

THE SOUTHWESTER

SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE | FALL 2025

MAGAZINE

Study Confirms SMC a Major Economic Engine for County



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**Boundless
Opportunities**



10

**V8 Moment
at SMC**



20

**Quest
for Purpose**



Emma Totzke

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Welcome to the Southwester!

The Southwester—written as Sou'Wester early on—was Southwestern Michigan College's newspaper for more than half a century. The paper was developed and distributed by SMC journalism students. In 1994, the paper won first-place national recognition from the Associated Collegiate Press at the University of Minnesota and from the American Scholastic Press Association in New York under 1989-1999 journalism adviser Dr. Chris Robinson. In 1999, color was incorporated into the paper and, in 2013, the paper was transferred into an electronic format. Today, the news stories are distributed on the college's website and shared on social media. To keep the tradition alive, The Southwester was transformed into this bi-annual magazine for the community, alumni, and donors to enjoy.

In this issue of The Southwester, you'll be introduced to SMC alumni who have made a success in their careers by building on their degrees from SMC. You'll also learn about some of the exciting things happening at the college.

To learn more about the college and programs featured in this publication, visit swmich.edu.



Dear Taxpayers, Alumni, and Friends of Southwestern Michigan College,

All of us know the power of a college education to broaden students' horizons and to improve future income prospects. However, few people appreciate the tremendous economic impact institutions of higher learning have on their local communities.

That is definitely the case with SMC, which provides a positive economic impact of \$58.4 million per year to our taxing district, enough to support 1,017 jobs. The impact to our broader service region is \$224.1 million per year, supporting 2,955 jobs. These figures come from an independent economic impact study conducted last fall by industry leader Lightcast. I encourage you to read the full details on pages 12-13 of this issue.

I'm proud to report that the expansion of student housing on our Dowagiac campus was completed on time and a little under budget—thanks to the diligent work of Interim President Brent Brewer—increasing capacity by 36 beds for this fall without incurring additional debt. And what a fall it is! Enrollment at SMC has grown for a record seventh straight semester to approximately 2,269 students, with housing at full

capacity. We are well underway on construction of our new wrestling facility, and plans are moving forward for extensive remodeling of the performing arts facilities in the Dale A. Lyons Building.

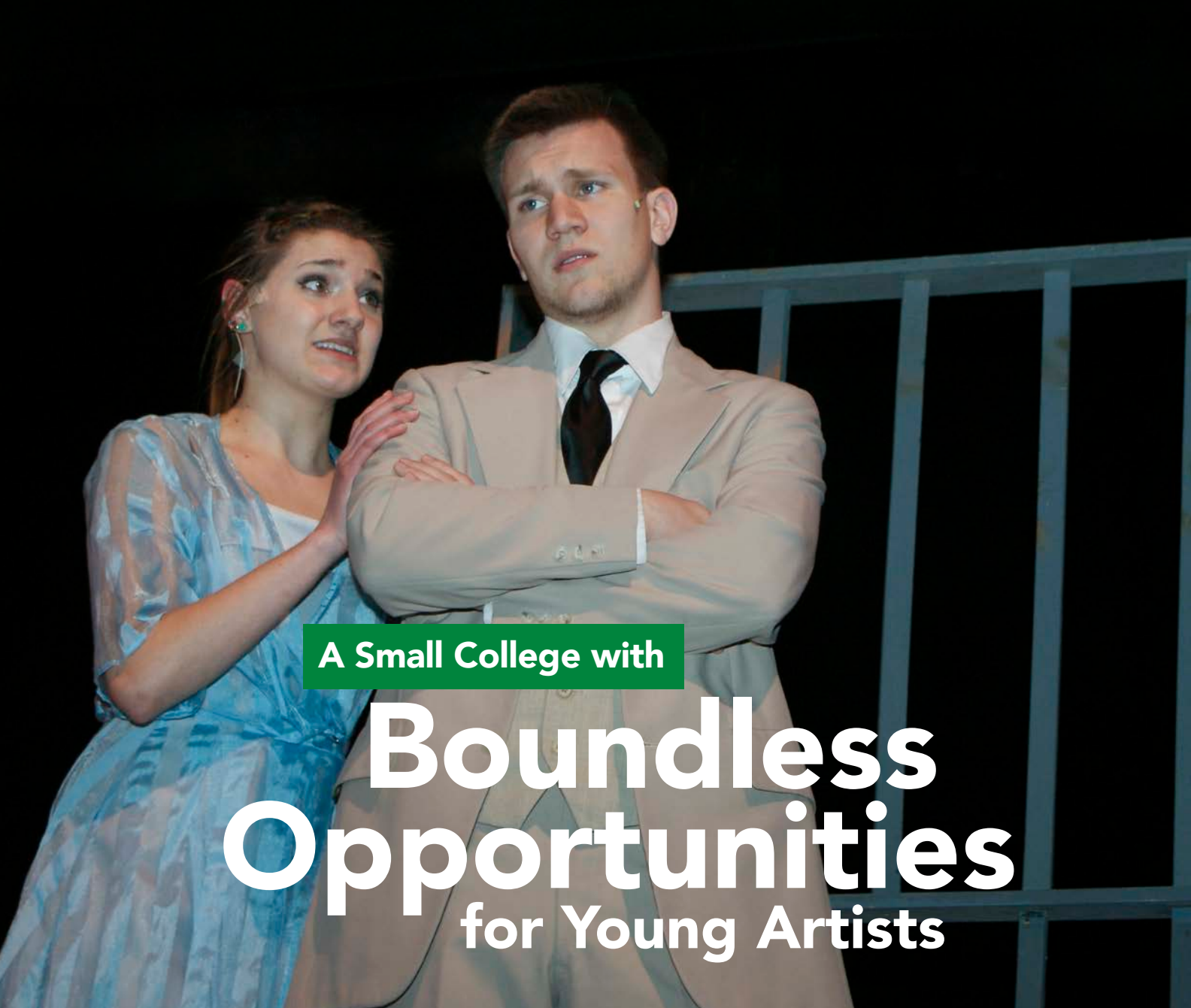
Our athletic teams continue to excel, with the women's cross country team pulling off an incredible upset on our home course to win the 2025 MCCA Western Conference Championship. On the men's side, freshman Owen Saylor was individual champion and named the 2025 Runner of the Year. Our women's volleyball team is at the top of the table in the West about halfway through the season. In addition, the debut of women's wrestling and the return of men's and women's track and field is in full swing. As a reminder, our athletic events are free to attend, as are the majority of our performing arts events. You are always welcome.

The search continues for our ninth president. We received an unprecedented 128 applications from all over the country, which is a true testament to SMC's long-standing fiscal management, facilities, and campus culture, all while not employing a costly search firm. The Board of Trustees, along with the selection committee, are hard at work evaluating and interviewing the most promising candidates with a goal of hiring our next leader by year's end.

Our trustee spotlight this fall features our long-serving and very dedicated Secretary, Beth Cripe, who joined the Board in 2011. Please take time to read all of the inspiring accounts of our students, faculty, and alumni in this issue, including WNDU's Mark Peterson and Cody Miller, communications and media studies department chair. Roadrunners on campus, in the community, and throughout the world are doing great things, and your College is getting better all the time.

Thomas F. Jerdon
Chairman, SMC Board of Trustees





A Small College with

Boundless Opportunities for Young Artists

Southwestern Michigan College literally changed the course of Danny Ferenczi's life.

