



# FACES *of* MU

# MILLIKIN MAGAZINE

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COVER DESIGN: RICHARD NDEMBE



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Phone: 217.424.6383

[alumnews@millikin.edu](mailto:alumnews@millikin.edu)  
[millikinfund@millikin.edu](mailto:millikinfund@millikin.edu)

### FOR CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

**Millikin Magazine**  
Millikin University  
1184 West Main Street  
Decatur, Illinois 62522-2084

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[facebook.com/MillikinAlumni](https://facebook.com/MillikinAlumni)  
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The mission of Millikin Magazine is to engage alumni, friends, parents and other constituents in the life of the University, to communicate the high quality of Millikin Performance Learning and to reflect the University's mission and values.

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**COMMUNICATION & PUBLICATION COORDINATOR:** JEREMY COULTER, CLASS OF 2000  
**PUBLIC RELATIONS COORDINATOR:** MATTHEW FLATEN  
**UNIVERSITY PHOTOGRAPHER/VIDEOGRAPHER:** RICHARD NDEMBE  
**UNIVERSITY WRITER:** KENDALL TRUMP, CLASS OF 2013  
**ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS:** DEB HALE KIRCHNER; JAY SCHLEPPENBACH, CLASS OF 2000

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# Jim Reynolds

President, Millikin University

## Dear Millikin Alumni and Friends:

During the development of our new Strategic Plan, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee spent a great deal of time discussing the value that having a richly diverse campus has toward the educational experience of our students. As we had these discussions, I often reflected on my own educational journey and how the opportunity to interact with a diverse community on my campus informed my view of the world. I'm eternally grateful for the experience I had as an undergraduate on a campus that celebrated the diversity of our community.

In her book "Cultivating Humanity," Martha Nussbaum describes three essential capacities necessary for the cultivation of humanity. To paraphrase her three capacities:

**1.**

*We must be able to critically examine our own traditions and cultures in light of others.*

**2.**

*We must be able to see ourselves as interconnected to other human lives and not as individuals against the "other."*

**3.**

*We must be able to imagine what it might be like to be placed into the shoes of a person different from ourselves in order to understand their view of the world in comparison to ours.*



We live in an interlocking world that is best described by our national motto, "E pluribus unum" — out of many, one. Our future continues to be one where we accept that the world continues to grow smaller by our interconnectedness and where we look for ways to take advantage of our diverse and distinct campus.

My hope as you read this edition of Millikin Magazine is that you will read the stories of success, spanning the gamut from student experiences to alumni success to faculty scholarship, and realize that our University continues to offer an incomparable experience for those who have chosen to be part of it.

As always, I'm grateful for the support you have provided to Millikin during the past year and look forward to building on that support in the future.

Jim Reynolds, President

Beginning with this issue of Millikin Magazine, we will highlight each of the University's four strategic initiatives by focusing on their purpose and importance to Millikin.

In this edition, we cover how Millikin is working to nurture a welcoming and inclusive environment that reflects its evolving campus community. Our coverage includes profiles spotlighting members of the Big Blue who embody these practices each and every day.

### STRATEGY

*The Strategic Plan consists of four distinct initiatives. These initiatives are supported by strategic goals and tangible, realistic steps toward success.*

## FOUR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Advance academic excellence

Invigorate community engagement

Nurture a welcoming and inclusive campus environment

Build a sustainable financial model

## THE MILLIKIN DIFFERENCE

Millikin University has unveiled its new Strategic Plan, "The Millikin Difference." This Strategic Plan was ratified by the Board of Trustees in November 2022.

### PLAN STATEMENT

Millikin's Strategic Plan, "The Millikin Difference," 2023-2027, will take us to the next level of articulating our distinct brand and strengths as a comprehensive University committed to student success and academic excellence. Our plan demonstrates how data-driven decisions will propel Millikin's success into the future and envisions a Millikin of tomorrow where Performance Learning abounds to develop graduates that excel personally and professionally, where our campus community is strategically engaged with industry and community, where all who engage with Millikin are welcomed, and where Millikin demonstrates the fiscal ability to steward these goals in perpetuity.

### LEARN MORE

**LEARN MORE ABOUT MILLIKIN'S STRATEGIC PLAN, "THE MILLIKIN DIFFERENCE," AT**

[millikin.edu/strategic-plan](https://millikin.edu/strategic-plan)



## Griswold Court Dedicated to Coach Lori Kerans

On Dec. 10, during the women's basketball game against Carthage College, Millikin University celebrated the championship legacy of Coach Lori Kerans, Class of 1985, with the dedication of Griswold Physical Education Center's basketball court, now the Lori Kerans Court. This honor was initially announced at the conclusion of Millikin's 50 Years of Women in Athletics celebration in May 2022.

An Academic All-American, Kerans competed on Millikin's first softball team and was a member of the Women's Basketball Team that

competed in the first NCAA Division III Tournament, placing third in the nation.

Kerans coached the Women's Basketball Team from 1986 to 2018, amassing a career record of more than 555 victories, 11 College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) titles, 11 NCAA Division III tournament appearances and an NCAA Division III Championship title in 2005, the only national team championship in Millikin history. Kerans was also the first female Athletic Director at Millikin and in the CCIW.

"The honor is awesome, but the responsibility is something I think we at Millikin take very seriously. We want to do as well for the current and future students as was done for us," Kerans said.

## Nursing Simulation Lab Receives Major Gift

The Millikin University Nursing Simulation Lab project has received a substantial gift from School of Nursing alumna M. Susan Ires Campbell, Class of 1968. The gift will support the naming of the new facility as the Campbell Family Nursing Simulation Lab.

"I continue my interest in everything that Millikin does, and my family remains involved through the years," Campbell said. "I'm excited to follow the project and do whatever I can to help it to completion."

The lab is in Phase I of a three-phase construction project and timeline. The project also recently received a \$2 million federal grant towards the



estimated \$4 million total cost of the project.

Funds will be used to construct the state-of-the-art simulation lab, including four simulation rooms, supporting control rooms, two debriefing rooms, a health assessment lab and several faculty offices.

Susan, and her late husband, R. Michael Campbell, Class of 1967, have been very active and generous Millikin alumni and were the co-recipients of the 2016 Alumnus of the Year Award, the highest alumni award presented by the University.

## Holocaust Survivor Sami Steigmann

*Delivers 2023 Ewing Lecture*



WATCH LECTURE

Millikin University welcomed Holocaust Survivor Sami Steigmann to campus Jan. 31 to deliver the Thomas W. Ewing Lecture. Steigmann's presentation, titled "Holocaust: My Story of Resilience," was delivered to a standing-room-only crowd in the University Commons' Bob and Debi Johnston Banquet Rooms.

Born on Dec. 21, 1939, to parents Nathan and Reghina, Steigmann was held from 1941 to 1944 in the region now known as Ukraine at the

Mogilev-Podolski labor camp. According to records, his parents declared him too young for work, resulting in Steigmann being subjected to Nazi medical experimentation.

As a Holocaust Survivor who shares his invaluable experiences, Steigmann presented his fresh perspective on hope, life and faith, as well as how he was able to transform himself from a victim into an agent for social action. Steigmann is dedicated to reaching as many young people as possible, in the

hopes that they will make our world a better place.

The Thomas W. Ewing Lecture was created by Millikin University and Congressman Ewing's colleagues in recognition of his many years of public service. Ewing, a 1957 Millikin graduate, retired in 2001 after serving nine years in the U.S. House of Representatives from the 15th District of Illinois.

## Dr. Sarah Kottich Named Executive Vice President & Chief Strategy Officer

Dr. Sarah Kottich has been appointed to serve as Millikin University's Executive Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer. Kottich has served as a consultant to Millikin since November 2022, working on recruitment strategies, and has a long history of executive-level strategic planning and leadership, last serving as Executive Vice President at the College of Saint Mary.

Kottich first visited Millikin two years ago when her daughter, Carlie Kottich,

Class of 2025, attended a campus visit. Carlie decided to Make It Millikin and is now a sophomore Theatre Design and Production major. "When they came here and saw the theatre building and met the faculty, Carlie thought, this is where we're supposed to be," Kottich said.

"I'm grateful that Sarah has joined our campus community," Millikin President Jim Reynolds said. "She comes to Millikin with a wealth of



experience at institutions like ours, and she will provide significant leadership in the areas of strategic planning and enrollment management, and help us to look for operational efficiencies which will set Millikin up for future success."

# HOMECOMING HONORS OUTSTANDING ALUMS

Members from across the Big Blue community returned to Millikin's campus Oct. 7-9, 2022.

Among the highlights of the weekend's festivities were the annual Alumni Awards and Athletic Hall of Fame inductions. The 2022 class of alumni honorees represented a cross-section of Millikin's best and brightest, including:



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Sept. 29-Oct. 1

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## ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR



### Dr. C. Kimm Hollis<sup>'72</sup>

Dr. C. Kimm Hollis, Class of 1972, was honored with the 2022 Alumnus of the Year Award.

Hollis is a longtime and faithful supporter of Millikin's School of Music and its students. This support includes founding and funding the Millikin Hollis Prize music competition, spearheading Millikin's Kaeuper Hall "Kickstart Challenge" and sponsoring four areas named in honor of the Hollis family in the School of Music.

