



# AURORA UNIVERSITY

MAGAZINE ————— VOLUME 7, ISSUE 2 — FALL 2021





DISCOVER WHAT MATTERS. AND BUILD YOUR LIFE AROUND IT.

Aurora University Magazine is published twice a year for alumni of Aurora University. Editorial offices are located at 1500 Southlawn Place, Aurora, IL 60506.

Fall 2021 | Volume 7, Issue 2

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About the Cover  
Artist Nathalie Miebach translates scientific data into woven sculpture. This close-up of her work “Changing Waters” is part of a 24-foot-long art installation in the lobby of the new Kimberly and James Hill Center for Student Success.

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Rediscovering What Matters: Lessons from the Pandemic

Almost two years into the global pandemic, the COVID-19 virus is still with us, and it is changing the way we live, work, shop, study, worship, travel, communicate, and socialize. Since we at AU are experts at discovering what matters and building our lives around it, we asked you — AU alumni, faculty, staff, and students — to share how this historic event has prompted you to take a fresh look at life and rediscover what matters.

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Pathways Summer Camps Bring College to Life for Students on the Autism Spectrum

In July, AU launched the Pathways summer camps, a first step in the new Pathways program aimed at helping select students on the autism spectrum attain their college degrees. The summer camp gave teenagers with autism a preview of college life and a feeling of home.

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Rebecca L. Sherrick  
REBECCA L. SHERRICK  
PRESIDENT

Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall.  
—F. Scott Fitzgerald

It is autumn on campus, and I am remembering the early years of my career when I taught history in a Wisconsin university classroom. Frequently, I relied upon literature to help students understand the zeitgeist of various eras in American life. Although I used many different novels for this purpose, my favorite was “The Great Gatsby.” So it is with a nod to F. Scott Fitzgerald that I prepare this letter for the next edition of the Aurora University Magazine.

Historians across the country are revisiting the Great Influenza (or Spanish Flu) epidemic of 1918 as speculation begins about the potential impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on contemporary generations. The first flu epidemic struck in the aftermath of World War I and claimed millions of lives as it raged across the globe. A century later, we are fortunate to have so many more strategies to invoke in the battle to stem a second deadly virus.

As the pandemic continues into a new academic year, we attempt a first reckoning in our feature story. We are thankful for the many members of the extended AU community who accepted our invitation to reflect upon their own pandemic experiences. Next we turned to our new Joe Dunham Distinguished Professor of Ethics, Dr. Gopal Gupta, with questions about the ethical dilemmas posed by the pandemic. The result is an exploration of rediscovery.

Such a realization came to me one morning in late April of 2020. I paid an early morning visit to a small neighborhood grocery store near the Aurora campus. I lingered in my car for a few minutes and watched other shoppers adjust their masks before dashing inside for eggs or milk or coffee. In that quiet moment, I suddenly realized that I was profoundly grateful to have meaningful work, even in the midst of a complicated and challenging time.

It was this powerful sense of mission that propelled Aurora University through the months that followed. Our new School of Health Science opened with a long list of articulation agreements that will allow qualified graduates to move easily into distinguished professional programs in Chicago and beyond. The autism initiative gathered momentum this past July with the first Pathways summer camp for high school students on the autism spectrum who are interested in earning a college degree. The experience gave these students a preview of college life and provided AU with growing evidence of our readiness to serve this new population.

Thanks to national search efforts, we recruited a new chief academic officer, Dr. J. Andrew Prall, and a new chief operating officer, Dr. Jeffrey King. Andrew joins us after successful service in two similar comprehensive university settings, and Jeff from a comparable role in the Elgin School District. Both colleagues bring impressive records of achievement and deep commitments to our mission. So, too, do the 30+ new faculty and staff members who began their AU careers this fall.

Now, to borrow from Fitzgerald, another fall semester has dawned and life starts all over again at Aurora University, albeit with masks in place. We will take special care this year, thankful to be together again and united in our shared belief in the “transformative power of learning.” Our work continues in even more exciting ways — as you will learn in the pages that follow. It’s a new year on campus, and I wish you sunny, clear, and crisp fall mornings.

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# REDISCOVERING WHAT MATTERS

## *Lessons from the Pandemic*

**I**t's going to be a very long time before we fully understand the impact of the pandemic — how it's affecting the world, the Aurora University community, and each one of our lives.

But there's one thing we know for sure: Life is no longer the same.

Almost two years into the global pandemic, the COVID-19 virus is still with us, and it is changing the way we live, work, shop, study, worship, travel, communicate, and socialize.

The pandemic isn't over. But has it taught us anything?

We at AU are experts at discovering what matters and building our lives around it. So, we asked you — AU alumni, faculty, staff, and students — to share how this historic event has prompted you to take a fresh look at life and rediscover what matters. What are the lessons worth remembering? What new discoveries are you taking with you into the future? Here is what you had to say.



# REDISCOVERING RESILIENCE



## *Lesson:*

Everyone struggles with fear and anxiety at one time or another. The global pandemic revealed how important it is to pay attention to mental health, especially when coping with uncertainty and disruption in our daily lives.

The pandemic reminded us that life is uncertain and unpredictable. It rattled our lives in countless ways. Many AU community members faced setbacks, but also discovered new purpose and hope.

**Christopher Samp MSW '17** was serving as a teacher in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia in March 2020 when the pandemic hit and all volunteers were ordered to go home. Samp had to cancel his school development project and return the \$5,000 he had raised for the program.

“The forced evacuation took all that effort and planning and reduced it to ashes,” said Samp. “It was a very difficult time for me as I realized the full range of consequences COVID-19 meant for me personally and professionally.”

But after a few months, Samp said he “got tired of moping.” He drew upon the lessons he had learned in perseverance as a student in AU’s Master of Social Work program and from his Christian faith, and he created new goals. Soon he discovered a teaching opportunity in Somalia, and this past summer moved to Honduras, where he is a language arts instructor at a bilingual school.

“The main lesson I’ve learned during COVID-19 is that circumstances are often unkind to our plans,” said Samp, “but if we choose to press ahead, they are never unkind to our development.”

## **Renewed Focus on Mental Health**

Since the onset of COVID-19, about 40% of adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety disorder and/or depressive disorder, a fourfold increase from before the pandemic, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit focusing on national health issues.

**Margaret Grau '77 GWC**, a licensed clinical social worker, said she has “never felt more relevant and useful than in this past year.” Demand for services rose beyond her capacity, and she had to refer many new clients to other service providers.

“The biggest rediscovery the pandemic has forced is the understanding of the overall importance of mental health,” said Brenda Barnwell, dean of the School of Social Work. “We really started to embrace mental health in our communities and let go of stigmas.”

At AU’s School of Social Work, the pandemic has sparked new curriculum across undergraduate and graduate programs. Students are learning how to navigate telehealth and how to get certified in the new field of telehealth services. Courses have also been expanded to teach how to assess social issues related to COVID-19 and how to address the barriers to accessing mental health resources — a gap that the pandemic has brought to light.