Ferenczi, who earned an AA degree in 2015, came to SMC considering psychology and becoming a therapist. But after taking every theatre and choir class available and playing clarinet in Concert Band, he chose to study theatre en route to an acting career.

"When I first came to SMC, I did not actually have much of a plan," Ferenczi said. "I originally envisioned myself studying psychology but still did not know for certain what I wanted to do with that degree."

As he became more and more involved with SMC performing arts, he realized that was the correct path for him. "Playing Leo Frank in the Jason Robert Brown musical 'Parade' my freshman year was truly the catalyst for what would become one of the greatest passions of my life—performing on stage.

"Once my two years at SMC had passed, I knew I wanted to study theatre at a university. I auditioned for the incredibly competitive School of Music, Theatre, and Dance at the University of Michigan and was wait-listed."

He found himself at Valparaiso

University, graduating in May 2017 and moving to Chicago that fall to pursue acting.

SMC was a no-brainer in many ways

"SMC was a no-brainer for me in many ways," he said. "I didn't yet know what I wanted to do, and I knew SMC would allow me to creatively explore different career paths while getting my associate's degree.

"A key element of moving forward with SMC was how affordable it was compared to many universities, and the fact that it had on-campus housing made me feel like I was still getting the full college experience!



to make up with my vocal education. Luckily, having Dave Carew as a choir director was beyond perfect for me as a young vocalist as he is not only an amazing musician and vocalist himself, but he also made learning music and technique so much fun!"

Ferenczi also developed his leadership potential while serving as a resident assistant in Thomas F. Jerdon Hall his sophomore year.

The 'Parade' Continued to NYC

"I would be remiss not to mention that during 'Parade,' we were lucky enough to have the composer himself, Jason Robert Brown, come and do a master class with us, then perform a concert with us.

"Off that residency, JRB invited us to come and perform in his New York City concert production of 'Parade' with Manhattan Concert Productions. Members of our 'Parade' cast took a train from South Bend all the way to the Big Apple and had two days of intense rehearsals before we performed at Avery Fisher Hall (now David Geffen Hall) in Lincoln Center.

"It was such a magical experience, and it was really all thanks to the hardworking musical arts team of Paul Mow and David Carew."

Not all of his SMC memories are arts-related

"I have many fond memories of just normal student life at SMC," Ferenczi said. "When we weren't in rehearsal, we headed to the Student Activity Center in the evenings and played volleyball or Super Smash Bros.

"Living on campus, many of us were navigating 'adult life' for the first time. We loved goofing off and just being weirdo arts kids together, but we really became a tight-knit community who cared for and supported each other through thick and thin. It's difficult to find that kind of community in life, but I was so lucky to find my people while at SMC."

Influential professors

"Shocking to no one, my favorite professors were those who taught my arts classes," Ferenczi said. "They believed in us, challenged us and inspired us to become not only the best musicians we would be, but to also be empathetic in our work and always remember to laugh.

"With that being said, there are many, many incredible professors at SMC who deeply impacted me as a student...truly a testament to the kind of community SMC fosters and the incredibly caring individuals who compose that community."

Bringing PAW to SMC

Ferenczi is a teaching artist with Performing Arts Workshops (PAW), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. He began his tenure there in 2014 as a camp counselor, joined the executive team as associate program director, and now serves as executive director of the organization.

PAW offers visual and performing arts education to youth aged newborn to high school seniors. "What is special about our work," said Ferenczi, "is that it's open to students across all counties in southwest Michigan.

"The workshops themselves were hosted at Brandywine Elementary School for many years...but we have now produced four summers of workshops at SMC!"

Transitioning into fundraising

Ferenczi also serves as the fundraising event manager for the Sarcoma Foundation of America. "My fundraising journey began with PAW, specifically with learning grant writing and producing small-scale fundraising campaigns. Since then, I've refined my skills to make a fulltime job out of it while I continue to pursue my acting career."

He was enshrined earlier this year in the Edwardsburg Hall of Fame for his efforts to keep arts education accessible in the community.

"I am always looking for ways to give back to the community that gave me so much growing up, so I was really humbled by this honor."

A resident of Chicago's Rogers neighborhood, he enjoys his Chicago community too.

"It's so close to the lake that it can truly feel like a Michigan beach town in the summertime! It often warms my heart to think about all of my family and friends 'just on the other side of the lake.'"

"The friendships and professional relationships that I gained through my experiences at SMC changed my life for the better, and I'm so thankful for the time that I spent there. It's a small college, but the opportunities for young artists are boundless."

Theatre was just one side of the performing arts options in which Ferenczi participated. "I was in every choir I could be in at SMC! I also played clarinet.

"Those music classes kept me incredibly busy but were so instrumental—pun intended—in my education, especially regarding vocal technique. I only began singing my senior year of high school at Edwardsburg, so I had a lot of ground

A young woman with blonde hair, wearing a white cowboy hat, glasses, a plaid shirt, and jeans with a large belt buckle, is smiling and holding a large white ribbon. The ribbon has a circular gold medal in the center and text that reads "SOUTH COUNTY FAIR". She is standing next to a dark brown horse that is also wearing a white ribbon with a similar gold medal. The background shows a fairground with red and white striped tents and other people under a clear blue sky.

Totzke's Passionate about

Advocating for Agriculture

Emma Totzke, an outstanding 2023 social sciences alumna, hails from a prominent Berrien County farm family. Yet, her original plan was to study social studies education at Michigan State University (MSU).

"I thought I wanted to be a high school history/government/geography/civics teacher because I had two really awesome history teachers in high school who really inspired me," Totzke said.

Today, she studies agribusiness management and public policy at MSU and analyzes legislation for Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt, 2026 gubernatorial candidate.

Mom influenced SMC decision

"My mom encouraged me to pursue college options closer to home since I'm pretty sure she had that gut feeling that I wasn't 100-percent sure that I wanted to teach," Totzke said. "I was pretty set on what I wanted to do, but I also knew that I wasn't quite ready to go further away from home for my education."

Attending SMC allowed Totzke to complete her general education classes close to home for a lot less. As she was getting to graduate from SMC, she explored a variety of transfer options, including Western Michigan, Ferris State, and Bethel, but MSU was always the goal.

Singing in SMC choirs

At SMC, Totzke was involved in the Concert Choir and Select Voices.

"I enjoyed being in both since my stint in high school choir was cut short due to COVID," said Totzke, who also served as third-floor White Hall resident assistant for a semester.

"I was involved in the AKO Bible Club quite heavily my first year and into part of my second year at SMC," Totzke said, "but put that on pause trying to balance being an RA, being in both choirs, and completing my schoolwork."

History classes with Dr. Dennis

"I have some wonderful memories of the history classes I took at SMC with Dr. Jeff Dennis," she said.

"I always enjoyed being in his classes because he was so passionate about the content and made learning history fun."

Five generations in farming

"I have a very large background in agriculture. My dad owns Heritage Family Farms, LLC, based out of Baroda, with his two siblings," Totzke shared. They farm about 7,500 acres—everything from seed corn and wheat to soybeans and grapes. She's the beginning of the fifth generation.

"I have shown chickens, ducks, pigs, horses, dairy calves and heifers, horses, horticulture items, baked goods, and different crafts. My summers were always very busy between preparing for fair week, raising my animals, and working," she said.