FACULTY/STAFF AWARD

### Denise Myers

Denise Myers, Professor in Millikin's School of Theatre and Dance, received the 2022 Faculty/Staff Award. On the faculty at Millikin since 1991, Myers was previously chosen by her colleagues to be Millikin's 2004 Honors Convocation Distinguished Faculty Lecturer and has twice received the Alpha Lambda Delta Teacher of the Year Award.



MERIT-LOYALTY AWARD

### Phillip Blankenburg<sup>'62</sup>

Phillip Blankenburg, Class of 1962, was the 2022 recipient of the Merit-Loyalty Award. Blankenburg served much of his successful investment career at the Champaign, Ill., office of A.G. Edwards, where he retired as Vice President. Blankenburg was also an active member of Millikin's Board of Trustees for nearly 15 years.



MERIT AWARD

### Dr. Thomas Mahoney<sup>'90</sup>

Dr. Thomas Mahoney, Class of 1990, received the 2022 Merit Award. Mahoney, a leader in education, serves as Superintendent of Schools for the Oregon (Ill.) School District and founded Millikin's annual Interview Bootcamp, where alumni in education offer mock interviews and job-seeking tips to Millikin education students.



LOYALTY AWARD

### Karen Maurer Krows<sup>'68</sup>

Karen Maurer Krows, Class of 1968, was honored with the Loyalty Award. Krows has supported Millikin as a volunteer, donor and champion in countless ways, including serving on Millikin's Alumni Board and as a class agent, event volunteer and phonathon caller.



YOUNG ALUMNUS AWARD

### Philip Lopez<sup>'16</sup>

Philip Lopez, Class of 2016, received the Young Alumnus Award. A bass-baritone studio artist for the Florida Grand Opera in Miami, Lopez has been recognized with several awards, including the 2019 Horatio Parker Memorial Scholarship awarded by the Yale School of Music.

# ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

## 2022 MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



**Patrick Allgeier**

Football Coach Patrick Allgeier recently entered his 26th consecutive year coaching the Big Blue's offensive line and serves as the program's Recruiting Coordinator. He also serves as Millikin's Assistant Athletic Director for Events and Facilities.



**Robert Armstrong<sup>'63</sup>**

Robert Armstrong, Class of 1963, was co-captain of Millikin's first Wrestling Team and finished in the top three for his weight class at four CCIW tournaments. Armstrong was also a defensive lineman for the undefeated 1961 Football Team.



**Stefen Edwards<sup>'10</sup>**

Stefen Edwards, Class of 2010, was a standout in two sports, recognized as All-Conference both as an outfielder in baseball and a defensive back in football.



**Sean Fahey<sup>'03</sup>**

Sean Fahey, Class of 2003, co-captained the 2001-02 CCIW Conference Championship soccer team, which finished the season 15-1-1. He also was a three-time member of the CCIW All-Conference First Team.



**Le Ann Spesard<sup>'13</sup>**

Le Ann Spesard, Class of 2013, set numerous records for both indoor and outdoor track and field and earned All-American honors in the shot put in 2012 and 2013. She also qualified for nationals five times.



**Jill Johnson**

Jill Johnson was the Big Blue's Athletic Department Executive Secretary for almost 25 years, serving the needs of more than 20 sports, assisting at athletic events and always an enthusiastic fan of all Big Blue teams.



**2004-2005 Women's Basketball Team**

The record-breaking 2004-05 Women's Basketball Team was the first team in Millikin's history to win an NCAA National Championship. The team boasted a Millikin-record 29 wins and only two losses for the season, as well as a CCIW record of 13-1 and a CCIW Tournament Championship.

## ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJOR NAMED LINCOLN LAUREATE

Bella Benning, Class of 2023, was honored as Millikin University's recipient of The Lincoln Academy of Illinois' Student Laureate Award for 2022.

An Elementary Education major from Bethany, Ill., Benning received a monetary prize, a Lincoln medallion and a certificate of merit signed by Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

Each fall, an outstanding senior from each of the four-year degree-granting institutions of higher learning in Illinois is awarded the Abraham Lincoln Civic Engagement Award and thereby becomes a Student Laureate of The Lincoln Academy of Illinois.



In the spirit of Lincoln, Student Laureates are honored for their leadership and service in the pursuit of the betterment of humanity and overall excellence in curricular and extracurricular activities.

"I was completely surprised and honored that my professors would want to recognize me with this award," Benning said. She was especially

honored that her nomination came from Dr. Chris Cunnings, Director of the School of Education.

*"I really look up to Dr. Cunnings in the education world. He's really been my biggest hype man in this major."*

## Political Science Students Awarded at Model UN

The Millikin delegation consisting of Political Science students and a variety of other majors were honored for their International Court of Justice case at the 2022 American Model United Nations (AMUN) Conference, one of the largest and most competitive Model UN conferences in the United States.

Sophomore Jadon Cox and senior Gaspar Ros were awarded for their Exceptional Representation of Hungary during their participation in the Historical Security Council of 1993 simulation event at the conference held in November in Chicago.

"This award symbolizes the hard work and very late nights that Jadon and Gaspar put into their representation of Hungary," Political Science Associate Professor Dr. Laura Dean said.

Cox and Ros used their debate and diplomatic skills to stand out in the simulation, which focused on the wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1993, including a refugee crisis that saw many crossing the border into Hungary. Cox and Ros were voted as exceptional delegates in their simulation by committee chairs and other member states.



## Women's Basketball Claims CCIW Crown, Competes in NCAA Tournament

The Millikin University Women's Basketball Team defeated Augustana College 57-52 on Feb. 25 at the Griswold Center in Decatur to win the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) Tournament and earn the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Tournament. The team claimed both the conference regular-season and tournament championships and qualified for the NCAA Tournament for the second straight year.

"The selection show had a different feeling when you already know you are in," Head Coach Olivia Lett said. "I think that shows our focus, and

their brains moved immediately to our matchup when we saw the names up there."

At the NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Tournament in Lexington, Ky., the team defeated Emory University 76-70 to advance to the second round, where they fell to second-ranked Transylvania University.

*"This was the first time we won the CCIW Tournament at home with fans here. We won it during COVID, but it was a little different feeling because nobody was here. It was nice to experience that with fans," said Lett.*



# FACES *of* MU



There's no doubt that Millikin University has changed significantly throughout its 122-year history. Everything from the campus landscape to the community of people who inhabit it has evolved, and each year this change continues as we welcome new faces to campus and send graduates into the world.

With every term, our students' backgrounds, needs, talents and skills change, both naturally over time and as the result of significant events, such as a global pandemic or the addition of academic or athletic programs.

What does this constant change mean for Millikin? According to Vice President for Student Affairs Raphaella Prange, it means that the University must evolve alongside its students in order to support them and help them succeed. Being responsible for the changing student body and responsive to their needs and differences sits at the center of the initiative in Millikin's Strategic Plan that aims to "nurture a welcoming and inclusive campus environment."

Historically, the demographics of Millikin's student body have shifted to reflect the changing demographics of the United States. In recent decades, the diverse student population at Millikin has increased from approximately 4% to nearly 33%.

"Around one in three students you see as you walk around campus are not going to identify with what is considered the majority," Prange commented.

She emphasized that diversity not only defines a student's race or culture, but also includes LGBTQIA+ students, those with accessibility needs and students who have different learning needs.

As Millikin embraces the diversity spanning the entire campus community, including students, faculty and staff, the importance of inclusion has been brought to the forefront. "Making sure that Millikin is a place where everyone feels like they have a voice, that they belong and that their culture and background are respected are very important," Prange said.

"Millikin is working to make sure our practices and community are friendly to individuals from all backgrounds, identities and abilities. That's why we have chosen IDEA — Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility — as our acronym for this initiative."

This approach to inclusivity is distinct among several similar models utilized by other schools and organizations, as it acknowledges accessibility as a large part of the inclusion conversation.

"We are considering things like physical ability and students who are struggling with mental health. We know that mental health is a very big issue coming out of the pandemic."

Ronald L. Branch, Vice Chairman of Millikin University's Board of Trustees, said that he believes making inclusion a priority on campus will help improve the University for generations to come.

"This part of the Strategic Plan is so critical, because embracing, accepting and helping our diverse student body succeed makes everything else about Millikin University more successful."

To implement Millikin's initiative to nurture a welcoming and inclusive campus environment, strategic goals and actionable steps have been identified.

## Goal One:

Intentionally revise policies and procedures to promote inclusive excellence across campus.

## Goal Two:

Actively recruit, retain and invest in faculty, staff and students from historically marginalized backgrounds.

## Goal Three:

Foster a sense of belonging for all who engage with Millikin.

*"We really want to show our commitment to supporting the ever-changing and diverse student body that we have, and that will continue to grow at Millikin," Prange said.*

Branch said that Millikin is already ahead of the curve compared to similar institutions in terms of inclusion. Resources on campus such as the Center for Academic & Professional Performance (CAPP) help students overcome accessibility obstacles, while the Center for International Education (CIE) supports students who represent more than 30 countries around the globe.

Prange explained that the initiative to prioritize inclusion and belonging across campus is directed at Millikin's entire student population. "Every student at Millikin is an example of how we can create more inclusive practices because no student's experience is one-size-fits-all. This initiative is about making sure everyone's needs are met."

**Inclusion** = Behavior  
**Diversity** = Representation  
**Equity** = Systems  
**Accessibility** = Opportunity

# Ronald L. Branch

Class of 1981

Vice Chairman,  
Millikin Board of Trustees

Founder, President/Broker,  
RLB Realty Group, Inc.