## **Finding New Purpose**

**Brian Hamilton '69 GWC** had thought about becoming a minister early in his life, but focused on his business career instead. The pandemic changed his perspective. As COVID-19 began to take its toll on his fellow church members, Hamilton decided to go through the 50-hour training to become a Stephen Minister. The nonprofit Christian educational organization trains lay church members on how to care for and counsel people in their congregation and community who are going through difficult times.

“Our church has suffered so many deaths during the pandemic, but many survivors have not had an opportunity to grieve their losses,” said Hamilton, who was commissioned as a Stephen Minister in May 2021. “I am coleading a grief support group, and I look forward to serving as a caregiver for the remaining years of my life.”

For **Gavin Withaeger '22**, a Nursing major and long-distance runner, going through the pandemic has taught him how to take life’s setbacks in stride. He was just starting to get comfortable with public speaking when COVID-19 hit and he “got knocked back about 10 steps.” The experience reminded him that progress isn’t always linear.

“Resilience is the key word,” said Withaeger. “We’ve all faced setbacks because of the pandemic. For some people it has been severe, such as losing a family member or losing a job. For other people, it has been minimal things like having their school schedule shaken up. We’ve all suffered a loss in some way. It’s about how we’ve bounced back, developed grit, and kept showing up, even when it was hard.”



# REDISCOVERING RELATIONSHIPS



## Lesson:

Human beings need each other. We all knew this, but the pandemic has brought this truth into sharper focus. More than any other lesson, this is the one that resonates most deeply.

The pandemic reshaped our relationships — at home, with friends, and at work. The isolation of the early days of the shelter-in-place orders, the loss of loved ones to COVID-19, and the uncertainty of the future prompted many people to reevaluate their priorities and make more time for friends and family.

“Connecting with people has become more important because we were separated from loved ones,” said Mark Woolfington, university chaplain at the Wackerlin Center for Faith and Action. “These are themes I’ve heard a lot during the pandemic — the importance of family and the longing for connection.”

Zoom became a household word and changed the nature of work and family gatherings, allowing people across distances to meet virtually. Some took the opportunity to reconnect with old friends. Others said they became more forgiving and compassionate.

For **Napoleon Ebot ’20**, a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps, the pandemic changed his perspective.

“I realized I had my priorities all wrong,” said Ebot. “I only focused on performing well at work and at school. I didn’t have time for anything else; rather, I never made time for anything else. When COVID-19 struck, I made more time to talk to my friends and family and to rekindle relationships. Now I talk to my family and friends every day, even though I have moved far away. I make sure they know their importance to me.”

**Ryan Roberts ’20** moved to Houston the summer after graduation to start his career in business. He didn’t know anyone, and the pandemic restrictions meant he spent most of his time alone in his apartment.

“It was a very hard adjustment to make,” said Roberts. “I learned the hard way that we can’t do everything on our own. I discovered that in order for me to become my best self, I need to surround myself with people who care about me and who lift me up when I’m not at my best. I reconnected with my two best friends that I met at AU, and I became closer with my parents than I have ever been, even though I live many hours away from them.”

## Dog Days

Roberts also got an emotional boost when he rescued a Labrador retriever named Bo, “the most awesome companion I’ve seen,” he said. Roberts joined a deluge of Americans adopting pets as the COVID-19 social distancing restrictions took hold.

Animal shelters, breeders, and pet stores across the nation reported a rise in consumer demand for pets shortly after the onset of the pandemic. The surge was so dramatic

that Time magazine named “Rescue Animals” its “2020 Pet of the Year.”

Veterinarian Jane Davis, professor of biology and chair of human-animal studies, isn’t surprised that so many people rediscovered the joy of pet ownership. Pets enlarge our lives, she said, especially when our world seems to be shrinking.

“One of the things I enjoy most about veterinary medicine is not only how people are connected to their animals, but how animals connect people to each other,” said Davis. “A lot of people were isolated during the pandemic. Getting up and walking the dog and meeting other dog owners in the street or in the park gave us all a connection.”

## Windows Into the World

We also discovered new ways to make connections. Professor of Chemistry and Smith Distinguished Chair of Physical Sciences Chetna Patel found that holding Zoom meetings when classes went remote allowed her new insights into her students’ lives. She plans to continue to rely on Zoom after the pandemic has subsided.

“It has been wonderful to connect with my students on Zoom and to have them invite me virtually into their homes,” said Patel. “They have shared glimpses of their pets and their families. It has allowed me to learn so much about what matters to my students.”

Still, for all its benefits, there are times when a Zoom meeting isn’t enough. **Eduardo Mendoza ’15**, a sales manager at Caterpillar Inc. in Denver, rediscovered how important face-to-face meetings are in business, especially in sales.

“In my line of work, we have a saying, ‘We are in the relationship business; build it and the rest will come,’” said Mendoza. “This was evident during the pandemic. We missed the travel, the lunches, the customer events, but more importantly, we missed the relationship-building aspect with new and existing customers.”

Becca Flaminio, executive assistant to the president, said the pandemic allowed her the time at home to see more deeply into the life of her 5-year-old autistic son.

“At times, I was working with therapists via telehealth to help provide needed services to him. But mostly, I was just observing him and his beautiful way of seeing the world,” said Flaminio. “I am so grateful for what the pandemic gave me. It gave me a window into my son that I am not sure would have opened without this pause in the world.”



# REDISCOVERING NATURE

The great American naturalist John Muir understood the power of nature to “heal and give strength to body and soul.”

The simple act of putting one foot in front of the other along a prairie path or a forest trail quiets the mind and reduces stress. It’s a fact that Chris Wells, chair and associate professor of parks and recreation leadership, understands well.

“In the early days of the pandemic, we were all cooped up at home due to the shelter-in-place orders,” said Wells. “Being around people is so important for our health. Nature was one of the places where it was relatively safe to get together.”

The upheaval of the pandemic sent a record number of Americans outdoors last year. The Outdoor Industry Association reported that 8.1 million more Americans went hiking in 2020 versus 2019, and 7.9 million more went camping.

The national parks, already struggling with crowds before the pandemic, experienced a new crush of tourists. Yellowstone National Park recorded its highest number of monthly visitors this past May, and many national parks have been so deluged with visitors rediscovering the outdoors that they are requiring reservations.

Even as the national parks beckoned, many members of the AU community discovered inspiring nature walks closer to home, and made outdoor treks part of their daily routines. There are more than 700 miles of trails in Illinois and more than 2,500 miles of trails in Wisconsin. Kane County alone has 23,000 acres of woodlands, wetlands, and prairies.

## Taking a Second Look

**Katie Blair ’22**, a Parks and Recreation major who interned at the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County this past summer, said the pandemic opened her eyes to the unusual wildlife in her own backyard.

“Many people like to say you should go out West and see Zion National Park or one of the national parks, and that’s true, but people forget that our state has a lot to offer,” said Blair. “I learned about all these endangered nesting birds in Illinois and certain species of plants that are invading the native plants. I wouldn’t have known these things if it weren’t for the pandemic. It makes you take a second look.”

