

# Alumni Spotlights

**Blia Schwahn '00**, was recognized at the Sixth Annual Women of Color Awards Ceremony and Reception at UW-Madison, October 27—28, 2000. This is a statewide award given to women of color who have initiated positive change within their communities by contributing to diversity and advocating for women's issues.



Schwahn

"Blia is an outstanding example of a woman who is committed to making the educational environment a positive one for all students, regardless of their background," said Ken Her, a multicultural student advisor at UW-Stout.

For 10 years, Schwahn worked as a bilingual specialist with the Menomonie School District, helping parents, students, staff and community members bridge language and cultural barriers. According to Her, Schwahn worked tirelessly to support Hmong mothers still in high school, the high school daycare, and the Neighbor-Neighbor Committee, a group that was formed to build community and resolve conflicts in Menomonie. She also volunteered many hours in the community to help others learn about the Hmong culture and history.

After the Vietnam War, Schwahn and her family escaped from Laos to a refugee camp in Thailand, then came to the United States. She was 14 years old and could not speak English. She never had the opportunity to attend a formal school, and did not even know how to read or write in her own language. Though she graduated from high school, she knew she didn't have the academic language she needed to go on to college, but she also knew the opportunity was there. She worked as an interpreter and taught herself to read and write English. She knew it would take her a long time to get to college, but she was determined.

While with the Menomonie School District, Schwahn was fortunate to have worked with a group of people who believed in her abilities and encouraged her to pursue her dream of a degree in education. With the support of her family and friends, she was back at school.

While working full-time and raising two children, Schwahn continued her education at UW-Stout in early childhood and graduated in May of 2000.

She is the first person in her family to graduate from college and is a role model to many by demonstrating her belief in hard work and the importance of education.

Schwahn would like to thank her wonderful, understanding husband (*especially during student teaching*), her two wonderful children (*whose favorite phrases were "mommy, are you done with your homework?"*), her friends (*who always said "You can do it!"*), and the faculty and staff at UW-Stout (*who always opened their doors for her*) for their support.

Schwahn is currently working as a school/community liaison for the Eau Claire Area School District, continuing her endeavor to making a difference in people's lives. She also serves on the Eau Claire City Council's Racial Justice Taskforce, the Eau Claire Area School District Equity Committee, the Eau Claire Partnership for Education, the Hmong Family Strengthening "Agency Partners" Committee, and is a co-advisor to the North High School HAPT Club (*Hmong American Pheng Cheng Club*). She hopes to earn her master's degree in guidance and counseling at UW-Stout.

You may reach Schwahn through e-mail at bschwahn@ecasd.k12.wi.us.

**Gary Madsen '77**, senior packaging engineer for Kimberly-Clark Corporation, has been promoted to packaging engineer consultant for their Asia Pacific operations. With this promotion, Madsen and his family have relocated to Bangkok, Thailand.



Madsen

In this newly created position, Madsen oversees the development, technological advances, education and cost savings associated with packaging in Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. He has been employed by Kimberly-Clark Corporation since December 1978 and has held various positions within the consumer packaging division located in Neenah, Wis.

Prior to his move, Madsen spent time on the UW-Stout campus recruiting interns and graduates for Kimberly-Clark. He was also instrumental in setting up a Kimberly-Clark/Stout scholarship program.

The Neenah native received his bachelor of science degree in industrial technology with a concentration in packaging in December 1977 from UW-Stout.

**Henry Lageman '79** was elected national president of the American Board of Vocational Experts for the 2000—2001 term.



Lageman

After earning his degree in vocational rehabilitation from UW-Stout, Lageman completed his internship with the State of Oregon, assisted in the development of a Work Evaluation Center with the old CETA program, and created and developed the position of rehabilitation manager for the Oregon State Accident Insurance Fund.

Lageman is known for his commitment to assisting individuals in identifying and truly understanding their special talents as they relate to the world of work. "The thrill is in helping folks maximize their vocational potential," Lageman said.

After serving his presidency, Lageman plans to pursue his doctorate in industrial psychology, teach at the graduate level at Portland State University and maintain his practice in vocational rehabilitation.

Lageman and his wife, Sue, were married in 1981 and live in Portland, Ore. He may be contacted via e-mail at HJLageman@msn.com or his Web site at www.VocExpert.com.

**Martin Gierke '79**, recently sent this update for the Outlook:



Gierke

"I was a 1979 graduate of Stout in a then-fledgling industrial design program. In fact, I was one of only a few students in the first graduating class of the program. Since then, the program at Stout has come a long way, and so have I. I am currently vice president of industrial design for Black & Decker, located in Baltimore, Md.