Before Ron Branch became Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Millikin University in 2021, he was a Class of 1981 Business Management graduate and a proud Big Blue parent, as his son, Malcolm Branch, Class of 2014, pursued a Management degree.

After being approached by former Millikin President Patrick White about the Board and interviewing for the position, Branch was invited to join in 2018. Before accepting the position, however, Branch told the former President that his focus would be on an area he felt was missing from the University experience.

“I told President White that I wanted to represent and feel comfortable in discussing the challenges for Black students on Millikin’s campus,” Branch said. “And he said that would absolutely be welcomed.”

Throughout Branch’s time as a Trustee, his efforts have been focused on improving and increasing opportunities for Black Americans. “Whether it be professionally, socially or civically, this has been my focus

because I think that the world is better if everybody is moving positively in the same direction.” Branch mentioned further that this tenet was a focus of his life, not just in his capacity at Millikin University.

After graduating from Millikin, Branch experienced adversity and a lack of advancement in his professional career due to his race. Because of this experience, Branch wanted to change things for diverse students following in his footsteps. Establishing an equal and diverse playing field is a goal that Branch firmly believes requires change at every level, especially in a university setting.

“For Millikin University to continue to improve as an institution, it has to go through some changes. Positive change is important and acceptance and support of that change is absolutely critical,” Branch explained.

For Millikin and for Branch, meaningful changes are on the horizon, as Branch is set to become Chairman of the Board of Trustees on July 1, 2023, after being nominated and elected by his fellow board members. Branch is the first Black man to hold this position in the University’s

history, and he is grateful to be a person of change at Millikin. “Having diversity and inclusion as a main part of the Strategic Initiative is, for me, extremely necessary and critical to the stability and growth of Millikin University.”

In looking ahead to his position as Chairman, Branch hopes to influence change by looking back at his time at Millikin, in which the percentage of diverse students enrolled, along with the graduation and retention rate, was far less than it is today. “Inclusivity and diversity are huge pieces for Millikin, because it is important to embrace, accept and help make our diverse student body successful,” Branch said.

*“Our biggest asset at Millikin University is our student body. Supporting our students is the best thing we can do to continue to move Millikin forward and to continue being a beacon of light as one of the best universities in the country.”*



# Carrie Pierson

Dean, Academic Support  
Services

Center for Academic &  
Professional Performance  
(CAPP)

Carrie Pierson has been working with students to ensure accessibility and accommodations since she came to Millikin University in 2007.

Currently, Pierson serves as Dean of Academic Support Services for Millikin’s Center for Academic & Professional Performance (CAPP), which she describes as the academic support system for students outside of the classroom.

At Millikin, the CAPP is devoted to delivering complete, wrap-around services to foster students’ resilience, confidence, academic success and social skills. The

CAPP works to ensure a successful college experience, positive personal development and post-graduation preparedness. All services, from tutoring to supplemental instruction, are free for students, ensuring that accessibility is top of mind.

To Pierson, accessibility means leveling the playing field for students and ensuring that everyone has the same chance to succeed at Millikin. This means providing accommodations to students for their academics, as well as every aspect of their lives on campus, from dining to mental health. Pierson said that the scope of accessibility and providing accommodations for students has changed drastically since she first came to Millikin and that she believes students are far more likely to ask for help now than in the past.

“When I first came to Millikin, all of the accommodations were focused on learning disabilities, but now we are able to provide students with all kinds of services,” Pierson commented. Among the CAPP’s programs that promote accessibility is the EDGE Program, which offers additional opportunities and assistance to first-year students to help them adjust to college academics and campus living.

An important role of the CAPP in its mission to ensure accessibility for students at Millikin is educating the campus community about accommodations. “We want to make sure that everybody gets what’s appropriate for them so that everybody can be successful. What equity looks like for me is different than what it looks like for someone else,” Pierson said. “When it comes to accommodating our students, it isn’t a race and it definitely isn’t a sprint. We just want all of our students to end up at the same point.”

The CAPP is located on the third floor of the University Commons and is open for students to make appointments, drop in for questions and get the help they need to make the most of their time at Millikin.

*“We are here to level the playing field for all of our students,” Pierson said.*

LEARN MORE

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THE CAPP’S ACADEMIC  
ACCOMMODATIONS AND  
SUPPORT SERVICES AT

[millikin.edu/capp](http://millikin.edu/capp)

# Ximena Gomez-Rios

Class of 2023  
Organizational Leadership &  
Spanish Double Major



When Ximena Gomez-Rios, Class of 2023, was deciding on a college in Illinois where she wanted to transfer, her visit to Millikin’s campus sealed the deal.

Millikin’s accommodation to her transfer credits was certainly a plus, but Ximena was greatly impacted by the University’s commitment to inclusion and accessibility.

“When I asked for a translator, Carmen Aravena was there to help translate information better to my dad, whose primary language is Spanish,” Ximena said. Aravena, the Director of International Admission at Millikin, regularly goes above and beyond to ensure international students and families have a welcoming experience at Millikin.

Ximena, a first-generation college student, is majoring in both Organizational Leadership and Spanish at Millikin, and following her graduation in May 2023, she is planning to enroll in a master’s program to pursue a career in human resources. Ultimately, Ximena plans to use her career to help others.

“I plan to work in a diversity, equity and inclusion space to enact more inclusive and equitable training and hiring practices,” she explained, describing how her goal relates closely to Millikin’s strategic initiative to foster a welcoming and inclusive community.

The Organizational Leadership curriculum strengthened her management and leadership skills, but in order to expand the reach of people she could help, Ximena added an additional major in her native language of Spanish. “I wanted to solidify my understanding of Spanish. With a more academic approach to the Spanish language, I hope to broaden my opportunities in helping those whose primary language is not English.”

At Millikin, Ximena has integrated her future career aspirations of leadership and multicultural support. She became the President of both Millikin’s business honor society, Delta Mu Delta, and the Spanish Club. She is also Vice President for the Latin American Student Organization

(LASO) and Secretary for the Multicultural Student Council. These roles are in addition to the several internships in which Ximena has participated.

“These roles and internships have helped me develop a lot of my communication and networking skills. I also learned how to delegate and organize events, which I know are skills I will use throughout my career.”

Ximena said that a highlight of her time at Millikin has been organizing the La Fiesta event through LASO.

*“It made me very pleased to see so many people interested in learning about Latin culture. The event is a great example of the hard work that the LASO Executive Board put in to make this event as successful as possible.”*

# Sheiliane Gragg

Class of 2024  
Criminal Justice Major

When Sheiliane Gragg, Class of 2024, decided to return to school to finish her undergraduate degree, she was initially intimidated by the challenge.

Having been out of the classroom for several years, she was uncertain of what to expect as an adult learner.

“I had been talking about finishing my education but was scared for when the time actually came,” she said. However, Sheiliane also knew that the longer she waited to go back, the more difficult it was going to be. She was influenced to take the leap and enroll at Millikin University by Criminal Justice Department Director and Instructor Keyria Rodgers.

Though she initially chose a different major, Sheiliane soon changed to the Criminal Justice program following a discussion with Rodgers, who served as her adviser. “We went over my old transcripts together, and after further review, I found I had more credits in Criminal Justice and my roadmap was built,” Sheiliane explained, mentioning that each semester she’s had at Millikin has been better than the last.

Being able to rely on her adviser’s knowledge and getting to know the faculty and staff at Millikin became a highlight of Sheiliane’s college experience.

“Being able to discuss my concerns, and the openness for comments has been great. With every issue I’ve had, there was always someone who could help, from the other students, all the way up to the Dean.”

During her time at Millikin, Sheiliane said that one of the most important things she’s learned is how to be a leader, which was not what she expected as an adult learner. “My peers watch and listen to me, probably because I’m the oldest one in the class. With that, I have to watch how I act and what I say, which holds me accountable.”

This lesson is one that Sheiliane believes will benefit her in her future career, which she hopes will involve serving the community. “I would like the population I am working with to trust and believe that I will do what I say, and that I will lead by example.”

Though Sheiliane is uncertain which career path she wants to pursue after graduating from Millikin in 2024, she is certain that the Millikin community, including professors, classmates and Big Blue alumni, will help her along the way. Overall, she hopes to do for others what has been done for her, which is to be an advocate for those who don’t think anyone is listening.



# Terezz Lee

Class of 2022 & MBA Class of 2023

Arts Technology & Administration Major; MBA Program

Decatur, Ill., is far away from home for Terezz Lee, who hails from Honolulu, Hawaii, but the draw of Millikin University's Arts Technology and Administration Program and the opportunity to participate in athletics made Millikin his school of choice.

Since coming to Millikin, Lee has excelled inside and out of the classroom, and he now has the unique distinction on campus of being both an undergraduate and graduate student. As part of Millikin's new 3+1 degree program, Terezz graduated in December 2022 with a B.A. in Arts Technology and Administration, and will walk the stage again in July 2023 for his MBA degree.

When Terezz's academic advisor told him that he could graduate early or take part in the new 3+1 program to earn two degrees in four years, Terezz chose to continue at Millikin. Staying at Millikin also allowed him to further explore the proposal of his senior capstone project, which was to bring esports to the University. Esports, short for electronic sports, is a form of competitive video gaming.



Following his presentation on esports, Vice President of Student Affairs Raphaella Prange approached him with interest in his idea and research.