Likewise, **Bela (Bill) Suhayda ’73**, a retired high school science teacher, said the pandemic prompted him to observe nature in a new way. He and his wife, Brenda, took long walks outside, slowing down and looking closely at the natural world around them.

“We took pictures of how the forest changed from early March through later spring, summer, and finally fall and winter,” said Suhayda. “Even though I taught biology for years, I hadn’t quite learned to appreciate the beauty the



## Lesson:

There’s nothing like a walk outside to clear your head. Nature has the power to heal, to restore, to reinvigorate. And we don’t have to travel far to find it.

sunshine creates in late spring and summer, and the glorious colors of fall.”

Professor of Spanish and Chair of Foreign Languages Denise Hatcher took up walking when the pandemic started and soon discovered local hiking paths not far from Aurora that she hadn’t known existed.

“We discovered Big Rock Forest Preserve, and I love it,” said Hatcher. “My favorite is the Bliss Woods Forest Preserve section of the Virgil Gilman Trail. The trees are so majestic. I love to learn about new places to explore. It’s a habit I plan to continue.”

As for Wells, he teaches his students about finding the balance between enjoying outdoor spaces for recreation and protecting the environment. He has taken his students to restoration projects across the country — from building and maintaining the 1,200-mile Ice Age National Scenic Trail in Wisconsin to restoring coral reefs in the shallow waters of Key Largo, Florida.

“I am so hopeful that people develop a fondness for nature — not only as individuals, but as a society,” said Wells, “and that we don’t just go back to our old habits once the pandemic is over. My great hope is that it will stick.”

## Rising Above the Pandemic

The pandemic has forced universities and colleges around the world to adapt. At AU, a tradition of discipline, agility, and compassion has allowed the university not only to survive the challenges, but to thrive.

While keeping classes operating and students and faculty safe, AU moved forward with bold plans to open a new School of Health Science, launch the new Pathways initiative to serve college-bound students on the autism spectrum, expand career services, and connect students with alumni across a variety of professions.

It is through the invigorating interplay between excellent teachers, eager students, engaged alumni, and caring community that AU continues to rise above unprecedented circumstances and support a new generation of young people in their quest to fulfill their aspirations and shine a light in the world.

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# THE AU COMMUNITY WAS OVERFLOWING WITH WORDS OF WISDOM

*When we asked the AU community to share lessons gleaned from the experience of living through the pandemic, the response was overwhelming. Here are just a few of the comments. To read more, go to [aurora.edu/magazine](https://aurora.edu/magazine).*



## The Art of Writing Letters

"As the pandemic dragged on, I learned the value of writing cards and letters to friends and family. It felt like regaining a more personal touch even though there was little actual personal contact. I am still writing to friends and family, even when they email and wonder what's going on with all the cards and letters."

—Roger L. Curless '68, MS '76 GWC



## Composting

"A few years ago, I spotted a big green compost tumbler at my local thrift store, bought it, lugged it home, and placed it at the back of our yard. There it sat, just waiting. COVID-19 was the catalyst for my husband and me to fill that bin with every scrap from our daily meal prep and the brown leaves and grasses on our property."

—Martha Kasten, Voice Instructor



## The Simple Life

"The most important thing I've learned is to accept the circumstances we can't change and enjoy the simple things that we may have been too busy to appreciate before. And understanding that even when it feels like everything is going wrong, life does go on, and there is always hope; it is everywhere around us."

—Kristin Millard, Human Resources Coordinator



## More Access to Educational Experiences

"COVID-19 has actually opened up new opportunities for our Criminal Justice majors. Some unique training opportunities that have traditionally occurred in person and been accessible only to practitioners were shifted to Zoom and made available for our students to attend. I was amazed at how receptive folks were to my simple requests for student access. Some government-sponsored and speaker events ordinarily held in places like Washington, D.C., and New York City went remote, and our students were able to hear directly from heavy hitters."

—Stephanie A. Whitus, Professor of Criminal Justice



## Healthy Eating

"I experienced quite a few life changes during the pandemic, the most important being renewed gratitude for the health of my friends and family. I realized I needed to take better care of myself, and I started eating healthier."

—Susan DeBroux, Administrative Assistant for Enrollment



## Second Chances

"As I travel down the road of life, I am trying to give more people second chances, because many of us are carting around at least one extra heavy burden."

—Van Seabaugh '58



## The Greater Good

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, my grounding question has been: How does my best self serve for the greater good at this moment?"

—Mariza Rocha, Director of Latino/a Initiatives



## Slowing Down

"I have discovered the value in slowing down. Society today moves so fast. Throughout all of this, I felt the gift was getting to pull back and not have to rush to and from things."

—Keith Herrmann, Assistant Professor and Chair of Physical Education



## Being Present

"If you care about someone, show them. If you love someone, tell them. Take time to be present in moments instead of always trying to capture them or missing them behind a screen."

—Tammi Hettinger '11



## Creative Time

"I learned to be much more creative with my time. I picked up some new exercise techniques, cleaned out cupboards, read some great books, and watched some interesting TV."

—Pamela Ferdinand, Educators Rising Co-Coordinator



## Do It Now

"Time. Time is precious, and that cannot be taken for granted."

—Tim Simms '19, MSW '21

## The Ethical Question at the Heart of the Pandemic

I remember during the first days of the pandemic, when no one really knew how to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, my wife was adamant that I stay indoors due to the fact that we have small children.

At that time, I remember reflecting on the state of my freedom, and how it affected the welfare of others. I certainly felt that my wife was inhibiting my freedom, and I felt annoyed by this, but I also had to admit that misusing my freedom could inhibit the freedom of our children. If they fell ill due to my poor choices, I could end up denying them a healthy life. If my wife and I fell ill, we would inhibit our children from having parents who would nurture and care for them.

The experience led me to the conclusion that my freedom is deeply intertwined with the welfare and freedom of others.

I believe the pandemic has encouraged all of us to reflect on the tension between welfare and freedom. I believe this tension lies at the heart of nearly every ethical controversy surrounding the pandemic, on the global, national, and local levels.

Should countries impose national lockdowns for the welfare of their citizens, or should they allow citizens to exercise their individual freedoms to move about? Should schools, colleges, and businesses require masks, vaccinations, and other restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19, or should they respect individual choice?

There are no simple answers to these questions. And this is precisely why reflection and ethical discourse are so important. Careful reflection allows us to find the fine balance between the common good and individual freedom, and to deeply examine our values.

The philosopher Socrates famously said "an unexamined life is not worth living." This pandemic has pushed us to take Socrates' statement seriously and perhaps a step further — if we lead an unexamined life, we may not allow ourselves, or others, to live fully.

—Gopal Gupta, Joe Dunham Distinguished Professor of Ethics



# Pathways Summer Camp *Brings College to Life* for Students on the Autism Spectrum

When the first Pathways summer camp for college-bound high school students on the autism spectrum was coming to a close, **Brianne Jonathan '11, MA '15** walked across campus with one of the quieter students. The teenager stopped, looked at her, and said, "Brianne? I really liked camp. It made me feel like I'm part of the AU family."



