FALL 2026

dutchology

THE CENTRAL COLLEGE MAGAZINE



THE GOOD GROWS HERE

A LEGACY OF GIVING
A lifetime of kindness.

FOUR CHAMPIONS, LASTING LEGACIES
Athletic alumni join Hall of Honor.

ALWAYS A STUDENT

Thirty-five years after graduation, **Tej Dhawan '91** reflects on service, shared governance and why Central's best days remain ahead.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **CENTRAL ARCHIVES**

I arrived on the Central College campus 39 years ago as a student who had no idea whether he'd last one year or four. Thankfully, I stayed and have served 26 years as a trustee, including the last eight as chair of the board. As I write this, I'm getting ready to transition that role to **Deanna Ver Steeg '94.** Before I do, I wanted to write to you — the people who make Central what it is.

Here is the thing nobody tells you about being a board chair: you aren't leading the board. You serve it. That distinction, learned from past chairs **Lanny Little '74** and **Dave Wesselink '64,** and board mentors **Julie Pothoven Fisher '90, Harold Kolenbrander '60, Mike Orr '69** and **Charlie Morris '70,** has shaped my time in the role. Our board is built so that any one of us can be called to assume responsibility, including that of chairing the board. As one of 40 and not one of one, I've tried to remember that every day: I'm here to represent the whole of Central's voice, not just my own.

If you ask what I'm proud of from my tenure, it is a small change we made years ago, asking every new trustee no matter their background — to spend their first year on our academic excellence committee. CEOs, CFOs, engineers, teachers, retirees, all of them sitting with faculty — learning how students are taught and evaluated, seeing the soul of the college up close. Almost none of them have wanted to leave that committee since. That's shared governance working the way it was intended: faculty, students, administration and board, genuinely in it together.

I've also learned that the college which shaped us in our four years is not the college today's and tomorrow's students need. Central has succeeded for 173 years because the people before us kept an eye on the future rather than staying stuck to a version of the past. They remained loyal to our history and heritage — but refused to be fenced in by it.

That's exactly the spirit behind where we're headed next. Central reflects Pella itself, a town built as a place of refuge and reinvention. As Pella has grown, Central has grown with it. That symbiotic relationship, between college and city, between graduates and the future they build, is what Imagine More embodies. The good grows here because we keep preparing for students we won't personally see. And that's precisely why Central is here for good.

A mentor once told me that the right institution fosters learning throughout their lifetime. Thirty-five years since my class's commencement, I remain a student, grateful for connections with my own teachers who have retired yet remain a part of my life. Here is what I'd ask of you, fellow alumni: carry that same optimism the commencement speakers hand to every graduating class. Be catalysts for what Central becomes next. The best of this college is still ahead of us. It'll just look different from what we remember.

With gratitude and confidence in what's next,
Tej Dhawan '91
Chair, Board of Trustees

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FALL 2026
ISSUE 1

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Dutchology is published by the Central advancement office for alumni, parents and friends of Central College. For information on the Dutchology's mission, visit **dutchology.central.edu.**

Address changes also may be sent to alumni@central.edu.

Dutchology welcomes letters and emails from readers concerning the contents of the magazine or issues relating to Central College. Please include the author's name, city and state; anonymous communications will be discarded. Letters selected for publication may be edited for length, content, clarity and style.

Address letters to Dutchology, Editor, Central College, 812 University St., Pella, Iowa 50219.

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Production Notes: Dutchology is printed with a vegetable-based ink by Christian Edwards, Des Moines, Iowa

A FOOT IN THE DOOR

STORY BY: **BRITTANY CARLSON PROKUPEK '16**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **MEGAN MUUR BOLINE '23**



Mickey Martens '27 completed a summer internship that has opened her career path.

Mickey Martens '27 almost skipped the conversation that led to an internship.

She stopped by Central College's career fair between classes, expecting a quick visit before heading to her next commitment. Instead, she struck up a conversation with Pella Corporation IT Infrastructure Manager **Josh Prokupek '18.**

A few days later, she received a call inviting her to interview. "I hadn't even applied for the job," she says.

In the summer going into her senior year, Martens completed an internship with Pella Corporation's IT infrastructure team, helping modernize technology systems used across the company. As she worked with sales subsidiaries transitioning to Microsoft's SharePoint, she learned that success depends as much on communication as technical knowledge.

"I was able to see the impact that I actually make," she says. "I get to walk away and say, 'Wow, I helped with that.'"

The internship is just one of many opportunities Martens has embraced since arriving at Central.

She came to campus to play golf. She stayed for something much bigger.

After arriving undecided on a major, Martens discovered computer science and found a passion she hadn't expected. An English class centered on murder mysteries strengthened the communication skills she now uses every day, especially in the workplace, while professors encouraged her to explore new interests and challenge herself.

She also said yes to competing in a national case competition, where Central placed fifth against large universities from across the country, and to spending the summer in Pella through her internship.

Each experience reinforced what she values most about her Central education.

"The community is what makes Central unique," she says. "People really want to know who you are and what drives you."

That community extends into the workplace. Prokupek says Central students consistently stand out because they're adaptable, involved and eager to learn.

"I've been very impressed with how Mickey has carried herself," he says. "She asks for feedback because she wants to get better. That's really hard to do early in your career."

For Martens, the internship has also shown her how classroom learning translates into meaningful work.

When one technology migration created challenges for employees, she found herself thinking less about the software and more about the people relying on it.

"They still have to do their jobs," she says. "I had to step back and ask, 'How can I fix this for them?'"

Those moments have helped shape her confidence and her future. Looking back, she's grateful she remained open to opportunities she never planned for.

"My mom says, 'You're not the same freshman girl that we dropped off,'" Martens says.

Her internship led to a full-time offer at Pella Corporation after graduation.

Her advice: Take internships and mentorships seriously and give back to the next generation when you can. **Central.edu/career/.**

Watch Martens' video at **bit.ly/mmartens27.**



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AROUND THE POND



WORLD OF GOOD SUCCESS

Central's comprehensive campaign, **A World of Good,** surpassed its original fundraising goal of $50 million, just one year into the public launch. The campaign is intended to raise both support for the college and goodwill for communities leading up to Central's 175-year anniversary celebration in 2028. To date, the college has raised $57 million and Central family members have logged more than 13,667 hours of service for $457,000 in economic impact. This past spring, the board of trustees increased the fundraising goal to $65 million as it expands its vision for the future of Central and Pella.



Wendy Weber, professor of mathematics, led the development of the data science major.

NEW DATA SCIENCE MAJOR

Data is everywhere in today's society and now Central students can major in data science in response to surging demand for skilled data professionals across many industries. This program is designed to give students marketable abilities to visualize, interpret and communicate data analysis across many different contexts.





Shelley Bradfield, professor of communication studies, and **Maggie Fisher Schlerman '02,** professor of accounting.

REALIGNED DEPARTMENTS

Central formed the Business and Communication Studies Department, an alignment designed to better prepare students for the demands of today's workforce. The college merged its communication studies program with the accounting, business management and economics programs. The shift reflects the formalization of the longstanding partnership that will strengthen curriculum planning and expand student opportunities for networking, internships and career development.



Paulina A. Mena, professor of biology.

CENTRAL'S NEWEST ENDOWED CHAIR

Paulina A. Mena, professor of biology, was installed as the Ruth and Marvin Denekas Endowed Chair in Science and Humanities. Mena was recognized for her dedication to students, her teaching excellence and her commitment to the breadth of disciplines across the liberal arts. Mena joined the Central faculty in 2009 as an assistant professor of biology. She was tenured and promoted to associate professor in 2015 and promoted to professor of biology in 2023. Her teaching across disciplines is reflected in courses that range from Human Evolution and Genetics to From Lady Bugs to Lady Gaga. Honors seminars, courses taught in Mexico and Peru and undergraduate honors research are also part of Mena's teaching portfolio.



DMU partnership will create fast-track pathways that enable students to save time and money while gaining early exposure to graduate-level education.

NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH DES MOINES UNIVERSITY

Central signed a partnership with Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences designed to expand pathways for Central students who wish to pursue graduate-level health sciences programs.

Central undergraduate students and DMU occupational therapy students may participate in a 3+3 program, allowing them to earn both undergraduate and graduate credit concurrently. Central students also have opportunities to begin graduate coursework and accelerate their completion of a Master of Public Health or Master of Health Care Administration degree.

Central students who meet academic benchmarks will be eligible to apply for a reserved seat annually in three DMU programs. The agreement also guarantees interview opportunities in five DMU programs.

MEET CENTRAL'S NEWEST FULL-TUITION SCHOLARS

Central welcomed the recipients of its prestigious full-tuition scholarships for the Class of 2030, representing both the outstanding achievements of these students and the generosity of the donors who make the awards possible.

+ **Jaidyn Achenbach,** Woodward, Iowa, recipient of the Thomas Ross Smith Scholarship.
+ **Bennett Barnthouse,** Lee's Summit, Missouri, recipient of the P.H. Kuyper Scholarship.
+ **Samuel Dahlem,** Swisher, Iowa, recipient of the Rolscreen Scholarship.
+ **Anthony Davis,** Albertville, Minnesota, recipient of the Pella Corporation Engineering Scholarship.
+ **Lucas De la Cuba,** Ankeny, Iowa, recipient of the H.S. Kuyper Scholarship.
+ **Logan Harswick,** Ames, Iowa, recipient of the Joan Kuyper Farver Scholarship.
+ **Morgan Lowry,** Waukee, Iowa, recipient of the Rolscreen Scholarship.
+ **Bryce Pollard,** Peoria, Arizona, recipient of the Rolscreen Scholarship.

