Continued contact with Stout grads

Bob Ekman ’82 grew up in Park Ridge, Ill., a northern suburb of Chicago. Ekman made the wise decision to attend UW-Stout rather than Michigan State based on the hotel and restaurant management program and the atmosphere at UW-Stout. Ekman was active in several extracurricular activities at UW-Stout including the Hotel Sales and Marketing Association and the Advertising Association. He was one of the driving forces behind the now famous “Dirt Cheap Auction” at UW-Stout.

Upon graduation, he joined Marriott Corporation. He started as a sales and marketing trainee in Bloomington, Minn. From there he moved up the ranks and was transferred to various places including Maui, Hawaii. In 1989, he was again transferred and promoted to the position of director of marketing at the Minneapolis Marriott City Centre.

Ekman has a dream of starting his own hotel management and acquisitions company and in late 1989 that dream was fulfilled. Along with a friend, the Bricket Group of Chicago was formed. While Ekman was president, the company saw significant growth. Interested in new challenges, Ekman left Brickett and joined forces with Leeland Distributors as general manager and vice president of marketing. During his tenure with Leeland, revenue increased approximately $7 million. But he still had a yearning to get back into the hotel business.

In 1996, he did just that. “It gets in your blood and there is nothing you can do about it,” states Ekman. When an opportunity to join with Holiday Inn Worldwide as regional director of Franchise Sales and Development came up, he took it. “This was an area of significant interest for many years,” says Ekman. “One has the opportunity to assist others with their dreams and earn a decent income.”

Four “generations” of Stout graduates recently overcame time and distance to create a new patient food service program for the Myrtle Werth Hospital in Menomonie. A short time ago, a 1971 graduate of the then hospitality and tourism management program, was working in his Nashville, Tenn. office when he received a phone call from Richard Schirg ’71, a vice president with Romanos, one of the largest food consultants in the United States, found himself discussing the development of a room meal program for patients in a small hospital.

The caller, Karl Alexander Flom, a 1993 graduate in psychology who is currently enrolled in the master’s program in food and nutritional sciences at UW-Stout, was hesitant to mention where she was calling from and the name of the hospital, as she was sure that the consultant would have no concept of where she was and what type of hospital was involved. Besides, the budget to create this new program, even if it was feasible, was very tight, and the consultant’s fees would surely prove too expensive. The consultant insisted however, and soon learned that the city was Menomonie, Wis., and the hospital was the successor to the one where he spent many hours in his field experience program 30 years before—the Myrtle Werth Hospital-Mayo Health System.

Schirg was the first student from Stout to obtain field experience from the hospital. The hospital’s food and nutrition service department has continued to provide an opportunity for student time experience and earn some income since that time, a marvelous support for Stout.

The coincidence didn’t stop there for this consultant. Maggie Finn ’56 is a graduate of dietetics in 1956 who enjoys a career as a dietitian in Green Bay, Wis., and is the current department head of experiences program 30 years before—the Myrtle Werth Hospital.

The story of time and distance being overcome to create a remarkable project team continues as new UW-Stout hotel, restaurant and tourism management program students are being introduced to the complexities of healthcare food service. White, Marotz and Flom have enlisted the help of Professor Phillip McGuirk’s current Food Production Class in developing signature entrees and foods for the hospital room service menu. Perhaps a new tradition is being born from this effort, but one thing remains certain, Stout graduates are special people who bring an extra measure of caring and sharing to their careers.

As for the consultant, the trip back to Menomonie for the first project team meeting, his first visit since his 1971 graduation, has started a wonderful chain of events. He has connected with old classmates, attended the first Homecoming game in the new stadium (he knew the Blue Devils were going to come back and win that game) and is now active with the Stout University Foundation and the Alumni Association.

Glen was so impressed with the dedication and commitment of the faculty and the program itself, that he enrolled in the online global hospitality management degree program.

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If you have wind chimes in your home, you may want to check the maker. If the brand is Whispering Winds, they are made in Anacortes, Wash., by one of your fellow graduates.

When Lynn Christofersen ’78 graduated with a degree in vocational rehabilitation, making wind chimes was not in her plans. After graduation, Christofersen joined Stout friends Sharon Duffy Warner ’77 and Sharon Knes ’75 in Anacortes and fell in love with the area. She knew this is where she would make her home.