In summer 2021, she was given the opportunity to join the Mid America Cowgirls Rodeo Drill Team.

"I had been looking for a different horse to ride and show that summer and a good family friend of ours who also happens to own and coach the drill team, reached out and said that she had a horse available for me," Totzke said.

"I've been able to ride in the AES Indy 500 Festival Parade four times, the Three Oaks Flag Day Parade four times, and present the colors at the opening ceremony of the Super Kickers Rodeo at the Berrien County Youth Fair three times."

Advocating for agriculture

This past summer, she completed an internship in the Public Policy and Commodity Division at the Michigan Farm Bureau.

"About halfway through my first semester at MSU, I decided that social studies education was no longer the track I wanted to pursue and that agriculture was the place for me. After one semester of agribusiness management classes, my parents encouraged me to apply for an internship with the Michigan Farm Bureau in order to gain outside-of-the-classroom experience.

"I added a second major, this one in public policy, as a result of that experience and decided to pursue a career in agriculture policy or something directly in government."

Interning with the Senate Minority Leader

"Ironically, I ended up with the internship in Sen. Nesbitt's office through a Michigan Farm Bureau event. I wanted to learn more about the policy development and lobbying side of the organization and attended the Lansing legislative seminar hosted by the Michigan Farm Bureau with my dad," she said.

"Through some of his connections, some other Farm Bureau members and I were able to meet with Sen. Nesbitt in his office that afternoon and at the end of our time with him he offered me an internship.

"I would like to get involved with his campaign eventually," she shared. "In the office, I do a lot of legislative analysis which involves reading bills, then I send them to his legislative director within the office to be used on the Senate floor when the bill comes up for a vote or for discussion.

Totzke also helps with constituent correspondence. "My position has given me the opportunity to learn essentially every aspect of the role of state senator and to learn how much work truly goes on behind the scenes.

"Last summer, I worked in Sen. Nesbitt's office as my job, and I took some summer classes through MSU to complete my degree by my desired date.

"As someone who strongly believes in standing up for what's right and advocating for those who need a voice, I feel a position in elective office would give me the best possible opportunity," she said.

"After watching my dad and his family deal with some of the policies politicians implemented on the agriculture industry, I realized that a lot were quite detrimental to our livelihood. That was when I realized I wanted to pursue a career in agriculture public policy to advocate for the agriculture industry since it benefits us all."

WNDU's Mark Peterson

Got His Start
Reviewing Albums
at SMC



Newsman Mark Peterson's retirement from WNDU-TV did not pass unnoticed. Peterson, a 1977 Dowagiac Union High School (DUHS) graduate who wrote for *The Sou'Wester* in 1977-78, reported for the Notre Dame, Ind., television station for precisely 40 years. He went on the air June 24, 1985, and called it quits on June 24, 2025.

"I kind of fell into it," said Peterson, who joined WNDU from WZZP-FM radio, where he served as news director in 1984-85. "I knew I wanted to work at WNDU because they were an up-and-coming demo, where WSBT at the time had tried-and-trues like Ray Roth who had been there for 20 years. Kind of the Tribune generation."



it up and meet the movers and shakers. Try to go where the action is and make some sense of it. All I wanted to do is what I do—report. I’m a dinosaur.”

So the outpouring at his departure caught him by surprise.

“I was shocked at all of the fanfare. I knew I stayed at the station a long time, but I guess I didn’t recognize that I did more than show up and that it meant something to somebody else” Peterson said of his sentimental sendoff.

One of his most memorable feature stories was covering a sunbathers convention at the Sunny Haven Nudist Resort, “since a lot of people didn’t know there was a nudist resort in Granger,” he chuckled.

“Breaking away like that and doing something crazy made it more fun because I knew that mainly my role was to get hard news on the air that others hadn’t heard about yet.”

In 2018, he reported that Ringo Starr wouldn’t be bringing the house down at the Morris Performing Arts Center because the Beatles drummer’s show shifted to the Century Center after a hunk of plaster fell from

the theatre ceiling.

In 2021, when the 25-acre site of the old Deer Forest zoo and amusement park in Coloma was auctioned, Peterson tucked in a personal detail—he still had his yellow elephant storybook key.

“I took the family out to lunch in Mishawaka, and the kid working there knew who I was and was hovering,” Peterson said. “He said, ‘I’ve never seen you smile.’ I thought about that for a while, but it wasn’t my job to smile on the air.”

Retirement proves hectic

“I’m going to have to go back to work to get some rest,” Peterson, 66, said, as he snuck in a trip to the zoo with his grandson, 6, the day before school started. “It’s been a blur, with so many things to take care of ...”

In addition, he still pursues his music hobby—playing guitar and singing with the rock band RPM, featuring drummer/lead vocalist Jim Murray, a Chicago attorney from Dowagiac, and bassist/vocalist Gregg Richardson, a former radio

personality who divides his time between Granger and Florida.

“For quite a stretch there, our band played for Steve’s Run, the big running race by the (creek) and the high-rise apartments (Chestnut Towers),” he said. “We also played at the blueberry festival in Plymouth.”

In August RPM marked 30 years as it played its 18th concert at Indian Lake Yacht Club. They also played for the DUHS Class of 1975 50-year reunion.

SMC piqued his interest in journalism

Peterson came to SMC to “sample the fare,” from speech to Western Civilization. But it was Professor Daniel Stenberg who ignited his passion for journalism by agreeing to let him write record reviews. “I got to review the Kiss ‘Alive!’ album that was all the rage at the time. Three chords, spit some blood, goodnight, everybody,” said Peterson.

“I graduated in ’77. My (older) brother (Peter) had died from leukemia in ’76. In ’78, my father died from a heart attack. Going away to school was pretty much taken off the table.”

In fall 1977, SMC introduced a night journalism class for adults with daytime jobs to help produce *The Sou’Wester*, as reported under Stenberg’s byline, “Night Owls Get Paper Trained.”

In the Nov. 7 issue, Peterson wrote about flags placed in the field northwest of the O’Leary Building for an architecture surveying class and the expanding business department.

The Nov. 21 edition contained Peterson’s review of Styx’s “The Grand Illusion.”

In March 1978, Peterson profiled the retiring Francis Hiscock, the Dean of Applied Science who served as acting SMC president three times. He also panned the Kiss “Alive 2” album, mostly recycled hits recorded live: “It’s like listening to a recording of the Indy 500, the sound is there but the excitement is lacking.”

Reviews of Frank Zappa, Journey, Lake, and Carlos Santana followed.

After four semesters at SMC, Peterson earned his bachelor’s degree in communication arts/speech and rhetoric from Indiana University South Bend (IUSB). He then went on to make a name for himself as a reporter, one of Michiana’s steadiest sources of news for the past four decades.

Prior to that Peterson spent three years as a reporter for WXMG/WRBR-FM radio in South Bend.

Joining the NewsCenter 16 team, Peterson began to build a reputation as one of Michiana’s steadiest reporters, the sort of journalist other journalists admire. He was known for his ability to quickly grasp facts and to stay cool under pressure.

He covered education events early on. “Then we started covering the Indiana legislature,” he said. “We’d go for a week at a time in the old days. You’d shoot your story on Monday because you had to get your physical tape to the airport and get it on a plane to fly it back to South Bend. Nothing like the cell phone stuff we see now.”