After deciding to complete the 3+1 program, Prange offered Terezz a graduate assistantship to further study the logistics of bringing esports to Millikin. He explained that his entire position is focused on esports, from performing in-depth research about similar programs, to determining student interest and writing grant proposals. "It's a lot of behind-the-scenes research and program planning," he said.

In September 2022, Terezz organized an event on campus for students to play games commonly played in collegiate and competitive esports.

*"I see Millikin as a competitive program in esports. Potentially, in the next few years, I see us getting a team together, practicing and playing against other schools for a championship."*

Terezz is confident that his esports research will help recruitment and admission efforts at Millikin, particularly for STEM programs.

"I think a lot of students who play video games don't see it going anywhere, but if they go to college and get to keep doing what they love, I think that would push them to get a good education."

# 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

## ENROLLMENT

TRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE : 1,710

GRADUATE PROGRAM : 99

TOTAL ENROLLMENT : 1,809

## FY22 ANNUAL REPORT

TOTAL DONORS : 2,331

NEW DONORS : 167

ALUMNI PARTICIPATION : 6.72%

TOTAL RAISED: \$7,680,000

AS OF JUNE 30, 2022  
END OF FISCAL YEAR

ENDOWMENT: \$102,200,000

30 NEW NAMED SCHOLARSHIPS/FUNDS

For more information contact Vice President of Alumni & Development Gina Bianchi at [gbianchi@millikin.edu](mailto:gbianchi@millikin.edu)

## DID YOU KNOW?

» You are automatically a member of the Alumni Association if you have completed 12 or more credit hours at Millikin. Learn more and view our list of current Alumni Board members at [millikin.edu/alumni-association](http://millikin.edu/alumni-association).

» Update your info at [millikin.edu/form/share-your-news](http://millikin.edu/form/share-your-news).

» It's a good time to set up a charitable gift annuity; payout rates increased for the first time in several years: [millikin.edu/planned-giving](http://millikin.edu/planned-giving).

» Only 7% of donors at companies with matching gift programs actually submit a matching request. Don't leave giving dollars on the table! Check your eligibility at [millikin.edu/ways-give](http://millikin.edu/ways-give).

» Students who are carrying on the Millikin tradition in their family (sibling, parent, grandparent or great-grandparent) are eligible for a \$4,000 Alumni Scholarship (\$1,000/year). Students who have submitted their admission application and received their acceptance packet can apply. Learn more at [millikin.edu/scholarships](http://millikin.edu/scholarships).

99% STUDENTS RECEIVE FINANCIAL AID

\$47.8M STUDENT FINANCIAL AID GIVEN

6 REGIONAL ALUMNI CLUBS

To start a club in your area or get involved email [alumnews@millikin.edu](mailto:alumnews@millikin.edu)

5 NEW ESTATE COMMITMENTS MADE

Create your legacy at [freewill.com/Millikin](http://freewill.com/Millikin)

# College of Arts & Sciences



WATCH VIDEO



## Dr. Nancy Curtin Named College of Arts & Sciences Dean

During her 25-year career as a Professor of Communication, Dr. Curtin has also been honored with the Dr. Ralph A. Czerwinski and Dr. Deborah Slayton Teaching Excellence and Leadership Award.



## MU Hosts Illinois VEX Robotics High School State Championship

In March, Millikin hosted the Illinois VEX Robotics High School State Championship. Participants from high schools across Illinois competed to be crowned state champions and qualify for the VEX Worlds competition.



### STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

# MAXIMIZING THE MILLIKIN EXPERIENCE

## Jarius Ingram

Class of 2023  
Biology Major, Pre-Physician Assistant Track

Since making Millikin University his school of choice, Jarius Ingram, Class of 2023, has made the most of his time in the classroom, the research lab, on the basketball court and beyond.

Jarius, a Biology major on the Pre-Physician Assistant Track, has also given his time and effort at Millikin to a purpose close to his heart. A great deal of Jarius' time and studies are dedicated to researching rhabdomyosarcoma, a disease that led to the death of his brother, Jalen.

According to Jarius, the loss of his brother served as a focal point for his life, helping direct the things he hoped to experience and achieve.

"Jalen set my trajectory for a lot of things I do," he explained while discussing the foundation of his biology research. "When I got to Millikin and found I could do research, I immediately went to my professor, Dr. Schroeder, and said I was intrigued by rhabdomyosarcoma."

In his research, Jarius said he has received support not only from his adviser, Dr. Jennifer Schroeder, and

his other professors, but also from the many programs and organizations he is involved with at Millikin.

Jarius actively participates in an impressive scope of activities at Millikin. Academically, Jarius is a James Millikin Honors Scholar, a Long-Vanderburg Scholar and a Leighty Science Scholar, as well as a member of several national honor society chapters on campus.

Outside of the classroom and the research lab, Jarius is a point guard on the Big Blue Men's Basketball Team, President of Millikin's Fellowship of Christian Athletes, a Resident Assistant and a Big Blue Ambassador.

Jarius credits his extensive involvement to the memory of his brother, explaining that since he was in elementary school, he has tried to be involved in as many activities as possible to have the experiences Jalen never could. "I've always put in twice the effort in everything I do." Further demonstrating his dedication to honoring his brother, Jarius wears a gold "2" around his neck. "It shows that I'm representing more than just myself, [that I'm representing] my brother as well."

In his three years at the Big Blue, the broad spectrum of research opportunities and unique perspectives offered by Millikin's Honors Programs have greatly impacted Jarius' worldview and how he interacts

with others. From addressing social justice issues and diversity as a Long-Vanderburg Scholar to performing graduate-level biology research as a Leighty Science Scholar, Jarius said Millikin's professors and academic programs truly deliver on the University's mission to prepare students for democratic citizenship in a global environment.

"The Scholars Programs here have really formed me into a more passionate individual. If I didn't come to Millikin, I wouldn't have been exposed to all of these different ways of life," he said.

While Jarius' research into rhabdomyosarcoma is rooted in a deeply personal cause, he is also using the rich collection of academic resources, relationships with his professors and advanced laboratory technology distinctly offered at Millikin to lay the foundation for his future.

In his senior year at Millikin, Jarius is building upon his research in the Biology Department with his capstone project for the Honors Program, which he believes is critical to furthering his findings into cardiac glycosides and rhabdomyosarcoma.

"I'll be continuing this project until the end of my time here at Millikin. It has an incredible amount of personal significance to me."



College  
of Fine Arts



### Dr. C. Kimm Hollis Donates Hollis Prize Collection

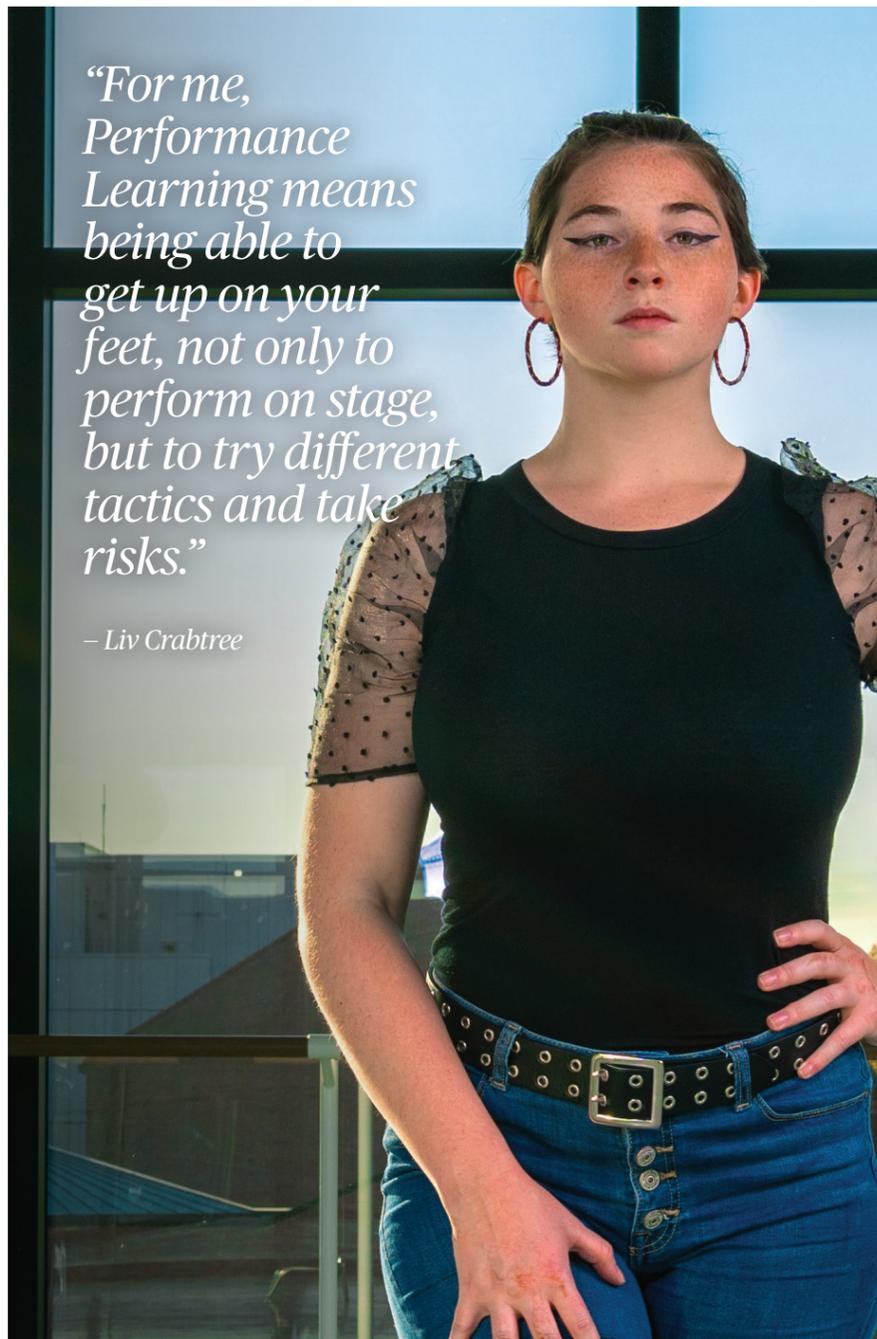
Dr. C. Kimm Hollis, a 1972 alumnus and founding endower of the Hollis Prize at Millikin, has donated his collection of Hollis Prize announcements, programs, mementos and other ephemera to the University Archives. This donation provides an important record of the award and its legacy in the School of Music.

