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ENJOY OUR FAVORITE MOMENTS FROM COMMENCEMENT 2024
Our choir members were eager to share. One student from a rural high school noted the challenges of singing in a very small ensemble of voices, sometimes with a recorded instrumental accompaniment. Others from larger communities described the “cutthroat” nature of the relationship among choir members constantly competing for recognition.

By contrast, the experience at Central was quite different. They noted the level of excellence they expect in their work but described their relational experience as a “family.” Members said, “We all want to be here.” “I feel supported by those around me and know they care about me.” Some described the benefits of singing to enhance emotional and psychological well-being. They agreed it was a highlight of their day and shared the joy they receive from working hard and laughing together. All of this warmed my heart, of course.

At the end of the rehearsal, the choir stood together hand-in-hand and sang their signature benediction, “The Lord Bless You,” an arrangement known by A Cappella Choir and Central alumni across generations. Even at the end of a very busy day, it was a sacred moment. This choir is bonded to all others before them and will remain connected to choirs in the generations to come.

In that moment it occurred to me that when I started at Central 14 years ago, some of these students were in preschool. The continuity of tradition, however, reliably paved the way for them to experience the very same sense of oneness, the shared sense of purpose and the deep sense of meaning embodied by their esteemed director who has been a part of this legacy since his days as a Central student. This is an enduring gift passed from one generation to the next and it is the very thing that makes us Forever Dutch®.
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The eighth annual Hoo-Rah Day brought the Central College family together, providing an opportunity to showcase passion for our community, dedication to lifelong learning and desire to uplift the next generation.

Central raised more than $398,000 on Wednesday, April 10, with over 430 donors supporting student scholarships and programs.

Alumni, current and past parents, employees and current students contributed to the success of the day, with support for Central shared worldwide. Gifts came from 34 states and the District of Columbia, and the farthest gifts were from Italy and Malaysia. Central spirit took social media by storm! Central's content reached more than 78K accounts and garnered over 85K impressions. The Class Participation Challenge was won by the Class of 2026 — what an incredible show of support from current students!

This year, a new challenge was launched. Central President Mark Putnam, along with his wife Tammy and Student Body President Jenna Hernandez ’24 challenged current and former Student Senate members to make a gift. The Presidents’ Challenge was an incredible success, and the leadership from these donors unlocked an additional $10,000.

It was another successful year for the 53-Mile Challenge! From Feb. 18 to April 10, nearly 100 Central students, employees, alumni, family and friends completed 53 miles by walking, running, biking or swimming.

Thank you for your support in another incredible Hoo-Rah Day!
The 24th annual Scholarship Celebration Dinner brought together a room full of people who share a love for Central College. Building connections among alumni, donors, students and parents bridges a network of people eager to support future generations of the Central family.

Quintin Hull ’26 presented a musical prelude on piano as guests entered P.H. Kuyper Gymnasium. DelTon Alexander ’24 delivered the opening prayer. Bryson McGowan ’24 and Kamryn Waymire ’24 performed show tunes as the night’s entertainment. A discussion on endangered species and how Central students and alumni provide hope for the environment was shared by Russ Benedict, professor of biology.

A heartwarming video honored Wilma Damhof Hoekstra ’45 and ’69 and her late husband Tony Hoekstra ’61, who established a legacy of love for Central that has persisted for generations. Watch the video honoring the family’s devotion to lifelong learning by visiting central.edu/scholarship-dinner24.

Central President Mark Putnam considered the impact of time, stating, “There’s something we learn from understanding sustained effort and sustained impact.” He emphasized the value of dedicating time and work to build a meaningful legacy.

“That this many people would take time to gather together to celebrate scholarship giving and its impact on these students today, and their impact on the world tomorrow, will be profound,” President Putnam says. “Because we believe this to be true and we will take that leap of faith, I can tell you the future is bright. We have great students. They do amazing things. And they will change this world.”

You can support the next generation of Central students. By making a gift, you can directly impact Central programs and opens doors for students. Make a gift by visiting central.edu/give or calling 641-628-5154 and asking for Michelle Wilkie, director of development.
The Geisler Penquite Foundation awarded Central $480,000 for scholarships and the Geisler Library endowment. The foundation has committed $400,000 to expand upon the Geisler Penquite endowed scholarship fund to support students accepted into the education program. A total of 25 scholarships are given each year with 15 new awardees announced in Fall 2023.

“Central is so thrilled to receive this award from the Geisler Penquite Foundation to support student scholarships and the Geisler Library,” says Sunny Gonzales Eighmy ’99, vice president for advancement. “The Foundation has such a heart for preparing future teachers who will shape the lives of students for generations. This gift will make a significant impact.”
PPI DONATION TO ENHANCE DECISION SCIENCE
PPI, Inc., formerly known as Precision, Pulley and Idler, donated $50,000 to the college to explore a curriculum around artificial intelligence, digital transformation and analytics, known as decision science. This cross-departmental focus area addresses the changing demands of the workplace, growth of business insights, complex customer interface and technology changes.

This support will enable Central faculty to build out a pilot of an academic platform or portfolio around decision science. This concept will create a network across academic disciplines, knitting data analytics, visual analytics, business, math, computer science, marketing and more to better serve the needs of future employers of Central students. The faculty-led team plans to implement the curriculum beginning in Fall 2025.

MLK DAY AND BLACK HISTORY MONTH BROUGHT POWERFUL MESSAGES TO CAMPUS
The well-crafted plans for Martin Luther King Jr. Day shifted when the weather prevented students from returning to campus on Jan. 15. Central faculty and students were gracious, creative and flexible, launching a semester-long program in place of the single day.

“Students in the social justice studies minor, many of whom have been minoritized, have thoughtfully organized the programming for MLK Day,” says Shelley Bradfield, associate professor of communication studies. “This sets a precedent for students initiating inspiring programming and that addresses the experience of attending college at a predominantly white institution.

To celebrate Black History Month, the Traveling True Black History Museum brought a unique experience to Central and Pella titled “A Tribute to the African-American Journey.” The exhibit featured over 1,000 artifacts including original documents from historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, President Barack Obama and other influential African-American leaders. The museum is meant to preserve the history and educate others about African-American contributions to the world.


The Zuzu African Acrobats wrapped up the month’s events performing traditional acrobatics set to high-energy beats within a cultural experience representative of the coastal regions of Kenya.

TWO GILMAN SCHOLARS NAMED
Lily Bardwell ’25 (top) and Veronica Johnson ’26 (bottom) received the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarships to study in Murcia, Spain, during Spring 2024. After graduation, Bardwell plans to work for a nonprofit or governmental agency that assists the Spanish-speaking population. Johnson intends to be a Spanish teacher after graduation.

Spoken-word poet Caleb “The Negro Artist” Rainey.
PATH TO McMARTIN’S DREAMS LED HIM HOME

Jeff McMarty 90, Central College head football coach, returned to his alma mater aiming to inspire both athletic excellence and a love for learning among his players. STOR Y BY: LARRY HAPPEL ’81

Among the things head football coach Jeff McMarty ’90 and Laurie Rieken McMarty ’90 enjoy most about being back at Central is the opportunity to watch daughters Emily McMarty ’26 and Caroline McMarty ’24 compete in track and field for the Dutch.

In private moments, the idea used to get a laugh from Jeff ’90 and Laurie Rieken McMarty ’90. That somehow the twisting path in Jeff’s determined pursuit of a college football head coaching job — spawned at Central College so many years ago — would eventually wind its way back to that same rural Iowa campus with the pond.

“Laurie and I always joked when were dating at Central that we would retire to Central someday,” McMarty says. “We just got here a lot earlier than retirement. We thought we’d move to Pella after my coaching career was over. We always liked Pella and we liked Central. This place has a lot of good memories in our world.”

Having two daughters — Caroline ’24 and Emily ’26 — grow up around the campus and thrive as Central students and athletes stretched even further than any dreams Jeff and Laurie entertained.

FROM COACHED TO COACH

Any notion that the quiet defensive-back-turned-student-assistant would someday trod the same sidelines as the coach the Central stadium is named for, American Football Coaches Association Hall of Famer Ron Schipper, was not one he ever considered. Nor did his Dutch teammates back then, said Central trustee Clay Thompson ’90, who recalls his initial impressions as a fellow former defensive back.

“D-backs tend to have a certain flashy personality and I can remember sitting around that room as a freshman just trying to figure out who’s who and I looked at Jeff,” Thompson says. “He just kind of kept to himself but he was clearly comfortable with who he was and was a super nice guy. I thought, ‘That’s a guy I can relate to.’”
McMartin was not a clone of the boisterous Schipper, whose whereabouts were never a mystery, with his voice booming across the practice field. Personality oozed out of every pore of Schipper’s body as he coaxed the Dutch through 36 championship-drenched seasons (1961-96) with boundless energy and a combination of determination and Dutch stubbornness.

The differences seemed stark to McMartin, who saw his college coach as an inspiration, not a personality to emulate.