Why he never anchored

He never aspired to a more glamorous position, like anchoring.

“That isn’t what I was in it for, sitting around reading other people’s stuff,” Peterson said. “The attraction to me was to get out of the building, go mix



V8 Moment

at SMC

Led to Life's Passion

St. Joseph chiropractor Dr. Sandy Martin came to Southwestern Michigan College to collect the full-ride scholarship she qualified for as Eau Claire High School's 2004 valedictorian.

The former Sandy Von Koenig thought she wanted to become a nurse but soon realized a better fit for her to help people while getting them healthy would be chiropractic, a form of alternative medicine concerned with the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system.

Martin, 39, started All Star Family Chiropractic after graduating from Sherman College in South Carolina in 2013. (She actually finished her bachelor's degree online through Excelsior University in Albany, N.Y., at the same time she was at Sherman.)

"My class was like 14 people," she said. "It's very small, so we got a lot of personal attention, which is also what I liked about SMC. You knew everyone. You knew your professors, who set us up to have positive relationships with other students."

For Martin that faculty member was Jackie Perry, who taught chemistry prior to Dr. Douglas Schauer.

Her favorite memory while at SMC is hiking the Grand Canyon on one of Ron Gunn's trips.

She left SMC in 2006 with two degrees: an associate of science in chiropractic and an associate of arts in physical education.

Above and beyond

Martin finished her formal schooling but not her education. She trains with TLC, a group of elite chiropractors that goes above and beyond the minimum state requirements for licensure to make sure her office is always performing at the top in practice and in education.

She is Webster-certified and has taken more than 200 educational hours with the International Chiropractic Pediatric Association in the care of pregnant women and children.

The Webster Technique, for example, “opens up” the pelvis and “provides space” for the baby to move and continue development. The technique itself consists of chiropractic adjustments to the lower back as well as abdominal massage.

‘I love to help people’

“I love to help people,” Martin said. “I recognized that the techniques I had learned work, but they don’t always work for all people, so I wanted to learn as many techniques as possible to help as many people as walk through my doors.”

Today, “I coach other chiropractors,” she said. “Reverse engineering is what I teach a lot of people. What kind of life-style do you want?”

“I opened my own office right after graduation. My husband’s from St. Joseph. We got married in 2009 and moved down to South Carolina. Three and a half years later we moved back to Michigan because we have a lot of family in the area. I opened my practice in downtown Benton Harbor. I outgrew that space within five years, bought another chiropractic office, and merged the two practices together.”

Today, All Star Family Chiropractic is located on Cleveland Avenue in St. Joseph, where the Martins reside.

“I’ve been practicing for 12 years. I was on my own for 10 years,” Dr. Martin said, “and I now have an associate for the past two years. We’re growing to the point where we could probably bring on another.”

Finding her passion

“I’ve been going to the chiropractor every other week since I was 4 years old,” she said.



“I worked for him when I was 18—the same year I started at SMC. It was like a V8 moment. I switched my major and started moving in another direction. I had seven teachers in my family. I knew I wasn’t going to do that. I actually wanted to be a marine biologist until I entered college.”

Martin followed her new-found passion and after graduating from SMC went to Sherman, her chiropractor’s alma mater. She has continued learning and growing ever since.

“I could have a second home and a boat for the investments I’ve made in the office,” she laughed. “But I continue to buy tools that heal people, like a shock-wave therapy system and decompression machines. We have tools to help all types of people, and I know eight different techniques. There’s always something new to learn.”

“I even have a bucket list, like hormonal balancing. Women ages 35 to 55 are going through a ton of hormonal changes from overweight, overstressed, not sleeping well, and huge mood swings. Chiropractic is only a piece of the puzzle. I’m in the middle of writing a book. Teaching at Sherman College in South Carolina would be my retirement job.”

Guiding Martin is her belief that people are meant to help each other.

“When you find your passion or your



purpose...when you find out what you’re best at and can solve someone else’s issue—with them not for them—you’re living your best life. When you’re on fire, people will come to you. It’s all energy. Whatever you put out, you will get back, though maybe not always in the way you think.”

SMC Generates over \$58 Million Per Year for Cass County

Southwestern Michigan College shared a comprehensive study that confirms the college is a major economic engine for Cass County. With 331 employees and an annual expenditure for goods and services of \$19.8 million, SMC generates significant positive impact for taxpayers.

SMC's effect on Cass County alone is estimated at \$58.4 million per year, or enough to support 1,017 jobs. That includes \$40.2 million in alumni impact, \$17.7 million spent on current college operations, and student spending of \$519,600.

An independent study conducted during summer 2024 by industry leader Lightcast analyzed data from the 2022-23 fiscal year. It found the college benefits regional businesses by increasing consumer spending while also feeding a steady flow of qualified, trained workers into the labor force, increasing the productivity of the firms that hire them.

"We know the hard work of our faculty and staff has helped so many students chart their

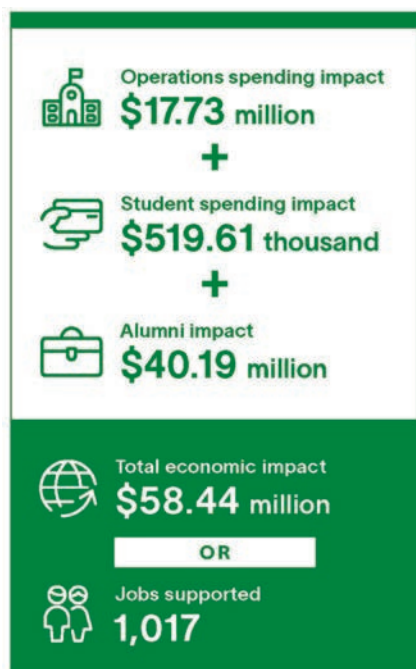
course to better lives," said Interim President Brent Brewer. "What we do is so much more than just workforce training, and it's important to quantify just how big of an economic engine Southwestern Michigan College is for Cass County and the region."

Lightcast's two-pronged analysis combines economic and investment impacts. SMC, which celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2024, enriches students' lives by lifting their lifetime earnings and helping them realize their individual potential by learning skills, networking with professionals, building self-confidence, and landing higher-paying jobs.

The study shows that students in the 2022-23 cohort will see a return of \$5.28 for every dollar they invest in their education at SMC and will earn \$65.2 million more in earnings over their working lives.

That translates to an annual return on their SMC investment of 18.11 percent, quite favorable when compared to the stock market's 30-year average annual return of 10.1 percent.

Going beyond just its taxing



» Those interested in reviewing the study's full results can do so at swmich.edu/community/public-information/economic-impact/



district, the college also benefits state taxpayers through increased revenues coupled with a reduced demand for government-supported social services.

For the full seven-county service area of Cass, Berrien, Van Buren, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph counties in Michigan and St. Joseph and Elkhart counties in Indiana, the study shows that SMC's annual impact swells to over \$224.1 million, enough to support 2,955 jobs, as alumni are more likely to reside in that larger region, bringing their higher incomes and business productivity to businesses there.

Overall, Cass County taxpayers furnished SMC with \$15.0 million in 2022-23. They benefit in the

amount of \$22.0 million through added tax revenue and public-sector savings. A reduced demand for government services translates into another \$2.2 million benefiting taxpayers.

For every dollar of public money invested in SMC, taxpayers receive \$1.61 in return over the course of students' working lives.