### Martin Atkins Featured on NPR's World Cafe

Martin Atkins, School of Music Instructor and Coordinator of the Music Business Program, was recently featured on NPR's World Cafe discussing his Post Punk and Industrial Music Museum in Chicago.

LISTEN HERE

[bit.ly/3ZL7rOn](https://bit.ly/3ZL7rOn)



*“For me, Performance Learning means being able to get up on your feet, not only to perform on stage, but to try different tactics and take risks.”*

– Liv Crabtree

# PUTTING THE ‘PERFORMANCE’ IN LEARNING

## Olivia Crabtree

Class of 2025  
Musical Theatre Major

Though she is a self-proclaimed hometown girl from Maroa, Ill., Olivia “Liv” Crabtree’s aspirations for her future career reach far beyond Central Illinois. Currently a sophomore majoring in Musical Theatre at Millikin University, Liv hopes to one day direct, produce and star in her own work on Broadway.

Millikin’s College of Fine Arts proved to be the perfect avenue to continue her journey toward her goals on the big stage. Liv already felt at home at Millikin, having frequently visited campus with her mother, a Millikin University alumna, while she was growing up. Liv was also drawn in by having a top-ranked Musical Theatre program nearby, meaning she could stay at home and attend classes as a commuter student.

Like most Musical Theatre students in Millikin’s College of Fine Arts, Liv came to Millikin with a decorated background of roles and performances under her belt. This past summer,

Liv starred as Belle in “Beauty and the Beast,” for Mid-Summer Movement Productions out of Oreana, Ill. Her experiences in Millikin’s Musical Theatre program, however, have piqued her interest in all aspects of theatre.

“I really love to sing, act and perform, and I enjoy the process of getting into character, but at Millikin, I also get to experience a lot of backstage work,” Liv said.

Liv recently completed an Introduction to Technical Course that let her experience different facets of stage management, including costuming, lighting and set design. “Millikin does a really great job showing all aspects of theatre,” she said. “A great thing to remember about musical theatre is that for every one person on stage, there are 10 or more people backstage or in executive positions who make the productions and performances happen.”

Gaining practical, hands-on experience with the non-performance aspects of musical theatre is part of what Liv believes will make her a “triple-threat actor.” The College of Fine Arts offers a wide variety of acting, voice, music and dance courses, as well as dance certificates to ensure that students become well-rounded performers before graduation.

Millikin’s School of Theatre and Dance sets itself apart from comparable

institutions and performing arts programs with the value of Performance Learning, the University’s hallmark approach to education.

“For me, Performance Learning means being able to get up on your feet, not only to perform on stage, but to try different tactics and take risks,” Liv said about the benefits of real-world, hands-on experience in her major. “I know I could crash and burn, but I know that Millikin is a safe place to crash and burn, and the only way I can go is up.”

One experience that stood out to Liv was being able to observe a vocal belting course for her advanced scene study class.

“It was an amazing experience to watch people take so many risks within a classroom setting and shape their technique. I fell in love with it and plan to take a course on it in my senior year.”

She also commented that observing performers and lessons was a good fit for her learning style, as opposed to sitting at a desk and taking notes.

Liv’s experience in stage management, costuming, lighting and set design — along with the opportunity to hone her passions and talents in singing and acting — have been integral to helping her succeed in Millikin’s School of Theatre and Dance, and she is confident that when she graduates, she will have a full understanding of the work ahead of her.

# College of Professional Studies



WRITTEN BY: KENDALL TRUMP, CLASS OF 2013

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



# PERFECTING PATIENT CARE

## Naomi Hall

Class of 2023  
Nursing Major

Nursing allowed her to practice these skills earlier than many other schools.

“One of the highlights of the School of Nursing is the hands-on opportunities that we’ve gotten. Just being able to practice the skills on campus and then go into clinicals with confidence was really big for me.”

Among the vast array of practical skills nurses are required to learn, administering an IV was the most intimidating for Naomi when she first started her health assessment course. It was the opportunity to learn and perform the skill as many times as she needed in class that prepared her for success.

“The first time that I did an IV on a real patient, I got it. That was such a huge confidence boost for me,” Naomi said.

Naomi’s confidence blossomed during the health assessment course, and she said that she is most comfortable doing histories on her patients. Along with a belief in her abilities, Naomi said Millikin’s Nursing program changed her entire perspective on the nursing profession.

“Millikin has broadened my view of what nursing can be. There are so many areas of nursing that I didn’t know about. You can go in and be a

nurse, you can do respiratory therapy or even be a flight nurse,” she said. “I’m hoping to specialize in intensive care and have already accepted a job right after college. I’m looking forward to going out in the world and giving care to critical patients.”

As a Decatur native, Naomi’s experience of Millikin has been as a commuter student. However, commuting to and from campus didn’t diminish her experiences or her opportunities to get involved at Millikin. “A big highlight of Millikin University for me has actually been my time outside of class,” she said. “I’ve really been able to immerse myself in the campus by making new friends and being part of different organizations. I feel like that has really elevated my college experience.”

Naomi is the chapter President of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Secretary for Millikin’s nursing fraternity Alpha Tau Delta and a member of both the Nursing Student National Association and the Black Student Union on campus.

*“All of my experiences at Millikin have prepared me for life after graduation by just really building my confidence.”*

When Millikin University senior Naomi Hall graduates in Spring 2023 with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, she will dive directly into her nursing career as an Intensive Care Nurse at St. Mary’s Hospital in Decatur.

Growing up experiencing her own visits to the doctor, Naomi always kept a healthcare career at the forefront. “I’ve always had a desire to work in healthcare. As a kid, I wanted to be a pediatrician, because that’s what I saw the most,” Naomi said.

“As I started doing some job shadowing and internships in high school, I realized that nursing was really the career I wanted to pursue.”

For Naomi, it was nursing’s hands-on patient care that she most wanted to practice. This made her hometown university the ideal place to earn her nursing degree, as Millikin’s School of



## Annual Interview Bootcamp Connects Students, Alumni

Millikin University’s future teachers gathered in the University Commons in February for the School of Education’s annual Interview Bootcamp event. Current student-teachers practiced interview skills, asked questions and developed professional networks with 20 alumni representing school districts across Central Illinois.

In Illinois, more than 220 practicing school administrators are Millikin alums and the reputation that the School of Education program has developed helps student-teachers as they reach the job market.



# Tabor School of Business



## Tabor Adds New Majors

In 2022, Millikin announced a new Agribusiness major within the Tabor School of Business. Launching in fall 2023, the Bachelor of Science program will teach students to apply the fundamentals of business to agriculture and agriculture-adjacent industries.

RJ Podeschi, Dean of the Tabor School of Business, cited a significant increase in third-party farm management and student interest driving the introduction of the Agribusiness major. In addition, Tabor added both a Communication and Business Communication major, with the former migrating from its former home in Millikin's College of Arts and Sciences.

*“We don’t just learn things in class. We actually get chances to apply what we learn through practical projects.”*

– *Stephie Morene Niyomwungere*



# BIG BLUE BY WAY OF BURUNDI

## Stephie Morene Niyomwungere

Class of 2023  
Digital Media Marketing Major

Stephie Morene Niyomwungere, Class of 2023, is ready to graduate from Millikin this spring. A Digital Media Marketing major in the Tabor School of Business, Stephie’s experiences with Performance Learning through her classes, internships and student-run ventures have helped her earn a job opportunity in New York with Google, which will start after she graduates.

Stephie came to Decatur from Burundi in East Africa. She found Millikin through a friend of her father and was excited to study in the United States. Even though she intended to study Biology when she first arrived, it was her father’s success in business that inspired her to pursue a business degree at Millikin. Quickly, Stephie realized how much she loved her business classes in Tabor.

“We don’t just learn things in class. We actually get chances to apply what we learn through practical projects.” Stephie said that one of her current classes is acting as a consulting agency to a client located in Mexico who

wants to expand into the U.S. Their research and advising will help the client plan and create a strategy for the future of his company.

While at Millikin, Stephie has kept busy by taking advantage of as many opportunities as possible on campus. “Millikin helped me find myself and what I like to do. There are so many skills, whether professional or personal skills, that I didn’t have before Millikin,” Stephie said.

During her sophomore year, she became a Residential, Academic and Peer Mentor, and she is also involved with the African Student Organization and the International Student Organization. Additionally, she is a Senior Consultant for the student-run venture, Millikin Tabor Consulting, and President of Tabor Business Club.