“I held Coach Schipper in such high esteem that I never tried to be, or thought I could be, like him,” McMartin shares. “I just tried to learn from him and saw him as a great example of how to do things really well and the right way. So, when I got this job, I never felt like I had to try and replicate that. I don’t think you can, and I don’t think you should.”

That recognition impressed Thompson.

“I give him a lot of credit,” Thompson says. “He wasn’t trying to be anything he wasn’t. It would be really tempting in that situation to try to adopt a Ron Schipper persona or try to be something you’re not because that’s obviously what people’s expectations were. But he stayed very authentic to who he is and through just kind of putting down his head and working hard, made himself successful.”

That work ethic and belief in the value of preparation are among the traits McMartin does share with his beloved mentor. His résumé reads like a head football coaching tutorial. After an initial stint as a graduate assistant at Wake Forest University while pursuing a master’s degree, McMartin bounded from Illinois Wesleyan University to the University of Rochester, Beloit College and DePauw University. Along the way, he coached defensive line, offensive line and special teams, then took on an offensive coordinator role. McMartin served as a cross country and track and field assistant coach, and later, head coach, as preparation tools.

“He put himself in uncomfortable situations because he appreciated that was the best way to learn,” Thompson explains. “That’s something I’ve seen in great leaders. They’re willing to go out and test themselves.”

**KEYS TO SUCCESS**

Books on coaching and leadership crowd McMartin’s office bookshelf. An eager student in American Football Coaches Association professional development sessions, he’s quickly risen through the ranks to the 12,000-member organization’s board of trustees and is the 2024 president, a role once held by Schipper but precious few other Division III coaches.

“I’ve always looked at myself as a seeker of information,” McMartin says. “I’m willing to learn and to find answers. I’ll ask for directions. I’m willing to go to the grocery store and ask somebody where the Pepsi Cola is.”

**Eric Jones ’87**, longtime offensive line coach and a major gifts officer at Central, said McMartin doesn’t pretend to have all the answers and is willing to shoulder the blame when things go awry.

“Almost to a fault,” Jones says. “He does a critical evaluation and if things don’t go right, he looks at himself first and says, ‘What do I need to do differently?’ and then expands it out from there.”

Thompson sees that process as a learning tool.

“It echoes something I’ve heard him say at practice the couple times I hung around, which is ‘Mistakes are OK, mistakes are how you learn,’” he says. “You don’t hear him railing on players when they mess up, it’s more, how do we teach them in this moment and get better?”

It’s that openness to change that Jones sees as a key to McMartin’s success.
ALUMNI COACHES CONTINUE LEGACY

Former Indiana State University softball coach Brenda Vigness Coldren ’89 lives in Knoxville, Tennessee, and provides private instruction for a limited number of top pitchers in the Atlanta area.

Yet she makes the 800-mile journey to Pella multiple times a year to serve as Central College’s pitching coach.

Coldren, a pitcher on Central’s 1988 NCAA Division III championship squad, insists she’s repaying an old debt.

“I want to make sure these players are taught the same life lessons we learned while I was playing here and that we use to better the world,” Coldren says. “Being able to come back here and help the community that shaped me was huge for me.”

For many of the 37 grads on the athletics staff, their own life-altering Central experience was part of the inspiration that drove them to share it with others.

“Central was transformational in my life,” says Eric Jones ’87, Central’s longtime football offensive line coach. Jones has touched nearly every corner of campus in his tenure. “As dysfunctional as I was growing up, Central showed me there are ways to have stability in your life and core values that I always appreciated. When I worked elsewhere, I enjoyed it, but didn’t always feel like my values aligned. I almost felt like I was a mercenary. I believe what we say all the time, that we do things right. There’s no better way of delivering education than the way we do it.”

Head Men’s Basketball Coach Joe Steinkamp ’03 served as an assistant, then as head women’s basketball coach before taking over the men’s program. Being at Central is more important to Steinkamp than the role.

“I just love the people here,” he says. “I love the community and the sense of pride. I think our athletes have a great set-up here with how many people care about them. There are a lot of alumni that work at Central and in Pella and I think our student-athletes really feel that presence. It just means a lot to me that I’m able to coach the program that I played for and care so much about.”

These head coaches are among the many at Central who are Forever Dutch®:

+ Adam Carey ’19, baseball
+ Jennie Hedrick-Rozemberg ’06, triathlon
+ Mike Kobylnski ’03, women’s soccer
+ Jeff McMartin ’90, football
+ Joe Steinkamp ’03, men’s basketball
+ George Wares ’76, softball

“It’s his ability to adapt and take a look at the resources we have and find out where we’re deficient and attack those deficiencies, but also not allow those deficiencies to hold us back,” Coldren says.

After his years as an assistant, McMartin was ready, yet caught off guard when the Central football job opened in 2004, and unsure whether to apply.

“I thought, well, this would be my first head football coaching job, it’s at my alma mater and they’ve been pretty good for a long time,” he recalls. “Laurie was very encouraging, saying, ‘Give it a shot. Do your best and, if you’re going to do it, have a little fun with it — enjoy the journey and don’t make this a miserable experience.’”

Twenty years later, McMartin is the 10th-winningest active coach in Division III with a 155-48 (.763) mark. He was named the 2021 AFCA Division III Coach of the Year after Central’s sixth conference title and NCAA playoff berth on his watch.

A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

That’s almost as rewarding as now seeing his daughters in Central uniforms. Caroline is a two-time cross country all-America honoree, placing 12th at last fall’s Division III meet. She’s received all-America distinction three more times in indoor track and field and once outdoors. Meanwhile, Emily is a conference track and field place winner as a sprinter. Both shine even brighter in the classroom where Caroline carries a 3.98 grade point average and Emily has a 4.0.

Despite the fact that by age 3 Caroline could entertain family guests by singing the chorus to Central’s fight song, both she and her sister considered attending other colleges.

“We wanted them to pick it for themselves and make sure it was the right choice,” McMartin shares. “And I think for both of them, with what they’re majoring in and want to do career-wise, Central has been a great choice, and the athletics piece has been a great choice as well. They have grown a lot, contributed to their teams and built great relationships, which are all things you hope for when your son or daughter goes to college.”

Spending time on other campuses, and then returning to Central as a coach years later brings a different perspective than McMartin had as a student.

“I see changes, but I don’t see dramatic changes to who we are as a college back when I was in school,” he says. “I see a lot more similarities than I see differences. We still have great coaches, and our students and faculty are amazing. Our professors see things in our students that they don’t see in themselves sometimes. I give our faculty a lot of credit for really wanting to get to know these students, working with them and helping them bring out their best.”

And it’s the academic side of Central that often drives family conversations.

“My two daughters come home and talk to me about nothing but what they’re learning,” McMartin says. “They’re really inspired and they get excited when they talk about their classes. How many colleges
ATHLETICS UPDATES

MEN’S BASKETBALL: Center Joshua Van Gorp ’24 was named to the NABC All-America team for the second time, receiving second-team honors and was the American Rivers MVP as well. Slowed by injury, Central was 17-9 overall and 11-5 in conference play, narrowly missing an NCAA tourney berth.

WOMEN’S BASKETBALL: Guard Abby Johnson ’25 was a first-team all-conference pick while center Allison Van Gorp ’24 received honorable mention. The Dutch were 11-14 overall and 5-11 in conference play.

MEN’S AND WOMEN’S INDOOR TRACK AND FIELD: The Dutch women were 13th at the NCAA Division III meet in Virginia Beach, Virginia, while the men tied for 38th. Caroline McMartin ’24, Abbi Roerdink ’24, Peyton Steffen ’26 and Megan Johnson ’24 finished second in the distance medley relay; Johnson was sixth in the 3,000 meters; Olivia Bohlen ’26 was sixth in the pentathlon; and McMartin was eighth in the mile. Noah Jorgenson ’24 was fourth in the men’s mile. Central’s women came in third at the conference meet and the men finished fourth.

WRESTLING: Pierre Baldwin ’26 and Gage Linahon ’24 gained NCAA tournament berths at 141 and 197 pounds, respectively. Central finished with a 12-4 mark. Former Wartburg assistant Landon Williams was named Central’s new head coach after the season. Eric Van Kley hung up his whistle and clipboard after 17 years to join Central’s senior leadership team as vice president for athletics.

For an up-to-date schedule of all sports, visit athletics.central.edu/calendar.
Larry Happel ’81 reflects on his 45-year tenure with Central College as athletics communications director and the memorable moments and people who made a job the fulfilling career for which he’s grateful.

STORY BY: LARRY HAPPEL ’81

Larry Happel ’81, longtime athletics communications director, in his natural habitat: The press box in Ron and Joyce Schipper Stadium, surrounded by student workers on a football Saturday.

As returning alumni wander past the sun-dazzled windows of the renovated P.H. Kuypers Gymnasium, some stumble upon my office, and the startled three-word greeting I receive is rarely, “How are you?” but rather “You’re still here?”

I’ve considered changing the title listed below my name outside my office door from “Athletics Communications Director” to “Still Here.”

Except that after 45 years in that role, I’ve handed off that title to someone else.