Using her degree, Christofersen worked in both the public and private sectors of rehabilitation. Her first position was with “Get There Social Services” and involved job placement and coaching for developmentally disabled adults who had recently been released from state institutions to a group home.

Christofersen left the field to join her husband in managing his musical instrument repair and luthier business. That business evolved into a specialty sawmill, cutting figured hardwoods to make beautiful and melodic chimes. Their collaboration leading Christofersen and her husband to start a business making wooden kaleidoscopes. It was while working at the sawmill that the idea for designing wind chimes was born.

The beautiful chimes are made of pewter, with each one individually molded—an extremely labor-intensive process. Walking through the plant and visiting with employees, you can feel the family atmosphere. It is one where everyone takes great pride in their job.

To continue with new ideas and maintain their creativity, an interdisciplinary design team has been formed. One of their most recent designs was a memorial for Sept. 11, with all the grieving families invited to decorate the chimes with personal messages. The final product is a beautiful and sentimental piece that is unique to each family that received it.

Christofersen stated she loves the Anacortes area as it offers everything she enjoys: camping, hiking, skiing and biking. Living on an island gives you a sense of community, she said.

For additional information on Christofersen and her business, visit the web site at http://www.whisperingwinds.com.

Eight years ago, they started with a 30-foot by 40-foot shop, one paid employee and three of their parents, who volunteered their labor for the first year. Within a very short time they had three trailers, two porta-potties and 35 employees. Today they have a 23,000-square-foot building, nearly 100 employees, their products displayed in 16,000 retail stores throughout the United States, and five sizes of chimes.

Now, Whispering Winds is a work site where any of us would appreciate the idea of going to work. It is located on Fidalgo Island, looking across Fidalgo Bay, with Mount Baker to the east. To the west you will find Rosario Strait and the beginning of the San Juan Islands. The beautiful chimes are made of pewter, with each one individually molded—an extremely labor-intensive process. Walking through the plant and visiting with employees, you can feel the family atmosphere. It is one where everyone takes great pride in their job.

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When you enrolled at Stout State in the fall of 1966, I was a confused young man that wasn’t sure what to do with my life. I had studied engineering for two years at another college and now at Stout, I was an Industrial Technology major. I enjoyed my classes in computer programming, mathematics, and industrial facilities planning, but there was something missing in my life. The second semester, and I don’t remember why, I signed up for Photography 101 and a film history class, decisions that would change my life forever. I also started playing guitar and by the next semester I was an art student. Four years later I graduated Stout with a B.S. in Art. Even though I was finding my path as an artist and musician, I still loved technology. During my last semester at Stout I took a class in television production only to be disappointed that the art department didn’t see it as an art class. My class project was a TV production called “Art is the Process” where I strung a long string around the studio while discussing art philosophy.

The next five years I spent in Madison working in a cheese factory while studying jazz guitar and the mathematics of composing music. In 1976 I moved to San Francisco and attended a recording arts trade school. With my Stout education in art and technology, I did very well at that school and a year later I landed a job in Hollywood, Calif. working for a company that designed and installed recording studios. I realized they that Hollywood, a place where they measure the neighborhoods with the number of recording studios per square mile, was where art and technology really came together.

One thing that any college education teaches is that it is possible to learn new things and how to go about doing that. Over the years I have taken many extension classes at UCLA studying everything from computer programming to screenplay analysis and it finally paid off. In 1991 I was asked to join the postproduction engineering staff at Universal Studios in Hollywood. A large motion picture studio is really just a big factory and although I work around movie and television stars everyday, what I do there goes back to my Stout education of industrial technology combined with an artistic vision.”

John Clavin '70

When my future husband and I entered Stout in 1956, there were approximately 600 students. There was an intimacy with faculty and classmates that would not have been possible in a larger population. A sense of family and community existed in the classroom, in our organizations, as well as on the dance floor. In contemplating the many attributes that were enriched during my experiences at Stout, that of racial tolerance seems especially significant since 9-11. Like many Stout students at the time, I came from a small community with a farm background, relatively insulated from the outside world. The very nature of Stout’s offerings attracted students from foreign countries. There were many Hawaiians, even before Hawaii became a State in 1959, as well as Africa and Ethiopia, that were financed by their countries to carry back the technology education for the betterment of their people. We all had similar goals—not only to become educated to enrich our personal lives, but to share our talents with our larger community. For these experiences, today I am grateful.”