Philanthropy directly empowers these bright minds to pursue their academic and personal goals without the burden of tuition costs.

HONORING THE LEADERSHIP OF DAN MARBURGER

The first class of the Dan Marburger Leadership Institute was honored with the presentation of a specially commissioned medallion — designed by a Central student, **Jack Every '28,** and destined to be placed on every future cohort of fellows.

The Dan Marburger Leadership Institute brought together nominated students on Saturdays for leadership training and sessions with guest speakers from across the field of education. The institute is named in memory of Principal **Dan Marburger '89,** whose selfless sacrifice saved the lives of his students at Perry High School in 2024. Eleven students were selected for the program's inaugural cohort. Co-directors are **Melissa McAninch,** associate professor of education, and **Julianne Taylor,** senior lecturer of education. **Seth Marburger '16** attended each session and helped select guest speakers during the first cohort.



The final gathering of Marburger Leadership Institute Fellows featured a presentation of medallions. Standing on left side of stairs: **Melissa McAninch,** associate professor of education, education chair and Marburger Leadership Institute co director, and **Jack Every '28,** medallion designer. Standing on right side of stairs: **Ajay Six '27, Julianne Taylor,** senior lecturer of education and Marburger Leadership Institute co-director, and **Seth Marburger '16**, son of **Dan '89 and Elizabeth Clausen Marburger '89.** On stairs: Row 1 – **Jillian Fairbanks '27, Rylee Dunkin '27, Jasmyn Williams '26, Georgia Matthews '26.** Row 2 – **Lydia Fisher '27, Emma Murphy '27, Taylor Sniezek '26.** Row 3 – **Madeline MacGregor '26, Brianna VanGroll '28, Samuel Vis '27.**

LEADING BY DOING

Central faculty members continue to publish groundbreaking research:

Timothy Olin, associate professor of history, presented a paper during the 500 Years Entwined History: Central and Ottoman Europe Conference in Budapest, Hungary.

Stavros Papakonstantinidis, associate professor of communication studies, co-authored a chapter titled, Adapting Marketing Education To The AI Revolution: A Longitudinal Perspective on Skills and Workforce Preparedness, in the Springer Nature book, "AI Powered Control Systems in Fintech."

AROUND THE POND

Kate Nesbit, associate professor of English, was awarded two prestigious archival fellowships in support of her new book project, "Victorian Alerts: Sonic Notification Technologies in Victorian Literature and Culture."

Nicole Palenske Ladner, professor of biology, and **Peyton Bytnar '24** co-authored an article published by the National Science Teaching Association, titled "Something's Not Right: An Investigation of Reproductive System Health and the HPG Axis."

Papae Wymore, lecturer of education, president and co-founder of The Reading League Iowa, led Central students to earn 100% pass rate on Iowa Foundations of Reading Test.

Jay Wackerly, associate professor of chemistry, along with **Piper Eighmy '27, Katherine Morrison '26, McKenna Burgess '25** and **Amy Philavanh '22,** published an article, "A Practical Synthesis of Cambiarenes with Mechanistic Insights," in the peer-reviewed journal, Supramolecular Chemistry.

DEANNA VER STEEG '94 TO CHAIR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Central College board of trustees elected **Deanna Ver Steeg '94** as chair, effective January 1, 2027. As an 18-year board member, she brings deep experience, professional expertise and a heart for giving back.

Ver Steeg is senior director of the Headquarters Project Management Office at SC Johnson, where she leads governance and special projects for the CEO and CFO. During more than 20 years with the company, she has held various leadership roles in finance and technology. Before SCJ, she worked at Ernst & Young and Deloitte in Chicago, following a graduate degree from Northern Illinois University.

Her Central story began with a full-tuition Rolscreen Scholarship, which made her enrollment possible. An accounting major with minors in Spanish and German, she studied abroad in Granada, Spain, served in Student Senate, played intramurals and hosted a campus radio show. Her sharp financial thinking was on display in the 1994 Central Writing Anthology, in an essay titled, "In Search of Reliable Truth."

Ver Steeg has been engaged with Central alumni leadership roles for two decades. She served on the National Alumni Council from 2005 to 2008, then joined the board. Since then, she has served on the Executive Committee and Committee on Trusteeship, chaired the External Affairs Committee, and been vice chair of the Audit & Risk Committee. She was also a member of the Economics, Accounting and Management Advisory Board and has mentored students along the way.



Deanna Ver Steeg '94

"Central is a place where students can find themselves, explore and feel safe trying out different versions of who they want to become," she says. "I'm excited to be able to use my skills, knowledge and talents for Central and the future."

"I am thrilled at Deanna's appointment as chair of Central's board of trustees," says **Tej Dhawan '91,** chair of the board and managing partner at 2946 Venture Fund. "As a former Student Senate President, she deeply understands the student perspective, which will help evolve Central to meet their changing academic dreams. She works closely with faculty to advance the college's focus on student success, both inside and outside the classroom. In her role as a governing board member, Deanna studies to understand nuance and governs toward a distant future where Central continues to thrive. I am honored by her friendship and thrilled to continue serving as a trustee in her leadership."

View her profile at: **central.edu/profiles/about/funding-the-future/.**

A GIFT THAT KEEPS THE MUSIC PLAYING

STORY BY: **JEANETTE BUDDING**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **DAN VANDER BEEK**

When **Kjerstin Aeikens '13** thinks about Central College's Flying Pans Steel Drum Band, she doesn't just think about music. She thinks about family, kindness and a community that never left her heart — even after graduation.

After losing both of her parents within the last five years, Aeikens knew almost immediately what she wanted to do with the inheritance she received. She established an endowed gift to support the Flying Pans, the steel drum ensemble that shaped so much of her Central experience — and her parents' as well.

"I knew pretty much immediately that I wanted to give back to the Flying Pans," Aeikens says. "I've always really loved music, and the band is one of my favorite music ensembles I've ever been in. My parents really loved it too. I think they would be happy that their money is going to support this group."

It's a gift born from grief, but also from gratitude. She placed no restrictions on how the endowment could be used, trusting longtime director **Stan Dahl,** senior lecturer of music, to use the funds where the band needs them most. That trust grew from a friendship that began the day she first visited campus.

On the drive from Ankeny for her campus visit, her family's car got a flat tire, throwing off the day's schedule. When they finally arrived, the admission staff had already rearranged everything so Aeikens could still meet every professor and see every part of campus. Everyone she met already knew what had happened and asked if her family was okay.

"That genuine show of care — that's what made me pick Central," she says.

That same sense of community stayed with her long after graduation. In 2021, as her father neared the end of his life in hospice care, Aeikens asked her bandmates in Tropical Steel, a Des Moines-based steel pans group made up largely of Central alumni, if they would play one final concert for him. Without hesitation, they cleared their schedules and traveled to the hospice facility.

"They all basically dropped everything … to come over to the hospice and play one last concert for my dad and the rest of our family," Aeikens says. "That was one of the kindest things that anyone has ever done for me."



Kjerstin Aeikens '13 performing during Homecoming 2011 with the Flying Pans Steel Drum Band.

Her memories with her Central bandmates don't stop there. In 2011, a small group from the Flying Pans traveled to Indianapolis to perform at the 50th anniversary of the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, joining musicians on stage from two other colleges and a high school.

Aeikens remembers not only the challenge of performing some of the hardest music she'd ever played, but also the pride she felt in Central's approach. While other groups remained on a single instrument, the Flying Pans members rotated drums for every song, reflecting the ensemble's emphasis on mastering the entire band.

While at Central, Aeikens was also a member of the A Cappella Choir, Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Pep Band, Percussion Ensemble and the community band.

Those experiences capture exactly what her gift is meant to sustain: a community of people who care deeply for one another and pass that care on to future generations. Her endowment ensures the Flying Pans will continue making both music and lifelong connections for years to come.

"We were all shaped by our experiences at Central," Aeikens says about Central's impact. "The core kindness that we all carry within us is the legacy of Central."

A LEGACY OF GIVING, A LIFETIME OF KINDNESS

STORY BY: **JEANETTE BUDDING**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **MEGAN MUUR BOLINE '23** AND **KAREN MERRILL**

Orleath Vogelaar Ingle '47 has quietly invested in future generations of Central College students — the latest chapter in a family legacy of giving that spans five generations.



Orleath Vogelaar Ingle '47 stands proudly with great granddaughter, **Jessica Merrill '18,** who continues the Central legacy of the family.



At 101 years young, **Orleath Vogelaar Ingle '47** loves to show her Central pride.

Orleath Vogelaar Ingle '47 and her husband, Glenn, have made annual gifts to Central College since they were married in 1963. They have supported the Journey Scholarship and programs for decades, quietly investing in students she will likely never meet. Her giving is guided by a simple conviction: Every student who wants an education should have the opportunity to earn one.

"I think scholarships are very good for people who want to go but have a hard time paying," she says. "I just think an education is so important nowadays."

Her generosity doesn't end with annual gifts. Ingle has also included Central in her estate plans, ensuring her support for students will continue long after she's gone — a quiet, lasting extension of a commitment that has spanned most of her life.