That’s right. This Parting Shot is, indeed, my parting shot. I confess my eyes moisten a bit as I type that. Serving as what’s more commonly known as Central College’s SID is woven into my identity. It’s consumed me 24/7, often to the justified irritation of family and friends.

And yet, ironically, I’ll probably be most remembered for helping create Lemming Day when I was a Central sophomore. Apparently, I peaked at age 19.

When new retirees claim to look back and say, “I wouldn’t change a thing,” I wince. Are you kidding me? I’ve got more regrets than Blaine Hawkins ’21 has passing yards, ranging from stubbornly taking my job and myself too seriously to once ordering baked fish at a KFC.

But I’m also filled with gratitude. I’m grateful I got to work so closely with pillars of Central like former President Ken Weller and coaches Ron Schipper, Jack Walvoord ’54 and George Wares ’76 as well as so many lesser-known figures, like cherished all-time fun former co-workers Sherry Meyers and Abby Gonzales Larson ’03. I even got to call them all friends. They each taught me much. Coach Schipper, in particular, impressed on me that everything we do leaves an impression about Central and that sweating the small stuff matters.

Yet Central is about students and I’m most grateful for them sharing their Central adventures with me. My mind glances back and sees men’s basketball center Steve Muller ’85, getting whistled for another foul under the hoop, then yelling over to me at the scorer’s table, “Larry, how many?” There’s softball right fielder Kris Hughes Gardner ’03, picking up her bat and raising a gloved hand to give me our ritual high five before heading to the batter’s box to hit the NCAA title-winning Salem Slam. So many magical images that require no description, only capitalization. Emilie’s Shot. The Miracle in the Mud. The Volleyball Three-Peat. Hawkins to Schminke.

But also, quieter moments. Walking into my office and seeing Laura Bach Olson ’93 with her feet on my desk, killing time between classes. Talking fantasy baseball with Bryan George ’06 or Kansas basketball with Trey Melvin ’23.

Purple ink smeared on the face of Lisa Tomlinson ’91 back when we used to run box scores on ditto machines. Emily Grimes Rottinghaus ’94 emptying another bottle of white-out correcting our mistakes. The joyous smile bursting from Meredith Mahoney ’22 after getting the call offering her the grad assistant job she worked so hard to land.

The job isn’t easy. Division III at a small rural Iowa school can feel like the athletics equivalent of the Federal Witness Protection Program when you’re trying to connect with Division I-obsessed media members who view Central as third-rate. Yet there’s nothing third-rate about the anxious feeling I get in my stomach when the Dutch face fourth and one, the joy of seeing students you care about succeed or the amazing people whose stories I got to tell.

Yes, I’m grateful. I had a job for 45 years and never worked a day.
A post high-school journey for students with intellectual disabilities can be rewarding at Central College.

STORY BY: JEANETTE BUDDING
PHOTOS BY: CJ BONIFER, DAN VANDER BEEK AND MELODY VANDERLEEST
“Be you and embrace your individuality,” stated Adam Duerfeldt ’06, during Central College’s 2024 Commencement ceremony. “The bottom line is that the world has never experienced another you. Don’t deprive it or yourself through social conformity.”

Duerfeldt, this year’s Commencement speaker, reminded the Class of 2024 that individuality is paramount as they move into the next phase of their lives.

And as the “Pomp and Circumstance” music resounded throughout Ron and Joyce Schipper Stadium, two alumni families were filled with overwhelming joy as they watched their children with special needs cross that stage. They were given the opportunity to gain experience in ways their parents couldn’t have imagined and enjoy their individuality.

Steve ’01, Central Board of Trustees member, and Stefanie Bresnahan Perkins ’02, are the proud parents of Jackson Perkins ’24, who has autism.

David ’93 and Jennifer Vander Werf Van Gorp ’95 are the proud parents of Bella Van Gorp ’24, who has Down syndrome.

“We are so proud of Jackson and what he has accomplished this year,” Steve says.

“Graduation at Central was never an assumption. It was a dream.”

Jackson crossed the stage during Commencement on May 11, graduating with a Certificate of Achievement from the Central READY program. Jackson enrolled in Fall 2023 with a program tailored to his passion: Baking.

Members of the Central community who attended the 2022 Scholarship Dinner may remember the video profiling the Perkins’ endowed scholarship, Jackson and his favorite chocolate chip cookies.

Jackson has a big smile to go along with his big heart. Central READY supported him as he explored training in baking skills with the Des Moines Area Community College campus in Newton, Iowa.

“We learned that Jackson was far more resilient than I think we ever could have imagined,” Steve says. “He became way more independent than we thought he would ever be.”

Similar sentiments are shared by the parents of Bella Van Gorp, who also walked across the graduation stage. Dave and Jennifer shared their delight in the progression of Bella in the Central READY program.

“For us, it’s always been important for Bella to have age-appropriate peers,” Dave shares. “College has allowed her to continue to mature but also to live life with similar-aged peers who are also going through transitions, different in some ways but similar. Transitions like cutting some ties with parents and relying on themselves to make their own decisions. Those decisions have both rewards and consequences, and you hope they don’t make decisions with consequences that are too long-lasting.”

“Four years of college is a really transitional and pivotal time for a young adult. It provides this kind of middle ground between childhood and adulthood,” Jennifer says. “There’s so much growth that happens whether you have a disability or not. It was advantageous for us, and a privilege for Bella, to get to experience that piece of young adulthood and all of the growth that comes in the four years. Giving Bella the opportunity was a big thing for us.”

Central READY has been in a pilot phase as it develops the programming, structure and funding to support students with intellectual disabilities. For the Perkins and Van Gorp family, Central READY provided a safety net for their students, the foundation
to build independence and connections with peers, the greater campus community and in Pella.

“Central READY customizes the programming to the needs of the young adult with special needs,” says Carol Williamson, Central READY director. “With her parents’ input, Bella participated in the two-year academic programming at the STRIVE Academy through Des Moines Area Community College and Pella High School. They supported Bella living on campus at Central and partnering with Respite Connections. This program supported the employment of Central students to implement and support residential living skills goals. These partnerships enabled Bella to spend four years on campus as she transitioned to working in a local school with preschoolers.”

Jackson’s journey was one year as his program was shorter. His skill set was different, so his individual support network was different.

“Jackson’s experience was challenging and rewarding in different ways than Bella’s,” Williamson says. “The individuality is paramount to the growth of each participant. We continue to learn along with each student what supports are necessary and adjust throughout their time at Central.”

THE SAFETY NET

Training and preparation for the workforce is important, but both families believed safety was the first priority. Stefanie, Steve and their other two sons live in Waukon, Iowa, more than three hours away from Pella. After Jackson graduated from high school, they looked at baking programs and thought about him living in Newton on his own but that was not feasible for Jackson at the time, so they turned to Central.

“Our idea was for him to go to this baking program because that’s the one thing he loves more than anything. He’s done more than I ever thought he could. And some of that is because Central is just a safe place to be,” Stefanie shares.

“I would say honestly when we dropped Jackson off at Central there was excitement,” Stefanie continues. “We were actually very excited because attending Central was something we didn’t think would ever happen. I think we both were excited, and we weren’t very nervous.”

“Being on a campus where he can go to events safely, be part of the Catholic group, walk to the library and walk downtown safely — that’s what Central has provided. He’s done more and grown more in the last nine months than we could have imagined,” Stefanie says.

“We let him fly a little bit — let him be on his own more than we could in any other place. We just know Central’s campus so well. We know the community of Pella. I don’t think we could have done that in any other any place.”

The old adage it takes a village applies to Jackson as well. His great aunt and great uncle live in Oskaloosa. Several of Stefanie’s friends and Steve’s former football teammates live in Pella. They were lifelines if the Perkins needed them.

“We often got texts with photos of Jackson downtown — ‘Jackson sightings,’” Stefanie laughs. “You tell your kids ‘Don’t talk to strangers.’ But Jackson would comment that strangers come up to him and ask, ‘Aren’t you Jackson Perkins?’ He’s just a kind-hearted loving young man and our friends watched out for him.”

The Perkins also have an app on their phones so they can “watch” where Jackson is. Jackson walked all over Pella, stopping at the Pella Public Library as well as downtown.

“I could look on the app and see where he was. It brought back fond memories of when I was studying in the library, Central Market...
The Perkins and Van Gorps enjoyed the tailgate lunch during Homecoming 2023.

Homecoming gave the families an opportunity to connect over the Central READY program and their own experiences at Central.
Bella works as an assistant in the preschool rooms at Madison Elementary School in Pella.

Jackson will use his exceptional baking skills in the next chapter of his life.
or down at the fieldhouse. It was just fun to see my son experiencing the same things that we did,” Steve says.

Safety was important for Jennifer and Dave as they dropped off Bella at Central in Fall of 2020, when the world was still in the throes of the pandemic. Students were more isolated in that time and it was difficult to meet people.