Nancy Feuerstein McDonald B.S.’60, M.S. ’81
Before I enlisted into the Wisconsin Army National Guard it was implicit and understood that in the event of a national emergency I would be mobilized and deployed into combat anywhere in the world at anytime. I accepted this without hesitation, never envisioning that the combat zone would come to me.

My family has coped well with the terrorist attacks and their aftermath. Recently, however, my daughter expressed grave concern for my safety as I left on a business trip. The connection of flying in an airplane and disaster were inseparable in her mind. We were able to work through the trip, with the aid of a candy treat and gift, so that relieved her anxiety. The Pentagon staff provided grief counselors and clergy to anyone in need. The greatest relief for me came from phone calls and e-mail messages of friends and relatives. A great number of these messages came from UW-Stout alumni. Relating my experiences to friends and colleagues provided the greatest degree of relief, comfort and closure. Our country is now united with great pride in the resolve that this event will not shake our foundation, and our citizens are committed to the necessary course that will eliminate future acts of terrorism. It is truly an honor to work in support of the defense of our great nation that serves as a beacon of light to the world. This shining light, as seen in the eyes of our citizens, casts a beam that symbolizes the strength of freedom the world will follow.

Is it a beautiful Tuesday morning, starting out like any other workday in a routine manner. I caught the 5:25 a.m. bus arriving at the office at 6:20 a.m. in time for a workout and run. I made it to the office just after 8 a.m., with a fresh cup of coffee, and was ready to start the day. I read through a few e-mail messages and went over my work schedule for the day. Nothing indicated that this would be anything but a normal day. What happened next changed my life, our nation and the world.

The first reports were incredulous and incomprehensible. An airplane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York! This shock was further exacerbated by another plane crashing into the other tower before our very eyes! My colleagues and I were in disbelief. How could this happen? Who could be responsible for such an atrocity? The names of likely perpetrators were briefly discussed. The name of the ultimate suspect was the first on our list.

In the midst of this discussion, I took a phone call from my wife. She had called to wish me a happy birthday, unaware of the recent events. I updated her on what had happened in New York. Instinctively she expressed concern for my safety. I confidently reassured her that I should be all right; after all, this is the Pentagon. Obvious to the fact that Flight 77, hijacked by political extremists and loaded with 64 crew and passengers, was on a crash course for the Pentagon. I assured my wife I would be okay and said goodbye. Just as I turned to stand up from my chair, a horrendous explosion and devastating shock wave ripped through the building, nearly knocking me off my feet. The plane had struck the Pentagon, penetrating through the E, D and C Rings, stopping directly beneath my office. The wall and windows next to my desk shattered violently as an incredible rush of air escaped upward between the B and C Rings, pelting the windows and exterior walls with rocks and debris just inches away from me.

An eerie silence momentarily enveloped the office and was abruptly interrupted by my directive. “Let’s get the hell out of here!” Our office evacuated quickly to the Pentagon Center Courtyard and immediately we began to account for our colleagues. Fearing the potential of a second suicide plane, I attempted to exit through the 8th Corridor toward the north parking lot. I was met at the door by a large number of people running toward the center courtyard. This seemed to defy logic. I could only imagine that someone with a machine gun was at the exit! We retraced back into the center courtyard and evacuated to the south parking lot to what we thought would be a safe location. Just as we exited the building and entered the south parking lot, our greatest fears were realized. The security personnel announced that another hijacked plane was heading in our direction. Fortunately for us all, a few passengers, demonstrating exceptional bravery in the face of what must have been mind-numbing terror, commandeered the plane and it never arrived in Washington, D.C.