As director of Aurora University's autism initiative and Pathways program, Jonathan was elated. AU's campus has always felt like home to her — as a student, a PhD candidate, and now as the chief architect behind a new program to help students with autism spectrum disorder reach their potential in their studies and their careers.

Jonathan's prime goal for the Pathways summer camp, which kicked off in July, was to create a welcoming environment that allowed students to get a taste of what it is like to go to college. She recruited faculty, staff, and students from across the university to work with the teenage campers. The entire campus came together to mentor, teach, and welcome them.

"Building familiarity is so important," Jonathan said, adding that change is especially challenging for individuals on the autism spectrum. "The idea is to take an abstract concept that teenagers in high school are hearing about — going to college — and give them an authentic experience. The fact that these students felt at home in such a short time was amazing."



Boost in Confidence

Pathways is a new, multifaceted initiative at AU that helps students on the autism spectrum who have a long-term interest in seeking a college degree to take their first steps toward college. The Pathways summer camp, which gives a preview of college, is designed to build students’ confidence so that they can thrive in class, graduate, and find a fulfilling career.

Before attending the Pathways summer camp, high school senior Ainsley Martin had been searching for a university. It has been an anxious time for her mother, Diane Stedman Conrad, a music educator who for years has helped her daughter through school. But Conrad was unsure about college — whom could she trust?

When she heard about AU’s Pathways, Conrad was relieved to discover a program that would prepare her daughter for success in college. Martin attended the Pathways summer camp in July and returned home invigorated.

“I learned some things about Russian history,” said Martin, who hopes to major in history and museum studies. “And I learned how to think from other people’s perspective and how to manage my time at college. We got to have the best experience.”

The Unwritten Rules

There were two camp sessions in July. The younger high school students attended a day camp for two weeks. The older students lived on campus for 10 days — experiencing life in a residence hall, eating in a dining hall, learning how to do laundry, and practicing other life skills.

At both camps, students attended classes in history, technology, art, music, and college preparation. They



received guidance on some of the unwritten rules of the classroom. For example, students were informed to keep paying attention until class is over — no packing up early.

Outside of the classroom, they learned how to relate socially with one another, skills that many students had lost during the pandemic. They kayaked, sang karaoke, and even visited the Shedd Aquarium and Millennium Park in Chicago together. They also took part in social activities such as yoga, nature walks, bowling, kayaking, a labyrinth walk, and theatre improvisation. The campers made new friends and connections.

Jodi Kastner and her son Ethan Tooby — who graduated from high

school in 2020 — had been looking for a way to get comfortable with the idea of going to college. The Pathways summer camp, Kastner said, offered a chance to do just that.

“When you have a child who has special needs and the school year completes, you’re always wondering, what are we going to do?” she said. “And even though camp was 10 days, I feel like it’s changed his life. He’s developed friendships with a lot of the people there.”

Tooby and his new friends now talk together via group chats, play games online, and meet in person for game nights.

“AU did such a tremendous job with camp,” Kastner said. “We’re

“  
When we have supports in place to decrease the anxiety and frustration that exists because of the challenges of autism spectrum disorder, it opens up a path for their strengths to rise.  
”

—Pathways Director Brianne Jonathan

all going to be forever grateful for their efforts.”

Jonathan hopes that more students will feel like they have a home at AU.

“We recognize and want to build on these students’ strengths,” Jonathan said. “When we have supports in place to decrease the anxiety and frustration that exists because of the challenges of autism spectrum disorder, it opens up a path for their strengths to rise.”

One of the most “beautiful and unexpected” revelations at this inaugural Pathways summer camp was the seamless integration of current AU students, who served as camp counselors, with the neurodiverse population of participants, Jonathan said. The camp counselors came from AU’s Social Work, Therapeutic Recreation, and History programs. It is that feeling of inclusivity and belonging that AU intends to bring to campus when the full-time Pathways launches next year.

The Pathways Collegiate Program for the 2022–2023 academic year will start next August, with applications now open. Students must apply and gain acceptance to AU on their own merit, and then they can enroll through the Pathways program to receive extra support during their college experience.

Tooby says he plans to apply to AU through the Pathways program, which Kastner said is “every parent’s dream.” Martin, too, has AU high on her list of colleges.

“I’m glad that AU is one of the schools that’s standing up for autistic people such as myself,” she said. “People need to understand that we as autistic people deserve a chance — people just need to give it. Now that AU is doing that, it means so much to me and future diagnosed individuals.”

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**Hometown**

Oak Forest, Illinois

**Degrees****Cassie Greenhill:**  
Disabilities Studies, BA**Rachel Greenhill:**  
Marketing, BS

Twins Cassie (left) and Rachel Greenhill with their handmade Sammy Spartan

## Twins Embrace AU Community, *Discover Their ‘Superpowers’*

**W**hen twins **Cassie Greenhill '21** and **Rachel Greenhill '21** decided to attend Aurora University together, they agreed to rely on each other while also finding their individual paths. The twins had deep conversations about the passions they developed and the challenges they faced as college students on the autism spectrum.

As AU expands its support of a neurodiverse college population, the experiences of the Greenhills and other students on the autism spectrum have helped inform the development of AU's new Pathways program. Pathways is designed to help students on the autism spectrum earn a college degree and launch their career. AU will welcome the first class of college freshmen and transfer students into the program in the fall of 2022.

"Aurora University was the perfect setting for Rachel and Cassie," said Sharon McCombs, mother to the Greenhill twins. "The size and distance from home matched their needs, and the smaller classrooms were conducive to their learning style. AU exceeded my expectations as a parent. With the addition of the Pathways program, I am certain other students like Rachel and Cassie will find the comfort and support to be able to call AU home."

**My 'Secret Superpower'**

**Cassie:** I have been passionate about people with disabilities since my freshman year of high school. My love for people with disabilities stems from the fact that my sister and I are on the autism spectrum.

The summer after my sophomore year, I had an internship at a summer

camp for people with disabilities and met an adult camper who changed my career path. I had initially planned on going into special education but realized that there was a great need to help adults with disabilities.

I guess you can say that my "secret superpower" is that I can see things about people with disabilities that a neurotypical person probably wouldn't — like if something is bothering them, or an attitude change if they're nonverbal.

I want to help other students like me, so for my senior project I wrote "A Guide to Aurora University for a Different Mind," which I based on interviews with current and former students.

**Rachel:** When I was in middle school, I had a terrible scratching problem, which is common for people with autism spectrum disorder. I would constantly scratch my legs, causing them to bleed and scar. But then I developed a hobby for knitting, and it helped me break that habit. Instead of scratching, I knitted and crocheted, and it turned into not only good therapy, but good business.

By high school, I opened my own shop on Etsy called *RachelsKnitShop18*, where I began selling my work and my patterns. It's been operating for more than a decade now. I crochet bears, elephants, giraffes, dogs, bumblebees, penguins, horror movie characters, video game icons, and my favorite TV actors. During the pandemic I crocheted a series of first responders — a fire chief, a nurse, and a police officer. And as a farewell gift to AU, I crocheted a

Sammy Spartan mascot and Tango (AU President Rebecca Sherrick's wheaten terrier).