That commitment traces back to her earliest years. Growing up in Pella, Central was simply part of who she was. Both of her parents were graduates. Her father, **Gary Vogelaar,** a 1916 graduate and local businessman, served on the Central Board of Trustees. Her mother, **Wilhelmna Koleman Vogelaar,** graduated in 1918. Conversations about the college filled their home.

"It was just natural for me," she says. "They talked about Central all the time. It was just part of my life."

She enrolled at Central in 1943, when World War II had changed the face of campus. Many young men were serving overseas, military cadets occupied campus housing and the women created their own sense of community.

"There weren't many boys," she recalls with a laugh. "Most of the girls made our own fun."

After two years, she transferred to Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois, eager to experience life beyond her hometown. She graduated in 1947 with a degree in business administration and built a career with the federal government in the U.S. Treasury Department in several departments including the U.S. Savings Bonds Division. It was there that she met her husband, Glenn Ingle.

Though her career and family life took her beyond Pella, Central was never far from her heart. She returned often through the years, and that connection deepened with each new generation of her family. One of her greatest joys came

when her great-granddaughter, **Jessica Merrill,** crossed the commencement stage as a Central graduate in 2018.

"That was special," she says.

It's that sense of family, carried forward across generations, that continues to shape her giving today. When asked what she hopes for the college's future, her answer is short but heartfelt.

"My hope is it keeps going."

It's the kind of answer you'd expect from 101-year-old Ingle — unassuming, sincere and focused on others rather than herself. Her decades of giving have never been about recognition. They have been about family, kindness and opening doors for those who follow, quietly and consistently, year after year. She has seen world wars, watched technology transform daily life and celebrated generations of her family's connection to Central.

And if you ask her how she feels about the place that has been part of her story — and her giving — for more than 80 years, she doesn't hesitate.

"I love Central College."

Editor's note: ***Orleath Vogelaar Ingle '47*** *passed away on Oct. 20, 2026, after we had sent the magazine to production. We loved her commitment to Central and chose to publish her story in memory of her beautiful life.*



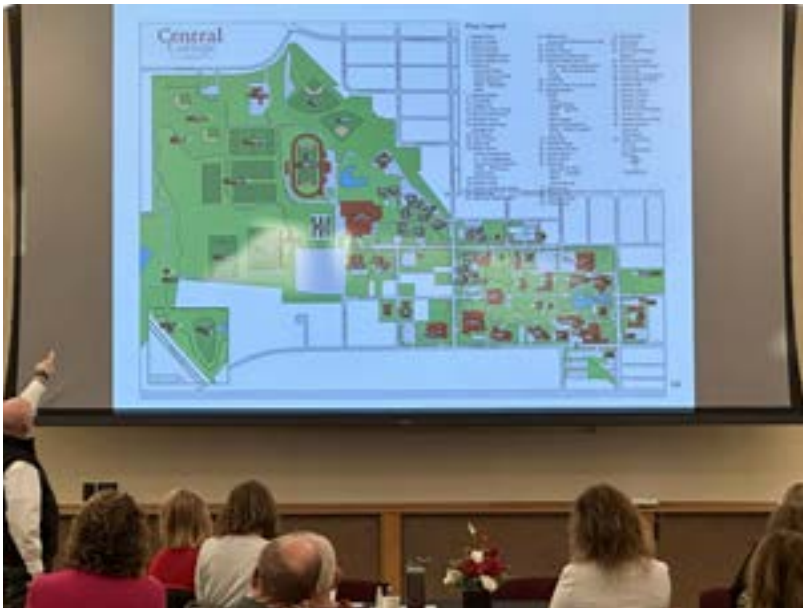




THE GOOD GROWS HERE

Story By: **Mark Putnam**

Central College is building on a strong foundation as it looks toward its 175th anniversary and the momentum behind A World of Good taking shape for Central and the Pella community.



President Mark Putnam shared with the Pella Community a proposal for a master plan under consideration.

Good things are happening at Central College.

Just one year after going public with our comprehensive campaign, **A World of Good,** we surpassed our original $50 million goal. That milestone is a reflection of the generosity and commitment of the Central family — and of a shared belief in what Central can mean for generations to come.

With the campaign continuing through Central's 175th anniversary in 2028, we have expanded the goal to $65 million. Our priorities remain clear: strengthening scholarships, growing the endowment, enriching the student experience and investing in Central's future while also activating a bold vision through Imagine More, It's Central to Pella.

IMAGINE MORE

This year, I had the opportunity to further develop and share our Imagine More vision with the Board of Trustees, our campus community, Student Senate, the National Alumni Council and the community of Pella.

Imagine More looks beyond the boundaries of campus, asking what we can accomplish through partnerships and collaboration. It brings together opportunities in workforce development, community engagement, business development, education, philanthropy and housing. At its heart, it's about imagining more for Central — and for Pella.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Housing is top of mind for our students and also a great need for young professionals. More than 6,400 people commute into Pella each day, while our downtown, businesses and industries continue to thrive. Central is fortunate to be located in such an amazing community. We have an opportunity to help address one of its growing needs: creating more places for people to live, work and put down roots.

The college is leading the way with opportunities for growth, development and progress for Central and our home community of Pella, one focused on vibrant living opportunities. New residential spaces create a natural need for investment in the visual and performing arts, recreation and academic programming. Developing partnerships reimagine how our shared assets and collaborative relationships can serve both. That is a future worth imagining — one where Central and Pella continue to grow together.

HERE FOR GOOD

Central's future is closely connected to the people and communities we serve. "Here for Good" is more than a phrase; it reflects our belief that a Central education prepares students to make a lasting difference wherever they go. That belief also shapes how we think about our own future.

Through A World of Good, we are investing in scholarships, the endowment, academic and learning enrichment, Forever Dutch® athletics and Imagine More's community impact. Each represents a different part of the Central experience, but together they strengthen the foundation for what comes next.

There is much to celebrate — the success of A World of Good, the energy on campus and the possibilities emerging through Imagine More. I invite you all to help champion the work ahead. It's an exciting time for all of us.

As we look toward Central's 175th anniversary and beyond, I'm grateful to everyone for helping us imagine more, grow what is good and ensure that Central's next 175 years are set for success. The best part of this moment is that we're not imagining the future alone. We're building it together.

Learn more about A World of Good campaign and Imagine More progress, including FAQs at **central.edu/imagine-more/.**





A WORLD OF GOOD
Central College





THE WORLD NEEDS
MORE CENTRAL

Coaching youth soccer. Serving in youth programs. Rebuilding homes after floods. Mentoring the next first-generation student.

That's not coincidence. That's Central.

A World of Good is Central College's boldest campaign yet — funding scholarships, hands-on learning and endowments as well as encouraging service — building good citizens, leaders and communities.

GIVE. Your gift matters. Invest in the next 175 years of Central by making your gift today!

VOLUNTEER. Mentor a student. Support community projects. Donate your time, and then document your service.

Your support of A World of Good is the greatest gift you can give Central.

Give. Volunteer. Be part of it.

worldofgood.central.edu

You can also scan here to give !

WHERE UNDERGRADATES BECOME SCHOLARS

STORY BY: **JEANETTE BUDDING** AND **MARY PAUTSCH**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **GABBY PETRUZZELLO '24** AND **MEGAN MUUR BOLINE '23**

Central students have a mind shaped for success as they present at the Midwestern Psychological Association in Chicago.



Leah Gilbertson '24 explored how people build a sense of pride around disability identity and earned a Psi Chi Research Award. **Randall Renstrom,** professor of psychology, helped recognize Gilbertson at the Midwestern Psychological Association in Chicago.



A Central alumni survey revealed 60% of Central psychology majors earn a master's degree and 15% earn a doctorate-level degree, both ahead of the trend reported by the APA in 2019.

All of us strive to be recognized for the work we do. A "good job" from a colleague, a congratulatory company-wide email or even just a thumbs up emoji from your boss in the Microsoft Teams chat can be enough of a boost.

But to be really recognized, like with an award or publication from a major network of your peers — that can be a major milestone that takes years of dedication.

Yet, psychology students at Central College are doing that year after year, before they even enter the workforce. What may be the peak of some careers is just the tip of the iceberg for Central undergraduates.

MAKING A REAL IMPACT

"They often tell us that they did more than they thought they could, or they accomplished more than they ever thought that they would be able to," says **Randall Renstrom,** professor of psychology and chair of the behavioral sciences department. "What they did was be recognized as professional researchers at the Midwestern Psychological Association conference."

"The success rate of Central students' projects being accepted for presentation is quite impressive," Renstrom says. "The psychology program began including empirical research projects in Experimental Psychology in 2011. Since then, 61 of the 62 projects submitted for presentation have been accepted via blind review."

Even more striking, Central undergraduates routinely earn a spot in MPA's professional-level program, presenting alongside graduate students, PhD candidates and faculty who have no idea, until they read the name tag, that they're talking to a junior or senior, Renstrom explains.

"What's exceptional about us is the quality of the research the students are doing," Renstrom says. "Our size allows us to do psychology and not just learn about psychology."

That philosophy, embedded in the department's curriculum since the late 1990s under emeritus faculty member **Ed Willis,** has become one of Central's quiet signatures. Many psychology majors culminate their studies with an advanced class where they design and carry out their own original research, often working side by side with a faculty mentor as a genuine research partner rather than an assistant.