These experiences are what Stephie says led to her success during her summer internship in Chicago with CDW LLC, a technology company headquartered in Lincolnshire, Ill. In her role as a Technical Sales Intern, she worked alongside the sales team and performed market research for clients.

Throughout her internship, Stephie developed a project about supply diversity, which she describes as facilitating opportunities for small businesses to work with large businesses. “I was selected among over 200 students for the opportunity to present my project to the CEO,” she said. “I had a really great experience at my internship, and I feel like Millikin had a great deal to do with that.”

The Performance Learning opportunities she gained during her four years at Millikin provided Stephie with the skills and confidence to apply for a position at Google. She said that, while the hiring process was stressful because of the highly competitive environment, she’s confident that she will succeed in the position because she already has experience performing the work that she will be doing in New York with Google.

Though she feels fully prepared to graduate and is looking forward to her move to New York, she knows she will miss the school where she spent the last four years. “I’m so used to Millikin and the life I have here with my friends and my professors. I’ve made some really awesome connections,” she said.

“I’m ready to graduate and I feel like Millikin has helped prepare me as much as possible for my future career,” Stephie said.



WATCH VIDEO



Class of 2010  
Theatre Major

# Joel Kim Booster

Hulu- and Netflix-starring Actor,  
Writer, Producer & Comedian



*“It was the culmination of so many years of work. I’ve always wanted to be in a leadership position, so being able to steer the ship was really gratifying for me,”* Booster said. *“It made me believe for the first time that I was doing the right thing.”*

When Joel Kim Booster watched his older sister perform in a play when he was 5 years old, he was certain his future was in theatre, a dream he says almost never wavered. Booster claims, wryly, that he stuck with theatre because it was the only thing he was good at, but his skyrocket into celebrity status in 2022 confirms his talents across many stages — both figurative and literal.

His best-known work, “Fire Island,” is a modern-day, queer retelling of Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice” that premiered on Hulu in June 2022. Booster wrote, produced and starred in the romantic-comedy alongside a diverse cast, including comedian Margaret Cho, Bowen Yang, Conrad Ricamora and James Scully. He credits the project with being the most impactful of his career thus far.



## STARRING ON HIS OWN STAGE

As the headliner for the 2022 Goodheart Event at Millikin University, Booster, a Class of 2010 graduate, returned to campus Nov. 9, 2022, to perform in Shilling Hall’s Albert Taylor Theatre and teach a stand-up comedy workshop masterclass. During the masterclass, students had the chance to perform a short stand-up set and receive notes and feedback informed by Booster’s professional experiences.

While Booster said there is no single secret to creating successful stand-up comedy, due to the medium’s individualistic nature, he had plenty of advice for aspiring comedians, actors and creators.

“Everyone has their own secret sauce that they add to the set to make it their own. If there was one general secret, I’d say it is figuring out what you bring to the table that’s individual and unique to you.”

The Goodheart Event, which was created through a generous gift from the late Margaret “Peggy” Goodheart Madden and her husband, the late G. William Madden, provides Millikin students with access to outstanding entertainment at no charge. Previous Goodheart Event performers include Seth Meyers, Jonathan Van Ness, Jay Leno, Sara Bareilles, Wayne Brady and David Spade.

In returning to his alma mater, Booster reflected on how his experiences at Millikin helped influence his future in entertainment. He said that one thing he really loved about Millikin was how open they were to creating opportunities when his interests didn’t line up with existing programs.

“When I came back my sophomore year, I said that I wanted to start writing plays, but there wasn’t a program for it. They were really open and helpful in creating individual learning tracks for me,” Booster remarked. The first play he wrote at Millikin, “Layover,” was written over Booster’s Christmas break and produced in his basement, which he said also served as a black box theatre at the time.

The primary lesson Booster took away from Millikin was the same lesson he conveyed to the students who attended his masterclass. “At Millikin, you have the ability to create your own opportunities. Millikin is a great platform to make things happen. If it’s something you want to do, like playwriting, and it doesn’t exist at Millikin, they will help you make it happen.”

“One of the reasons I was able to find the success that I have is by making opportunities. Not waiting around for someone to open a door for me, but seeing a wall with no door and making one for myself.”



Booster has taken that lesson and created his own opportunities in his career, leading to a fast-growing list of credits as writer, actor and producer. He has been recognized on the “Time100 Next List” as an advocate, nominated by “Fire Island” co-star Margaret Cho, along with being named to the list of “Queer Young Comics Redefining American Humor” by The New York Times. Booster has a Netflix comedy special, “Psychosexual,” and is currently acting in the AppleTV+ series, “Loot,” opposite Maya Rudolph. In November 2022, Booster also appeared on “Celebrity Jeopardy!” to raise funds for the Selah Neighborhood Homeless Coalition.



Class of 2014  
Theatre Major

# Korri Burton- Universe

Founder & Owner  
of Uncommon Closet

A burlesque suit with undergarments made of old suspenders and garter belts. A custom 1970s-style Catwoman costume. A choir uniform for a transgender teen who could not move in the limited sizes produced by the uniform company.

These are just some of the unique projects undertaken by Uncommon Closet, a Chicago custom clothing and tailoring business founded, owned and operated by Korri Burton-Universe, Class of 2014.

In just five short years since it opened, Uncommon Closet has made a name for itself by successfully handling projects that other tailoring shops deemed impossible. And more importantly, Burton-Universe has created a welcoming environment for people with body types and needs that are often overlooked by the fashion industry, including members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the differently abled and plus-sized individuals.

## CREATING INCLUSIVE & ACCESSIBLE CLOTHING

*“For some people it’s just clothing. But for some, especially for trans or queer people, it’s such an expression of who we are. It can express gender. It can express how you present yourself in society, ranging from punk battle jackets to just being able to wear a dress and present feminine and feel that you are a woman. That’s huge.”*

Burton-Universe has seen clients cry during fittings because it’s the first time they’ve had a garment that fits them well. Transgender individuals, for instance, may have bigger chests or hips and smaller waists, features that traditional masculine suits don’t fit. And many tailors won’t take on altering suit shoulders — something that Uncommon Closet does on almost a daily basis.

“I would definitely say theatre and specifically what I learned at Millikin really kind of brought me here. Because in theatre you have to do alterations that you wouldn’t normally see at a

tailor shop. We just know a wide range of how things can be done. And it also means we’ve worked with a wider range of bodies and had to be more flexible.”

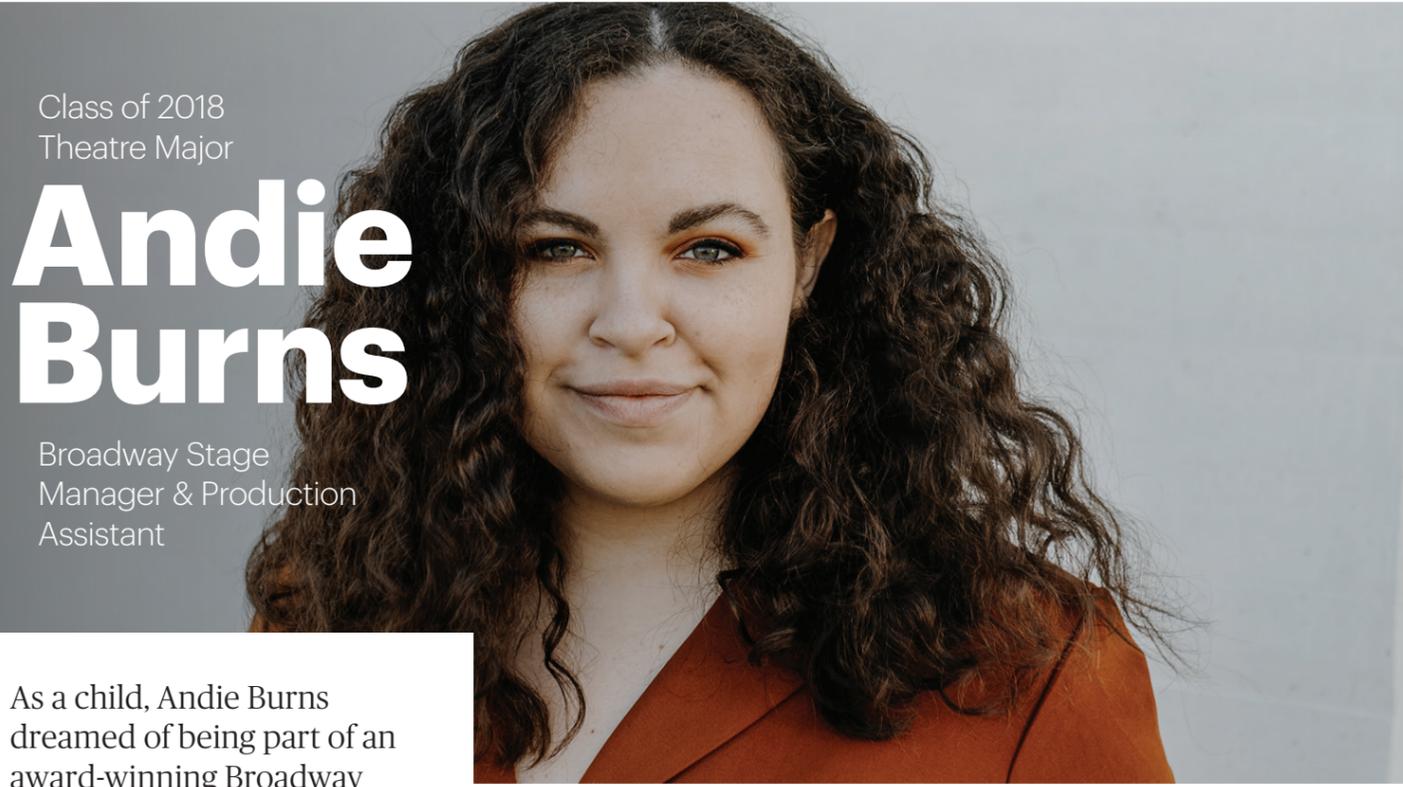
Burton-Universe (who uses they/ them pronouns) says they credit the performance-based teaching of Millikin Professor of Theatre and Dance Jana Henry Funderburk for helping them understand the fundamentals of pattern drafting and draping. They recall late nights working in the costume shop with Funderburk on projects like the quick-change effect to help Cinderella’s peasant dress transform into a ball gown. A key team member had just quit and there was “no choice” but to burn the midnight oil to ensure everything was ready on time for the show. The team succeeded, and Burton-Universe found the trial-by-fire experience “incredible” and an opportunity to truly feel the “family aspect of being in theatre.”