I guess one of my "secret superpowers" is that I've been able to turn a problem into a great opportunity. What started out as a therapy for scratching has become a successful business. I've gained a following, including from such celebrities as "Gravity Falls" creator Alex Hirsch and "Chicago Fire" actor David Eigenberg, whom I've met several times. It's just opened doors for me that I never could have imagined.

I also have the ability to go over anything with a fine-tooth comb and catch errors, which helped me in my job at Phillips Library reviewing records.

**Being Part of Something Bigger**

**Cassie:** I was an active member of AU's choir. I also organized a campus Christmas card drive for disabled adults at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

**Rachel:** I really enjoyed serving on the AU Activities Planning Board because I felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself. I also taught members of the Latin American Student Organization how to crochet.

**What's Next**

**Cassie:** I am working as a paraprofessional at Carl Sandburg High School in Orland Park. I love my job!

**Rachel:** I'm expanding my knitting and crocheting business.

**A**



# Why I Give to AU

## Shaping the future of our communities

At Aurora University and George Williams College, we are committed to helping students reach their potential and discover what it takes to build meaningful, examined lives. Contributions from donors and alumni directly impact our work with students and the communities they will serve as they make their way in the world. We are grateful for every gift. Here are just a few examples of the many ways the generous supporters of AU and GWC are making a difference.

### Herman Jimerson '79 GWC Home: St. Louis

There have always been angels watching over me. That's how I got to GWC almost 45 years ago. As a youth, I was considered "at risk." A group of young Jesuit priests started a tutoring program in which I was involved. They took me and others to a college fair, and that's where I learned about GWC. During that fair, the representatives from GWC recruited me, and the baseball coach invited me to join the team.

Now, as I think back to GWC and the people I met there, I am filled with gratitude and the love that was embodied throughout the GWC experience. The college was not simply bricks and mortar; faculty wanted us to learn the joys of life while serving others.

By supporting scholarships for GWC students, I want to continue

paying it forward. I gave to the Ingalls Building Chapel restoration project because the need to love is greater than ever. Today's students need and deserve our support and love in whatever way we can give.

There was never one day I spent at GWC that I regretted. My experience, because of faculty and students, was instrumental in determining who I wanted to be.



Before I opened my own law practice, I worked in the Missouri State Public Defender office, litigating death penalty cases for the State of Missouri. I now practice general law with an emphasis on corporate and small-business law.

What I learned at GWC and as a professional inspires my philanthropy: Giving is a gift that always returns. I think back to the Jesuits; if they had not given of their time to tutor and guide me, I would not be who I am today.

### Catha Loomis '71 GWC Home: Portland, Oregon

I arrived at GWC as a pretty naive California girl who just wanted to "work for the YMCA." For the first time in my life, I was living far from my suburban Los Angeles home, on the multiracial, multicultural, multinational George Williams College campus when it was located in Downers Grove, itself surrounded by largely white, middle-class Chicago suburbs.

The Vietnam War was raging, along with antiwar sentiment. Young

African Americans had elevated the Civil Rights Movement with a call for Black power. The campus was a crucible that reflected the many tensions, challenges, and struggles of the times. I was often bewildered and frightened. But I was also discovering a community in which dialogue and conflict resolution were encouraged.

I got a fine education in the classroom and developed knowledge and skills that served me well in a successful career. But it was the "human" education that most influenced my life. Looking back through the lens of present-day issues, particularly Black Lives Matter, I realize that my time at GWC laid a foundation on which I have grown as a person and a social advocate.



The two greatest influences on my life and work were the YMCA and George Williams College. I believe in giving back and paying it forward. By contributing to GWC today, whether to its nursing program, to student scholarships, or to the annual fund, I am saying thank you for my education and helping another student. My strongest hope is that today's GWC students will experience, appreciate, and embrace the history and traditions of the college.

### Mary A. Miller, Dean Emeritus, School of Nursing Home: Brighton, Colorado

As a lifelong nurse-educator, I have a deep appreciation for AU's commitment to its mission and

students. There is a genuine concern for each student. My experience at AU was the capstone of my career in nursing. When I was dean of the School of Nursing from 1996 to 2001, I worked with dedicated faculty who were collaborative and committed to making sure AU nursing students would excel in the workplace.



My decision to financially support AU is because both my mother and uncle shared their meager resources with me, which is now beyond what I need for self-support. I want to honor them by remembering their names with the Miller Green Family Endowed Scholarship.

AU attracts nursing students who want to help others and who want to have an impact. The students are motivated and eager. Being able to provide scholarship support for these students is a privilege. I believe in the power of education to change lives, and I believe AU delivers that education.

### W.C. "Bill" Nickerson '60 Home: Dowling Park, Florida

With the encouragement of one of my best friends, who graduated from Aurora College in 1958, I decided to enroll there. I traveled from my home in the Boston area to start college at what is now Aurora University. As a student, I felt privileged to attend several classes taught by Dr. Moses Crouse. I also discovered "me" and the larger world beyond me. I was able to envision

broader horizons and understand the potential that awaited my attention and exploration.

Following graduation, I spent a year working for Aurora College in recruitment and public relations, earning \$30 a week and traveling the Midwest and Southeast. I also worked for two years at the Advent Christian Village in Florida, then returned to Aurora College to work there for another five years.

It was in 1968 that I joined ServiceMaster. I worked from the home office for two years, again traveling the southeastern part of the country, before purchasing a ServiceMaster distributorship and moving back East, to Maine, where I ran the business for 25 years.



My Aurora education enabled me to experience and envision broader horizons, understand the greater world, and discover my potential. In supporting AU, I wish to share the dividends of my life to help today's students develop their personal goals and enjoy an expanding and rewarding life while maximizing their potential.

### Guadalupe Reyes '70 Home: Kirkland, Washington

As the first person in my family at the time to graduate from both high school and college, I am aware of how transformative education can be. My parents taught me and my six siblings the value of hard work and tenacity. We were grateful for the

assistance others provided us when times were tough.

Throughout high school (East Aurora) and college, I benefited from the support of two local business leaders, who provided me with part-time jobs. I also benefited from a local scholarship when I enrolled at AU.



In college, I grew tremendously. The exposure to a diverse range of ethnic and religious cultures allowed me to understand and explore the broader world. While I majored in mathematics, I developed several interests at AU, including the arts, history, and travel. My academic experience made me realize that getting a solid education could lift one out of poverty.

At AU, I also learned the value of community involvement. During my career, and continuing into my retirement, I have served as a member of almost 20 organizations, working to make a difference for others.

My wife, Connie, and I firmly believe in giving back to our community and to those organizations that made a difference for us. We established the Reyes Smith Endowed Scholarship to provide students with the financial assistance needed to attend AU.

In doing so, we hope that students today will understand the importance of philanthropy, of community, and of excellence. These are values we cherish, and we know that AU does too.