STUDENT SUCCESSES

It leads to some unique, award-winning studies. **Andie Leeper '20,** who studied perceptions of sexism against women in STEM, was a Psi Chi Research Award winner, and went on to become a practicing counselor. **Leah Gilbertson '24** explored how people build a sense of pride around disability identity and also earned the Psi Chi Research Award. **Shelby DeMeulenaere '13,** in one of the department's earliest standout projects, researched post-traumatic growth and later earned a master's degree at Bangor University in Wales — where she still lives today.

"What's greatest for me is just seeing the kind of bubble around students break," Renstrom says. "They start to see, 'Oh, I'm actually above a lot of these other schools,' or 'I'm doing things that other students aren't.' But it's not really until they get to the MPA conference that they realize that."

MPA is also a launchpad for future opportunities. Renstrom has seen students get scouted by faculty at other institutions for graduate programs after seeing the work they can do.

Central psychology graduates go to graduate school at rates well above the national average for private colleges, into fields ranging from clinical psychology to law, social work and physical therapy — each one carrying the confidence of having already stood in a conference hall and shared their discoveries.

Funding from the Ed Willis Endowment, the De Cook Endowment for Character and Leadership and the **Bette Brunsting '56** Student Project Fund help cover the cost of the trip, ensuring the experience remains accessible to students regardless of financial means. You can contribute to these funds and help ensure students get the chance to show off how Central teaches success.

VOICES FOR GOOD

STORY BY: **BRITTANY CARLSON PROKUPEK '16**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **MELEAH FESLER '28** AND **LEIDY HUAMAN**

Before the A Cappella Choir ever sang a note in Peru, they'd already started doing good in the world — raising funds for a nonprofit supporting Andean youth. What followed was a cultural exchange that turned strangers into friends.

For many Central College students, the A Cappella Choir's international tour to Peru began with music.

It ended with something much deeper.

The 68-member ensemble spent 10 days performing in centuries-old churches, standing beneath the peaks of the Andes, exploring the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu and experiencing a culture unlike anything many had encountered before. Along the way, they discovered that the most memorable moments weren't found on a sightseeing itinerary. They happened in conversations, shared songs and unexpected human connections.

"This is not tourism," says **Mark Babcock '91,** M. Joan Kuyper Farver Endowed Chair in Music and professor of music. "This is an educational, artistic and cultural exchange."

That distinction shaped every aspect of the journey.



Central opens doors to new ideas and new perspectives for students as they travel with faculty and programs. Central's A Cappella Choir traveled to Peru in May to serve and sing.

MORE THAN MUSIC

Before students ever boarded a plane, they learned about Peru's history and Indigenous cultures. They also raised money for My Small Help, a nonprofit

organization that supports educational opportunities for children and young people in underserved Andean communities. When the choir arrived in Lima, students met the organization's executive director, learned about its work firsthand and presented the proceeds from their fundraising efforts.

The experience became far more personal than simply writing a check.

While visiting the Sacred Valley, the choir spent time with children who benefit from the nonprofit's work. The students exchanged performances with the school's choir before the young singers surprised the Central ensemble by attending one of its concerts days later.

"They were just in awe," says **Tony Braida '89,** whose longstanding relationships in Peru helped make the tour possible. "Not only were we helping from a financial standpoint, but we were engaged with the children who were the recipients of what we were supporting."

Those moments reflected Central's commitment to preparing students to do a world of good — not simply by seeing new places, but by building meaningful relationships across cultures. Moments when music becomes a universal language.

The choir performed four concerts in historic churches throughout Lima, the Sacred Valley and Cusco, including a memorable performance of a sacred work sung in Quechua, the Indigenous language of the Inca. Congregations responded with standing ovations, requests for encores and heartfelt words of gratitude — even when language itself created barriers.

"You don't have to know the language to know what that performance meant and that those in attendance loved it," Babcock says. "Music makes strangers friends."

The performances were only part of the education.

EMBRACING A NEW CULTURE

Students visited Potato Park, where Indigenous families continue agricultural traditions dating back thousands of years. They learned about biodiversity, sustainable farming and food systems while sharing songs and a meal prepared entirely from ingredients grown within the community. Rather than a staged cultural demonstration, the exchange unfolded naturally as hosts and visitors took turns performing for one another.

For many students, the experience challenged long-held assumptions.

"You can tell students this is a poor country," Babcock says. "But then they meet people who have tremendous joy, strong community and meaningful lives. They realized life satisfaction isn't just about wealth and accumulation."

That lesson resonated with **Angelina Hemphill '26,** who nearly didn't make the trip because international travel felt intimidating.

Instead, she found what she now considers one of the defining experiences of her college career.

"This choir tour enabled me to experience Central's community-centered values firsthand, develop meaningful connections and grow toward the person I am meant to become," she shares.

Those opportunities don't happen by accident.

They happen because generations of alumni and friends believe that learning extends beyond the classroom and are willing to invest in experiences that broaden students' perspectives and deepen their understanding of the world.

For the students who traveled to Peru, the journey wasn't simply about singing in extraordinary places. It was about returning home with a wider view of the world — and a clearer understanding of the good they can do within it.



DON'T MISS OUT!

Keep up-to-date with what's happening in the arts at Central by visiting:
central.edu/events and central.edu/fine-arts/.

HOMECOMING 2026

PHOTOS BY: **MEGAN MUUR BOLINE '23, KATIE BOWER '27, CASHEN THOMPSON '27** AND **MARY PAUTSCH**

Want more Homecoming moments?
Check out all the photos at **central.edu/homecoming.**







CLASS OF 1976 CELEBRATED 50 YEARS!

Front Row: **Jan Massie Boyd, Pamela Howard, Mary Ettel, Diane Miller Tough, Beth Lunan Lauterbach, Sandy Perry Sigman** and **Maxanne Dearolf Rearich.** *Second Row:* **Shelley Best Ellerston, Dick Redman, Daryl Sherman, Joyce Heusinkveld Sherman, Leigh Vaughn Bennett, Steve Fritche, Jerry Brookshire, Mindy Lipman Simon, Bill Albrecht, Debbie Robinson Albrecht, Dave Way, Park Woodle, Karen Westervelt** and **Linda Bielema Merema.** *Third Row:* **Steve Kohlhagen, Larry McCalla, Ginger Heusinkveld White, Craig Clard, Allen Reynen, Harry Ter Maat, Gordon Lauterbach, Ron Merema, John Hanna** and **James De Vries '77.**


GO DUTCH






GO
DUTCH











CENTRAL SCENE

New-to-college jitters turn to laughter and smiles during the annual Welcome Week Playfair when the new class rallies on the Ron and Joyce Schipper Stadium field and begins building the culture of Central.

PHOTO BY: **GLORIA MONTIEL '23**

FOUR CHAMPIONS, LASTING LEGACIES

Story By: **Alex Gast '26**
Photography By: **Megan Muur Boline '23** and **Central Athletics**

During the annual Athletics Hall of Honor dinner, Central inducted four champions.



Left to Right: **Kurtis Brondyke '11, Jill Ziskovsky Halcomb '11, Chad Beck '91** and **Guy Dierikx '08.**

Chad Beck '91, Guy Dierikx '08, Kurtis Brondyke '11 and **Jill Ziskovsky Halcomb '11** are the latest Forever Dutch® family members to be inducted into the Central College Athletics Hall of Honor.

NCAA CHAMPION WRESTLER

Beck was consistently successful at Central, qualifying all four years for the NCAA Division III Championship meet. He performed well at the Iowa Conference meets in 1988 and 1989 before finishing fourth at the NCAA Division III Championships in 1989.



Beck reached a truly elite level during the 1990-91 season, posting a 39-4 record and taking first in the Iowa Conference before also taking first at 126 pounds at the NCAA Division III Championships. He finished his Central wrestling career with a 113-38-1 career record, setting the school record for career wins at the time of his graduation. He was also a member of Central squads that won the Iowa Conference in 1989 and had three top-10 NCAA Division III Championship finishes as a team.

Beck began his own construction firm in Grinnell, his hometown, after graduation. He also served as Grinnell's head wrestling coach for 23 years.

TWO-SPORT ALL-AMERICAN

Dierikx excelled in both men's track and field and football at Central. He was a three-time All-America honoree in the NCAA Division III indoor championships and six-time outdoor honoree. At the indoor meet, he placed in the 4x400 meter relay and twice in the 400 meters. At the outdoor meet, he placed in the 4x400-meter relay four times, and in the 4x100-meter relay and 400 meters.



Dierikx especially shined at the Iowa Conference meets. At the indoor meet, he won multiple times in the 4x200-meter relay, 4x400-meter relay and the 400 meters. At the outdoor meet, he won the 400 meters three times and the 4x400-meter relay. He was named the Iowa Conference indoor MVP in 2008.

While dominating the conference in track and field, Dierikx also contributed heavily to Central's football success. He helped the Dutch reach the NCAA Division III football playoffs three times and win two outright conference titles. Dierikx played defensive back, tying the school single-season mark with eight interceptions in 2007,

and excelled as a punt and kick returner, receiving third-team D3football.com All-America honors in 2007 as well as first-team all-conference recognition.