We quickly moved away from the building, only to watch in horror as the building burned and rescue personnel evacuated the dead and injured. We then moved across Interstate 395 to the front of the Pentagon City Mall. Shortly after we arrived, an Air Force fighter jet flew fast and low over the Pentagon. This brought cheers from everyone in the area. It was also the first time since the attack that I felt some sense of safety and security. During this flurry of activity, I vividly recall a sincere desire to contact my wife and family to let them know I was all right. My most fervent desire was to be reunited with my family. I had grave misgivings of leaving the area knowing that some families would never again see their loved ones. I received a ride from a friend and arrived home to the loving arms of my wife and family.

The events of Sept. 11 remain vividly etched in my mind—the fire, smoke, relentless wail of emergency sirens and the look of terror on the faces of people as they exited the building. It seems as if it happened yesterday. I still recall two co-workers who had evacuated the building and found sanctuary on a small grassy area near the Pentagon City Mall. As they sat there together catching their breath, I could see the adrenaline begin to diminish from their faces, only to be replaced by shock and horror as they reflected on their close encounter with death.

As president of business operations for the Astros, Pam Gardner, ’78 is one of the highest-ranking women executives in professional sports.

Gardner says she didn’t think a whole lot about gender issues when she took the job. “I feel privileged that Drayton gave me the opportunity. But whether I’m a woman or a man, I still have to get the job done.” Simply, she’s in Gardner charge of everything in the Astros organization off the field. What happens on the field falls under the jurisdiction of baseball guru Tal Smith.

Often Gardner and Smith, president of baseball operations, talk and swap ideas. She...
Weber plagued with design curse

For some creative individuals, being plagued with the design (aesthetics) curse implicates all aspects of life, not only dictates a certain lifestyle, but also defines the individual’s identity. This curse manifests itself in various ways: its primary form is a passion for a particular art form, vocation, skill set or hobby. This curse or affliction produces the critical assessment of all that we see, hear, touch and smell. It is possible that this curse can develop into something that is good, constructive and even profound—possibly producing significant developments such as fine art work, beautiful music, humane architecture and great food.

For me the curse was realized at an early age, perhaps an innate quality genetically transferred from my grandfather, an artist and art director in the advertisement industry. As far back as I can remember, I was always involved in producing/experimenting artistically, also disassembling various products and constructing objects with an intended purpose. This curse led me to the University of Wisconsin-Stout and the art-industrial design program, where in 1987 I graduated. The UW-Stout system and the art-industrial design program supported and fostered this curse positively, providing the knowledge, tools and skills that have enabled me to work and live in a way that is very satisfying.

Since graduation, I have worked for KI, the furniture maker in Green Bay, Wis., then joined William Stumpf + Associates, an industrial design consultancy in Minneapolis. I married Judy Kilian, a 1987 UW-Stout graduate, who spends her days nurturing our two children, Natalie, two, and Nicholas, three, and managing the household and exploring her personal interests.

In 1999, William Stumpf and I formed the partnership Stumpf, Weber + Associates (SWA) in Minneapolis, which builds upon the design philosophy, principles and values that Stumpf has established over the last 30 years. SWA is retained by the Michigan furniture maker Herman Miller Inc. We develop furniture products primarily for the contract (office) furniture market. Products accredited to SWA, are the Aero Chair, renowned for its technical innovation, high performance/comfort, unique architecture and commercial success, the Caper Chair family, which responds to the frequent and impromptu nature of collaborative work, and the EihoSpace Furniture System, which supports the needs of the individual worker by providing a humane work environment. SWA is also responsible for various ancillary furniture solutions.

For more information about these products, connect to http://www.hermanmiller.com.

SWA has continued to support the UW-Stout art-industrial design program by sponsoring of an internship program, and currently employs two Stout graduates, Jason Holt ’97 and Jennifer Baeur ’98, who both have contributed to the success of SWA and Herman Miller Inc.

We’d love to hear from you

We would love to hear some of your favorite stories during your years on campus. If you would like to participate in our “Reminiscing” column, please send us your memories, along with a current photo of yourself. Stories will be held for three years and every opportunity will be given for publication. The Alumni association reserves the right to edit all stories.
Photographing tall millionaires

Ask him what he does for a living and he will tell you he photographs tall millionaires who are slightly more agile than he. Get close enough to read the credit card-sized credentials hanging around his neck and you will see the words: Official, Bucks/NBA Photos, Gary G. Dineen.

