Today we celebrate the 50th anniversary of UW Marinette. In the fall of 1965, 232 students arrived to begin taking classes in the newly completed main academic building. Over the next few years the campus expanded, starting construction of the fine arts building we are currently in in 1968, and the library and Max Peterson Field House in 1969. The story of UW Marinette, like all great stories, is a complex one, filled with large and small details and interesting and intriguing characters and for the next 5 and a half hours, I plan to unfold to you the story of every single one of them! No, not really, I'll try to keep this short…

The history of UW Marinette, like all great history stories, has roots that go much further back than the opening of this beloved campus 50 years ago this fall. You could say it goes back at least to 1935 – not 50 years ago but 80 years ago – when the first college classes were offered by UW Madison faculty to 25 students in the old Marinette high school (now the Marinette Middle School). You could say it goes even go further back than that – 111 years ago to 1904 when the then President of the University of Wisconsin Charles Van Hise first articulated what has become known as “The Wisconsin Idea” declaring that he would "never be content until the beneficent influence of the university reaches every family in the state". That idea became the central, guiding light for the expansion of the great University of Wisconsin system, and has made – and we hope will keep - Wisconsin a world leader in higher education.

But today, we look to that fall of 1965, when with the great foresight and leadership of Marinette County leaders and UW officials this campus became a reality. We were in the thick of the “Baby Boom” in 1965, and it was eminently clear that the demand for higher education was going to explode in Wisconsin in a few short years. Indeed, it already had. Classes taught by circuit-riding UW Madison faculty became a regular feature of the educational landscape in Marinette starting after World War II, and starting in 1951 Marinette had its own resident UW faculty – married couple Joe and Herta Gerend who taught English and German here for years. “Ping-pong Joe” as he would become known, was the director of what was then called the UW Extension Marinette Center from 1951 to 1963 when Lon Weber – who is with us today! - was appointed the director. Lon would remain the director and then Dean of the UW Extension Marinette Center during the first years of its construction. The late Bill Schmidtke served as acting Dean from 1967 to 1968, and he was appointed the full-time campus dean in 1969, a position he held until his retirement in January of 1995.

During that time “UW Piney Grove” as it was sometimes affectionately called, went through a variety of affiliations and configurations – starting as a “center” for the UW Madison Extension, then becoming for a few years a satellite campus of UW Green Bay (which, coincidently is also celebrating its 50th anniversary this year). In 1971 the old Wisconsin State University system and the University of Wisconsin system merged to form the single, UW system we know today. One of the results of the merger was the creation of a new entity, the “University of Wisconsin Centers”, the 2-year liberal arts transfer branch of the UW system, including UW Marinette. The UW Centers were authorized to offer an Associates of Arts and Sciences degree, and the first UW Marinette commencement ceremony was held on May 26, 1974 when 26 students from across our area received their Associates degrees. UW Marinette would get one more name change, in 1998, when the University of Wisconsin Centers became known as the University of Wisconsin Colleges. That’s why, by the way, when you tell anyone over the
age of about 30 in this area that you go to UW Marinette, they inevitably say “Oh, the Center! I love that place!” You have to cut them some slack, and gently remind them that we are now the *Colleges*!

While these kinds of institutional details are certainly an important part of the story of UW Marinette, the most important part of the story is about the people who really made this place over the past 50 years. Indeed, the life of UW Marinette has been made by the people – the faculty, staff, students, campus supporters and friends – who have filled our halls, engaged our minds, challenged our assumptions, and enlivened our lives. So, as far as I’m concerned, the past 50 years has been the story of the people who have made this place what it is. It’s about community leaders on the Marinette County Board of Supervisors who cajoled and lobbied the state and university officials to place a campus here and agreed to pay (and continue to pay) for this lovely campus. It’s about UW System leaders who, 50 years ago, had the foresight to see that the Wisconsin Idea would be well served with a system of local, high quality liberal arts campuses open to the entire citizenry of the state. It’s about pioneering folks like Ping Pong Joe and Herda Gerend, and Lon Weber.