After graduation, Dierikx became a successful high school football coach before finally becoming the head football coach at Riverdale High School in his hometown of Port Byron, Illinois, where he is also the school's athletic director. He was inducted into the Riverdale High School Hall of Fame in 2012.



VERSATILE DOMINANCE

Brondyke was a jack of all trades at Central, competing in football, men's basketball and men's track and field as a first-year. In football, he played wide receiver but was especially elite as a punter, becoming an All-Iowa Conference first-team selection three times and second-team selection once. He was also a three-time second-team D3football.com All-West Region selection and was tabbed as the Iowa Conference special teams player of the week five times. In 2007, Brondyke won Central's Brian O'Donnell Award, given to the team's top first-year. He recorded three of the top-10 season punting averages in Central history. He also pinned opponents with punts inside the opponent's 20-yard line an average of 1.59 times per game for his career, a school record.

Brondyke was a force in track and field too. At the NCAA Division III indoor championships, he placed twice in the pentathlon before he won the event in 2011. At the outdoor meet he placed in the long jump once and three times in the decathlon, placing second in 2011. He was a conference champ in the indoor triple jump and pentathlon (tie), as well as in the outdoor high jump, decathlon and javelin. He earned Iowa Conference outdoor co-MVP in 2010. Brondyke finished his Central career as a seven-time Iowa Conference athlete of the week, six-time track and field All-America honoree and seven-time national meet place winner.

After graduation, Brondyke continued competing in track and field while also launching his collegiate coaching career in the sport. He finished in the top-10 at the US-ATF national meet five times, was selected to represent the U.S. at the Thorpe Cup against Germany three times and won the decathlon title at the Drake Relays in both 2014 and 2017. He also represented Central at the U.S. Olympic Trials in 2020. Brondyke is the associate head men's and women's track and field coach at Iowa State University.

EXCEPTIONAL ACADEMICS AND ATHLETICS

Halcomb was both a dedicated athlete and scholar during her time at Central. In women's track and field, Halcomb was a three-time team MVP and co-captain, won the team's Most Valuable Freshman and Dutch Spirit awards and was the 2010-11 Iowa Conference Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year. She was also selected as a 2011 nominee for the NCAA Woman of the Year Award. She received All-America recognition at the NCAA Division III championship meets seven times and was a two-time CSC Academic All-America honoree.

Halcomb won Iowa Conference indoor pentathlon and 4x400-meter relay titles and grabbed outdoor titles in long jump, 4x400-meter relay and heptathlon. At the NCAA Division III Indoor Championships, she placed twice in the pentathlon and three times in the 4x400-meter relay. At the outdoor meet, she placed three times in the heptathlon and once in both the 4x100-meter relay and 4x400-meter relay.



In addition to her athletic prowess, Halcomb posted a 3.94 grade point average while majoring in both communication studies and Spanish, receiving the DeBruin Award for outstanding communication studies student during her time at Central. She even spent a semester studying in the Yucátan in 2008 and was a member of the Alpha Zeta Mu academic honor society.

Halcomb is now the director of program success at Goldfinch Health, working in West Des Moines, Iowa.

GRIT AND GRACE

STORY BY: **BRITTANY CARLSON PROKUPEK '16**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **U.S. ARMY** AND **PAUL JOY**

Kristina Oeth Stanger '00 knows her career path taught her two important lessons: Success is not linear, and to get there, you must evaluate your priorities.

Kristina Oeth Stanger '00 knew she wanted to be a lawyer in second grade. She just didn't know any.

Growing up in rural Iowa, the daughter of a welder and the first in her family to consider law school, Stanger built her sense of what the profession looked like one visit to the courthouse at a time. When she was a child her mother drove the family once a month to Aldi in Clinton for groceries — and to the public library, near the Clinton County Courthouse. While they picked out books, Stanger would also admire the courthouse and eventually attend summer "College For Kids" mock trial sessions. She didn't fully understand what she was seeing; she just knew the people that came to that courthouse sought out others to solve problems that mattered, and that she wanted to be part of it.

That instinct — equal parts curiosity and determination — would define the next three decades of her life.

FINDING CENTRAL

By high school, Stanger was methodically researching where a small-town kid with big dreams could build a foundation for law school. Central College kept surfacing, largely because of its pre-law program and the reputation of longtime advisor **Don Racheter.** But it was the full picture that sold her: rigorous academics, a value-driven community and a global outlook that didn't require leaving Iowa to experience it.

"Central just felt like a place where I could create my own adventure," she says.

It offered something she couldn't find packaged together anywhere else — a place to pursue excellence without the fear of failure, in an environment she described as competitive, but never cutthroat.

"You have people at the top of their game who can still be nice and committed to their values — that's what was different," she says.

She said "yes" to nearly everything: choir, symphony, intramural athletics, drama classes, the nationally-ranked mock trial team and an admission ambassador position — her first real window into the world beyond small-town Iowa.



Kristina Oeth Stanger '00

A DETOUR THAT WASN'T

Then she said "yes" to a decision that would reroute — and ultimately enrich — everything. Needing a way to help finance two private-school educations (Central, followed by law school) beyond scholarships, Stanger joined the Iowa Army National Guard the week after a Central choir trip to Wales. Her enlistment was inspired by a conversation with a fellow member of the Central family on the flight. She shipped to basic training on Mother's Day, between her first and sophomore years, and Central built her academic schedule around her service — accelerating her final three years into two, so she could graduate early and attend all her military training.

Joining the military was far from a detour; it was fate, "a blessing" (according to Stanger), and built the foundation of her legal career. After initial military training, she said "yes" to officer school, where she met her husband, Doug. About a decade later, after other meaningful assignments and practicing law, she returned to the officer school and became the first female Company Commander in the history of that same school — a milestone in a command pipeline that had long been closed to women.

Stanger graduated from Central in three years to complete her military officer training in Texas and get married to that active-duty soldier. She then enrolled in law

school at Drake University in the fall of 2001. She started her first year of law school the same week the world changed on September 11. She was deployed to Northern Iraq halfway through her second year of law school and served with the 101st Airborne Division for just over 14 months, while her classmates moved forward without her. She came back, finished law school, sat for the bar examination, continued her military service and started what would become a 20-year career at Nyemaster Goode, one of Iowa's largest law firms.

Over the better part of the next two decades, in addition to being a military wife and becoming the mother to three children, Stanger balanced parallel careers as an Army officer and a practicing attorney — often quite literally at the same time, alternating overseas deployments with her husband, an active-duty soldier, across eight years and five combined mobilizations. The careers melded into one; it is known that Stanger is referred to as "The Colonel" both in court or in the boardroom.

REDEFINING SUCCESS

Not every chapter of this journey was smooth, though. There have been injuries and sacrifices from service and the practice. The challenges of a military family and trying to practice full-time would collide. At times, she had to say "no" to the opportunities. As an example, seven days after the birth of their oldest daughter, Stanger was mobilized for a deployment she desired to lead but ultimately couldn't. Choosing her family's needs was a hard decision that cost her a command position, and nearly her military career. Eventually, it opened an unexpected door, as she was invited to become an instructor at the Officer Candidate School; a role that ultimately led to her historic command.

It's a story she now tells deliberately and often, especially to young leaders and students weighing careers in law or the military with the obligations of a life devoted to your faith, family and service of others.



Stanger shares her knowledge and inspiration during the 2022 Women's Leadership Conference hosted by Central.

"Life is gritty. It is hard when you commit to your values and there will be immense pressure," she admits. "There are lows that make the highs even higher."

Stanger believes that success in the law and life isn't just about billable hours or winning every case — it's figuring out, day by day, how to solve difficult problems with people that have entrusted you.

"You have to redefine what 'success' looks like for you and your family. It might not be about the rank or position or making partner on a fast track; it is about fulfilling your calling and using the gifts God gave you," she says.

Balancing all of these obligations has been difficult but worth it. As Stanger will say: "You might be able to 'do it all.' You just can't do it all at once."

Stanger retired from the U.S. Army in August 2022, after being selected for promotion to Colonel and an invitation to apply to War College — an opportunity she chose to set aside as their oldest children were entering high school, and as her husband continued to receive care to overcome his combat-related injuries.

Today, she practices as a nationally recognized business restructuring attorney, representing clients in everything from basic contractual disputes to complex, high-profile bankruptcy cases across the country — from Delaware to New York, Iowa to Arizona — often on short notice, and tight timelines. It's a specialty she says suits her instincts for acting decisively with incomplete information, built over years of military decision-making under pressure and working with others. It is a foundation of a little bit of grit and a lot of grace.

WHAT STAYED WITH HER

Ask Stanger what she'd tell a prospective Central student today, and she doesn't hesitate: look for a place that gives you a community-centered foundation, one that lets you pursue excellence, without losing yourself in the process. It's the same thing she tells young lawyers and soldiers weighing service-oriented careers — the highs are high, the lows are low, and both are worth it.

She's quick to deflect credit for her own path.

"None of my accomplishments were my efforts alone," she says. "Whether it was mentors, classmates, teammates or fellow service members — everything I've done has been because of other people pouring into me."

The other thing she wants young professionals to hear is simpler and harder: never compromise your integrity.

"You can never get your reputation back," she warns. "It takes one moment to lose yourself."

Three decades after a young girl in Clinton, Iowa, sat quietly in the library and driving by the County Courthouse, wondering what it would take to belong there, Stanger has built a career defined by exactly the kind of grit and community she first admired from those monthly grocery runs to Aldi — and never stopped chasing.