“For me, our biggest concern was safety. Just the idea that she wasn’t going to be under our roof. Her environment wasn’t going to be controlled by us any longer,” Jennifer recalls. “Similar to the same feeling we had with our oldest. And probably the same feeling we’ll have with our youngest as he heads off to college. But for Bella, safety and then just the unknown of whether these experiences will be meaningful.”

“One of the things that concerned us was where our place was in this journey,” Dave says. “When we sent our oldest child to college, mostly we were hands off. They were doing their own thing. But if Bella got sick, or if she had a roommate conflict, we didn’t know where our job as parents, her job as a Central student and Central’s job as an institution began or ended. What was our role in that and what was everybody else’s role? It’s been a work in progress to try to figure out how parents navigate with Central READY.”

**LEARNING LIFE SKILLS**

Parents of children with intellectual disabilities share common concerns about what a meaningful life looks like for their child. How can parents prepare and protect their children for the future?

“Bella has learned independent living skills,” Jennifer says. “She has learned job readiness skills and life skills. All of those things you learn aren’t fun but are necessary to live as an adult. You need to learn the skills that keep the wheels turning in your life.”

“One thing that has changed is that I have learned to make healthier choices since coming to Central,” Bella says. “I have learned that it’s important to do chores. I have also become more independent since coming to college. I can do tasks without being asked or told and do them well. I’ve learned time management, meal prep and cooking skills, how to keep my room clean and do laundry.”

Jennifer also explains asking for help is important.

“That’s a life skill, too. If you don’t know something, you ask a question. Bella and all of us learned to ask for help if you don’t understand.”

“We made a conscientious decision after her freshman year, to have her live in a townhouse her sophomore and junior year because we felt like that would be the next natural step towards independence,” Dave says. “Hindsight tells us that it actually isolated her while still on campus. She wasn’t in the hub of campus, and a lot of the responsibilities fell on her helpers.”

The organic interaction with other students is different in the townhouses. The Van Gorps decided to move her back into Graham Hall for her senior year where Bella had more opportunities for interaction.

“When a girl is heading to supper, she yells down the hall and invites anyone to go along. All of a sudden there are four girls, one of whom Bella may know really well and two or three she may not know at all. It forces interactions, which is helpful for Bella,” Jennifer explains.

“The three best experiences since coming to Central have been going to The Calm — a campus ministries weekly gathering, the Best Buddies Ball with Grace Hoffman ’25 and all the friends I have made on campus. I love cheerleading. Because of that I learned what it feels like to wake up at 4:45 in the morning with the other girls,” Bella says with a smile.

The parallels of life and cheerleading are important to Bella.

“You learn how to be a good teammate. I
learned how to cheer on the team, peers and teammates and how to learn new things,” Bella shares.

**GAINING CONFIDENCE**

Both Bella and Jackson learned there are things and people competing for your attention, and as a result, learned how to manage their time.

Stefanie and Steve Perkins also realized the personal growth in Jackson from living on campus.

“He’s always been good with schedules and keeping things on task,” Stefanie says. “But even more so he’s become a master of his lifestyle. He knows what he wants to do and when he wants to do it. That’s been very, very positive for him. I think he’s grown in self-confidence, as well.”

Jackson worked at Central Market making deli sandwiches and doing general cleanup twice a week. During the spring semester, **Sara Shuger Fox**, associate professor of kinesiology and parent of a child with autism, **Hadyn Miller ’24** and **Jocelyn Timmerman ’24** baked with Jackson every week in the Garden Cottage kitchen.

“That has certainly been a highlight for Jackson and a real lifeline for him,” Steve says. “Sara had Jackson over for the Super Bowl and looked out for him. She reached out to us if she had concerns about Jackson. She’s been a real gift from heaven.”

“I liked trying new events on campus,” Jackson says. “I went to ‘Young Frankenstein,’ headphone disco and the libraries. I exercise in the Maytag Student Center.”

He admits the most challenging part of his time at Central was meeting new friends. Baking with Miller and Timmerman expanded his connections on campus.

“Anytime you let your child go somewhere, especially with Jackson being autistic, you worry will your son be the butt of jokes or be picked on,” Steve says. “We have not gotten that side at all from Jackson. He’s been treated with respect. He may have been more invisible than we’d have liked him to be. A lot of students don’t know how to interact with autistic kids. And that’s something I would have liked the regular students on campus to learn how to do — interact with kids like Jackson a little bit better.”

Jackson participated in Alive, a Catholic student organization with weekly fellowship gatherings. His parents say he has gone to at least one of every home sporting event on campus, mainly by himself and he will sit with someone if he knows them. His parents are thrilled because Jackson doesn’t migrate toward sports.

“I never would have seen him walking into a wrestling meet by himself when he was in high school,” Steve says. “Just this year he went into the fieldhouse and watched a wrestling match. He was confident enough to go up to Coach **Eric Van Kley** and just say hi. I can tell he has matured.”

“Jackson isn’t like people who are self-conscious of ‘What is someone going to think of me’ or ‘Am I cool enough’ or ‘Should I say hi to that person?’ Jackson will go up and say hi to somebody at the info booth if he knows who they are. He’s going to make sure he waves at people he knows. And he’s become even more confident,” Stefanie says.

**SOLID FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

“I’m doing well and trying new things,” Jackson shares. “I do things for myself and have more responsibility like grocery shopping and doing my own laundry. I learned a lot in the classes this year like different baking techniques, how to make a new recipe, understanding ingredients, how to run the large equipment, how to roll out dough and using piping.”
His parents are more comfortable with his independence. “If he were to go to Newton now, we’d be more comfortable with him living there,” Stefanie says. “From his Central experience, he has become more empathic, independent and competent.”

“When we started Central READY and his Newton program, we really didn’t know what the future was going to hold for him. We knew he really wanted to do the baking skills program. This was the one time that he could really do something for himself that he wanted,” she adds.

This summer, Jackson is an intern at a bakery in Oskaloosa and lives with his great aunt and great uncle, while he completes the final classes for the DMACC certificate of baking skills.

Jackson plans to secure a job near Waukon after completing his training. His dream job is to own his own bakery or a food truck. One of his next goals is perfecting the soft pretzel.

Williamson is so proud of Jackson and Bella. She is also proud of Central for putting together a path for these two young adults.

“Saying ‘yes’ to working outside the box, when saying ‘no’ would have been the easier route, has made a huge difference in the lives of both Bella and Jackson and the rest of the Central community. Taking this pilot program and watching these two students grow and develop within the Central community has been a gift.”

“I am confident to leave campus and work, but I will miss my friends and living so close to everyone on campus,” Bella admits.

Bella completed her two-year certificate with DMACC in 2022. She has worked for two years in the preschool rooms at Madison Elementary School in Pella as a partnership with the college and Pella Community Schools.

This summer Bella is attending the Easter Seals Camp with a few Central students who volunteer as camp counselors and participate in Central’s Campus Ministry programs. She will also volunteer at The Well Thrift Store.

In the fall, Bella will be back in the classrooms of Amy Wilson and Stacey Sikkema, preschool teachers in Pella. She will support the early learning center in the new Little Dutch Academy that opens in the fall.

Bella decided to live independently after college. She has an apartment with a pool that is close to her work, the church she attends and her family.

“She could have come home and lived with us but that wasn’t really our dream for her. I don’t think it was her dream for herself,” Jennifer says.

As Duerfeldt expressed at Commencement, college is hard. “It’s the first time in your life that you’re on your own, charged with the responsibility of prioritizing, self-motivating, paving the way of your own future and … learning to do your own laundry,” he says.

These and other words of Duerfeldt resonated with Jennifer as she described Bella’s journey during her graduation party.

“As the speaker said, ‘We don’t need another version of you.’ Bella can be her authentic self. We feel so blessed and this room full of people are the ones who rallied around us lifting mountains and dreaming things that we didn’t even know. They made it happen,” Jennifer says thankfully.

To see your child grow and develop in the Central READY program, contact Carol Williamson, director of Central READY, at 641-628-7667 or williamsonc@central.edu.

The Central READY program can grow and assist more students through your generosity. To make a gift and make an impact, please call 641-628-5154 and ask for Michelle Wilkie, director of development.
Choosing a college is a journey. Through relationships and connections, advice, support and more, Central College educates students and their families to help make the decision as clear and as easy as possible.

STORY BY: BRITTANY CARLSON PROKUPEK ’16
PHOTOS BY: CJ BONIFER
FOSTERING COMMUNITY
Since 2015, Central has adopted the third-grade class from Findley Elementary School in Des Moines, Iowa. Chevy Freiburger, vice president for enrollment management and dean of admission, has helped foster the partnership since the beginning.

“Working with Des Moines schools for more than seven years, I got to know Heather Burr Isaacson ‘97 very well,” Freiburger shares. “She came to Central with the idea of adopting the third-grade class and we jumped at the opportunity.”

Isaacson is the director of programs for By Degrees Foundation, an organization that helps economically disadvantaged families and students learn about and attend college and so much more.

Another key player among the small army of hands to help lift such a partnership was Cheri Trout Doane ’98.