A



# AU Women’s Lacrosse Team Makes History

Seven years ago, Christina Fried became head coach of Aurora University’s women’s lacrosse team. The team had won just four games. Fried set an ambitious goal: win a conference championship.

This past season, Fried’s goal came true. In 2021, the AU women’s lacrosse team became champion of the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference with a perfect in-conference record of 5–0 and an overall record of 11–4. It was the team’s first year in the NACC.

“Our captains accepted the championship trophy from the conference commissioner and the team really went crazy,” Fried said, calling it one of her favorite moments of the season. “It was great to see. They had worked so hard for this for years.”

The team also won its first bid to the NCAA Division III tournament in AU history. AU beat Carroll University by a score of 13–8, advancing to the tournament’s Sweet Sixteen, where its season ended.

As part of its 2021 winning season, the team swept the awards: Fried was named NACC Coach of the Year, senior Claire Carlson was named NACC Offensive Player of the Year, sophomore Monique Gibson was named NACC Midfielder of the Year, and senior Emma-Lee Martel was named NACC Defensive Player of the Year. Martel also became the first AU women’s lacrosse player to be named to the Great Lakes Region First Team by the Intercollegiate Women’s Lacrosse Coaches Association.

“The awards made a really loud statement that AU is now considered a Midwest powerhouse program,” Fried said. “Across the board, we have the strongest athletes and strong leadership as well.”



The season wasn’t easy, as the pandemic made the schedule uncertain and limited each player’s social circle — no one wanted to test positive and miss a game. But the challenging year brought the team together as they rallied under the team’s 2021 slogan, “Together we rise.”

“If these players called on each other and needed something, they’d be there in a second for one another,” Fried said.

Fried now has a new goal: advance deeper into the NCAA tournament. She wants her team to keep playing against stronger competition and winning conference titles, so it can climb the rankings of the top 25 teams in the country.

While AU’s lacrosse program is only nine years old, its highly successful 2021 season is fueling recruiting success, attracting talented players from across the country.

“It wasn’t just a lucky year for Spartans lacrosse,” Fried said. “We’ve been working for this for a really long time. We will continue to build a strong culture and not change who we are now that we’ve experienced success.”

A



# AU Men’s Golf Wins Its Fourth NACC Title in Its ‘Grittiest’ Year Yet

Aurora University men’s golf had a banner year in 2021, in spite of the challenges brought on by the pandemic. The team won the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference championship for the fourth year in row and earned another bid to the NCAA Division III Men’s Golf Championship.

In the NACC championship, the Spartans won by 26 strokes. Teammates Jack Vercautren, a junior, and Scott Boyajian, a sophomore, battled for first place. Vercautren eventually edged ahead, placing first by one stroke. Vercautren was named NACC Player of the Year and NACC All-Conference, while Boyajian and senior Noah Hogue earned NACC All-Conference honors.

Head coach Justin Wyeth, who was named the NACC’s Golf Coach of the Year, said that this year’s championship was the team’s grittiest. The pandemic made the season feel more uncertain, as tournaments could be disrupted by positive COVID-19 tests.

“You never knew what was going to happen the next weekend,” said Wyeth. “The whole team had to handle business and stay competitive. I really appreciate what they did.”

The team finished the season winning seven out of its 11 tournaments, and securing an invitation to the 2021 NCAA Championships in Wheeling, West Virginia. After a tough first day in the NCAA tournament, the team played brilliantly on day two. But in the end, they missed the next round by one stroke.

“Missing by one stroke is heartbreaking,” Wyeth said. “Every guy was looking at himself and figuring out what he could have done better. But overall, it was very exciting to be there. We want to be back. That’s where we can make a name for ourselves. We’re pumped.”

Spartan Vercautren advanced deeper into the tournament as an individual player, the first in AU and NACC history to do so. Vercautren had a final score of 302 and came in tied for 40th place in the tournament.

The men’s golf team faced its next big test in September at the NCAA Division III National Fall Preview in Florida, the team’s first invitation to this prestigious event. The tournament hosts the top 25 teams in the nation, and the Spartans made a strong showing, shooting a three-round 900 and finishing 17th.

Wyeth’s philosophy is that no matter the score, the team never loses, but learns. Even in losses — heartbreakers by one stroke included — the team receives invaluable lessons.

“Ultimately, I just want to give them the best student-athlete experience possible,” said Wyeth.

A

## BY THE NUMBERS

Even with the pandemic challenges facing college athletics, Spartans continued to succeed academically and athletically during the 2020–2021 academic year.

AU student-athletes achieved impressive marks in the classroom and on the field, despite having seasons postponed or cut short due to COVID-19 restrictions.

330

Student-athletes named Spartan Scholars

86

Spartans earned a 4.0 GPA

7

Coaches named Conference Coach of the Year

7

Teams won Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference championships

2

Student-athletes named Freshman of the Year

11

Student-athletes named Conference Player of the Year

2

Student-athletes named All-American

101

Spartans earned All-Conference recognition





## Marvel Davis Donates \$1.2 Million to AU Music Program

An abiding love of music led **Marvel Davis '55** to donate \$1.2 million to Aurora University's music program.

The generous gift from her estate will fund a new endowed professorship while also improving and expanding AU's music program.

To honor Davis' commitment to AU and to recognize her talent as a vocalist and pianist, AU has established the Marvel Davis Distinguished Professorship in Music. The first holder of this new post will be Associate Professor Cristian Pastorello, who teaches piano and music theory at AU.

In addition, a portion of the gift will be invested as an endowment to benefit AU's music department, creating a legacy that reflects Davis' desire to improve and expand the music program. Earnings from this new resource will support a wide range of music initiatives, including establishing a music education major, the development of a new wind ensemble, and occasional student concert tours.

A lifelong resident of Big Rock, Illinois, Davis passed away in July 2020. She was 93.

"All who knew Marvel understood her to be larger than life," said AU President Rebecca Sherrick. "Her passion

for conservation, rural America, historic preservation, and music made her an engaging conversationalist. Her laugh was contagious and her sense of humor just slightly wicked.

"I remember once sitting in her living room and talking together about something serious," Sherrick said. "Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a stuffed animal on the floor twitching. I jumped and Marvel laughed. She had set a timer and knew that at any moment a surprise was coming. Marvel lived life with joy and panache. I am so grateful for the opportunity to be her friend."

Several years ago, Davis donated her extensive sheet music collection to AU. Some of the most striking sheet music is framed and hanging in the recently renovated Roger and Marilyn Parolini Music Center.

Davis received a bachelor's degree in Education with Gold Leaf honors from Aurora College, later renamed Aurora University, and a master's degree from Northern Illinois University. She had a 23-year teaching career and played piano and organ for churches and other organizations for more than 40 years.



## Student Success Center Opens with Expanded Career Services and Alumni Relations



The new Kimberly and James Hill Center for Student Success offers a reflective space for students to study, receive career guidance, and consider their path in work and life.

The 7,000-square-foot building, which opened in August, is the new home for Aurora University's expanded career services and alumni relations departments. It is designed to inspire students as they build a purposeful professional and personal life after graduation.