FROM THE LINKS, WITH LOVE

Story By: **Alex Gast '26**

Photography By: **Martín Mantegini**

Members of the Central College family embarked on an unforgettable trip across the ocean to Scotland.



The Forever Dutch® family members who traveled to Scotland in late May pose for a group picture.

"Finding time to study abroad can be difficult for golfers. This is, basically, your set-aside chance for a mini study abroad."

That was the mantra echoed by Central College men's golf head coach **Mel Blasi** that inspired so many Central men's and women's golf team members to sign up for a trip to Scotland. From May 27 to June 4, 2026, members of the men's and women's golf teams at Central (including this author), parents including some alumni, Blasi and head women's golf coach **Mackenzie Biggs '24** all embarked on a journey to the birthplace of golf. The traveling group, plus two trip guides, found themselves spending seven full days, not counting plane travel time, in Scottish lands that were fascinatingly foreign.

"Having a course where you can see the ocean on every hole is something we have to travel really far to get," Blasi explains.

The trip was just the second installation of what Blasi hopes can become a Central golf tradition. The first trip for the men's and women's programs occurred in 2022 and saw a similar group head to Scotland. After that trip, Blasi was so captivated by the home of the great sport he'd played and coached for so long that he knew he wanted more of the Central family to journey to this destination.

"Scotland was always a bucket list for me," he says. "And when we went in 2022, I wanted to see if we could make it a regular part of our program …. There are just so many fascinating aspects to Scotland."

GOLFING AROUND EDINBURGH

This second trip in 2026 was bound to be greater than before. The group landed in Edinburgh on May 28, where they subsequently toured the city and its castle for the day. After a filling pub dinner and a night of embracing jetlagged sleep, the golfers awoke the next morning to journey to East Lothian to play Dunbar Golf Club. This course was established in 1856 and designed by Tom Morris Sr., who is better known as "Old Tom Morris." He started and maintained the world's first golf course, now known as the Old Course at St. Andrews Links in St. Andrews, Scotland. He is widely recognized as golf's founding father.

Needless to say, we were excited to get on the course. That first day was a true introduction to the Scottish style of golf referred to as "links golf." The wind was blowing 30+ mph every which way. The coarse, undulating terrain meant your ball could keep rolling forever and bound into tall fescue grass or a deep pot bunker. Even the rain made an appearance to welcome us to the country as we trudged along the coast. By the time our rounds were done, many of us felt like we had fought a battle against nature itself. But the new challenge was a thrilling edition of the game we loved.

The next day brought another round of golf at Gullane Golf Club on the Gullane No. 2 course. The day after that was a visit to the iconic Old Course at St. Andrews Links and a self-guided tour of the town. For several members, this was their highlight of the trip.

MAKING MEMORIES OF A LIFETIME

"My favorite memory from the trip was walking up the 18th hole at the Old Course at St. Andrews," **Kayden Pendergrass '25** says. "The whole town of St. Andrews was awesome."

Brandon Eighmy '01, father of men's golf team member **Lincoln Eighmy '27** and all-around avid golfer himself, echoed Pendergrass's sentiment. "Walking the Old Course and visiting the local pubs was like going back in time," he states. "As a golf fan, it doesn't get any better."

Our journey through golf history was followed by another round at the St. Andrews Links Eden Course, which ran alongside several parts of the Old Course. In fact, one golfer says an item he used to own technically resides on the Old Course, since his tee shot on Hole 3 of the Eden Course may or may not have ended up in the plants near the tee box of Hole 13 on the Old Course. The wind was howling that day and we got a proper introduction to the large gorse plants that cover much of Scotland's terrain, which quickly became a rather thorny trap for several golf balls.

Even after that round, though, we hadn't had enough of our time on the links. The following two days featured even more golf, with a sunset round at Moray Golf Club on a beautiful seaside

golf course, then a final round at Kings Golf Club in Inverness. In between the rounds came bus trips through the breathtaking Scottish Highlands, authentic pub dinners, a boat ride across Loch Ness (no, we did not find Nessie), a mini–Scottish Highland Games competition and free time to enjoy the Scottish culture.

"I really enjoyed going to the different pubs and listening to live music," says **Mickey Martens '27,** a women's golf team member. "No matter where you walked in, someone was playing some music which was very enjoyable. It was something everyone loved to do and it was a good break from the golf at times!"

One of my personal favorite moments occurred when I was paired with Brandon Eighmy. On the final hole at Moray, Eighmy had put himself in a tough spot off the tee but had recovered nicely with a second shot that landed just short and right of the green. With almost everyone else who had golfed that day watching, he decided to hit a chip shot from over 30 feet away from the hole that proceeded to pop up perfectly, trickle up the slope and drop into the hole for an unlikely birdie. Brandon's hat toss and triumphant yell following this minor miracle captured the excitement that so many of us felt throughout our trip.

"When my ball leaked in the backside of the cup on 18, I started to wonder if I still had eligibility left and if Coach Blasi would take me!" Eighmy jokes.

For those keeping track: Yes, it was five rounds of golf for five days straight, plus walking tours and early mornings in a time zone six hours ahead of home. We were exhausted. Most of us, though, were too focused on savoring all the memories that will last us a lifetime to bother with being tired. We were gathering souvenirs to show off back home or taking photos of scenery that could make eyes water. We were meditating on how grateful we were to be alive and be in this beautiful place we would have never reached without Central.

"People dream of playing golf in Scotland, and if I didn't go to Central, I probably would have never gone," Martens says.

THANKS TO DONORS

This journey began over two years ago with fundraising for both teams largely focused on getting this group to Scotland. The Central community responded, teaming up with the family and friends of the golfers to provide them with a pathway overseas. Because of this support, it felt like our group had the entire Forever Dutch® community there with us. As if all of you stepped across the wind-swept, scraggly terrain with us, or rode the boat across the misty Loch Ness in the seat next to us, or admired the towering, lush, glistening green beauty of the Scottish Highlands right by our sides. It's no coincidence that in the home of the famous Scottish knight William Wallace, this group from Central felt a sense of freedom. For just a moment in time, the only worry we had was when the rain would be coming that afternoon. Even that we could simply greet with a laugh, shrug off and accept as part of our experience abroad in the homeland of a game so many of us love.

"I think the Scotland trip is very important to a student-athlete's total college experience," Blasi says. "Experiencing a whole new culture with different food, language and landscapes is something they will remember for a long time and contribute to the way they see the world."

This experience wouldn't have been possible without the Central community supporting us. So it's our turn to share our gratitude with you for helping us make a lifelong dream come true. None of us will ever forget this trip, and we will certainly never forget your kindness.

The opportunity for this life-changing experience will be coming again for those who dare to dream. With your help, we can turn those dreams into reality so that more students can say, 'Central gave me an unforgettable experience that I'll cherish forever.'

ATHLETICS UPDATES

BASEBALL: Making the American Rivers Conference tournament for the first time since 2021, Central tied for fifth (17-23 overall, 12-12 conference). Third baseman/pitcher **Brayden Sawyer '26** was named an all-region player by D3baseball.com and the American Baseball Coaches Association.

DANCE: Central won its fourth consecutive American Rivers Conference title at the league championships in February and then took first in Division III Pom at the NDA College Nationals in Daytona Beach, Florida, in April.

MEN'S GOLF: Central came in third in the league tournament. **Carter Yurgae '28** and **Maison Brandt '28** both finished in the top 10 as individuals to earn all-conference honors.

SOFTBALL: For the 34th time in school history, the Dutch participated in the NCAA Division III Championships. Catcher **Rylee Dunkin '27** and third baseman **Hannah Higgins '26** were first team American Rivers All-Conference honorees.

MEN'S TENNIS: Central placed fifth in the conference (5-17 overall, 4-4 conference). **Alex Slaymaker '27** was tabbed for American Rivers Conference Player of the Week honors on March 2.

MEN'S TRACK AND FIELD: Three athletes won individual national titles during the 2026 season: **Jack Brown '27** in the indoor mile, **Gunner Meyer '26** in the indoor 60-meter hurdles and **Kale Hobart '27** in the outdoor decathlon.

WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD: At the 2026 NCAA Division III Outdoor Track and Field Championships, **Olivia Bohlen '26** won the individual national title in the heptathlon. A total of nine Dutch women earned All-American accolades between the indoor and outdoor seasons.

ACADEMIC ALL-AMERICA: A record seven Central athletes were named to the CSC Academic All-America Teams® this spring. Bohlen, Brown, Hobart, **Gage Huyser '26,** Meyer, **Gavin Smith '26,** and men's wrestler **Sam West '26** were honored. Bohlen also became the 28th athlete in school history to receive an NCAA postgraduate scholarship.

For an up-to-date schedule of all sports, visit **athletics.central.edu/calendar.**

CLASS NOTES

THE '70S

Harry Smith '73 narrated Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait" and selections from the new multimedia work "American Mosaic" with the Des Moines Symphony during Yankee Doodle Pops on July 3, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Armeda Reitzel '75, professor emeritus, Cal Poly Humboldt, in May 2026 joined the Peace Corps as a virtual service pilot participant in Ukraine. She co-facilitated a virtual summer camp for teens in English as a second language. Reitzel is fulfilling a lifelong dream by joining the Peace Corps after retirement. She appreciates the key role that her Central professor and mentor, **Maxine Huffman,** played in her career as a TESL and communication studies professor.