“It started off with us having a regular presence at Findley, and from there Cheri thought of different ways our academic programming could be involved as well when the students came to campus,” Freiburger recalls. “We got our students involved and it’s become a collaborative effort for the entirety of campus as we promote a college-accessible culture. It’s about instilling optimism that there are pathways for you after high school no matter if it’s technical or a four-year degree — it’s attainable.”

As the partnership celebrates a milestone — the first class to graduate since the partnership began — Freiburger and the Central team can’t help but feel good about it and hope they made an impact.

“From the very beginning, it wasn’t about these students going to Central,” Freiburger says. “It was much broader, and rather, more so about the importance of education — how it changes your life and puts you in a stronger position to grow personally and professionally. We hope their college-going rates increase and we feel the work we’re doing is changing lives for the better. And of course, the cherry on top is if they choose Central.”

REFER TO MORE
Another cherry on top moment comes from the Central family.

“There are lots of ways to help the college,” says Sunny Gonzales Eighmy ’99, vice president for advancement. “When alumni, parents or friends ask to help, we animate pathways for giving, volunteering and referring students to Central. Each of these activities helps the college more than they may realize.”

Central’s Refer A Student program helps the college connect with promising students who would benefit from a Central education. Once the form is submitted, the college invites the student to learn more about Central, visit campus and apply. As a token of gratitude, Central sends the referrer gear when they refer a student and again if that student enrolls.

“The tap from a family member, mentor or family friend can go a long way,” Eighmy explains. “To hear, ‘I think this school would be a great fit for you’ or ‘You’d really thrive
here’ from someone they love and respect is one of the best compliments a 17- or 18-year-old could receive.”

The program is rooted in the very core of what Central is all about: A high-quality, personalized experience.

“Central family members are our biggest cheerleaders,” Eighmy says. “When we share our stories with the next generation, it opens doors to great possibilities. Pair that with a great, personalized visit and an investment from donors through scholarship support and it’s easy to see why Central would rise to the top of the list. We know not everyone can or will choose Central, but know we do what we do really well for the students who call our campus home.”

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

After more than 20 years in higher education, Freiburger has helped thousands of prospective students and their families navigate the college search. In that time, he’s learned what families want to learn and how to best guide them.

“Do your homework and take the time to make a good decision,” he affirms. “It’s a life-changing one! Spend time on campus and get to know where you want to be — meet the faculty, coaches and students and understand the culture. It doesn’t hurt to be in a thriving community, so take a look at your surroundings.”

“We’re fortunate to have a community like Pella with a warm, welcoming feel, great amenities and incredible support from the people and businesses,” Freiburger shares. “The people of Pella wrap their arms around our students and really take care of them. So, once a student has asked all the questions and feels like they’re making the right decision, we couldn’t ask for a better place for our students to learn and grow.”

“We know a lot of our alumni love it here, too,” he says. “When 10% of your population are alumni, there’s something good going on.”

No matter the path current and future Central students take to find their way here, one thing is certain: The Central journey and the relationships made here are for a lifetime.

Kelly Kowzan, Central’s director of admission, meets with a prospective student and their family. Central creates a personalized visit experience tailored to each student and their interests.

To learn more about Central’s relationship with Findley Elementary and the By Degrees Foundation, watch the video celebrating the partnership at: central.edu/fostering-community.

Know a great student looking for a great education, lifelong relationships and amazing opportunities? Refer them to Central at: central.edu/refer. Once you’ve referred them, encourage them to schedule a visit at central.edu/visit.
Central College’s newest alumni show off their diplomas after Commencement on Saturday, May 11, in Ron and Joyce Schipper Stadium

PHOTO BY: DAN VANDER BEEK
Forever Dutch® Lager is more than a beer: It’s a commitment to Central College students. With 15% of sales donated to the Journey Scholarship Fund, every sip supports educational opportunities and allows students to pursue their dreams.

Betsy Duffy, BJ Stokesbary and Mindi Vanden Bosch hold cans of Forever Dutch® Lager just after its launch. Central’s connection with these local business owners opens doors to a new opportunity to show our Central spirit and support student scholarships.

STORY BY: ERIN KAMP  PHOTOS BY: CJ BONIFER
Like many of our favorite moments, Forever Dutch® Lager came together because of Central College connections.

When Mary Benedict, director of engagement at Central, sat down with BJ Stokesbary, a donor and friend of the college, she had no idea how big his ideas would be. A year after their initial meeting, Forever Dutch Lager is now available for purchase at retail locations in Pella. A beer with a big purpose, Central continues to raise the bar with local connections and creative ways to build connections among the Central family.

TAP IN

Partner and CEO of ATI Group, Stokesbary is passionate about engaging in and supporting the Pella community. Interested in finding new ways to support the community, his newly formed connection with Benedict provided the avenue he was searching for.

“A big thing that everyone always talks about is having a takeaway for people who come to Pella,” Stokesbary says. “People want a keepsake that says Pella on it. That was the impetus for Pella Hops, to have some sort of takeaway.”

The novelty of a tourist town like Pella provides opportunities to showcase local products differently. With this in mind, Stokesbary created Pella Hops Co. as a way to promote the Pella community.

“Pella Hops is a tool to bring people and ideas together, all while giving back to the community,” he shares. “I knew we wanted to do more things like this. I’m passionate about Pella and Central, so it was just a matter of determining how.”

His meeting with Benedict opened the door to a new opportunity.

“When I met with Mary, we talked about how we’d seen other colleges create beers that only support athletics,” he says. “We wanted to serve a higher mission. I thought it was a long shot, but it would be so cool to create a Central beer.”

“BJ really felt this was a good match and that we had the strength in our brand and in community support that people would rally and be really excited about it,” she continues. “That’s a huge compliment.”

State universities in Iowa have college beers, but the proceeds support athletics. While establishing the foundation for Forever Dutch Lager, the Central team knew they could do better.

“It was important to all of us that the project resulted in something positive for our campus community,” Bonnstetter shares. “I made the suggestion that a percentage of beer sales should be donated to the Journey Scholarship.”

“The Journey Scholarship Fund is fantastic,” Duffy says. “If we can help students in any way to work toward their education and learning, that’s a huge gift. As the person who shows up every day and knows everything about the business, it’s easy to do the mental math and say, ‘Yeah, we can do that.’”

Thanks to Gezellig’s generosity, 15% of sales from Forever Dutch Lager are donated in support of the Journey Scholarship Fund. Completely funded by donors, Central’s goal is to award every student with a Journey Scholarship.

RAISE THE BAR

The local connections established for this project made all the difference. With strong partners in Vanden Bosch, Duffy and Stokesbary, Central staff members knew the outcome would mean more to the Central and Pella communities.

“Anyone can put a logo on a material good. We wanted it to mean more,” says Steffanie Bonnstetter, director of communications and marketing.

Newton, Iowa. Both Vanden Bosch and Duffy are local to Pella, and their longstanding connection with the community made them the perfect fit.

“We’re a small brewery, and one of the benefits of that is we can be nimble,” Duffy shares. “There was an additional amount of pride working on this beer because it belongs to my community.”

“Gezellig is a woman-owned business and they’re doing really amazing things,” Stokesbary adds. “What better partnership than to work with people who care about the community and are making great beer.”
As the team determined logistics, a timeline presented itself. Decisions were being made throughout the summer, and the next time a large group of alumni would be on campus would be Homecoming — which was only a few short months away.

“We wanted to launch at a time that made sense and would offer an opportunity for our community to come together to celebrate. Homecoming was perfect,” Bonnstetter shares. “With our short timeline, there was not a lot of room for us to hesitate.”

Melody VanderLeest, senior content strategist — design/art director at Central, brought her connections and expertise to the project. A former designer for Gezellig, she was the perfect person to create artwork for Forever Dutch Lager.

“Having a history with Gezellig, I know their brand. Their labels are so fun to look at and usually have lots of color and design,” VanderLeest says. “We wanted something that stood out among the craziness of the cans on the shelf. Central’s brand is very clean. We’re grateful to have such a vibrant color as our main color.”

“We had a lot of support from Betsy to make sure we were meeting the standard,” Bonnstetter says. “I think the bold use of red on our can helps us stand out. Red’s our best friend.”

VanderLeest mocked up a handful of label options, and the decision was unanimous. “We went with what we are: Bright red and proud.”

SUCCESS IS BREWING

The specific beer Gezellig recommended for Central was the perfect choice to ensure it reached a wider audience.

“I knew that it needed to be a beer we could sell,” Duffy says. “The flavor needed to be very approachable.”

“Based on Gezellig’s recommendation, we decided on a lager because it’s universally friendly,” Bonnstetter says. “It’s nice to show people that a craft beer from a small brewery has a flavor that’s friendly for anyone to enjoy.”

Using footage from Gezellig’s first canning of Forever Dutch Lager, Central’s communications team began to share social media posts hinting at the upcoming announcement.

“The strategy meetings our communications team had were exciting because it was a new type of project for Central and for our team,” Bonnstetter says. “It allowed for a new level of creativity because there was going to be a reveal. It was fun to strategize dropping previews to capture people’s interest.”