"The AU alumni community is united in supporting students as they consider career paths and options," said Teri Tomaszewicz, vice president for alumni relations and career services. "We want this beautiful building to inspire students so they too can discover what matters most to them, just as our alumni have. And to our alumni, we want to extend the Spartan hospitality that they experienced as students."

Here are some of the things that visitors will find at the new Center for Student Success:

- » A great room with a large fireplace and picture windows that invite visitors to read, study, or watch the seasons change.
- » Small rooms for students to talk to career counselors, practice mock interviews, and meet potential employers.
- » A large classroom for holding networking events, career events, and panels with alumni and employees.
- » A new and improved Spartan Attic, where students can find free professional clothing and accessories appropriate for interviews and internships.
- » Nathalie Miebach's art installation "Changing Waters," a 24-foot wall sculpture depicting coastal weather patterns, accompanied by a QR code linking to a video about the artist.
- » A catering kitchen to support events.
- » Free popcorn.

AU merged the career services department with the Office of Alumni Relations to ensure that today's students benefit from the full experience of AU alumni. The new center connects current students and alumni in a variety of ways, including the *Sundays @ 7* Career Conversations with Alumni. The conversations give students access to alumni, who share first-hand insights into the workplace and their chosen professions.





New Chiefs for Academics and Operations Join AU

**J. Andrew Prall** views himself as a product of the liberal arts experience. A native of Indiana, Prall served in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua and Paraguay, worked in adult literacy in Chicago, and even counted pigs as a credit analyst in Minnesota before embarking on a career in academia. Prall joined Aurora University in August as vice president for academic affairs, bringing with him a lifelong commitment to empower underserved populations. He returns to the Midwest after serving as provost since 2018 at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas. “I am just really excited to join the AU community,” said Prall. “I am so pleased to be a part of a place that’s

so authentically focused on its mission. AU is an adaptive and dynamic place, and I can’t wait to do my part to tell that story.” While at St. Edward’s, Prall facilitated the development of several new academic programs and led the university’s Student Success initiative, which increased retention rates for traditional and transfer students by more than 8%. Before that, Prall spent a decade at the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he served six years as vice president for academic affairs and held other posts, including chair of the English and foreign languages department. He earned a BA in English and Economics



from DePauw University, an MFA in Creative Writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a PhD in English from the University of Denver.



**Jeffrey King EdD ’16** understands what it means to keep things running smoothly. After two decades in operations and finance at School District U-46 based in Elgin, the second-largest school district in Illinois, there isn’t much that rattles him. He has done

everything from develop landscaping and grounds plans for almost 1,000 acres of property, finance new business equipment, oversee district-wide software systems, manage the construction of new buildings, negotiate with food vendors, and fix leaky ice machines. The broad span of duties makes King particularly well-suited for his new role as chief operating officer at Aurora University. “There’s always a different challenge every day,” said King. His first job out of college was as a steel buyer for a steel distributor, and that led to a career in purchasing, warehousing, and distribution. He worked for Jewel Food Stores and Webvan Inc. in various management roles before finding his way into education.

King most recently served as deputy superintendent of operations at School District U-46, which encompasses 11 communities in Chicago’s northwest suburbs. He received both his BA in Economics and MBA from Eastern Illinois University, and earned a Doctor of Education in Leadership in Educational Administration from AU. He also taught finance as an adjunct professor in AU’s EdD program at the Woodstock Center in Woodstock, Illinois, for two years. “I am so excited to rejoin the AU community,” said King. “I want to provide the best environment for students and faculty with all of the things that AU needs to deliver the best education possible.”

A

AU Welcomes New Board Members

Aurora University welcomes five new members to the Board of Trustees. The incoming trustees bring a diverse range of experiences, backgrounds, and global perspectives to the board, including expertise in healthcare, education, finance, and social impact.

**Tom Choice** joined the board in 2020. He has served as president of both Rosary High School in Aurora and Kishwaukee College in Malta, as well as vice president of academic affairs at Harper College in Palatine. Choice currently serves on the board of Goodheart-Willcox Publishers and is an adjunct instructor at Aurora University, teaching in the EdD program. He is an assistant track and cross-country coach at Benet Academy in Lisle. He earned a BA in English and Speech from the University of Michigan and an MA in Communication Studies and an EdD in Higher Education Administration from Northern Illinois University. Choice and his wife, Susan, reside in Batavia, and have three grown children.

**David Edelman** joined the board in 2020. He is a partner at PMR Inc., a sales and marketing firm in Oswego founded by his father in 1967. Edelman has worked for PMR Inc. since his 1991 graduation from Nebraska Wesleyan University, where he earned a BS in Business Administration with an emphasis in management. He has been active in local campaigns in support of the local



school district and fire department as well as the Americans for Peace Now movement. Edelman and his wife, Jill, live in Oswego and have two college-age daughters, Olivia and Annie.

**Amir Kirkwood ’94** joined the board in 2021. He has spent his career largely in community and economic development, finance, banking, and private investment. He is currently the chief investment and network officer at Opportunity Finance Network in Washington, D.C. Kirkwood also serves on the boards of Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, ROC USA, RSF Social Finance, Pacific Community Ventures, and Partners for the Common Good. He and his wife, Sheila, live in Arlington, Virginia, with their daughters, Noelle and Isabella.

**Hilary Rantisi ’93** joined the board in 2021. She is the associate director of the religion, conflict and peace initiative, and senior fellow of the religion and public life program at Harvard Divinity School. She also serves on the board of the Gaza Mental Health Foundation. In her various roles, Rantisi uses her bilingual and bicultural (Arabic/English/Middle East) communication skills to develop networks with government representatives, faculty, students, NGO leaders, and other

stakeholders to achieve meaningful impact. After receiving her BS in Political Science and International Studies at AU, she earned a master’s degree in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Chicago. Rantisi and her husband, Paul, reside in Somerville, Massachusetts.

**MaryMargaret Sharp-Pucci ’83 GWC** joined the board in 2021. Sharp-Pucci has extensive experience in healthcare policy and administration and education. She currently serves as the associate dean for academic affairs at the Parkinson School of Health Sciences and Public Health at Loyola University Chicago. She is also on the board of directors of ViMedicus Inc. and serves on the State of Illinois Task Force on Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities. After earning a bachelor’s degree in education from Northern Illinois University, she was awarded an MS in Exercise Physiology and Cardiac Rehabilitation from George Williams College. She also holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an EdD from Northern Illinois University. She and her husband, Gregory, reside in Chicago.

A



Butters Receives 2021 Trumbo Award for Excellence in Teaching

Aurora University awarded its most prestigious faculty recognition to Professor of History Gerald Butters. The Marcus and Mark H. Trumbo Award for Excellence in Teaching acknowledges the finest work of full-time AU faculty as teachers, mentors, and scholars.

Butters has been an engaged citizen of the AU community for more than 20 years. He has been active in the *Celebrating Arts and Ideas* series and has worked to extend student learning beyond campus borders by leading field trips near and far.