Terri Evert Dennison Karsten '77 won first place in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards pre-1900s Historical Fiction category for her new book, "A Necessary Death."

THE '80S

David Koller '81 was inducted into the Central Lee Community School District's Academic Hall of Fame.

Paul Sparks '81 celebrated his 25-year anniversary of employment with Indiana University–Indianapolis.

Randy Sikkema '82 published "Golf 99: A Travel Guide to the State of Iowa Featuring All Its Golf Courses." Sikkema visited all 390 golf courses in Iowa and played at least one course in every county. He also visited all 99 Freedom Rocks and county courthouses across the state, along with other local attractions.

Gina and **Allan Graham '85** retired after being owners and operators of WineStyles in Johnston, Iowa, for 16 years.

Jennifer Donelon Lefevre '85 is the lead French teacher in the dual language immersion program at the GLOBE Academy in Atlanta, Georgia, where she resides.

Mary Whisenand '86 began a new role as a product analyst at W.R. Berkley Companies in Urbandale, Iowa.

Gretta Goldsworthy Irwin '88 received the Honorary Alumni Award from Iowa State University for her outstanding contributions to uplift the reputation, welfare and prestige of Iowa State.

Jeff Staton '88 started a new position as an associate professor of practice at Iowa State University.

Christi Vrban '88 stepped into the role of director of learning and gerontology at The Hartford.

THE '90S

Thomas Robbins '91 is the assistant general manager and director of booking at Five Flags Center (Arena and Theater) in Dubuque, Iowa.

Erin Frazier '92 moved to a new role as the communications director for the City of Lafayette, Colorado, where she resides.

Rena Striegel '93, president of Transition Point Business Advisors, helped launch and lead a program to strengthen communication within family-owned farms before they have a leadership transition.

Howard Feitel Jr. '94 celebrated 30 years and a promotion to senior certified financial and HUD counselor at BALANCE Financial Wellness in San Francisco, California.

Chandra Smith Leeper '94 retired from the Cherry Creek Community School District after thirty-one years of teaching sixth grade math at Horizon Community Middle School in Aurora, Colorado.

Aaron Mager '96 took the role of head girls basketball coach at ADM High School in Adel, Iowa.

Kellie Swacker Tu '96 was selected to be the new principal of Madison Elementary School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Mark Wall '96 was appointed the chief financial officer for Pella Regional Health Center in Pella, Iowa.

Chad Huyser '97, Central Trustee, is the chief executive officer for Ritchie Industries in Conrad, Iowa.

Korine Wills Marshall '98 holds a position in Applied HVAC Channel Marketing at Johnson Controls.

Tony Bradley '99, colonel in the Iowa Air National Guard, assumed command of the Iowa Air National Guard 132d Wing.

Ellen Friis-Ehle '99 opened Beer Garage Brewing in Montezuma, Iowa.

THE '00S

Amanda Hansen Fletcher '00 started a new job with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach as a youth 4-H development specialist.

Mark Phillips '00 began a new role as senior business development manager at Story Construction.

Amy Spaur '00 assumed the role of senior pastor at Plymouth Park United Methodist Church in Irving, Texas.

Rachel Gans '01 embarked on a new role as client experience lead at Central Event Rentals in Bend, Oregon.

CLASS NOTES

Andrew Whitham '01 was promoted to executive territory account specialist at Bristol Myers Squibb.

Amy Stanwood Dean '02 performed the role of Gertrude in a production of "The Underpants" presented by the Carousel Theatre in Indianola, Iowa.

Gwen Worster Waddingham '06 was named the director of the Office of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa.

Sarah Frese Nickel '09 is a foreign commercial service officer for the U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Association.

THE '10S

Andrea Kroeger Irwin '12 is the owner of Empirical Sales & Marketing, LLC, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Cory Nikkel '12 is the assistant superintendent at Gilbert Christian Schools in Gilbert, Arizona.

Greg Ellingson '13 was hired as a vice president for HJ Sims.

Steven Overbergen '13 entered into a new role as the early education-fourth grade principal for Pella Christian Schools in Pella, Iowa.

Samuel Parker '13 is a vice president of product management at Circana, while **Jeana Newendorp Parker '13** is a senior data services consultant at SAP. The couple lives in Arvada, Colorado, with their son, Clayton, 3.

Greg Barner '14 was named the head men's wrestling coach at Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa.

Morgan Baustian Morris '14 is a senior recruiter for Loenbro in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Ellie Miller '15 is the executive assistant to the dean at the Creighton University College of Nursing in Omaha, Nebraska.

Cody Walter '17 is a resident physician — pediatrics at Southern Illinois University, Springfield, Illinois.

Robert Butts '18 assumed the rank of lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. He and **Rachel Verhun Butts '18** reside in Norfolk, Virginia, with their three children.

Matthew and **Jen Kern Johnson '19** married on February 21, 2026. The couple resides in Batavia, Illinois.

Taylor Smith '19 is an assistant track and field coach and athletic facility coordinator at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

THE '20S

Anne Williamson Dillon '20 obtained her CPA license and shifted to a new role as an audit and assurance manager at Deloitte.

Kirsten Buniak '21 had a paper published in the Applied Magnetic Resonance journal titled "Exploiting Fast-Field-Cycling NMR Relaxometry to Differentiate Sickle Cell Hemoglobin from Hemoglobin A."

Ian '22 and **Megan Muur Boline '23** celebrated their marriage on June 27, 2026. The couple resides in Pella, Iowa, and both hold positions at Central.

Erik Murphy '22 transitioned into a new role as a mechanical engineer for new product development at Cemen Tech, Indianola, Iowa.

Shawn '22 and **Madison Clark Spurrier '23** married on June 22, 2024. The couple lives in West Des Moines, Iowa.

Madison Farrington '23 is a physician assistant at the Pella Regional Walk-in Clinic.

Dillon '23 and **Paige Busick Hoit '23** celebrated their marriage on May 9, 2026. Their wedding party consisted entirely of fellow Central alumni from the Class of 2023.

Abby Marr '23 joined First Security Bank & Trust as an ag/commercial loan specialist at the Riceville, Iowa, location.

Esveidy Soto-Soto '25 is a billing specialist at Access Systems, Inc.

Alex Gast '26 is in the role of content specialist – editorial at Central. He and **Andi Dvorak Gast '26** also celebrated their marriage on July 11, 2026. The couple resides in Altoona, Iowa.

Preston Rowe '26 is an Engineer 1 – Industrial at Vermeer Corporation in Des Moines, Iowa.

ADVANCED DEGREES

Amy Houston Miller '99 received a Master of Arts in organizational communication from the University of Kansas in May 2026.

Nichole Malott '16 received a Master of Science in curriculum and instruction from Western Governors University in 2026. She resides in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Hannah Reussner Phillips '19 earned a Doctorate of Osteopathy from Des Moines University.

CLASS NOTES

NEW ARRIVALS

Christine Lundgren-Williams '12 and **Beau Williams '12,** daughter Lucia Elizabeth, January 3, 2026.

Betsy and Tim Wilson '14, daughter Abigail Joy, October 3, 2025.

Robert '18 and **Rachel Verhun Butts '18,** son Daniel Martin, April 24, 2026.

Nathan '18 and **Katie Phillips Manchester '19,** daughter Hannah Quint, March 7, 2026.

A NOTE ABOUT CLASS NOTES

We know you enjoy the updates in the Class Notes section of Dutchology. You will find the accompanying photos in the online edition. This gives us the opportunity to highlight more of your milestones, celebrations and memories. Be sure to check out the online Class Notes gallery at dutchology.central.edu to see familiar faces and celebrate the moments that make the Central community special.

IN MEMORIAM

Dona Van Hemert, former staff member, Boone, Iowa, Feb. 22, 2026.

Mary Louise Tucker '49, Monroeville, Alabama, April 26, 2026.

Bill Wellner '50, Bella Vista, Arkansas, March 26, 2026.

Ernest "Ernie" De Jong '52, Pella, Iowa, May 3, 2026.

Dick Ebbers '61, Morrison, Illinois, March 21, 2026.

Vivian Vroom Hildebrandt '67, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 3, 2026.

Gary Bagnall '68, Newton, Iowa, January 31, 2026.

Carol Brown Fenton '68, Metuchen, New Jersey, February 4, 2026.

Charles Menke '70, Columbia, Missouri, April 25, 2026.

Robert Whitehorn '77, Canton, Georgia, April 17, 2026.

David Hansen '87, Jefferson City, Missouri, June 28, 2026.

Berta Van Ekeren '16H, Monroe, Iowa, February 2, 2026.

IN MEMORIAM



GEORGE ANN HUCK

The Central College community is saddened to share George Ann Huck, professor emerita, passed away at the age of 87, on Aug. 6, 2026, in Mérida, Yucatán.

Huck served as the residential director of the Central Yucatán program for nearly 40 years — from its inception until 2005. During that time, she helped countless students fall in love with Mexico's language and culture the same way she did.

Yucatán was also where she ignited passions for women's empowerment and environmental protection. She founded and chaired several groups advocating social change and climate awareness. That drive also led her to co-author the book "Women of Yucatán: Thirty Who Dare to Change Their World," in which she celebrates women across the region for their leadership.