Dineen ’82, an industrial education graduate, has spent a good part of the last 15 years seated on a wood-planked floor with camera in hand, mirroring the same levels of intensity, skill, precision and lightning-fast reflexes of those he photographs. A contract photographer for the National Basketball Association, he currently acts as the official team photographer for the Milwaukee Bucks. “Photography is my passion,” said Dineen. “I eat, sleep, and breathe it.”

Dineen’s passion for photography began in his youth. At Homestead High School in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, he worked on the yearbook staff and became passionate about the art of photography. During those experiences, he realized that photography was a potential career path and he started taking photography courses in high school. This led to his decision to pursue photography as a career.

Dineen was 15 when it was time to decide on a college and major. Dineen chose practicability over desire. “I loved photography but I never thought I was good enough,” he said. “I shot the majority of my photos as a hobby and I believed what I said. If you wanted to make money shooting professional sports, you would be wise to be really good at your job because there aren’t enough room at the top.”

Dineen chose UW-Stout because of its strong graphic arts and education programs. Sharing his passion with others through teaching would be the next best thing to becoming a professional sports photographer. He packed his camera and zoom lenses and headed to Menomonee Falls in the fall of 1978. As a freshman at UW-Stout, he continued his involvement with athletics, becoming head equipment manager for the football team. When game preparations were complete, he deferred to his assistants and grabbed his camera to cover the action.

Every few weeks during the season, Dineen would assemble a slide show and project the images in the locker room as players were arriving for practice. They got to see themselves as photojournalists and, Dineen made some extra money from the additional practice. They got to see themselves in the locker room as players were assembling a slide show and projecting the images.

Dineen spent the year taking graduate courses and providing his photographic services to the university. He was paid to shoot a variety of subjects in and outside of the classroom, including his wife, a member of the gymnastics team. Those experiences prepared him for a full-time position as a staff photographer for Marquette University, beginning in 1984.

There he provided photography for publications and instructional use, but most importantly, he now had the chance to shoot NCAA Division I men’s basketball.

During his second Marquette basketball season, Dineen approached the sports information director for her opinion on what he needed to do to realize his dream of becoming an NBA photographer. He expected some pat advice but instead watched as she flipped through her Rolodex, got on the phone and five minutes later told him there would be a pass waiting for him at Thursday’s game. “To be successful in photography, it needs to be your passion, you have to have the talent, but you also need a break,” said Dineen. “This was my break.”

For the first three years, he was one of several photographers who paid their dues by trading photographs for the opportunity to work the games. In 1988, the Bucks moved into the Bradley Center and sought to improve the level of photography along with other areas of the organization. “Management wanted a more cohesive effort and high-quality images,” said Dineen. Those needs, along with advanced technical requirements of the new building, narrowed the field of photographers to two, with Dineen being one of them.

Eventually, Dineen became the sole team photographer. The added workload began to take its toll personally and professionally. Something had to change. For years, the Bucks had been considering the NBA’s offer of providing photography services for all of their games. The Bucks finally agreed to the last teams to do so, but with the stipulation that Dineen remain as their photographer. All parties agreed and Dineen became one of a select few NBA contract photographers, beginning with the 1995–1996 season.

In 1996, Dineen left his Marquette job to become a full-time freelancer. Since then, in addition to his NBA job, he has covered professional baseball and football for Associated Press and the new defunct United Press International. He is the team photographer for the Milwaukee Wave, a professional indoor soccer team; and the house photographer at the Bradley Center, covering concerts and other special events.

Highlights of his career include covering Michael Jordan’s last three NBA Championship games in Chicago and the Mark McGuire/Sammy Sosa homerun derby of 1998.


Although sports photography has been the bulk of his professional work, Dineen is not a sports junkie—often, not even knowing the final score of the game he’s covering. Over the years, he has tackled a wide variety of subject matter. And although he does shoot several weddings each year, he doesn’t like being called a wedding photographer.

“I would describe my wedding style as documentary, photojournalistic in nature,” he said. “It can also be very artistic.” He shoots exclusively in black and white and rarely asks his subjects to pose. “I shoot first and edit later, relying on all the same skills and equipment that I use in my action photography. I try to capture the couple’s most intimate, touching and telling moments.”