"After graduation, I spent four years in the Minneapolis area, working for a small consultancy, and later for Honeywell Inc. In 1983, I moved to Maryland to join Black & Decker's household products group, working

as a designer on new concepts. In succeeding years, I worked for a number of divisions of the company as both designer and project manager, finally taking on my current responsibilities as head of design in 1995.

"I received my MBA from Loyola College in Baltimore in 1995, and became an adjunct professor for the college that same year. I am an active member of both IDSA and the Design Management Institute. After serving three years on the advisory board for DMI, I was elected to their Board of Directors this year. In addition, I am advising a start-up industrial design program here in the Baltimore area, and serve as an adjunct faculty member for the industrial design program.

"On the personal side, I am enjoying the 'empty nest' phase of life along with my wife, Margie. My son, Tom, is a percussion performance major at James Madison University in Virginia. He has recently played professionally for an international touring Broadway company production of Victor/Victoria, and participated in the California-based Santa Clara Vanguard drum corps as a mallet percussion specialist."

**Pete Meyer BS '91, MS '96**, a technology instructor at Lisle Junior High School, was recently recognized by the Illinois Industrial Technology Education Association as its Teacher of the Year. The award recognizes Meyer "as Illinois' most outstanding technology teacher," and as someone "who keeps abreast of developments in technology education, uses this knowledge to constantly upgrade classroom curriculum and maintains a positive rapport with students," according to the IITEA.



Meyer

"I am thrilled and honored by this award," said Meyer. "As a teacher, I have always strived to make a difference in our students' lives and help them realize their potential. Still, I was quite surprised and humbled to receive this honor. I wish to thank the IITEA board for recognizing my work with the students of Lisle. I would also like to thank my parents and teachers from high school and college who always encouraged me to work hard and pursue my goals."

One person who was not surprised was Lisle Junior High School principal, Roger Wanic, who says receiving this statewide award "is quite an honor not only for Mr. Meyer but for the entire Lisle School District 202 Community. He is a very dynamic teacher who makes each and every lesson meaningful and relevant for his students. Mr. Meyer has an excellent rapport with the students and is constantly encouraging his students to do their very best. His application of technology helps to make his class come alive for students every day."

"His knowledge of technology is also invaluable for our entire school staff, as he is always willing to spend the time in assisting his fellow teachers in the use of technology. As an enthusiastic, dedicated professional, Mr. Meyer is a most deserving recipient of this honor," added Wanic.

The IITEA is the professional organization of all technology education instructors throughout the state of Illinois. Its parent organization, the International Technology Education Association, honored Meyer as Illinois' Teacher of the Year at its annual convention in March.

Meyer is a lifelong resident of Lombard, Ill.,

and a 1985 graduate of Glenbard East High School. He went on to Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minn., and graduated with an associate of arts degree in 1987. He then continued his education at UW-Stout, graduating in 1991 with his BS degree and in 1996 with his MS degree, both in technology education. He is currently working toward another MS degree, in educational administration.

Meyer resides in Lombard with his wife, Kendra, and may be reached via e-mail at pmeyer@lisle.dupage.k12.il.us.

**Timothy VanHeirseele '72** was named the "Lakeland Press Coach of the Year" for 2000. Van Heirseele has coached varsity softball at the Warren Township High School for seven years, and has won 116 games in that time. The team finished third in the North Suburban Conference in the 2000 season.



VanHeirseele

VanHeirseele was very involved with campus life during his time at Stout. He was the sophomore class president in 1970, an S-Club member, a resident assistant in North Hall from 1970—72 and secretary of Sigma Phi Epsilon. Sports were also a large part of his life while at Stout. He participated in several intramural sports, was the announcer for basketball and wrestling, played shortstop on the varsity baseball team from 1969—1972 (*also team captain in 1972*), and was an all-district NAIA baseball team member in 1972.

Six Stout grads are employed at the Warren High School, ranging from the classes of 1968 to 1999. "It's a special feeling," VanHeirseele said. "We have an automatic friendship together because of our times at Stout."

**Debra K. Anderson '76**, a native of Menomonie, graduated cum laude from UW-Stout with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. She devoted nine years to teaching kindergarten, starting in the Menomonie School District and followed by positions in the suburbs of Chicago. Returning to Menomonie, Anderson went into retail, which led to managing Lee's Drug Store for eleven and a half years. The year 2000 presented a new career opportunity—that of lifestyles editor for the *Dunn County News*, where she remains today. Describing her information gathering practices, Anderson said, "I'm a gleaner and a weaver."



Anderson