State support of SMC amounted to \$32.2 million. Michigan's economy is projected to grow by \$267.4 million during students' working lives, with society benefiting from another \$7.01 million of public and private-sector savings. For every dollar invested in SMC, the state reaps \$8.53.



Student Perspective

\$65.2 million

Benefit: Higher future earnings

\$12.4 million

Cost: Tuition, supplies, opportunity cost



Taxpayer Perspective

\$24.3 million

Benefit: Future tax revenue, government savings

\$15.0 million

Cost: State and local funding



Social Perspective

\$274.4 million

Benefit: Growth in state economic base, future earnings, tax revenue, and private and social savings

\$32.2 million

Cost: All college and student costs

For every \$1...

Students gain in lifetime earnings

\$5.28

18.1%

Rate of return

Taxpayers gain in added tax revenue and public sector savings

\$1.61

3.2%

Rate of return

Society gains in added income and social savings

\$8.53

n/a*

Rate of return

Future benefits are discounted to the present.

* The rate of return is not reported for the social perspective because the beneficiaries are not necessarily the same as the original investors.

Fishing South Africa in December



Southwestern Michigan College freshman Colten Dickerson, 19, of Zeeland, will be Michigan's sole angler on Team USA at the Tri Nations Bass Fishing Tournament in South Africa this December.

Dickerson, is one of just 13 selected nationwide for the Bass Youth Team to

"go for gold" against South Africa and Zimbabwe. Team USA captured bronze in 2024, when the Zimbabwe National B.A.S.S. Federation hosted the inaugural event at Mazvikadei Dam.

"We're going to make gold happen," he said.

"I was messaged out of the blue by the Team USA coach. It seemed too good to be true. The first thing I did was a lot of fact-checking to make sure it was legit before I responded. I honestly don't know how he heard of me," but it might have something to do with him and his partner being ranked second in the state and in the top 30 in the United States, plus he knew a current Team USA member from Illinois from fishing against him.

"You could say I was surprised," he said. "At this point we've had several team Zoom calls because we're all over the country. The first one we planned how to research this body of water," Loskop Dam.

The curved gravity arch dam on the Olifants River in Mpumalanga, South Africa, was built in 1939 and renovated in 1979. Located near Groblersdal and Middelburg, it is a popular tourist destination within the Loskop Dam Nature Reserve, known for its wildlife, including antelope, leopards, crocodiles, and hippos. The dam primarily serves for irrigation and offers activities like boat cruises for game viewing, fishing, and hiking.

"We've got our travel plans pretty well nailed down," said Dickerson, who set up a GoFundMe page to cover airfare. "We won't meet until we get to the airport. It's about 26 hours travel time. We're flying from O'Hare (Chicago) to Newark (New Jersey), then from Newark into Johannesburg."

Dickerson, who is studying mechatronics and robotics, is well-traveled domestically from fishing for the Zeeland Fish Hawx club starting in middle school then the Zeeland West Dux in high school "I've been to Ontario, Canada, but Africa's a first. I've never been overseas," he said.

"More than anything, I wanted to go to school to be able to fish college events," he said. "That was always kind

of my dream—to go to a college and get a scholarship to bass fish.”

Charter boat captain

Dickerson’s ultimate goal is fishing professionally. However, entry fees for the pro series and their qualifying events are expensive, and sponsorship is key. But he has a plan.

“I’m going for my captain’s license over the winter. I’ve been first mating on a charter boat on Lake Michigan out of South Haven the past few years, which has been a huge source of my income. I’m going to actually run them next year.

“Depending on what kind of sponsorship I can gain throughout college, if I get enough I’ll go directly to fishing qualifying events to get into the pro series. If I don’t gain the sponsorships needed, then I will continue a year or two of captaining charters. That will give me enough to fish a season or two of opens—hopefully enough to qualify.”

Dickerson credits teammate Pete Johnson from Rockford, whom he fished against in high school, with putting SMC and Bass Fishing Head Coach Zachary McNary on his radar.

His hometown, Zeeland, is about five miles southeast of Holland. Despite his proximity to Lake Michigan, Dickerson would more likely be found fishing inland lakes.

“There’s not much bass fishing in Lake Michigan because there’s nothing out there for them,” he said, “just sand and water. Bass are predators,” and opportunists which use camouflage and ambush tactics to hunt a wide range of prey.

“Pierheads, however, are known to have smallmouth bass,” he added.

His passion for fishing began “as soon as my grandfather could get a Spiderman rod in my hand. When I caught my first memorable bass, I was probably 9.”

An “outdoorsy” guy in general, Dickerson also enjoys hunting, though not ice fishing. “I’m not a fan of sitting in one spot,” he said. “I like going out and actively searching.”

Dickerson said the format in Africa will be similar to American tournaments except instead of staying with your

partner throughout, he’ll be paired with participants from different teams. “You pre-fish with a Team USA member, then during the three-day event, one day I’ll be paired with an angler from Zimbabwe and another with a South African.”

According to Dickerson, there’s plenty of science involved in modern competitive fishing, and that will be even truer in South Africa. “Proximity to the equator has a large effect on fish,” Dickerson said. “Elevation is also a large factor because we’ll be 5,000 feet closer to the sun. Temperatures are hot, I’m hearing 115 average. December is their summer.

“We’re going to have a single day to practice. The winner is decided on total weight over the three-day event. Each day you’re allotted the weight of five

combined bass. Besides Olympic-style medals, you get to network for two eight-hour days on the water with guys from across the world and get to know each other.”

For more than 20 years Zimbabwe and South Africa have competed against each other, taking turns as Tri Nations Cup hosts. Zimbabwe won the past five times, including the previous year in South Africa. Dickerson said the contest hopes to expand in the future by adding Canada and Mexico.



More Roadrunners Living Large:

Finding Solutions To



Safe, affordable, on-campus housing that offers comfort and community is important to students...and a big part of the whole college experience. When a college does a good job at providing quality housing options for its students, it can lead to other challenges, such as housing shortages and waitlists. While some may say these are good growing pains, they still require solutions.

Over the past three years, Southwestern Michigan College has explored ways to alleviate the housing shortage on campus. Extensive feasibility studies were conducted on several potential solutions—including converting the upper floor of the Dale A. Lyons Building into housing, repurposing an off-site apartment complex into residential halls, and constructing an extension onto one of the three current residence halls.

Option 1

The Lyons option would have required investing \$11 million to gain approximately 99 beds, a cost of over \$111,110 per bed, and moving some of the programs in the building to other campus locations.

The renovations surrounding this option would have disrupted the academic programs housed in building—access and safety, noise and dust, and more. Adapting the space to accommodate the housing needs of students also raised concerns. Current SMC residence halls offer a lot of privacy and apartment-style suites. But kitchens, living areas, and bathrooms under this option would feature more community areas.

“We did a focus group with some students, and they said it was not ideal,” Interim President Brent Brewer said.

Option 2

Another option explored repurposing the existing One World Center on Dailey Road. It was projected to cost \$9 million for approximately 60 beds, about \$150,000 per bed. Brewer noted, if it had been chosen, this project would have encompassed a range of factors, such as purchasing the property, as well as demolition, construction, renovation, landscaping, security, and personnel.