The project became a whispered rumor among those in the know. Despite the secrecy around the early stages of the project, local partners were slowly introduced to the idea. In order to be successful with a launch at Homecoming, retailers in Pella had to carry and sell the beer throughout Homecoming weekend. Bonnstetter, Benedict and Duffy collaborated to approach Pella stores and restaurants. It took time to organize, but the Pella community was eager to rally behind the exciting idea. Everyone who was approached wanted to carry the beer.

“When we walked through the doors of local businesses and asked them to carry the beer, everyone agreed almost immediately,” Bonnstetter says. “It’s a great testament to
the support the community provides to Central. The support we have here is so special.”

On Sept. 15, 2023, the college announced Forever Dutch Lager. The first Iowa private college to partner with a local brewery, Central received immediate media attention and was featured by WHO13, the Oskaloosa Herald, Des Moines Business Record and other media outlets.

The project had a fast turnaround, but the launch was smooth. Central’s communications team had prepared assets to feature the community ties, donation back to student scholarships and the ways the beer would benefit the entire community. From posts on social media to posters in Pella stores, Forever Dutch Lager was a major feature of Homecoming weekend.

“For an idea that was a bit surprising at first, everything came together seamlessly,” Bonnstetter admits.

“The beer was meant to bring a love for Central together in a new way to create community and do good,” Stokesbary says. “It’s been really exciting to see what the idea has grown into.”

Once the announcement was made, Forever Dutch was available in Pella for purchase. Central’s Homecoming weekend kicked off with golf outings, happy hours and reunions, and everyone wanted a taste.

“You can create all kinds of things, but how do you create something that people actually want to consume?” Stokesbary says. “You know you’re doing something right when you go to Main Street Markt or Hy-Vee and you can only buy one of them.”

CHEERS TO A GOOD CAUSE

Throughout Homecoming weekend, alumni could be found purchasing and enjoying Forever Dutch Lager. With the bright red can, it was impossible to miss.

“It was fun to see how excited everyone was,” Benedict says. “To see everyone enjoy the beer and then go get another one was great. We loved all the photo ops of people with their beer!”

“It’s been fun to watch alumni,” Bonnstetter agrees. “There’s a look of pride when they see the can for the first time.”

The timing of the launch was perfect. With the biggest crowd of alumni back on campus during the weekend, the moment allowed for more people to enjoy a beverage that supported something near and dear to their hearts.

“The biggest thing people love is that it’s going to scholarships for any Central student,” Benedict says. “People are proud their alma mater has a beer and they’re doing good with it. They’re supporting students.”

The Saturday of Homecoming was a hot day, and the Post-game Party on campus sold out of Central’s beer — along with multiple local retailers. Alumni were enjoying a refreshing drink that supports an important cause.

“There are so many amazing things that Central already does for Homecoming and the beer was a great compliment,” Stokesbary says. “To see the success when it sold out so quickly during Homecoming weekend was amazing.”

One month after Homecoming, Central received the first check. A full Journey Scholarship was funded with only one month of sales. Months later, multiple Journey Scholarships have been funded just by sales of Forever Dutch Lager.

“It’s the power of the Central family!” Bonnstetter says. “They rally bigger and prouder than anybody else.”

“It’s an honor to see what we can do to support students,” she continues. “Central wants to continue finding new ways to provide more for our students and make Central an affordable option for each of them. This is a really unique way to do that.”

Central continues to show the ways it supports students, alumni and the community. By supporting scholarships and building local partnerships, Central believes in doing good for others so they can do good in the world.

Forever Dutch Lager is available for purchase at limited Central events and in Pella — and this is only the beginning.

“We have our own beer,” Benedict says. “What can we do next?”

You can directly support the Journey Scholarship Fund by visiting central.edu/give or contacting the Advancement Office.

Are you a business owner interested in a sponsorship opportunity or have a product with which you’d like to partner with Central? Let’s talk! Please call 641-628-5154 and ask for Michelle Wilkie, director of development.
The Central College alumni family grew by 240 on Saturday, May 11, as the Class of 2024 was honored during this year’s Commencement ceremony. Great weather and the words of Commencement speaker Adam Duerfeldt ’06 were enjoyed by graduates and guests.

In the words of Central President Mark Putnam, “Go forth and do great things!”

Congratulations, graduates!
Nancy Smith Boswell ’75 is part of the Missouri Humanities Speakers Bureau and has presented as Laura Ingalls Wilder all over the state. Boswell’s second character is Aunt Mildred, who tells the story of Sedalia resident George Whiteman, the namesake of Whiteman Air Force Base where the B-2 stealth bomber lives. 

Randy Caldwell ’77 co-authored a new treatise for lawyers entitled, “Iowa Estate Planning, Will Drafting and Estate Administration with Forms.” Caldwell resides in Newton, Iowa.

Denise Bartlett Garth ’80, chief strategy officer at Majesco, is a distinguished figure and a prominent influencer recognized in the InsurTech Top 50 and International Business Weekly’s 30 Most Powerful Women in Business: The Titans of Industry. Garth drives Majesco’s strategy, marketing and innovation initiatives.

Chris Hopkins ’82 started the rock-and-roll band Labyrinth as a student at Central. The band will be inducted into the Iowa Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in fall 2024. Fellow band members included: John Smalley ’78, Ralph Johnson ’80, Craig Jones ’80, Matthew Bell ’81, Doug McCauley ’83 and Jeff Knight ’84.

Lori Wiser-Dyas ’84 is a youth sports site supervisor at the YMCA of Greater Omaha. Wiser-Dyas lives in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Mark Coffey ’85 retired from Hormel Foods after nearly 40 years of service.

Pat Dale ’85 is regional manager at Climbing Kites.

Stacie Runyan Gibler ’85 and friends from the 1983 Wales program gathered at Rathbun Lake in Moravia, Iowa, in September 2023 — exactly 40 years from their arrival at Trinity University in Carmarthen, Wales. 

Lori Schaefer Rempe ’90 is a senior director of treasury and global credit finance at Vermeer Corporation.

Beth Aldrich Van Zee ’90 is a realtor at Legacy Realty of Iowa.

Chris Vlahakis ’90 is a research scientist at Corteva Agriscience.

Jan Damsteegt ’86 came out of retirement due to the educator shortage in Michigan and is a preschool through eighth grade resource teacher for the Vista Charter Academy in Wyoming, Michigan.

Cheryl Hastings Dewey ’87 was promoted to senior vice president, product operation at Continuum Clinical. Dewey resides in Wilmette, Illinois.

Lori Schaefer Rempe ’90 is a senior director of treasury and global credit finance at Vermeer Corporation.

Michael Merry ’89 is an accounting manager for Compass Group. Merry lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Lorena Sernett ’92 is director of corporate partnerships - global markets at Society of Human Resources Management in Alexandria, Virginia.

THE ‘50s

Donald Bruggink ’51 and the late Eugene Heideman ’51 published “The Canons of Dort: God’s Freedom, Justice, and Persistence.” Written by Heideman and edited by Bruggink, the publication can be purchased from Amazon and several other stores.

Wes Harmelink ’56 celebrated his 90th birthday in January at his home with wife Nancy, their four children (including Bill Harmelink ’86 and Bob Harmelink ’92) and spouses, six of their grandchildren and five of their great-grandchildren. Harmelink resides in Redlands, California.

THE ‘70s

Bob Parrott ’70 (pictured far right) is a member of the 2023 USTA National Men’s 65 & Over Doubles Championship team from Woodlands, Texas. Several fellow BKE members showed up to support and cheer for Parrott in the USTA League National Championships. Parrott resides in Montgomery, Texas.

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THE ‘00s

Amanda Hansen Fletcher ’00 is the development director at Healthy Birth Day, Inc. She and husband Justin Fletcher ’02 reside in Norwalk, Iowa.


Melissa Vink Gentry ’01 was honored as the 2023 physician assistant of the year by the Iowa Physician Assistant Society.

Tim Brand ’02 penned the story of his father, Dennis Brand ’65, the last days of his life and the legacy his father left behind on this earth. A beautiful story about a life well lived, “Standing on the Shoulders: A Legacy Story of a Father, a Son, and Life’s Greatest Gifts” was released January 2024.

Joshua Steger ’03 is associate director of enterprise reporting & business intelligence for Leprino Foods. Steger works and resides in Denver, Colorado.

Jon Sexton ’04 is senior vice president of culture & leadership development at Vibrant Credit Union. Sexton launched Sexton Leadership LLC in spring 2023.

Doug Anderson ’06 is vice president - asset management for Percipio Partners and wife Mackenzie Lauman Anderson ’06 is FSOR customer value expert people lead at Cargill, Incorporated. The couple resides in Blair, Nebraska.

Nicole Brooks Dingeman ’08 is vice president of retail and residential real estate department lead for Leighton State Bank.

Reid Turner ’08 is a cornea, LASIK and cataract specialist at Wolfe Eye Clinic based in Des Moines, Iowa.

