plans are another way Ridgewater helps its students make college a reality. There are several plans to choose from. To find out what's best for you, contact the college's Business Office.

Scholarships
Each year, the Ridgewater College Foundation awards more than $230,000 in scholarships. Hundreds of students with financial needs benefit from this type of assistance each year.

Be sure to apply early!

STUDENT SERVICES

Counseling
Counseling services are designed to assist individual students with admission procedures, career decisions, academic, personal and social problems. Through the Counseling Office, you can schedule a campus visit and campus tour, meet with faculty members or participate in computer-aided explorations. Professional career counselors are also available to help you identify special interests and talents that can be related to a variety of jobs, careers, and professions.

Academic Assistance
Ridgewater College offers many services aimed at helping you succeed in college:
- Testing assistance
- Individual support plan development
- Supplemental instruction
- Tutoring
- Study skills and work skills training

Disabilities Services
Ridgewater College has a strong commitment to provide equal access for students with disabilities. The college complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Ridgewater College's policy is to provide accessible programs, services, and activities for students with disabilities. Students are responsible for requesting available assistance from the campus Disability Services Office.
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While many of these programs do not offer a degree option, they are specially designed to provide students with a foundation for pursuit of a professional or graduate-level degree.

Pre-Accounting Information Systems
Pre-Chiropractic
Pre-Dentistry
Pre-Engineering
Pre-Law
Pre-Medical Technology
Pre-Medicine
Pre-Nursing
Pre-Occupational Therapy
Pre-Optometry
Pre-Pharmacy
Pre-Physical Therapy
Pre-Veterinary Medicine

**Key**
- H = Hutchinson campus
- W = Willmar campus
When Victor Ramirez enrolled at Ridgewater in the fall of 2004, his goal was to earn an AA degree and then transfer into a program that would prepare him to teach Japanese and French. Later, he changed his mind and decided he wanted to work for a large company, so he switched gears and earned an AAS in Marketing and Sales Management. “I wanted to live the American dream,” he says.

Ramirez earned that degree last December but along the way, another dream took hold, this one to teach intercultural studies at the college level. That change in his career goal brought with it the pursuit of a second degree from Ridgewater, this one an AA in Liberal Arts that Ramirez will earn later this year. Following that, he plans to continue on and earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees, preferably at the University of Minnesota.

While serving as a student-at-large with the Minnesota State College Students Association (an association of Minnesota public two-year college students that works to ensure accessible, quality, and affordable public higher education), Ramirez became aware of organizations and programs that promote higher education to underserved and underrepresented students. The first in his own family to attend college, he’s particularly aware of the obstacles—as well as the opportunities—that such students face, and became determined to help remove the former and increase the latter. “I realized I could do something else with my life,” he says of the change in his career plans.

Reaching out
Ramirez’s drive and dedication have not gone unnoticed. In fact, they earned him a coveted internship with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU), where he has been working with the Diversity and Multiculturalism Division. That internship, which began in November and will run until June, drew applicants from throughout the state. “I
“As a person, it changed me a lot—not only my career path but my way of thinking.”
—Victor Ramirez

Victor Ramirez didn’t think his chances were very good, but that didn’t discourage him, Ramirez says. “I looked at it as more of a challenge—and I got it.”

The division is responsible for compliance enforcement, policy development, community outreach, and education and training at each of the 53 colleges and universities that MnSCU represents. “Each campus has its own programs; we coordinate them,” says Dr. Whitney Harris, executive director of the Diversity and Multiculturalism Division. “Through community outreach, we recruit students, faculty, and staff who are underserved and underrepresented.”

Ramirez has been heavily involved in the outreach program, which includes meeting with parents and potential students, as well as with community leaders. His work ethic, intelligence, and enthusiasm have earned him kudos from others at MnSCU, including Chancellor James McCormick. “We did a Super Weekend in January where we visited faith communities to talk about accessing opportunities in higher education,” Harris says. “We want people to start thinking about college when they’re in the fifth grade—not the 12th grade, and we want to make sure parents get the message.”

Several of those presentations were conducted with groups who did not speak English. Enter Ramirez, who accompanied Chancellor McCormick and served as a translator during a meeting with parents and prospective students. “Not many students get to serve with the chancellor,” Harris says. “He was very impressed with Victor. He is a fine young man and has done an excellent job. He is a hard worker, creative, and a self-starter. We hope we may be preparing him for a future in higher education.”

And that is exactly the road Ramirez will be traveling as he pursues an education that will qualify him to teach at the college level. He credits his education and experience at Ridgewater with setting a strong foundation for doing so. And, while he hopes he has made an impact on the people he has met through his internship, he says his work with MnSCU has had a powerful effect on him. “As a person, it changed me a lot—not only my career path, but my way of thinking,” he says. “There are many students of color and minorities who need an education to become better people and better citizens. We’re in this great country where everything is possible, and we still have these gaps in education. It makes me want to be an advocate for these people.”