In addition to the front building, which is being utilized as apartments, at the back of the property is a

lodge-type structure with classrooms and a kitchen that would need to be demolished to provide space for resident parking. SMC would also have had to build a security gate and establish and maintain a security presence to ensure student safety. Other factors would include initial and ongoing landscaping and maintenance, not to mention the cost of a permanent on-site, 24-hour residence hall manager.

Option 3

Expanding one of the current halls was priced at \$5 million for 51 beds, approximately \$98,000 per bed. Basically, plans detailed opening the end of the building so rooms could be added to each floor. This option would have resulted in some of the same concerns as the Lyons building option—access and safety, noise and dust. However, since plans included building around an existing stairwell, all current rooms would be available for student use during the duration of the project.

A different solution

“After careful consideration of the cost-effectiveness and long-

Growing ~~Housing~~ Pains



term impact, we determined that converting the existing commons areas in each residence hall into suites was the most efficient approach,” Brewer said. The two-phase project would add 36 new beds by fall 2025 for about \$3 million—around \$83,000 per bed, without impacting any of the currently available rooms but also without incurring any additional personnel costs, such as resident assistants, resident hall managers, or desk staff.

At its regular meeting on Jan. 10, 2024, the SMC Board of Trustees approved the addition of the new rooms to the three existing structures on the Dowagiac campus—Keith H. McKenzie Hall, William M. White Hall, and Thomas F. Jerdon Hall.

According to Brewer, the design phase began in February 2024, with the bidding process following in May. Then phase one of the construction in McKenzie and White halls ran from June to December. By January 2025, 24 of the proposed beds were complete so students could move in.

“We started construction over the summer so we could get the major renovations done over this seven-month period,” he said. “Then in July



2025 we finished the last 12. We could accommodate 390 (130 on each floor of the three halls), plus the 36 new beds, giving us occupancy for 426.”

Just in time, too. SMC housing was at full capacity this fall.

“This is a step in the right direction to grow the college,” said board Chairman Tom Jerdon. “Clearly, student housing is the key. It’s little different from say, a family farm expansion—which cannot be done without more acres, and SMC cannot expand without more student beds. The Board of Trustees is focused on a growth mission, and we will continue to make decisions with this in mind. With the achievements of this administration, the word is now out on SMC being the place to go to college, and now the challenge is meeting this demand,

which is always the best position to be in.”

Since completion of the project, students living on campus can choose between a four-person, private bedroom suite; two-person, private bedroom suite; or two-person, shared bedroom suite. A keycard is required to enter the residence halls, suites, and bedrooms, as well as the parking lot. All suites have kitchens, and most of them feature a full-sized refrigerator, oven, microwave, and dishwasher. Each suite offers full bathrooms shared only with suite mates. Other amenities for Roadrunners living on campus include on-site laundry, central air, Wi-fi and cable, and free parking. Want to know more about student housing at SMC?

Visit swmich.edu/housing.

Composes Specific Plan For Each Patient



After 15 years as a music therapist, Kelly Garland-Egeler can still say, "Even on bad days at work, it's transformative."

Garland-Egeler, a 2004 Dowagiac Union High School (DUHS) graduate who played clarinet, bass clarinet, and saxophone in the Jazz Ensemble, graduated from Southwestern Michigan College in 2006 in music and fine arts.

She went on to study music therapy at Eastern Michigan University, graduating in 2010 and subsequently interning at Mott Children's Hospital, where she provided musical comfort to newborns in the midst of the disorienting beeping of the neonatal intensive care unit.

Music therapy was 'a better fit'

"I did a research project my senior year at DUHS about what called to me. I found music therapy that way. I knew teaching wasn't for me. Music therapy is a much better fit. It's more process-oriented," Garland-Egeler shared.

Music therapy uses musical interventions designed and developed by a credentialed professional to address a variety of health care and educational goals, such as promoting wellness, managing stress, expressing feelings, enhancing memory, alleviating pain, improving communication, and

promoting physical rehabilitation.

Music therapists assess emotional well-being, physical health, social functioning, communication abilities, and cognitive skills through musical responses. They provide treatment for people of all ages who have mental health needs, developmental or learning disabilities, Alzheimer's disease and other aging-related conditions, substance abuse problems, and brain injuries. They even treat patients with acute and chronic pain.

Teaching is part of the job

"In some ways I am a teacher," said Garland-Egeler, who also plays piano, guitar, and ukulele. "Families come in looking for something that will be enriching for a child with special needs—piano lessons, guitar lessons, voice lessons. A music therapist typically will develop a treatment plan.

"I've recently started doing more hospice work because music therapy is a proven pain reliever."

Garland-Egeler's private practice is in Ann Arbor. Whether in her office or in a home, she works one-on-one to fill each patient's needs. For example, physically some students might struggle with fine motor skills and are unable to use a musical instrument unless it is adapted for them.

She is also adept at working to help patients overcome learning disabilities. Dyslexia is a familiar dysfunction that affects reading, but lesser known disabilities can also affect an individual's well-being, such as dysgraphia, which impacts a person's ability to write, or dyscalculia, which hinders an individual's ability to understand and work with numbers. In those cases, she tailors the music therapy treatment plan to the task at hand.

"Some kiddos use iPads with

applications on them to help communicate what they want," Garland-Egeler shared. "For video gamers, it can be the theme from 'The Legend of Zelda.'

"Some kids like The Beatles. Some like Taylor Swift. They tell me what their preferences are—and aren't," she said.

"In memory care, it might be Elvis Presley, Broadway musicals, or Big Bands. I look for their responses.

"Sometimes they just want to listen. Sometimes they fall asleep, which is totally fine if they feel safe."

Music in her personal life

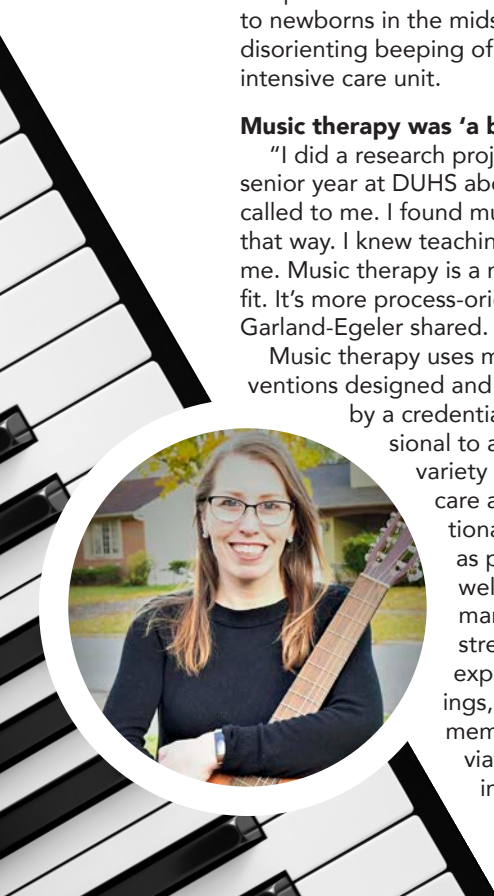
Garland-Egeler admits to occasional periods of sonic overload doing music as a career, but overall, being a music therapist has made her appreciate music even more.

Especially since she carves out time for personal preferences, such as Steely Dan, Genesis, Phil Collins, and practicing her piano. Recently, she mastered "If I Fell" by The Beatles.

