Thrive
Commencement, Iris Reunions and a Day of Giving to Remember
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When Barbara Farner Laedtke first crossed the stage to receive her diploma from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 1981, her husband, Stephen Laedtke ’68, was right there, cheering her on from the audience. This past May, when Barbara walked once more after completing her master’s in English education from UWSP, Steve was able to help celebrate her accomplishment from a slightly more favorable vantage point. He processed in with his wife and her fellow graduates as a Golden Iris Reunion participant.

Each year, alumni celebrating 50-plus years since their graduation from UWSP, highlighting the class celebrating 50 years spot-on, are invited back to campus to participate in the event. Golden Iris members are treated to a slate of activities, including a Champagne brunch, campus tours and “Alumni College” classes. The capstone of the experience is the chance to process in with the current graduating class during the commencement ceremony.

Sometimes the intersection of celebrations by alumni and graduates encompasses more than mere geography and fond memories. The Laedtkes are a case in point. In a way, the weekend became something of a family reunion. On the graduate side, Barbara was joined by her son John—also getting his master’s in English Education—who unfortunately was not able to attend the commencement ceremony because he was fulfilling his student teaching requirement in Spain. (“That was disappointing for me,” says Barbara.) In addition to Steve, Golden Iris attendees that weekend included his sisters, Carla Webster ’64 and Louise Van Der Horst ’64, and a cousin, Bonnie Bach ’65.

“When I found out that my husband was invited to be a part of the Iris celebration, I was initially taken aback,” Barbara admits. “No one else in my family was going to be there, so I was sad that Steve wasn’t going to be my audience.” She says she quickly changed her mind when she realized how much Golden Iris participants processing in with students enhances the graduation experience. It also didn’t hurt that Steve was perfectly willing to downplay his Golden Iris involvement in favor of acknowledging Barbara’s big day.

“Like a good husband, I made sure the graduation festivities were all about her,” he says. “I can attest to how hard she worked for her master’s degree and am very proud of her achievement.”

Coincidentally, another familial situation occurred as part of the Silver Iris Reunion, an event instituted this year that celebrates alumni graduating anywhere from 25 to 49 years prior. David Falkosky Sr. ’93, who was in the 25-year-reunion class, processed in with his son David Jr. ’18. Both men are now the proud recipients of bachelor’s degrees in accounting from UWSP.

The Laedtkes seem to have thoroughly enjoyed the Commencement-Golden Iris combo weekend. Barbara says the brunch and luncheon with Chancellor Bernie Patterson were excellent, and that the couple enjoyed attending the Albertson Award dinner honoring the top achievers from the graduating class, held on Friday. She especially enjoyed taking part in her second UWSP Commencement ceremony.

“The graduation was beautiful,” she remarks. “In 1981, I remember that all the bright gymnasium lights were on and no attention had been paid to the theatrical elements that we now see in graduation ceremonies. The stage, the lighting, and the decorations were magnificent, as well as the carved wooden cupola that we all touched.”

All in all, the weekend was enjoyable and memorable for the Laedtkes, a fitting way for them, as both graduates and alumni, to reconnect with a place that means so much to them.

“I owe my marriage, my career, and all the advantages I have had in my life to my experiences at UWSP,” says Barbara.
A seasoned host, moderator, interviewer and lecturer, Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization President and Chief Creative Officer Ted Chapin is no stranger to speaking before large crowds. But then again, his appearance on May 19 at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point marked the first time he had been tapped as a commencement speaker. As such, he had some pretty “Big” shoes to fill—at least in his own mind.

“When my older daughter graduated . . . the commencement speaker was the father of one of her classmates,” Chapin told the 1,300 total graduates and their guests assembled in the Multi-Activity Center during two separate ceremonies. “The classmate was Elizabeth Hanks, and her father, the charismatic Tom Hanks, gave an insightful talk. So, in thinking about the privilege I have been given today, it is certainly my hope to be more in the Tom Hanks mold.”

Early on in his address, Chapin remarked, “Over my life I have learned to say what you want to say and get on with it.” And that is exactly what he did during a 10-minute speech that had him briefly reminiscing about lessons learned when dealing with Broadway luminaries such as Julie Taymor (“The Lion King”) and Chapin’s former boss, Stephen Sondheim. He left audience members with an important one-word takeaway—listen. “In thinking about what I have liked or not liked about commencement talks in the past, I figured one simple piece of advice would be better than trying to speak about big, worldly matters,” he said prior to the talk.

UWSP-Broadway connections led Chancellor Bernie Patterson to invite Chapin to speak at commencement. Former UWSP students Laura Osnes ’05 and Tatyana Lubov ’15 each have starred as the titular character in “Rodgers + Hammerstein’s Cinderella”—Osnes in the original 2013 Broadway cast and Lubov in the national touring production. Chapin and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization oversee the mounting of classic R&H shows, including “Cinderella,” which originally was written for television.

Chapin does not know Lubov well, but he and Osnes go back a ways. In addition to “Cinderella,” she has starred in other R&H vehicles: “Carousel” at Chicago’s Civic Opera House, the little-known “Pipe Dreams” as part of the New York City Center Encore! series and a recent revival of “South Pacific” on the Great White Way. Osnes also has performed in a tribute to Chapin, and recently worked with him in a benefit concert version of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s “Show Boat” at the legendary Bucks County Playhouse in Pennsylvania. The actress portrayed the female lead, Magnolia, and Chapin served as the show’s narrator.

“I adore Laura,” said Chapin. “She is a rare talent, and a rare human being.”

