

## A Second Chance: Nontraditional Student Makes Big Impact at ACC

Imagine losing everything you've ever known—your family, your livelihood, your friends, and even your freedom. That was reality for one Alpena Community College student when he arrived in town in the autumn of 2017. With the help of the college, that student built a new life from the ground up using the foundation he laid at ACC.

Todd Graham, who goes by Graham, took a 33-year hiatus from education before coming to Alpena and enrolling at ACC. After talking to Graham, who is engaging and friendly, and learning about his involvement in a wide array of campus clubs and activities, it's hard to believe he moved to Alpena following a 50-month stint as a guest of the Michigan Department of Corrections.

Open about the man he was prior to coming to Alpena, Graham describes his former life in the Clare area as toxic. He admits to embezzling thousands of dollars from his employer during what Graham calls, "...the darkest chapter of my life." His marriage broke up. He was shunned by his church. He forfeited his freedom by making poor choices that hurt people who trusted him.

With 50 months in prison to think about how his life had come to this point, Graham discovered some truths about himself and developed dormant talents. He started to write, churning out several hundred poems, a series of 16 children's books, began a science fiction trilogy of novels, and did ghost-writing for other inmates who wanted to communicate with their loved ones but weren't adept at putting their thoughts into words. Halfway through his prison sentence, Graham determined he wanted to make writing his career, but had to get an education first if he was going to change the

trajectory of his life and live more authentically. How he would obtain that education, however, was a mystery to him.

When he emerged from prison after more than four years, Graham headed north to Alpena to live with one of the only friends he had left. This friend was just the first in a long line of people from Alpena who ended up making a positive impact on Graham's new life and is one of the reasons why Graham says that Alpena will always be his home.



*2020 Jesse Besser Award  
recipient Todd Graham*

Two months after arriving in Northeast Michigan, Graham planned to enroll for classes in the spring 2018 semester at ACC, but he feared his past would prevent him from being able to truly have a fresh start.

"I was incredibly nervous and concerned I would not be accepted...because of my criminal record," he admitted.

Graham was so apprehensive that he began expressing his fears via email to ACC Director of Admissions Mike Kollien, who ultimately invited Graham to come in for a meeting and personal tour, something Graham still talks about with amazement in his voice.

"I will never forget what he said in our interview when I shared my story," Graham recalled. "He literally shrugged his shoulders and said, 'So what?'"

Kollien told Graham that the student's future, not his past, was what was important. With ACC, Graham had an opportunity to build a life in which he could take pride.

Reflecting on that day in Mike Kollien's office, Graham now considers it a turning point in his life. He threw his time and energy into school and tried to make a positive impact

*(continued on next page)*



*Dr. Don MacMaster  
ACC President*

## President's Message

Over the past four years, ACC has made considerable progress increasing the general fund and maintenance and replacement fund balances, the two unrestricted cash reserves available to the College. On March 1, one of my goals was to get the sum of the two fund balances to equal 20% of the annual budget, or approximately \$3 million. Working with senior administrators to refine our 2021 budget, I could see the College closing in on the target. Then the coronavirus hit. Over the next eight weeks, as the buildings emptied, the state's budget cratered, and fall enrollment projections ranged from anemic to catastrophically down. Suddenly the future viability of the College appeared in question, depending on which worst-case scenario was considered.

In late March, based on the rapidly deteriorating condition of the state's budget, Michigan Community College Association President Mike Hansen advised community college presidents to prepare for a 10% funding cut in fiscal year 2020 ending June 30, and another 10% hit in 2021. Forty percent of ACC's operating revenue comes from state appropriations. Ten percent cuts each year would equal a \$1.15 million reduction in state revenue in the next four months.

With little time to absorb these cuts, a wave of painful layoffs certain to degrade the capacity of the College and the services we provide to students loomed ahead. As U.S. Senator Gary Peters noted on an April conference call with community college presidents, COVID-19 has been like a hurricane that hit the entire country all at once, leaving widespread death and Depression-era financial destruction in its wake.

In May, as college officials explored cost-cutting measures, ACC applied for a CARES Act Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan. Many community colleges across the country considered the same move and virtually all were considered ineligible to access funding from the program. Fortunately, ACC had on file an IRS letter from 1964 documenting 501(c)3 status, and after a brief tussle over eligibility, a PPP loan to ACC was approved by the U.S. Small Business Administration, one of only a handful obtained by community colleges nationally. Three key factors made the loan a game-changer. One, it covers up to 2.5 months of payroll, a substantial amount for ACC where approximately 85% of expense is personnel. Second, the loan is forgivable and essentially becomes a grant if more than 75% is used on payroll. And third, the loan prohibits layoffs during the funding period, which aligned well with the College's strong desire to keep staff intact. The PPP loan in hand, I think ACC will be able to weather the storm financially, no matter how the State's budget situation resolves.