It’s about campus leaders like Dean Bill Schmidknte who was so renowned within the UW system for his barbeque grill expertise that when the UW Board of Regents met at UW Richland in 1990 they asked Bill to bring his grill down and grill steaks for them, and he did! It’s about Dean Sid Bremmer who guided the campus through a $5.1 million expansion from 1998 to 2000. And it’s about Dean Paula Langteau, under whose guidance the campus has greatly expanded our international programming, our outreach to local high schools and other curricular achievements, and added student housing.

It’s also about the faculty members on this campus, folks like Emeritus Professor Carl Krog, who still graces our library regularly, and must have just been a kid when he started his career here in 1966! And it’s about the founding father of this theatre Herb Williams, who created “Theatre on the Bay” and in doing so enriched and enlivened the cultural life of this region for decades. It’s the story of other long-time members of the faculty – like Jim Berry and Chuck Richards with his bright red UW blazer, and Al Bedrosian who never lost his southern New Hampshire accent, much to my eternal delight! It’s about biologist Wendel Johnson and artist Jim LaMalfa who served this campus community and the broader area for decades, both of who retired only a few years ago. And Connie Hemr, Lyle Espenscheid and Sue Poquette who taught generations of students that math was nothing to fear! It’s been about Jane Oitzinger and Katherine Holman and their wonderfully creative learning communities, and delightfully soft southern accents! Oh, and Art Holman, Katherine’s amazing husband, who while not a member of the faculty might as well have been, served as “bicycle repair man” for dozens of international students and was easily the coolest retired career Marine I’ve ever met! And it’s been about Jim Zim and his drum pants, and Elmo the geologist, and Julie the economist, and Greg and Mark and Gary and Doug - the theatre guys... It’s also about David Giebler and Dorothy Kowalski both of whom have been here for more than 30 years and must have been only teenagers when they first arrived! And it’s about Al Bugaj, who has been a curricular leader and innovator both in the classroom and on the internet for thousands of psychology students. And it’s about Dail Murray, the only faculty member I know of who constructed and hung out in sweat lodges with her students! UW Marinette has been the story of wonderful faculty from around the corner – like Tonya Meisner, Bethany Welch and Kim Hurkmans Frederikson who started their own collegiate careers here as students and now are faculty members. And it’s been about wonderful faculty from around the globe, like Vijay who came from India, and Salah from Egypt, and Mahmood or Mo from Palestine, and now Deepak from Nepal. And for many of us on the faculty over the years we all would agree with words of Jennifer Flatt that we “settled for a great job!”
UW Marinette has also been the story of dedicated and tireless staff members without whom the wheels of this place would have fallen off in days, if not hours! People like Elaine Jorgensen, who has to be one of the kindest people on the planet, and Ron Aitkin, and Randy & Linda Crozier and Jerry Eggener who liked to play his trumpet in the gym on weekend mornings, and Steve Richie, and Eric Craver. And Maureen Frawley who kept the community informed of all the good things going on out here and seemed to be the conscience of this campus for years. And Scott Ward who has so many muscles and is so strong he has to be the only man I’ve ever known who is as tall as he is wide as he is thick and can lift a house! And Carol La Pierre who as campus Business Manager won repeated UW System awards for finding minority suppliers, and Lenora Delgoffe who, I’m sorry, she always just scared the crap out of me! And it’s been about Connie Scofield who has been here forever and is always willing to drop whatever she’s doing to help a student in the library! And been about the tireless Cindy Landenberger Baily and Jenn Hass and Tricia Hurley, all of whom started here at UW Marinette as students and now without whom we’d all be lost.