Garrett Hill ’09 works for Wells Fargo as a senior consultant/consumer operations.

Amber Smith Remick ’09 is a team member experience manager for Vermeer Canada Inc.

Matt Sigmund ’09 is a principal consultant for Latham BioPharm Group, Part of Sia Partners.

THE ‘10s

Jessi Steward McQuerry ’10, director of programs for Iowa Association of Business and Industry Foundation, was named to the Business Record’s 2024 Forty Under 40 class.

Emily Miller Mendez ’10, director of development at Proteus, is a member of the Business Record 2024 Forty Under 40 class.

Rachel Statman Mejibovsky ’11 works as a literacy specialist writing children’s decodable books for Ello. The app recently launched with over 50 books that Mejibovsky has written for kids ages four to nine. Mejibovsky resides in Ellicott City, Maryland.

Jenae Jenison Sikkink ’11, senior vice president of talent development and inclusive strategies at Greater Des Moines Partnership, was named to the Business Record’s 2024 Forty Under 40 class.

Kylene Brittian Sommers ’11 is the director of marketing for Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

Cody Kowalik ’12 left his decade-long career in corn research to begin a new path with Original Appearance Manufacturing in sales and customer service.


Ashley Kinkade Wenke ’12 owns and operates Pleasant Grove Homestead, located in southern Poweshiek County, with husband Zachary. Wenke earned first place in the Iowa Farm Bureau’s Grow Your Future competition at the Young Farmer Conference in February 2024.

Tyler Wentworth ’12 is director of social media at Youthforia. Wentworth resides in San Diego, California.

Dirk Lindaman ’13 works at Grinnell Mutual as a commercial lines product manager. Lindaman lives in Ankeny, Iowa.

Carly Stratbucker Rodrigues ’14 works as an associate product manager for Pella Corporation.

Jordan Roseburrough ’14 is a data-sharing coordinator at the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.

Megan Querry ’15 is a child protective services investigator with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Querry resides in Dallas, Texas.

Blake Rozendaal ’15, was elected to the Urbandale City Council in Urbandale, Iowa.

Joshua and Araceli Votroubek Phua ’16 married Feb. 4, 2024.


Ben ’17 and Madi Schmeigelt Robertson ’19 married Feb. 3, 2024.

Rachelle Annen ’18 received a grant through Palo Verde Fiesta Bowl Charities Wishes for Teachers Draft Day presented by Salt River Project. Annen’s granted wish was a smart TV for her classroom.

Ben Clark ’18 is an account manager at Rion Equipment.

Monica Powers ’18 works as a marketing communications specialist at Great West Causality Company.

Katie Zimmerman ’18 is a people specialist at Mulhall in Omaha, Nebraska.


Dylan Tuttle ’19 works as a commercial sales representative at Right Roofing.
Caleb Hamerlinck ’23 is an accounting coordinator for Century 21 Signature Real Estate.

Megan Muur ’23 works for Indigo Living at Hubbell Realty as a marketing coordinator.

Samantha Scholz ’24 works at Vermeer Corporation as a data analyst.

Emily Van Gent ’19 is an executive assistant at Pella Corporation.

Aiyana Rouse ’21 is a microbiologist at Mark Anthony Brewing, Inc. Rouse executes the application of approved microbiological testing of ingredients in-process and finished products. Rouse resides in Peoria, Arizona.

Brett Staton ’21 works for Hopkins Roofing as a project manager.

Alex Kaczor ’22 is a field sales manager for GRUNDFOS.


Rylee Powell ’22 works as an athletic trainer at Work Fit. Powell resides in Moses Lake, Washington.

Zoe Runyon ’22 is the office manager at Hopkins Roofing.

THE '10s (continued)

Seth ’18 and Baylee Kivett Signs ’20 married June 4, 2022, after Seth graduated from medical school and Baylee completed her Master of Social Work degree. Seth is a resident physician in the ER and Baylee is a clinical psychotherapist in Detroit, Michigan, where they reside.

IN MEMORIAM

Trudy Vander Ploeg Goettsch ’45, St. Louis, Missouri, Feb. 19, 2024.


Barbara Yount ’54, Mason City, Iowa, Dec. 29, 2023.


Marilyn Spoelstra Baham ’59, Franklin, Wisconsin, Feb. 20, 2024.

Delbert Jungling ’60, Grundy Center, Iowa, Feb. 9, 2024.

Judith Bandstra Van Dusseldorp ’62, Pella, Iowa, Feb. 11, 2024.


Keith Nollen ’68, Pella, Iowa, March 3, 2024.


Rick Kingery ’83, Mason City, Iowa, Feb. 4, 2024.

THE ’20s

Caleb Hamerlinck ’23 is an accounting coordinator for Century 21 Signature Real Estate.

Megan Muur ’23 works for Indigo Living at Hubbell Realty as a marketing coordinator.

Samantha Scholz ’24 works at Vermeer Corporation as a data analyst.

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Zoe Runyon ’22 is the office manager at Hopkins Roofing.

ADVANCED DEGREE

Renee Sedlacek Lee ’05 completed her doctorate of philosophy in education in February 2024.

Jessica Baker Pappalardo ’12 earned her Ph.D. in civil engineering-hydraulics from Colorado State University in 2021.

Julie Wunder Evans ’14 earned her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree in December 2022 from St. Ambrose University.

Jordan Roseburrough ’14 graduated with a Master of Public Administration degree in nonprofit management from Upper Iowa University in August 2022.

Blake Rozendaal ’15 received an MBA from Iowa State University in August 2023.

Marissa Wright-Post ’19 completed a master’s degree in education from Drake University in August 2023.

NEW ARRIVALS

Taylor and Mark Sanger ’05, son Robby Keith, Jan. 29, 2024.

Jon and Aimee Schmidt Lane ’07, son Owen Christopher, Feb. 8, 2024.

Lara and Peter Fegley ’11, daughter Reagan Michelle, Feb. 2, 2024.

Travis Hook ’13 and Tess Ory ’16, son Maverick David Wayne, Feb. 8, 2024.


Eric and Julie Wunder Evans ’14, son Everett Jon, Dec. 21, 2023.


Dustin and Sarah Holtz Young ’16, daughter Kallynn Jo, Feb. 7, 2024.


Nick ’18 and Paige Wilkin Drucker ’17, daughter Ava Marie, Jan. 23, 2024.

Lindsey and Zach Martinelli ’17, daughter Emersyn Doyle, Oct. 29, 2022.

Shannon and Sam Norgaard ’17, son Parker Endre, June 14, 2024.

Casey and Valorie Taylor Dorhout ’18, daughter Harper Taylor, Jan. 18, 2024.

Patrick ’19 and Whitney Burgardt Gray ’19, son Weylin Lawrence, June 10, 2023.
IN MEMORIAM

TIM HEEREMA ’88

Tim Heerema ’88, Central trustee and loyal supporter, of Pella, Iowa, passed away unexpectedly March 9, 2024. After obtaining his undergraduate degree, Tim went on to law school at the University of Iowa later returning home a dedicated attorney. Tim joined the Central Board of Trustees in July of 2015 and recently retired as co-CEO of Heritage Lace in Pella, leaving behind a legacy of hard work, integrity and unwavering commitment.

Known as a man of profound faith and devotion, his love for the Lord was evident in every aspect of his life and his generous spirit extended beyond his religious endeavors, as he dedicated his time and resources to numerous charitable causes and foundations, embodying the true essence of compassion and altruism.

Visit central.edu/give to make a gift in memory of Tim.

DAN MARBURGER ’89

Dan Marburger ’89 of Perry, Iowa, passed Jan. 14, 2024. While at Central, Dan played football for the Dutch under Coach Ron Schipper. After graduation, he taught, coached and served as athletics director while completing his master’s in education administration. Dan arrived at Perry High School in 1995. Under his leadership, numerous academic programs and student services were implemented. While education was his passion, family time was most meaningful to him.

Grilling with loved ones was a time to celebrate and create memories. A servant-hearted man, Dan brought light and love to others through his time, actions, kind words and support.

The Dan Marburger Memorial Fund has been established in Dan’s honor. Visit central.edu/give to make a gift in memory of Dan. Funds raised will support various areas of interest chosen by the Marburger Family.

IN MEMORIAM

DON RACHETER

Don Racheter, professor emeritus of political science and Mock Trial coach, passed Feb. 24, 2024, in West Lafayette, Indiana, after a battle with cancer. Don was a Central professor of political science from 1976-2005 and helped establish the American Mock Trial Association.

He served Central students for 21 years as a mock trial coach and pre-law program director. His dedication and passion for mock trial has left an incredible mark on the Central community. We extend our heartfelt condolences to all those who knew and worked with Don during their time at Central. The Racheter family has created a memorial fund to honor his legacy and impact on Mock Trial at Central.

Visit central.edu/give to make a gift in honor of Don.