Regarding enrollment, the other major unknown, faculty and staff are preparing for multiple instructional scenarios for fall semester—online, remote, hybrid, and face-to-face. Meanwhile, we focus on what we can control—fall semester enrollment and our process for safely re-opening our facilities to students, faculty, staff, and the community. ACC has frozen tuition to make college more affordable to our friends and neighbors navigating these uncertain times. We are grateful to everyone who supports our students through scholarships. Please consider reaching out to the ACC Foundation for ways to provide additional support. The need is great and the time is now.

### Nontraditional Student Makes Big Impact *(continued)*

on the institution and town that has given him a chance at a better, more honest life. Once a user of Alpena Community College's student food pantry—which allows any student to take what food he or she needs, no questions asked—Graham now is a frequent donor of food, which he helped store, organize, and display at the pantry in ACC's Besser Technical Center during his time at ACC.

As much of an impact as ACC has had on Graham's life, he has also impacted ACC. At the 2020 ACC commencement ceremony, Graham was honored as the 2020 Jesse Besser Award recipient. The award is given to a male graduating student who has made outstanding contributions to the life of the college through scholarship, leadership and expression of responsibility in solving social problems.

Having just graduated summa cum laude with an Associate in Arts degree and an Associate in Science degree, Graham is transferring to Saginaw Valley State University in the fall and will work towards a degree in creative writing. His goal is to become a published author and earn an advanced degree in psychology so he can continue to help others who struggle like he did.

Todd Graham is a prime example of the redemptive opportunity Alpena Community College provides students with complicated pasts. Given a clean slate upon admission to ACC, he seized the opportunity to write a new future for himself and discovered the person he was always meant to be.

# Ambient Learning at ACC Promotes Immersive Education

Massive canvases with artistic representations of Hubble Space Telescope images of the galaxy brighten up the hallway outside physics classrooms. Arresting abstract modern art featuring the digital painting of an ACC fine arts student hang in alcoves in the Besser Atrium. Vivid new artwork seems to be everywhere at Alpena Community College, where visitors and students alike are noticing a more vibrant, engaging campus—and not just at Van Lare Hall, which is in the midst of a \$8.7 million-dollar renovation.

At the center of the campus “beautification-with-brains” initiative is ACC instructor Tim Kuehnlein, who was recently awarded the 2020 Russell H. & Fromilda Y. Wilson Endowed Teaching Chair for his ambient learning proposal entitled *Fixing the Damn Walls—An Effort to Sauce-Up the Brutalist Walls of ACC by Enhancing Their Aesthetic and Educational Value*. The ACC Foundation Endowed Teaching Chair Program seeks to recognize and promote academic excellence at Alpena Community College by honoring noteworthy faculty members and providing resources for improving instruction, academic programs, and professional development.

Designed around the theory of ambient learning—which is the premise that people absorb information from their environment—Kuehnlein is using the \$5000 endowment award to carry out an ambitious plan set by the ACC Campus Beautification Committee, of which he is a member, to transform the endless swaths of bare concrete walls around the Alpena campus into engaging halls of higher learning using colorful, educational art. The project is designed to not only improve the look of ACC, but to also foster discussion and learning for students, faculty, staff, and visitors alike.

“The quality of our spaces impacts learning and motivates us towards thinking outside the box, considering things we have not yet contemplated,” Kuehnlein explained. “Art makes a difference—it sounds cliché perhaps. But arts and culture create a sense of place where people want to live, work, play, recreate—and learn. There is no question that our environment shapes our ability to learn effectively.”

While the vast majority of summer classes from ACC are being held online, it is Kuehnlein’s hope that when students return to campus they find a more inspiring place to learn.