Vicki Stavig is a Bloomington-based freelance writer.

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Ridgewater College • Spring 2008
In 1980, after years of working for other people, Willmar residents Lyle and Bonnie Lange decided to start their own farm equipment business focused on the swine industry.

At first glance, the timing wasn’t exactly ideal. Interest rates were hovering around 20 percent. Foreclosure rates were near record highs and many family farmers were going bankrupt. The couple had three young children at the time. But Lyle knew the hog business pretty well after having worked for eight years for a company that today continues to be his major competitor. And the Langes knew how to work together to nurture and shrewdly build the business. Today, Lange Ag Systems is an $8.5 million operation that supports 12 full-time employees and a new store in Marshall.
Throughout nearly three decades of operating the business, the two Ridgewater College alumni (which was known as Willmar Technical College when they attended in the early 1970s) have maintained close ties to their old school. They employ several Ridgewater graduates, have hired many students to work as part-time employees over the years, and have supported the college financially through a local trade association.

**Looking ahead**

Lyle says the company’s success can be attributed to continually expanding its product line. Within two years of opening, the Langes had already added bagging machines and dairy equipment. That was followed by the addition of more swine dairy farm equipment products, including feeding equipment, feeders, curtain systems, sorting scales, heating systems, crates and gates, sorting panels, flooring systems, manure pumps, and storage tanks.

The business works with more than 75 suppliers of ag materials, many of which get shipped directly to farmers. “Our customers come from northern Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin,” says Lyle. “We also sell into another 10 to 12 more states.”

But Lange Ag Systems does much more than simply sell products to farmers, or “producers.” What it offers is a one-stop shop for the swine industry. The company can help with the creation of new confinement barns where pigs live before they are taken to slaughter. It also trains farmers and services the equipment it sells, too. “We help design the facility, we do the equipment part, we work with builders on design of all the ventilation, all the feed systems and all that,” Lyle explains. “And we also have crews that install the products in all these facilities—no matter where they’re at within the five-state area.”

The nasty smell of swine stocks has been in the news over the last several years as some communities have been making noise about increasingly dense pig operations and the odors that emanate from them. Lyle says that technology has improved to the point where, with new biofilters, the smell is largely removed. “The biofilters reduce the smell by 60 to 75 percent,” he notes. “[Our] customers are doing that to be good neighbors. [The filters are] an additional piece of technological equipment that we market. It makes sense for people to do it.”

Advances in ventilation in the past few years have also improved the energy efficiency of swine production, he adds. The total energy needed to produce pork has been reduced by better design and technology, driven to a large degree by steadily increasing energy costs, especially of propane. Many of the Lange’s customers have reported energy costs in new facilities at 30 percent less than existing ones.

**On the growth track**

The Lange’s business has been solid for years. “We’ve been growing steadily over the years, and the last five to seven years we’ve grown at a very good rate,” Lyle says. “We’ve developed a clientele and a network base, and we’re always building upon that.”

In contemplating the future, he notes the main challenge will be to stay on top of the new products arriving in the marketplace. “You’re always looking beyond the season you’re in; we’re looking at 2009 now and what that will bring, and looking for products or markets out there,” he says. “Technology is changing extremely fast and you have to be on top of that. Our sales people always have to be on the cutting edge of those products.”

It’s not surprising that Lyle has a fascination with new technology—his Ridgewater degree is in Ag Technology. He and Bonnie, who focused on clerical work at the college, have fond memories of Ridgewater for totally different reasons. Encouraged by his instructors, Lyle ran for and won a slot on the student senate, where he became vice president of the student body. “I give them credit for encouraging me to do those things,” he says. “It got me out in front of a lot more people than I would have ever done.”

Bonnie says she appreciates the breadth of knowledge she picked up at the college. “It gave me a broad range of all the different office stuff that goes on,” she notes. “Our business office has changed a lot over the years with computers but that broad range of activities I learned about back then has helped me in my career.”

Although Lyle never followed up his early political involvement with a run...
for a higher office, he has used his leadership skills for more than two decades as a member of the West Central Ag Sales Association, which has among its members two of his former instructors, Swede Johnson and Glenn Arfstrom. Since 1984 Lyle has helped plan and operate the Willmar Ag Show, which the West Central Ag Sales Association sponsors. A portion of the proceeds from the annual show, totaling $250,000 over more than two decades, has gone for scholarships and grants for Ridgewater students who want to work in the ag industry, Lyle says.

Not all couples could work together as closely as the Lange’s but the arrangement has never carried much of a burden. “We’ve never had a problem with it; he has his part, and I have mine,” says Bonnie. “We’re just always together.”

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