IN MEMORIAM

BEATRIZ ALCOCER VIDIELLA

Beatriz Alcocer Vidiella, longtime house manager in Mérida and friend of the college, passed away on January 16, 2024, in Mérida at the age of 94. To her last breath, Beatriz was surrounded by family, including her daughter, Claudina Alcocer, who succeeded her mother as house manager when Beatriz retired in 2001.

Beatriz was a resourceful, gracious and hard-working woman. She served the college for over 30 years, helping generations of Central students adapt to and learn about Yucatecan culture and social norms. Her legacy lives on with all who knew her — a testament to a life full of love, kindness and selflessness.

Visit central.edu/give to make a gift to international education in memory of Beatriz.

MEMORIAL GIFTS AT CENTRAL

Some alumni and friends inquire about making a memorial gift in honor of a special member of the Central family. If you would like to do so, please call 641-628-5154 and ask for Michelle Wilkie, director of development, or give online at central.edu/give and add a note to designate your memorial.
YOUR GIFT DOES A WORLD OF GOOD!

Scan the code above and make a gift today!
Every gift directly supports Central programs and opens doors for Central students.

WRITE US!

Civitas welcomes letters and emails from readers concerning the contents of the magazine or issues relating to Central College. Please include the author's name, city and state; anonymous communications will be discarded. Letters selected for publication may be edited for length, content, clarity and style. Address letters to Civitas, Central Communications, Central College, 812 University St., Pella, Iowa 50219 or email Brittany Carlson Prokupek '16, Civitas editor, at carlsonb@central.edu.
You’ve likely seen them cheering on the Dutch at a Central College softball or football game or around Pella, but Jeremy ’97 and Laura Bach Olson ’93 don’t live in town. In fact, they don’t live in Iowa, but in their hometown of Mapleton, Minnesota, and come back as much as possible — that’s how much they love Central.

THE PATH TO CENTRAL
Laura fondly remembers her first encounter with Central, tagging along with a friend on a campus visit and immediately feeling welcomed by the friendly atmosphere.

“It wasn’t even my visit; my friend Julie Nelson ’92, invited me to come along for the day with her parents,” Laura recalls. “We played softball together and she was going to meet with the coach, and before the day was over, I knew I was going to Central.”

Central was the right fit to continue her educational and softball careers. Jeremy was introduced to Central through Laura, and after serving in the Navy for four years, joined her in Pella.

Central provided a sense of belonging and purpose for the Olsons and their shared experiences from academics to athletics and campus involvement, solidified their bond with the college.

“‘The people were a large part of our experience,’” she says.

For Laura, Gert Beintema, former staff member, Larry Happel ’81, athletics communications director, George Wares ’76, head women’s softball coach and lecturer of kinesiology, and Ken Weller, president emeritus, among countless friends and professors, played a big role in her four years at Central. Jeremy echoes a similar sentiment.

“I met Dean Marjorie Giles on my visit, and Laura being at Central was a plus, but the welcoming, warm feeling I got in that meeting is what drew me to Central and is what I remember most,” Jeremy shares.

After Laura graduated from Central and earned her master’s, the couple’s path led them to fruitful careers and family life back in their hometown. For Laura, this meant teaching biology and coaching; for Jeremy, success in manufacturing. Despite their distance, their ties to Central remained strong.

THE NEXT GENERATION
When the time came for their children to look at schools, the couple hoped, but didn’t force Central on them because they knew fit was most important.

“My students are always asking, ‘Is college worth the money?’ ‘Two years or four?’ and so on,” Laura says. “There’s so much development that happens those four years after high school. It’s a very influential time, so being in the right spot is important. No matter if you’re seeking a two-year degree from a vocational school, the military or a four-year school, make sure it’s the right fit because it can determine what the rest of your journey is going to be like.”

Central won both Tyler ’18 and Kylie ’19 over in the end and witnessing their children’s graduations was a moment of pride and reflection for the couple.
“Seeing the kids walk across the stage at graduation, we just kind of hated to see it end,” Jeremy shares. “It had been so much fun for us! We’d become close with their friends and their friends’ families hanging out at games and around Pella. We were proud, but it just felt like the end of an era.”

As parents of two Central graduates and proud Central alumni themselves, the Olsons continued to be active supporters of Central, attending games, participating in events and contributing to Central Club and the Journey Scholarship Fund. Their passion for Central and involvement with the college reflects their belief in the power of a Central education and their commitment to ensuring future generations have similar opportunities.

“It feels like home,” Jeremy shares. “We talk about it a lot. Once we hit Highway 163 and we’re pulling into Pella, there’s this happiness that is almost overwhelming. And that’s the way it is on campus, too. We have memories of our time there and from Tyler and Kylie, too.”

A sentiment dear to both their hearts, Laura agrees. Their dedication to Central is rooted in the impact the college has had on their lives.

“It’s hard to put into words,” Laura admits. “The decision I made as a 17-year-old has changed and dictated how all of our lives — mine, Jeremy’s and the kids’ — have turned out.”

In reflecting on their Central journey, the couple expresses gratitude for their experiences both as alumni and parents. For the Olsons, supporting Central isn’t just about financial contributions; it’s about preserving the transformation that happens over the course of four years, the amazing opportunities and the lifelong relationships created here.

“It’s part of our responsibility to the next generation,” Laura affirms. “We need to pass that on and ensure future students get to experience those things and enjoy all the benefits of attending Central. Then they can do the same when they graduate.”

“No matter what you can give, you’re helping someone; that’s what matters,” Jeremy adds.

The couple’s commitment to giving back and passion for Central encapsulates their deep connection to the college, embodying what it means to be Forever Dutch®.

“I can’t explain the immense pride I feel when I see Central on anything, whether it’s an advertisement or on social media,” Laura says. “I remember seeing a post about students accepted into dental school and it makes me think of my son who’s graduating from dental school. And because of his experience, I know they’re well-prepared for what’s to come. You just know these grads will go on to do great things.”

Central students may be here for four years, but membership in the Central family is for life — a lifetime pass the Olsons carry with pride.
I suppose teaching here for 40 years makes me a candidate for being Forever Dutch®! Central College has been a large part of my life both professionally and personally — I even met my wife, Louise Zaffiro, emerita professor of chemistry, here.

Central has been good to us, offering flexibility, support, opportunities and sometimes challenges that led to growth. Our leadership and colleagues made it possible for a chemist and a political scientist to team-teach in the Yucatán twice on the Mérida program, to take up a Fulbright research opportunity in Botswana and later, to spend two weeks in China adopting our daughter.

Both of our daughters, Tonia Zaffiro Bleam ’91 and Katie Zaffiro ’15, graduated from Central. As a family, we depart with many fond memories and rewarding experiences. Many mentors helped me to navigate, appreciate and eventually enjoy undergraduate teaching. Having a rewarding career and still enjoying what I do after all this time is an unimaginable luxury and privilege that very few people ever get.

What makes Central special today, in 2024, is really the same thing I encountered when I arrived here in 1983: The people. I was only a temporary replacement, but you would not have known it based on the way people treated me. From helping me find housing to inviting me for meals and supporting me in my part-time teaching role, it was as if I were a full-time, tenure-track faculty member. It has always been the people.

I was fortunate to have been here and mentored by so many kind and caring people. They made me who I am, not just a better teacher, advisor or researcher, but a better person. We have people here today with that same dedication. Someday, I hope there will be scholarships and awards in their honor.

Many of my former students stand in this honored space as well. Hundreds. Thousands. Watching them grow and develop during their brief four years here has been fulfilling. Following them as they go out into their communities and undertake careers and service in local, national and international communities makes me feel like I have had a small but meaningful impact on their lives.

My students span the globe and the spectrum of professions. Some now even serve on Central’s Board of Trustees. A political science major turned poet and translator; lawyers, teachers and nonprofit managers from China and Kenya to India, Spain and Mexico.

What makes us all candidates for being Forever Dutch is our shared dedication to working to ensure the success of our students. It takes all of us working together and supporting each other to continue doing this vocation at the very high standard that others set for us many years ago — well before my time. May we continue to nurture this dedication, to 2053, our bicentennial, and beyond.

As I enter retirement after 40+ years at Central, many colleagues and mentors come to mind. The list of those who have impacted my career reads like a who’s who of Central legends: Hutch Bearce, former academic dean; Art Bosch ’51, professor emeritus of chemistry; Don, professor emeritus of economics, and Barb Butler ’58, longtime former staff member; Walter Cannon, professor emeritus of English; Cheri Troat Doane ’98, retired director of community-based learning; Bill Julian, former professor of political science and associate dean of academic affairs; Harold Kolenbrander ’60 and ’96H, professor emeritus of chemistry, trustee emeritus and former academic dean and provost; Mike Lubberden, retired director of facilities planning and management; Robin Martin, former associate professor of library science/library director; David Roe, former Central president; Mary Stark, John and Anna Poole Professor of Humanities and professor of English; Ken, president emeritus, and Shirely Weller, former first lady of Central and friend of the college, and many more. Thank you to all who have been part of my journey at 812 University St. We are all Forever Dutch®.
WE CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU!

CENTRAL COLLEGE HOMECOMING

OCT. 4-6, 2024

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