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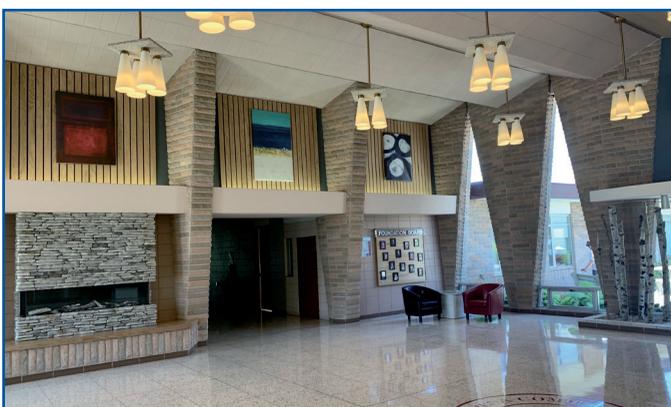
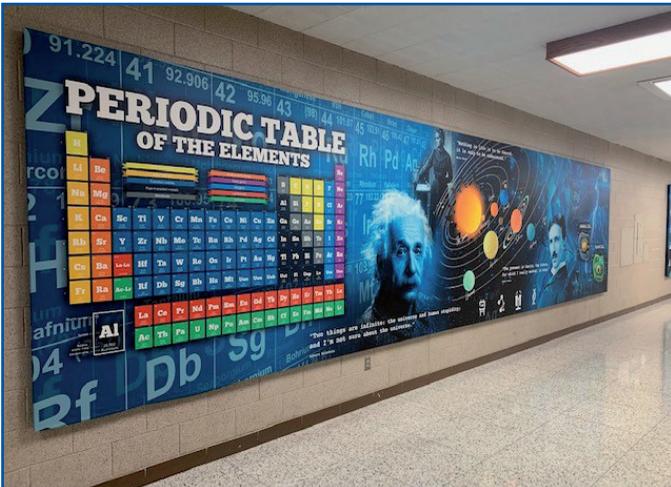
## Ambient Artwork at Besser Technical Center

Top: Sir Isaac Newton looks over the physics hallway.

Second: Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, and Nikola Tesla float among the elements.

Third: *Infinite Possibilities I & II*, paintings by artist Pamela O’Neil, depict images from the Hubble Space Telescope.

Bottom: Modern abstract artwork by ACC alumna Lisa Ann decorates the alcoves in the Besser Atrium.



# 25th Annual Robert M. Granum Memorial Scramble for Scholarships

*Golf appeals to the idiot in us and the child. Just how childlike golfers become is proven by their frequent inability to count past five. —John Updike*

With author John Updike's criticism of golfers in mind, it is perhaps appropriate that one of the Alpena Community College Foundation's major fundraisers for the past 24 years has been a golf scramble to raise money for scholarships—which presumably are used to fund at least some math classes. Well over \$400,000 has been raised by generous golfers and sponsors the past 24 years in honor of Robert Granum, who was an ACC Foundation trustee and community leader who worked hard to promote education and cultural enrichment in our community.

This year's 25th edition of the ACC Scramble for Scholarships, to be held August 15th at River's Edge Golf Club, will be a special event we hope you'll participate in as a golfer. However, even those who don't golf can be a part of the scramble and show their support by donating \$25 to our general scholarship fund. To express our appreciation, the ACC Foundation will include your name on a banner displayed at the event. Donating is easy! Simply send in the tear-off form with payment to the ACC Foundation at 665 Johnson Street in Alpena or securely give online at [alpenacc.edu](http://alpenacc.edu).

If you're interested in seeing if you can unseat Phil Straley and the Peterson family—whose team has won three out of the last five scrambles—secure your spot as soon as possible for the event by picking up a registration form at River's Edge Golf Course or visiting the ACC website.



*The Robert M. Granum Scramble for Scholarships would not be possible without our hardworking team of student volunteers.*



*Winners of the 2019 Robert M. Granum Scramble for Scholarships were (L-R) Erik Peterson, Adam Peterson, Todd Skiba and Phil Straley.*