While in Stevens Point, Chapin toured campus and met with UWSP theater students for a Q&A session. He also found time to conduct a self-guided architectural treasure hunt, which led him to the historic Fox Theater on Main Street. “My colleague and I drove around downtown to see if we could spy on old Vaudeville house that most towns like that have,” he said, “and we did!”

But the highlight of his trip was, obviously, giving the commencement address. Through eleventh-hour editing—spurred by careful listening on the part of the speaker himself—Chapin managed to make the closing of his speech on the importance of listening even more topical by referencing discord over UWSP’s planned academic restructuring.

“I would ask, in keeping with what I’ve said up here today, that each and every one of you, no matter how involved you are in the discussion, listen to what everyone else is saying and feeling,” he said. “Listen to what others say. You won’t learn anything while you are talking. Listen to those who agree with you and listen to those who don’t. The right solution will come only if you all keep an open mind to solving your problems together.”
Numbers don’t lie. Whether measured by how many gifts were received, the number of states from which donors hailed or the overall amount raised, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point’s 2018 Day of Giving was a smashing success. Once again, the D.O.G., as the event is acronymically and affectionately known at UWSP, brought out the best in Pointers near and far.

Although only in its third year, the D.O.G. shows signs of tremendous growth as a fundraising vehicle. More than $150,000 was raised in a 24-hour period on May 1, with donors from 29 states making a grand total of 227 gifts. To put this in perspective, the previous one-day record for giving at UWSP was 123 gifts, set during the D.O.G. during its inaugural year (2016). This year’s total marks an increase of 121 percent. The number of states represented nearly doubled. “Our Pointer family rose to the occasion,” says Nicole Pare ’14, marketing and communications manager for advancement and D.O.G. organizer. “This day was a vote of confidence in our students and UWSP in general.”

The Day of Giving began as a complement to the university’s Then, Now, & Forever capital campaign, the public phase of which was launched in April 2016 and, with a year to run, stands on the cusp of meeting its $30 million goal.

“Oftentimes in campaigns you hear about the major gifts, like the $4 million endowment from Sentry Insurance. However, every gift made during the Capital Campaign counts toward the end goal,” Pare says. “A Day of Giving helps shed light on that and celebrates all the good that can come from a lot of smaller gifts and not just the major ones.”

Right from the start, the D.O.G. has been about meeting challenges and having fun while doing good. Pointers are encouraged to raise money for the university not only by donating directly, but by participating in social media activities. A donor or donors agree beforehand to pay a certain amount when an individual completes a certain activity. For instance, every selfie taken in UWSP gear on the day of the event and posted with the hashtag #UWSPGivesBack translates into one dollar given in support of student scholarships.

Generous donors also step forward and issue dollar-for-dollar matches. In 2016, Pat and Leslie Arendt matched every gift made during that year’s Day of Giving, for a total of $50,000 raised. Proving that you really can teach an old D.O.G. new tricks, organizers have switched that concept up a bit, expanding to a series of match challenges designed to benefit particular areas of campus. This year, new content was released on social media every hour, and a new challenge was issued to meet the match. Specific “power hours” revolved around, and benefitted, the Alumni Association, the College of Natural Resources, the College of Letters and Science, UWSP Athletics, the College of Fine Arts and Communication, the College of Professional Studies and the Division of Student Affairs.

“Special thanks to Mike Pucci, Brad Duckworth, Tina Hill, Bill Schierl, Sarena Melotte, Dianne Pleuss and Alumni Association Board members for their generosity to support the Day of Giving power hours,” says Pare.

In conjunction with D.O.G. fundraising activities, organizers encourage Pointers to take part in Day of Service events that have them giving their time and talents in support of the university. In 2018, alumni chapters across Wisconsin and as far away as Phoenix, Arizona filled backpacks with food for children in need, cleaned up roadside trash, and baked hundreds of cookies with teens looking to gain work experience and leadership skills, among other volunteer activities.

Plans are already in the works for the next edition of the D.O.G., slated for May 7, 2019. This year’s event looks to be a tough act to follow, but Pare firmly believes her team, and Pointers everywhere, are up to the challenge.

“We plan to keep the momentum going,” she says. “We’re on the lookout for matching donors to sponsor power hours, to continue the tradition of having exclusive content for each hour. We also hope to add more challenges, such as looking to have someone from every state make a gift. As we have since the start of the D.O.G., we will continue to hold the Pointer Pride Selfie Challenge, to share our Pointer pride all over social media.

“We have set the bar high, but our Pointer family will step up to the plate.”

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As they filed out of the Multi-Activity Center on May 19, members of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Class of 2018 were treated to words of wisdom and advice tucked inside “Welcome to the Family” cards, many of which had been penned by UWSP alumni. The cards are part of a new tradition designed to build ties between alums and their newly minted counterparts.

This got us to thinking, “If given the chance, what would alumni say about and to their former selves upon their own graduation?” Here is a selection of quotes—some famous, some of their own devising—that previous UWSP graduates feel sum up their experience at Point.

**Kati Koster ’05**
“Dance like no one is watching.”
—Att. William Pukey

**James Van Kirk ’07**
“And I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”
—Robert Frost

**Rachel Ridgeway ’14**
“What we learn with pleasure we never forget.”
—Alfred Mercier

**Sarah Olsen ’16**
“You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think.”
—Christopher Robin (A.A. Milne)

**Katie Teske ’17**
“Having a dream is what keeps you alive. Overcoming the challenges makes life worth living.”
—Mary Tyler Moore

**Ethan Cates ’18**
“What a journey. I have made lifelong friends that I never would have imagined would mean so much to me.

[My] education is so invaluable, and all it took was taking one risk to change my life.”