But mostly the story of UW Marinette, over the past 50 or more years has been about the students, some who went far away and many, many who stayed close to home. Some who have gone on to fame and fortune, and many who have lead richer and more meaningful lives for having spent some of their college years here. People like Marinette County Board member Al Mans who to this day fondly remembers the Gerends. And Fran Picard Seefeldt who, in 1970 together with the rest of the UW Marinette student body, and seemingly every other college student that year, boycotted classes and marched on Shore Drive to protest the U.S. invasion of Cambodia during the Vietnam War. And Barbra Alloy who lives in Green Bay now, and was a cheerleader here for 2 years in the mid-1970s and figures she was involved in over 50 plays at “Theatre on the Bay!” And Diane Erickson from Menominee who was here in the early 1980s and joined her brothers Mark, Michael, and David all of whom attended UW Marinette. And it’s about the student who, on the first day of flag football intramurals, in September 1983, pulled up to the field in her station wagon, opened up the back and pulled out a cooler of beer. They were planning to tailgate! The student - Susie Schmidtke. Yup, the dean’s daughter! And so many people in our community, like my insurance agent Bruce Mattison, and my friend Linda Wilke, and my banker friend John Reinke, and my State Assembly Representative John Nygren, my friend Dr. Mike Arnold, and my wonderful former student Dr. Andrea Bell Polzin, and fellow hockey parents Dave and Ruth McGuire and Terri Florek and Brian Swenson. And Vanessa Smith who is now famous for cupcakes, and Joe Callow who’s famous for wine, and Kristen Kramer, who’s famous for all kinds of yummy things at “The Landing” in Menominee. All around this area, everywhere you look, there are UW Marinette grads - teaching school, working with clients and patients, being community leaders and active community members.

UW Marinette has also been about students who have shown tremendous perseverance, like Andrew. Many in his high school didn’t think he was really college material, but he came here, was a member of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and participated in our Undergraduate Research and Performance Conference, where he gave a well-researched presentation on how autism is viewed in Chinese and Navajo cultures. His research and personal identification heightened awareness of autism on our campus and in the community as well. He went on to Stout to complete a bachelor’s degree in Disability Studies and has since given presentations in many area schools to parents of autistic children on how to help them navigate secondary education in the public schools. And Derek Gagne, who while serving in Iraq was traveling in a HUMVEE that hit an IED. He lost half of his left foot, his right leg below
the knee, and vision in his left eye, his whole nose and nasal cavity and incurred a lot of scarring from shrapnel. He would spend nine months recovering and going through rehab at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The doctors told him he would not walk for 18 months. He was walking in three months. He said “It’s bad to tell me that I can’t do something, because I am going to prove them wrong.” And he came out here and was a great student! And Markell who wasn’t real sure she belonged here – or in college at all – but went on to get a degree in anthropology from UW Madison, and do field work in North Africa.

It’s been about student leaders like Nick Kohn and Lee Nguyen, both of whom won the UW Colleges-wide Lee Grugal Student Leadership award, And Faith Nibbs— who was assigned a 10-15 page paper in anthropology 104 by Dail Murray. Dail remembers her paper being 50 pages or so long. She’s gone on to get a PhD from Southern Methodist University and is now the Director of the Forced Migration Innovation Project and a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at SMU. And Ethan Linstad – who took all the chemistry he could, worked on two CHE 299 independent projects and was able to present at the Posters in the Rotunda in the capitol building in Madison on the results of his work. And Colleen Johnston who left here in 2008, transferred to Smith College in Massachusetts, went on to do a really challenging 2 years in Teach for America in Memphis city schools, and is now pursuing her PhD in sociology at the University of Indiana. Her focus of research? Two-year colleges and how they enable access to education for working class and minority students.

And all the hundreds of international students who have come to UW Marinette over the years, from who knows how many countries around the globe? 30? 40? You may not know this, but at times UW Marinette has had the largest proportion of international students on its campus of any of the 26 campuses in the entire UW system; more than UW Madison or UW Milwaukee or UW Eau Claire, more than any of them!

UW Marinette has also been the story of wonderful returning adult, life-long learners (or as Jane Oitzinger and I called them, “sages”) like Darwin Adams, who will always know more about the Civil War than I ever will, and Bob McGuire, and Maxine Oleszak and Mary Vanderfin, George and Ruth Olson, and Mary Staudenmaier and dozens and dozens of others.

Generations of students, who knows how many, probably more than 13,000 or 14,000 by now, have come to UW Marinette and were changed by the experience.

The American author Ralph Waldo Emmerson once wrote “The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.” And he was right. We’ve all been stretched by UW Marinette – community members, campus leaders, faculty, staff, and students – all of us. And we’ve all been changed as a result. “We change people, they change the world” is our motto for this 50th anniversary celebration, and that’s exactly what we all have done – all of us together - changed the world, in big ways and small ways, in subtle and not so subtle ways. The world has changed because of UW Marinette, the world is a better place for what we have done here, together, all of us! So, well done, UW Marinette! Well done! Here’s to another 50 years!

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