Now Burton-Universe has an even larger family, as word spreads within the LGBTQIA+ community about Uncommon Closet’s accessible and inclusive approach to clothing. The business has been recommended by Chicago Queer Exchange and was included as part of “Chicago” magazine’s “Best of Chicago 2019.”

Burton-Universe has partnered with Sharpe Suiting, a queer-owned company and premier suiting label in Hollywood, to provide custom suits that not only fit but match the wearer’s unique style and identity. And after starting out in half of an artist’s loft with “two sewing machines and just enough space for an iron,” Uncommon Closet recently prepared to double its space for the second time in its existence with an early 2023 move.

This success is not something Burton-Universe necessarily envisioned when they came to Millikin as a student, a time when they “hated sewing” and thought stage managing or scenic design might be in their future. They tell current Millikin students to “be open and flexible.”

“You are at Millikin to work toward your dream, but your dream may change. Always keep that eye out for opportunity and what paths may open. Uncommon Closet started as a note in my phone because I was frustrated with the fashion industry for not being able to find clothing for my partner. That’s where it started. And you can find a path wherever you look just by keeping your eye out and seeing what you can do.”



Class of 2018  
Theatre Major

# Andie Burns

Broadway Stage  
Manager & Production  
Assistant

As a child, Andie Burns dreamed of being part of an award-winning Broadway production.

She often traveled with her family from their hometown of Bethlehem, Penn., to New York to see shows. She was active in performance theatre, envisioning herself working on Broadway one day.

A mere four years after graduating from Millikin, Burns' dream came true when the show she joined as a Production Assistant in fall 2021, the wildly creative "A Strange Loop," ultimately won rave reviews and numerous major awards, including two Tony Awards for Best Musical and Best Book in June 2022.

Also winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Drama, "A Strange Loop" explores the life of a young, black, queer artist struggling with his inner thoughts on "desires, identity and instincts he both loves and loathes," according to the show's website. Among its fans are Lin-Manuel Miranda and Trevor Noah, who called it "Phenomenal. One of the

funniest and most poignant shows I've ever seen."

Andie initially served as Production Assistant for the show's run in Washington, D.C., an experience she calls "very hard but very validating," before the show moved to Broadway to open in April 2022. Andie was asked to join the show's production team in New York as a production assistant, part of the stage management team.

"It was a whirlwind process. I had no expectations of going to New York. In fact, I even had a job lined up in Colorado. But when the opportunity presented itself, I took the chance and moved to New York on March 1."

In New York, she found herself working with the same cast but also a production team that had grown in numbers due to the needs of a Broadway show.

"We spent so much time together. At the watch party, we screamed together when the show was named Best Musical at the



Tony Awards. It was the best feeling to have that level of validation and acknowledgement."

Burns had fully intended to study Theatre Performance at Millikin, but to her surprise, she changed her mind within a week after beginning her first semester.

"I'd made it a week into Millikin before being asked to be Assistant Stage Manager for a production at Pipe Dreams; that was a turning point that made me realize that maybe stage management was a better path for me than performance at the time.

## FROM CHILDHOOD DREAMS TO TONY AWARDS

I gravitated toward upperclass students doing stage management and found myself relying on their expertise."

Andie's preference for stage management over performance had been on her mind before Millikin. "A teacher in high school had said I'd be a good fit to stage manage the dance concert, but it wasn't until my first professional production in the summer before college that something went 'boom!' — that was it. I just really fell in love with stage management."

Andie's rising success in stage management comes as no surprise to Millikin Professor of Theatre and Dance Alex Miller, who appeared in a student-led production of "Red" headed by Joseph Bezenek, Class of 2016. Then a sophomore, Andie had been asked to serve as Stage Manager for the production. She remembers feeling nervous yet honored that Bezenek trusted her to handle the position. Miller clearly remembers seeing Andie's potential.

"Andie is a consistent pillar of excellence. I've had the pleasure of working with her on two productions, and in each case she brought a level of professionalism and artistry that would create a safe and inclusive atmosphere, where directors and performers could effectively focus on the task at hand. She's brilliant."

At Millikin, Andie also worked as Stage Manager for several other Pipe

Dreams Studio Theatre and mainstage productions, including "Rough Magic," "Nice Work If You Can Get It," "The Last Smoker in America," "Solstice: A Concert of Dance" and "9 to 5: The Musical."

"It was the best learning experience. The plan of action was always to do your best to keep the show moving forward. I learned that lesson in Pipe Dreams."

After graduating with her Millikin BFA, Andie worked in stage management for various regional theatre companies, including the Actors Theatre of Louisville, Southern Colorado Repertory Theatre and Spoleto Festival USA. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, her work was abruptly halted as live productions shuttered their shows nationwide.

For three months she was unemployed before securing a position outside the industry. In total, she worked outside her field for a little over a year. During that time, she wondered if she'd made the right career choice and felt "kind of dumped. I wondered why I'd committed all this time and energy to work that would be deemed non-essential [during the pandemic]."

Eventually though, Andie remembered the little girl who had been awed by theatre and committed to contributing to its excellence.



"I finally decided that little girl in me deserved another shot at reaching her dream. And because of that, 2022 was the best year I've ever had. Being part of a Tony-winning production has been a full circle for me."

Andie is still closing circles. Although she joined a revival of "A Raisin in the Sun" in fall 2022 to serve as its Assistant Stage Manager, she recently returned to "A Strange Loop." This time she served as its Assistant Stage Manager until the production closed. Her next dream? To be Production Stage Manager for a long-running Broadway show, from workshop through the Tony Awards.

*"The whole experience is about me stepping up. It hasn't just been a pipe dream."*

1960

**Lou Ann Giller Querrey,**  
Class of 1960, and Gerald C. Freeman,  
Class of 1962, were married Sept. 4,  
2021, at their home in Cave Creek, Ariz.

**Carolyn Findlay Harper,**  
Class of 1962, of Lynn Haven, Fla.,  
married Wes Harper on May 6, 2022.

**Milton Scott,**  
Class of 1967, retired from First  
Lutheran Church July 1, 2022, as Choir  
Director after 53 years of service. He  
conducted the Children's Choir, Bell  
Choir and Chancel Choir, as well as  
serving as Director of Music. He also  
retired from Opus 24 community choir  
after serving as its Artistic Director  
and Conductor since 1992. He and his  
wife, Carla, Class of 1973, celebrated  
their 50th wedding anniversary on  
June 24, 2022.

1970



**Larry and Lynn  
Schumaker Crecelius,**  
Class of 1971 and 1972, gathered with  
family and Millikin alumni at their  
St. Louis home to kick off their 50th  
wedding anniversary weekend.

**Greg Martin,**  
Class of 1979, of Houston, Texas, retired  
as Senior Program Manager at Coca-  
Cola/Minute Maid in Sugar Land, Texas.

**Scott D. Siders,**  
Class of 1979, is retired. Scott  
worked as a Chemist, Project  
Manager, QA Manager and Director  
of Quality Assurance in commercial  
laboratories. Most of his career  
was with the Illinois EPA serving as  
Superfund CLP Manager, Divisional  
Quality Assurance Officer, Interim  
Agency Quality Manager and  
Laboratory Accreditation Officer.  
He also worked for the USEPA in the  
Superfund's Contract Laboratory  
Program. He has been directly  
involved with the NELAC Institute  
(TNI) and its predecessor for over  
25 years, serving on numerous  
committees and as a Director on the  
TNI's board of directors. Currently,  
he is still active in TNI and also a  
member of the Illinois Environmental  
Testing Laboratory Association.

1980

**Anne-Marie Proske Berk,**  
Class of 1988, has returned to  
Millikin's Alumni and Development  
Office to serve as Director of Grants.

**Victor Binkley,**  
Class of 1980, coaches basketball for  
Clinton High School in Clinton, Ill.  
This is his 43rd year coaching high  
school basketball. He coached six  
years at Mt. Auburn High School,  
in Mt. Auburn, Ill., and 36 years at  
Warrensburg-Latham High School,  
Warrensburg, Ill., where the  
Cardinals celebrated their 1,500th  
program win during the 2021-2022  
season. Coach Binkley has 724 career  
wins and 56 championships. He was  
the 2008 IBCA Hall of Fame Coach.