A former Fulbright scholar, Butters has published four books and is working on his fifth. His research and publications focus on the intersection of race and gender in American popular culture. He has organized countless dynamic discussions for students and alumni, and most recently hosted forums on race relations and on the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Before coming to AU in 1999, he received a PhD in History from the University of Kansas, an MA in History from the University of Missouri–Kansas City, and a BA in History and Political Science from Washburn University. Butters was lauded for instilling a love of lifelong learning in his students.



Coming Soon: AU Adds Residence Hall, Sports Center

Aurora University expanded its footprint this summer by kicking off construction of two new buildings: a residence hall and a sports center.

AU broke ground in August on an \$18.5 million residence hall located on the main campus, just south of Vago Field. The five-story building is AU’s first new residence hall in almost a decade and will include spaces designed specifically to support college students on the autism spectrum. Construction is scheduled to be completed by August 2022.

Meanwhile, at Spartan Athletic Park, a \$5 million academic and athletic facility is slated to open later this year. The 12,000-square-foot building will house AU’s new men’s and women’s wrestling program practice and training center, a weight room, and state-of-the-art facilities for students studying athletic training and exercise science.

Bell Tower Brings Spirit to Spartan Athletic Games

The Spartan Athletic Park is ringing with Spartan pride thanks to the Aurora College Class of 1969.

The new Spirit Bell Tower arrived at the park this past summer, a class gift on the occasion of their 50th reunion in 2019. The bell will be rung at the start of Spartan athletic competitions, after a Spartan victory, and for special events.

“The idea of the Spirit Bell Tower got us excited because it reminded us of the strong sense of community and the excitement we felt as students more than 50 years ago,” said **Tom Gandee ’69**, a member of the class reunion committee. “We wanted our class gift to contribute to the vibrancy and energy of campus life.”

The class reunion committee also donated a plaque installed at the base of the tower with a Biblical verse to inspire Spartans in all of their endeavors: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

The committee selected the scripture verse to remind students that competition isn’t just about winning. It’s about how you conduct yourself when competing.

“School pride and team spirit are critical to any athletic event,” said **Cindy Gandee ’69**. “Our hope is that when the Spirit Bell Tower rings and hundreds of students, alumni, faculty, and fans cry out, ‘We are Spartans! We are Spartans!’ our student-athletes and their opponents will hear the spirit of the AU community.”



AU Yearbooks Collection Digitized

Are you looking for a former college classmate or trying to track down a photo to fill in your family tree? Researching Aurora University history just got easier.

The Office of Alumni Relations spent the summer digitizing AU’s collection of yearbooks so they are accessible online.

The Pharos yearbooks date back to 1931 and chronicle the early days of Aurora College, and later Aurora University.

The Embers yearbooks date back to 1913. They track George Williams College from its early days as a YMCA camp in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, through its relocations to Hyde Park and Downers Grove, and back to Williams Bay, where the college is currently located.

The Pharos are currently available online, and the Embers are scheduled to be online by Thanksgiving. You can find the yearbooks at [aurora.edu/yearbooks](http://aurora.edu/yearbooks).





## Back to Nature at Geneva Lake

If you visited the George Williams College of Aurora University campus this summer, you got a chance to experience a completely renovated and restored waterfront, reminiscent of what the grounds looked like when the Western Secretarial Institute founded the college on the shores of Geneva Lake in Wisconsin more than a century ago.

The multifaceted project has restored the lakefront to its original condition, with a natural boulder revetment and native plantings replacing the many hard surfaces that had accelerated erosion and conservation problems.

Unightly utility transformers that stood for years on the lake side of the Weidensall Administration Building were moved and replaced with a small new deck for sun lovers that flanks either side of the staircase leading to the lake. A gently terraced garden, planted with colorful deer-

resistant species, now greets guests as they arrive on campus by boat or walk along the lake path.

The transformation is dramatic, a true celebration of GWC's lovely lakeside setting.

"Like our neighbors around the lake and our many GWC alumni, we truly value the natural environment and are committed to thoughtful environmental stewardship," said AU President Rebecca Sherrick.

"We did find a surprise or two along the way, such as the collapsed storm sewer line that stretched from the circle drive to the lakefront," said Sherrick.

"The pandemic allowed us to undertake this project without inconveniencing students and campus guests. We are grateful especially to the donors who supported this effort. The outcome is truly lovely."

The GWC campus improvements continued around the Ferro Pavilion, home to the *Music by the Lake* summer concert series. Four outdated cottages were demolished to create an unencumbered view of Geneva Lake from every seat in the house. Hardier



materials replaced wooden portions of the original structure while backstage improvements make it possible to host larger productions. Small umbrella tables invite guests to gather on the new brick pavilion terrace.

All of these projects were completed in time for the return of this summer's *Music by the Lake* concerts, after the season was postponed last year due to the pandemic.

Since its construction in 2007, Ferro Pavilion has hosted more than 80 concerts, as well as commencement ceremonies, alumni gatherings, and numerous special events.

Summer at GWC never sounded — and looked — so good!

A

## Drawing From the Past

Bob Happ '87, MBA '92 considers the Aurora University campus home. He and his wife — Marissa Happ MSW '00, DSW '18, assistant professor of social work at AU — live a block and a half from the campus. The Happs raised their five children in and around AU, and the many red brick buildings serve as landmarks of some of Bob's favorite memories.

A few years ago, Happ, 68, a trained draftsman and commercial illustrator, started to create pen-and-ink architectural renderings of the AU buildings. He began with Eckhart Hall — the oldest building on campus — and then moved onto the Phillips Library, Davis Hall, Dunham Hall, Centennial Hall, and more. Happ felt a spark of joy and kept drawing. "It just grew and grew," he said.

By 2020, he had composed drawings of all 16 buildings on campus, including the renovated Roger and Marilyn Parolini Music Center. The black-and-white drawings evoke the simplicity and classic styling of architectural drafts.

Happ's interest in drawing began as a child. An uncle who was a commercial illustrator himself spotted Happ's talent and encouraged him to develop his sketching and illustration skills. Happ is color blind, so he gravitated toward the black and white of engineering drawings. After graduating from Northern Illinois University with training in graphic design and city planning, he worked for the City of Aurora and then at Allsteel Inc. At age 30, while working full time, he enrolled in AU and earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and later an MBA. That led him to a career in marketing and sales. But he always loved drawing.

As Happ moved toward retirement, art once again became his passion. He set up his own company and website to take on commercial and residential architectural rendering commissions. And he began making regular trips to Williams Bay, Wisconsin, to illustrate the buildings at AU's George Williams College campus. When his work is completed, he will have a total of 26 illustrations of AU buildings in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Happ is donating all of the drawings to AU in hopes that the university can use the illustrations as prints, notecards, and calendars, among other ways to help fellow alumni remember the campus.

"For me, Aurora University is a destination for education and a destination for culture," Happ said. "These buildings symbolize the relationships we build here."

A





## CONNECT WITH US



Keep in touch! Aurora University is your university, and we want you to stay up-to-date about everything happening around the Aurora University and George Williams College campuses.