"I create a lot of intention about what I listen to and sprinkle it throughout my week," she said. "For example, when I want to have a slow Sunday, I'll turn on something soulful, such as Otis Redding. My 8-year-old is into baseball so we'll play 'Centerfield' by John Fogerty.

"Living in Ann Arbor there's so much to experience musically. We went down a bluegrass rabbit hole for a while. It's seasonal, too. Summer is classic rock, though with my clients I did 'Porgy and Bess.' Fall is folksier, like Simon and Garfunkel."

According to Garland-Egeler, music therapy looks a lot of different from one patient to another because people are different, but with so many musical options, there's something that can reach each person. Her job is to find it.



Beth J. Cripe

The volunteering gene runs several generations deep for Beth J. Cripe, not just her own almost 15 years on the Southwestern Michigan College Board of Trustees but also her father's and grandfather's roles with the college's development.

Cripe, of Wayne Township, joined the board at its regular Jan. 10, 2011, meeting. She was sworn in by Chairman Dr. Fred L. Mathews to fill the unexpired term of Dan Wyant, who resigned to become a member of Gov. Rick Snyder's cabinet.

"I was asked out of the blue," Cripe recalled. "A spot was vacated and needed to be filled. Dr. Mathews asked my husband Matt and I out to lunch but didn't let on to what we would be discussing. I figured he was going to ask Matt to join the SMC board, but he asked me instead! You could have knocked me over with a feather."

Her range of community service led to her being awarded a Rotary Paul Harris Fellow despite never being a Rotarian, just as she co-chaired the Miss Dowagiac pageant and served on its executive committee in the 1990s though she never went out for queen in high school. Cripe also received the Distinguished Citizenship Award from the Order of the Elks.

"My parents instilled it at an early age," Cripe said of service, "and it was something we made sure to instill in our children."

Her grandfather, Richard M. Judd Sr. was a founding father of the SMC foundation board.

"When he went off the board, my dad went on, so our family has been on the foundation board at SMC since

its inception," Cripe said. "My dad was one of the original 50 who donated \$50 each to get the millage request on the ballot."

Dick Judd, best known for leading Michigan's oldest lumber business, served as Dowagiac Board of Education president in the early 1970s and taught history at Port Huron Community College for two years prior to moving home to Dowagiac. He served as foundation president in 1986 and in 2005.

Beth continues to serve as an unpaid college trustee for the satisfaction of "knowing that I am playing a part in promoting student success

to so many individuals who may not otherwise have been afforded the opportunity.

"I feel it's important to give back to the community that has been so good to me. As long as I am able, I will continue."

She co-owns and manages the books for her husband's dental practice, Matthew Cripe, D.D.S.

Cripe has also been development officer since 2007, serving as a liaison between the hospital, Beacon Dowagiac, and the Borgess-Lee Hospital Foundation. She spearheads two annual fundraising events, a golf outing and the Don Blackmond Memorial Wine and Beer Event.

"I also manage the Tree of Love campaign which provides breast screening and diagnostic services for uninsured and underinsured individuals living in Cass County," said Cripe, whose mother, Karen, served for many years on the Borgess-Lee Hospital Board and Borgess-Lee Foundation

Board as an active member and president.

Cripe graduated from Dowagiac Union High School in 1982, earned a bachelor's degree in economics from Albion College in 1986 and her master's degree in business administration from Loyola University in 1990. Following her graduation from Loyola, she worked for the Chicago Board Options Exchange and the Hull Trading Company.

After returning to Dowagiac, she worked five years for Adept Advertising in South Bend and in sales and marketing for Judd Lumber in Dowagiac.

In addition to her service with the college, she serves as chair of the Supervisory Committee at the Dowagiac Area Federal Credit Union, is an active member of Kappa Beta Sorority, and belongs to Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Church.

Their son, Andrew, graduated from DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. He was recently married. He and his wife are expecting their first child in January—Beth's and Matt's first grandchild.

Andrew works in sales and serves as executive branch manager with Energy Home Improvements in Indianapolis.

Their daughter, Margaret Ann, 28, of Chicago, passed away on June 5, 2023, due to unexpected complications from Type 1 diabetes.

A 2013 Dowagiac Union High School graduate, Maggie was a section leader in band and won varsity letters in tennis, soccer, and golf. She attended Albion College and joined Alpha Chi Omega Sorority, graduating in 2017.

After college, she went to work for Alight, utilizing her communications degree in marketing for six years. Maggie was fortunate to experience medical mission work in Haiti and travels to Europe with her family.





Mia Clay's

Quest for Purpose

Steered by
'Renaissance Soul'

Tamia "Mia" Clay's journey since graduating with honors in communications from Southwestern Michigan College in 2021 has been guided by her "Renaissance soul." It is her inquisitive nature that keeps leading her back to classrooms.

Clay, 24, taught middle school science and social studies as a long-term substitute during the pandemic, but her exploratory excursions since graduation exposed her to numerous industries, including fitness, fast food, food safety, and transportation.

Now her odyssey is delivering this Benton Harbor High School graduate back to SMC to begin work on her bachelor's degree through Ferris State University.

"As a first-generation college student, SMC was where I first learned to believe in myself," Clay said. "Earning my associate degree opened so many doors. I am looking forward to returning to SMC this spring to complete my bachelor's degree in teaching science. It means so much to feel seen and celebrated by the place where my educational journey began.

"SMC showed and taught me gracious professionalism, which simply means taking pride in your work and delivering a high-quality of work that supports the values of others," Clay said.





"With this, I have been able to experience a lot of different roles. I never forgot the support SMC gave me as a student. I am forever grateful for the feeling of belonging."

Clay was profiled as an SMC student who was also accepted by Stanford University after winning Michigan Engineering Student of the Year. In April 2019, she testified before the Senate Appropriations Sub-Committee on Talent and Economic Development on behalf of Jobs for Michigan's Graduates (JMG), which named her Student of the Year.

As Clay, eighth of 12 children, told legislators, "JMG changed my life. Like a lot of kids, I was told I would not amount to much. JMG showed me a different path, how employability skills mattered—things like communication, teamwork, showing up on time, and critical thinking. Many students at my school have barriers to overcome, like poverty, growing up in foster care, crime, drug abuse. Our JMG team is there to help not only overcome barriers, but succeed in school, employment, and life."

Teaching science

"I already had a lot of experience working with kids," she said. "My first job was as a teaching assistant at the Krasl Art Center in St. Joseph. In Benton Harbor, I applied to be a paraprofessional, but the principal was impressed with all the accomplishments on my resume, and she needed a long-term sub, so I was doing everything a certified teacher does" at Mildred C. Wells Academy charter school.

"It was hard because I was only four or five years older than the students I was teaching," she said. "My colleagues often mistook me for one of the kids."

"I've always loved math and science," said Clay, who participated in FIRST Robotics all four years of high school, switching from Michigan Lutheran to BHHS sophomore year.

"I was team captain all three years and took them to state twice. One of my classmates and I taught robotics to fourth and fifth graders at Martin Luther King Elementary School in Benton Harbor."

Saving her life through health

Clay, who is 5-foot-1, has lost 100 pounds pursuing her fitness training certification. She gained weight starting at 11. Her hip bone slipped out of its socket, necessitating major surgery and confining her to wheelchairs, walkers and crutches until she could walk again at 16.

"It took six years for my bones to heal," Clay said. "They told my mom I might never walk again." That didn't stop her.