**David Thorne,**  
Class of 1983, married Ashley Zehrung  
Thorne on Nov. 13, 2021. Additionally,  
after 36 years of service, David retired  
from Exelon Corporation on Jan. 14, 2022.

1990

**Shelly McCrosky Gaza,**  
Class of 1995, was promoted to full  
Professor of Theatre Arts and appointed  
as Director of the School of Theatre Arts  
and Dance at the University of Northern  
Colorado (UNC). As school director  
at UNC, Shelly works with 20 theatre  
and dance faculty members to service  
approximately 400 undergraduate and  
graduate students in five undergraduate  
and two graduate programs

**Roy Hinkamper,**  
Class of 1995, is the Chief Audit  
Executive at Silvergate Bank in La Jolla,  
Calif. As the Chief Audit Executive,  
he interacts regularly with all facets  
of the business, as well as the bank's  
regulators. Roy leads the internal  
audit function and works with other  
parts of the business to improve the  
bank's overall operations, improve risk  
management and contribute to the  
bank's continued growth.

**Andrew Meyerkord,**  
Class of 1999, is a Manager with  
Hayat Brown LLC, an engineering  
and real estate consulting firm based  
in Washington, D.C. Currently, he is  
working on a team advising the Austin,  
Texas, Independent School District  
on the repurposing of surplus school  
buildings. Andrew and his wife, Denise  
Loomis Meyerkord, also '99, have two  
children, Benjamin, 11, and Hannah, 7.

**Jessica Tyler Wright,**  
Class of 1996, began rehearsals  
for Classic Stage Company's  
Off-Broadway production of "A Man  
of No Importance," directed by John  
Doyle. Some notable castmates include  
Jim Parsons, Mary Beth Peil and Mare  
Winningham.

2000

**Annie Kennedy Adams,**  
Class of 2009, is Words & Music  
Coordinator at Country Music Hall of  
Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tenn.  
Words & Music is the Country Music  
Hall of Fame and Museum's flagship  
education program that teaches  
Language Arts through lyric writing. In  
her role as coordinator, Annie oversees  
logistics and facilitates programs for  
school groups, veterans, corporations  
and other specialized audiences. She  
also occasionally uses her songwriting  
and performance experience to serve  
as a staff songwriter for programs.



**Paul Lidy,**  
Class of 2004, is Senior Director of  
Alumni Engagement for Millikin's  
Alumni & Development Office. Lidy  
has over 16 years of higher education  
administration experience at small  
private universities and colleges and  
most recently served Millikin as Dean of  
Campus Life.



**Alex Berry,**  
Class of 2009, is Millikin's University  
Registrar.

2010

**Ernest England,**  
Class of 2011, is Assistant Professor in  
the Education Leadership Doctoral  
Program at the University of Maryland  
Eastern Shore in Princess Anne, Md.



**Derekah Kingery,**  
Class of 2015, is Millikin's Associate  
Director of Annual Giving. She  
previously served as Campus Staff  
Minister for Intervarsity Christian  
Fellowship.

**Dayle McMahon Rebelsky,**  
Class of 2019, is an Outpatient  
Therapist for Heritage Behavioral  
Health, working to connect  
community members with services  
they need, including mental health  
counseling. Dayle earned a master's  
degree in Clinical Mental Health from  
the University of Illinois in 2022.

2020

**Sean Irons,**  
Class of 2021, works as a Crisis  
Interventions Specialist at National  
Suicide Prevention Lifeline PATH in  
Bloomington, Ill.

SHARE

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### Marianne Wattley

*Class of 1951, Englewood, N.J., July 3, 2022*

“Millikin has woven threads throughout my life wherever I might be.” Wattley, an early pioneer in the television industry, spent more than 30 years in the field, leaving her Decatur hometown after graduation to work at CBS-New York from 1951 to 1957. Wattley then returned to Decatur to work with WTVP, an ABC affiliate, as a copywriter. After working in Washington, D.C., for a Metromedia station, her career took her to WNEW-TV-New York in 1976 before she was named Director of Administrative Services for the program syndication division of Metromedia Producers Corporation. She then served in the Metro TV Sales Division of Metromedia until 1983.

### Phyllis Jo Morris Lotchin

*Class of 1959, Chapel Hill, N.C., Oct. 1, 2022*

“My father could have afforded to send me to college, but he said, ‘Girls don’t need to go to college’ ... I told him that I was going, and I went and worked my way through college with my little scholarship. I worked in the dining room, and a lot of girls did that, at that point.”



### Marilyn Dechert

*Class of 1955 and Big Blue Coach, Decatur, July 7, 2022*

Dechert served as Coach of the Big Blue Women’s Golf Team for 12 years, starting in 2001 at age 69. During her final season as Coach in 2014, she was named College Conference of Illinois & Wisconsin (CCIW) Coach of the Year. She was also inducted into the Illinois Women’s Golf Hall of Fame in 2015. During her life, she won a total of 14 women’s golf titles in Decatur tournament competitions. In her career, she worked in the research department at Archer Daniels Midland Co. before retiring in management from Wallace Laboratories. She and her husband, Dick Dechert ’54, were married in 1971.

Lotchin, who retired as Associate Professor of English from North Carolina Central University in Durham, majored in English at Millikin, where she met her husband, Roger Lotchin ’57, who retired as Professor of History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Phyllis and Roger taught briefly at Chatham Glenwood High School before pursuing graduate education at the University of



### Karen Faye Lepp Baird

*Class of 1965, Decatur, Sept. 1, 2022*

Karen and her husband, the late Dr. Neil Baird, also ’65, shared a lifelong love of teaching biology. Both biology majors at MU, they married in 1966. Each completed advanced degrees and taught biology for more than 30 years. Karen joined Decatur’s Richard Community College faculty the year of its founding in 1972 and retired from RCC as Professor Emeritus in 2006, shortly after Neil retired in 2005 with emeritus status after teaching biology at Millikin for 35 years. Karen also taught four years for St. Louis, Minn., public schools. During her career, Karen loved teaching a range of students — from recent high school graduates to adult students returning to advance their education.

Chicago. They moved to Chapel Hill after Roger received his Ph.D. in Western History.

While teaching, Phyllis continued to finish her doctorate and assisted Roger by researching and proofreading his books on San Francisco history. She also taught the Evelyn Wood Speed Reading method in California and adult education classes at Duke University.



### George B. Irish

*Class of 1968, and former Chair of the Millikin Board of Trustees, Avalon, N.J., Sept. 13, 2022*

“Overall, Millikin provided early stability in my life and gave me knowledge and information that has been very helpful throughout my life.”

George Irish led the Hearst Newspapers Group for 10 years during his 29-year career of achievements with the Hearst Corporation, where he also guided two of the Hearst family’s philanthropic foundations. Upon his death, Hearst Foundation President Virginia Hearst Randt noted that Irish “made the world a better place in business, in philanthropy and as a friend.” A loyal and devoted alumnus of Millikin, Irish was honored as 2002 Alumnus of the Year among other University awards. A generous donor, Irish also served 10 years on the University’s board of trustees, including several years leading it as chair.



### Ellen Wittlinger

*Class of 1970, Haydenville, Mass., Nov. 24, 2022*

An award-winning author of young adult novels, Wittlinger was a pioneer in the field of addressing the emotions and experiences of teenagers at a time when the stories of LGBTQ+ teens were not being published. Her third novel, “Hard Love,” published in 1999 and named a Printz Honor Book, featured a teen who came out as a lesbian. “She was an absolute pioneer of LGBTQ+ literature, a fierce advocate for all voices and a genuinely warm and wonderful human being,” said Justin Chanda, a Senior VP and Publisher at Simon & Schuster.

*“The world lost a light today. [Annie Wersching] was one of the greatest actors I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with, and my friend.”*

— Tweet by “24” Lead Actor Kiefer Sutherland



### Annie Wersching

*Class of 1999, Los Angeles, Jan. 29, 2023*

The unexpected passing of Annie Wersching, Class of 1999, shocked many of her friends and fellow artists in the Hollywood creative community, who responded with an outpouring of condolences and remembrances. The actress appeared in numerous television roles, including “Star Trek: Picard,” “24,” “Timeless,” “Bosch,” “Marvel’s Runaways,” “General Hospital” and “The Vampire Diaries.” She also appeared in “The Rookie,” where series producers announced they would dedicate the Feb. 14, 2023, episode to her memory. In addition, Wersching was a lead voice actor in the popular video game, “The Last of Us,” and served as a frequent collaborator with creative team members behind TV’s “24,” “Castle” and “Supernatural.”

The actress is survived by her three children and husband, Stephen Full, who attended Millikin in the late 1980s. Stephen noted, “She found wonder in the simplest moment. She didn’t require music to dance. She taught us not to wait for adventure to find you. ‘Go find it. It’s everywhere.’”



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1184 WEST MAIN STREET  
DECATUR, ILLINOIS 62522  
[millikin.edu](http://millikin.edu)

# Save the date!

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- May 12** Big Blue Golf Outing, *South Side Country Club, Decatur*
- May 21** Spring Commencement
- June 12** Summer Orientation Begins for Class of 2027
- June 15** Alumni & Friends Event, *Washington, D.C.*
- June 30** Big Blue Day at the CornBelts, *Normal, Ill.*



## Sept. 29-Oct. 1 **HOMECOMING 2023**

[millikin.edu/homecoming](http://millikin.edu/homecoming)



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