Huck's work opened a gateway toward positive cultural exchange for both Central students and her neighbors in Yucatán. Central has established a memorial fund in her name that will directly support the Spanish department. Our community will look back on her legacy with gratitude and admiration.

MEMORIAL GIFTS AT CENTRAL

Some alumni and friends inquire about making a memorial gift in honor of a special member of the Central family. If you would like to do so, please call 641-628-5154 and ask for **Kathy Cashen Thompson '87,** director of development, or give online at **central.edu/give** and add a note to designate your memorial.

You can also scan here to give !

WHAT IF ... Central Makes a Big Splash?

STORY BY: **ALEX GAST '26**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: **LGM PHOTOS**



What if swimming was a sport at Central? How could it increase enrollment, strengthen campus culture and contribute to athletics and academic success?

We won't have to wonder much longer.

Thanks to the new Pella Recreation Center, opening in 2027, Central will have a new home for its first men's and women's swimming programs, which will begin competition in the 2027-28 academic year.

The programs offer a new opportunity to bring more student-athletes to campus — including from a largely untapped pool of swimmers across Iowa.

"The swimming opportunities within the state of Iowa are so few that I think that will really help draw some more students to Central," says **Jennie Hedrick-Rozenberg '06,** head women's triathlon coach and new head coach of Central's men's and women's swimming programs.

She expects the women's recruiting pool to stretch beyond Iowa, too, particularly among students drawn to Central's small-school experience.

"A lot of them actually want to get out of the city," she says. "It's interesting talking to them … They want the small-town experience."

Building a new program takes more than recruiting athletes, however. It also takes community support.

"Startup equipment is going to be more than what it normally would be," Hedrick-Rozenberg says.

The new recreation center won't have lockers, for example, so the team will need equipment such as backpacks. Donor support also can help provide team building resources that enhance the student-athlete experience.

Donors to Central's new swimming programs help build teams that are more than fast in the water.

"I'm looking for student-athletes with authentic personalities and who are good citizens," Hedrick-Rozenberg says.

For her, that means athletes who graduate from Central are prepared for what comes next — whether that's a career or graduate school.

"That's why they're here," she says. "The athletics are just an added bonus … I want them to be great in the classroom."

Of course, she also wants them to compete.

"I want us to be competitive at conference," she says. "I want us to be the team everyone's looking at and saying, 'Oh my gosh, that's the team I wish I was on because they're cheering for each other, they're all just a team and they're competing.'"

Central's new swimming programs are about more than adding another sport. They're an opportunity to bring new students to campus, build community and develop the kind of people who go out and do a world of good long after they leave the pool.

Make a splash. Donate to Central's new swimming programs today and invest in building a team at **ignite.central.edu/SWIM.** For information and naming opportunities, contacting **Eric Van Kley,** vice president for athletics, at **vankleye@central.edu** or **641-628-5422.**

A WORLD OF GOOD
Central College

A SHARED WISH FOR THE FUTURE

At Central College, we believe meaningful change starts with an idea – or in this case, a wish. One of the questions we hear most often centers around how the Central family can help the college. The best ways to do so? By referring a student to Central and by making a gift – no matter the amount. As we move into a second year of our comprehensive campaign, A World of Good, we invite alumni to dream with us and create the future for Central.

Through our World of Good campaign and accompanying Wish Book, we've gathered a collection of tangible opportunities — projects, enhancements and student experiences — that can make a lasting impact on Central's campus and beyond. Whether it's new lab equipment, expanded programming or unique learning opportunities, each wish represents a chance to create something special. With your support, these wishes can come true — helping us build a stronger, more vibrant Central, one meaningful gift at a time.

1



$1,000, $2,500, $5,000

SPONSORSHIPS

Help make Central events memorable for all our students, families, alumni and guests! Sponsorships available for athletics, Scholarship Celebration Dinner, Heritage Day Luncheon, Homecoming, Commencement, recruiting events and more. We also welcome advertisers in this magazine and newsletters. Let Central sing your praises to the world and feel good knowing you've helped make an experience come to life.

2



$5,000, $10,000, $25,000

GIVING DAY CHALLENGER

Participation matters! Help us challenge the Central family to unlock dollars for students and progress. Your support multiplies the impact, inspires others and supports the Journey Scholarship Fund. Mark your calendars for Nov. 19 for Thankful Thursday; April 8 for Hoo-Rah Day; and the 48-Hour Challenge, Aug. 31-Sept. 2.

3



$8,000/PROJECT

UNDERGRAD RESEARCH

Support a faculty/student pairing for undergraduate research to give our students the edge as they pursue graduate and professional school. Students in every major have the opportunity to work alongside our teaching and subject matter experts to further develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Students are challenged in a supportive and caring environment.

4



$50,000

ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Create endowed scholarships that directly support Central students. Endowed scholarships provide a permanent and reliable source of income from which the scholarships are awarded every year, which lowers costs for families, attracts strong students and keeps Central in a position of sustainable and financial strength. Get to know your student scholarship recipient at our annual Scholarship Celebration Dinner!

5



$25,000, $50,000, $100,000

FOREVER DUTCH®

Help advance our nationally recognized athletes and programs! Stock our Dutch Fuel nutrition center, which features protein, drinks and energy specifically intended for our student-athletes. And, projects are lining up for our outdoor facilities including lighting for soccer fields and tennis/pickleball courts, baseball and softball fields, recreation sand volleyball and basketball courts; installing baseball turf; resurfacing the track and more.

6



$15,000

MOCK TRIAL

Help our nationally known mock trial team compete at national tournaments. With travel costs on the rise, some extra support for this talented team makes the case for Central far and wide. Volunteers also are needed to serve as tournament judges and provide Central students with internships, clerkships and real-world experience.

7



$100,000

ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY

Want to help every single Central student? Updating our academic technology across buildings and classrooms around campus is a phased project on the list. Whether you can cover all or some, you'll know you'll be playing a role in preparing our graduates for leadership and service beyond our campus walls.

8



$10,000

STUDENTS

Grocery bingo, silent disco, games, dances and entertainment — on campus and off. Remember the laughs and good times of your college days? Your support helps make those experiences possible for today's Central students, who are always ready to have fun, build community and do life together.

SUPPORT CENTRAL WISHES

If you'd like to support one of these wishes, please contact the Advancement Office at 641-628-5154 or development@central.edu. Ready to make your gift? Visit **central.edu/give.** Every gift, big or small, makes a difference. We appreciate your support.

You can also scan here to give !

FROM THE DESK OF ...

I visited Central College for the first time unwillingly.

My dad insisted on a campus tour, in part because my grandmother had graduated from Central in 1927. I wasn't interested. But I remember coming into Pella on T14, reaching the square and thinking: This is what a college town is supposed to look like.

On the campus tour, people made eye contact. They smiled. They said hello. Not because they knew me, but because that was simply what people at Central did. A few weeks later, an admission counselor called to tell me I had received the H.S. Kuyper Scholarship, and I finally acknowledged what I already knew: Central was home.

Only later did I discover how true that sense of home was. I learned that my Dutch ancestors came to Pella with Scholte in 1847. My connection to this place stretches much farther back than I knew when I first arrived on campus. It makes me realize that Central is here for good.

Central has endured in Pella because generations of people believed that this college, in this community, matters. Central gives Pella its students, faculty, employees, alumni, ideas, arts, athletics and energy. Pella gives Central something equally valuable: a place where students can learn what it means to belong, contribute and build a life. Central and Pella enrich one another, creating a vibrant place to learn, work, live and belong.

The good grows here means more than longevity. It means doing something worthwhile with the years we are given. We see the results across the college — in classrooms and laboratories, on fields and courts, on stages and in studios, and in the lives our alumni build around the world. Through changing times, Central continues to create opportunities for students to discover what they can do and who they can become.

Good institutions do not simply preserve what others built. They cultivate it. They give students room to learn, compete, create, worship, lead, question, serve and imagine what might come next.

But I think Central's greatest success is something harder to measure. It is the culture I encountered on that first campus tour. The welcome I felt at Central and the sense of place I felt in Pella were part of the same experience.

Central is a place where people look one another in the eye and say hello. Where professors know their students. Where coaches, mentors, classmates, colleagues and friends expect something from one another — and show up for one another. The individual achievements we celebrate are possible because they grow from a culture that believes people matter.

Nearly a century ago, my grandmother was one of those students. Years later, Central became my college, too. Today, students walk the same sidewalks, enter these classrooms and experience what I discovered on a campus tour.



Central's future belongs to more than the students who come here. It belongs to all of us who care about this college and community — students, faculty and staff, alumni and friends, and the people of Pella. We share an opportunity and responsibility: to treasure what those before us built, to imagine what Central and Pella can become together, and then help build it.

Generations change. The work continues.

Central is **here for good.**

Deanna Ver Steeg '94
Chair-elect, Central College Board of Trustees

Central College
1853

812 University St., Pella, Iowa 50219

Fall 2026 Vol. 52

CELEBRATE HOO-RAH DAY

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THURSDAY, APRIL 8!

Share your #CentralSpirit with us on social media for #HooRahDay!

HOO-RAH
HOO-RAH

**SHOW THE WORLD WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE FOREVER DUTCH®
BY MAKING YOUR GIFT AT HOORAH.CENTRAL.EDU.**