Today, she can walk; however, she has eight screws and a plate in her right leg and one screw in her left leg.

"I took the certification to become a trainer to learn more about the human body and fitness health," she said. "I'm so proud of myself because I wouldn't have had a clue about how serious this injury I have to live with is. I'm an Elite trainer, which is right under Master. I'm also certified in corrective exercise, which is physical therapy; certified nutritionist; certified strength and conditioning coach, so I could help coach a sports team. I just ended my program and took the state exam. I don't see myself training others, though with this certificate I could be in a physical therapist's office or in a hospital."

Burgers, beans, and big trucks

Burger King hired her as a manager based on her teaching experience.

"That got my foot in the door," she said. "It was the first time I ever worked in fast food, not even in high school. I did that for eight months. It was fun. I'm a people person and an extrovert. I love talking and helping people. When you're working that kind of job, you can make somebody's day just by being a bubbly, outgoing person. It taught me how to navigate situations which could go sideways, but you can control yourself and how you react."

Her stint in food safety came in a green bean factory for Pero Family Farms, the Berrien County food processor. "That job was so cool because you're like a scientist," she said. "I wore a white lab coat in a building that's 36 degrees all the time to keep the green beans cool. My job was a mix of office and warehouse work. When drivers delivered beans, right after forklifts take them off trucks, I took their temperature. They have to be between 36 and 38 degrees. If they're too hot, we had to do a cooling process. Then they're rinsed, bagged, and shipped to Costco, Meijer, Walmart, Aldi's, and all the big stores."

She went from working beans with Pero to working as a truck service advisor arranging truck repairs with TravelCenters of America. "Truckers can stop to get food or take a shower. These super-tired drivers had attitudes that Burger King prepared me for. They wanted their trucks fixed fast so they could get back on the road. My job was typing in their work orders and making sure I had the right mechanics to complete that job. It was a fun job, too, but a lot of stress."

"I had no idea where my degree could take me. I want to do what God wants me to do. I'm waiting to feel my moment of purpose by continuing to put myself out there out of my comfort zone."

"I've just got to keep exploring and building a solid foundation, but teaching is the one job where I lose track of time and don't mind going the extra mile. I love learning, and teachers have to have great communication skills, too."

Making Writing and Critical Thinking Add Up



It's been 20 years since Cody Miller, then in his second semester as a student, joined Southwestern Michigan College as a math tutor. Now, the 2007 SMC honors graduate is in his second year as communications and media studies department chair.

Math and English aren't an either/or proposition to Miller, who moves effortlessly through both disciplines. His bachelor's degree from Indiana University South Bend is in math. His master's degree, also from IUSB, is in English.

"It's not that I lost my love for math," the 2016 Niles Campus Tutor of the Year told *The Southwester* newspaper in 2013. "I found my love for English and the power of words. It is why I

was a writing consultant and love to help people tell their story.

"Writing is power. It's growth. It's critical thinking about the self and the world around us. It's understanding that words are single interactions and reactions in a space full of other words and that when writers put them together on a page, something beautifully brilliant comes into existence. It's exciting, and seeing that excitement occur for a struggling writer is like seeing a flower open under the shade of an oak."

Sitting in his office in the Foster W. Daugherty Building, which is crammed with Marvel Universe and Dr. Who posters, books from hefty literature textbooks to slim flash fiction

volumes, and baskets of "fidget toys" to calm nervous students, Miller commented about that epiphany.

"When I got to IUSB as a math major, I minored in creative writing," which included literature, he said. "I loved poetry, short fiction, flash fiction. I stayed a year to double-major in mathematics and English.

"That was the lightbulb for me," he said. "I loved the readings, like James Joyce and Franz Kafka, and analyzing them. I wanted to communicate what I thought about these readings with other people, then write about them. English classes meant discussion."

Flash fiction and journalism

Flash fiction is an extremely short narrative, generally under 1,500 words, characterized by concise language and the ability to convey a complete story in a minimal space.

"It's like telling your story on



a grain of rice, and it took off," Miller said, "partly because of technology. You can read it and write it on your phone. People don't have time to sit down and read for long periods of time. It's one of the hardest forms of writing because you have to capture everything you need to in a shortened form.

"Tons of my students like fan fiction, which is super popular with Harry Potter, but flash fiction has to be isolated, not part of something bigger known in the outside world."

While journalism courses per se no longer exist, Miller said, ENGL 103 and 104 provide foundational expository prose strategies with writing assignments ranging from analysis to persuasion. Expository prose informs, explains, describes, or defines a topic, relying on clear, factual, and objective language—such as news articles, textbooks, and research papers, which rely on verified facts, evidence, clarity, and a straightforward tone.

"First, students write essays to find their voice and how to tell a story, then they write a rhetorical analysis paper on

how out-in-the-world writing and images try to persuade you and examine how they engage you emotionally. That paper is the closest they are going to come to writing something with journalistic integrity. Unbiased. Not passing off their opinions as truth, as so often happens in our culture. This is information-driven research passed on to readers in an unbiased fashion.

"In ENGL 104 they write persuasive papers, making an argument around a debatable topic by engaging the strategies learned in 103," Miller said. "We try to steer students away from typical hot-button issues to something they're passionate about and want to argue for or against. Journalists also need interpersonal communications skills to interview people and to work with them, like pitching an idea to an editor."

The communications umbrella covers a range of topics, from writing grant proposals to non-fiction writing, such as memoirs.

Helping students two ways

"We help students in two ways," Miller said. "One is getting them on the path to

somewhere else like a four-year, if that's their goal. And we can help students understand what college is, if it's right for them, and if they want to go further or if they want to pursue trade skills, such as automotive or welding to get into industry.

"That's what I like about SMC. We're not just vocational, although we offer vocational programs. What's important is that we provide the total college life experience to get students ready for a university and be even more successful when they get there.

"The department has a student interest group. We take two trips each semester.

"We also try to engage students in the literary world by taking them to Notre Dame, St. Mary's, or IUSB to hear a literary reading, be it poetry, short stories, or a novel," Miller said. Other times authors come to campus, like Angeline Boulley, whose debut novel, *The Firekeeper's Daughter*, named one of the best young adult books of all time by Time magazine, spoke in October 2021.

Miller, who was in sixth grade when he started reading the Harry Potter series, wasn't a fan of school until his freshman year at Brandywine High School when he met Ruth Kittleson, who withheld an "A" in a subject which came easily to Miller.

She taught me "that a 'B+' was what I earned. I was not yet good enough to earn an 'A.' It was kind of a wake-up call that I had to work harder if I wanted to achieve the next level and not settle."

Kittleson became a major mentor to Miller in high school, helping him understand how to better himself through education. "As a senior I taught a basic freshman math class to struggling students under the supervision of an instructor," he said. "I truly loved teaching before I even got to college. She gave me that opportunity."

When he came to SMC as a student, he met Dr. (Keith) Howell, retired dean of arts and sciences and former math and science department chair, and Hailey Sheets, former department chair. "I always find people like Hailey Sheets and Dr. Howell to connect with to truly help me grow."

He tries to pay his good fortune forward by taking promising students under his wing "because those are the types of things that keep you going as a teacher, when students are excited for your class."

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Thomas F. Jerdon
Chairman



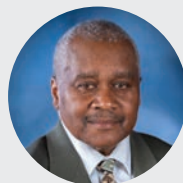
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