## Robert M. Granum Memorial Scramble for Scholarships Champions

- 1996 Jon T. Crow, Larry Hanner, Jim Vivian II, Ron Werner
- 1997 Bill Benson, Mike Cadarette, Chris Limback, Dave McDonald
- 1998 Jim Boldrey, Tim Fitzpatrick, Dave Karschnick Sr., Bill Yahne
- 1999 Bill Benson, Mike Cadarette, Chris Limback, Dave McDonald
- 2000 Chuck Atwell, Steve Lewis, Charley Rosebush, Paul Sabourin
- 2001 Mike Cadarette, Chris Limback, Dave McDonald, John Pintar
- 2002 Mike Cadarette, Chris Limback, Dave McDonald, John Pintar
- 2003 Tom Grueter, Max Lindsay, Tim Muszynski, Bill Talaski
- 2004 Tom Bennett, Jerry Hochstetler, Bob Palmos, Roger Reddinger
- 2005 Tom Grueter, Max Lindsay, Tim Muszynski, Bill Talaski
- 2006 Jason Cramer, Derek Seguin, Kyle Wirgau, Travis Wyman
- 2007 Jim Boldrey, Tim Fitzpatrick, Jim Masters, Al Senchuk
- 2008 Eric Krebs, Bob Piper, Dan White, Bill Yahne
- 2009 Jim Boldrey, Tim Fitzpatrick, Jim Masters, Al Senchuk
- 2010 Angela Bartosh, Tyler Bartosh, Ryan Diethelm, Eric Lindsay
- 2011 Chuck Ingle, Tanner Ingle, Al Skiba, Jake Skiba
- 2012 Bill Peterson, Erik Peterson, Jerry Skiba, Bill Yahne
- 2013 Jerry Skiba, Phil Straley, Adam Peterson, Bill Peterson
- 2014 Bob Centala, Harvey Marlatt, Jack McCoy, Todd Skiba
- 2015 Dick Boyce, Adam Peterson, Bill Peterson, Phil Straley
- 2016 Ken Geyer, Sue Geyer, Bob Piper, Dan White
- 2017 Harvey Marlatt, Chris McCoy, Jack McCoy, Brian Natzel
- 2018 Bill Peterson, Adam Peterson, Todd Skiba, Phil Straley
- 2019 Adam Peterson, Erik Peterson, Todd Skiba, Phil Straley

## 2020 Distinguished Graduate



*Tom Sobeck ('88) is presented the 2020 Distinguished Graduate Award.*

The ACC Foundation is pleased to announce Thomas Sobeck as its 2020 Distinguished Graduate. Tom joins a prestigious fraternity of 25 other alumni upon whom the college has bestowed its highest honor.

A native of Rogers City, Tom enrolled at ACC several times, starting and stopping as he tried to find what career path he wanted to follow. ACC faculty and support staff were able to provide the specialized, one-on-one attention that eventually helped guide Tom to the business program at the college. There, Tom discovered his love of accounting—and a solid career path to follow.

After graduating from ACC in 1988, Tom transferred to Northern Michigan University, where he found himself well-prepared to compete with his classmates, thanks to the education he received at ACC.

In 1990, Tom graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in business administration from NMU and soon after became an adjunct faculty member at both North Central Michigan College and Lake Superior State University.

In 2001, Tom took a job at Presque Isle Electric & Gas Cooperative in Onaway, eventually working his way up to his current position of president and CEO, responsible for the successful operation of a utility company that provides electricity and natural gas service to approximately 36,000 electric and 13,000 natural gas customers in Northeast Michigan.

Even outside of work, Tom is a power in his community. In addition to serving as the mayor of Rogers City from 2013 to 2017, Tom also spent time as a city councilman, trustee and chairman of the Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan, board member and chairman of Presque Isle County Development, Target Alpena board member, director of Huron National Bank, and a member of the dean's advisory board of the Walker L. Cisler School of Business at Northern Michigan University.

Reflecting on the significance ACC played in shaping his career, Tom said, "ACC truly prepared me to be successful in pursuit of my BS in Business Administration at Northern Michigan University and beyond that helped to prepare me to be successful in my professional career. I still remember fondly all the courses and instructors and the genuine pride and care they exercised in delivering a high-quality education at an affordable cost."

Established in 1998 by the ACC Foundation, the distinguished graduates program honors ACC graduates who have contributed to society through building successful careers. The productive, meaningful lives honorees have led demonstrate how an ACC education provides the foundation for a lifetime of achievement.

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### GET INVOLVED AT ACC

I'd like to donate to help students in need.

- \$25 ACC Golf Scramble Sponsorship
- \$50
- \$100
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Where would you like your donation to be used?

- Where it is needed most
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*Please make checks payable to the ACC Foundation. To give securely online, visit [discover.alpenacc.edu/donate.php](http://discover.alpenacc.edu/donate.php) or call 989-358-7297.*



#### Mail to:

Alpena Community College Foundation, 665 Johnson Street, Alpena, Michigan 49707

#### For more information, contact:

Brenda Herman, ACC Foundation Executive Director, 989-358-7297, [hermanb@alpenacc.edu](mailto:hermanb@alpenacc.edu)

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## ACC Creates Office of Alumni Relations

While Alpena Community College forges close relationships with students during their time on campus, little has been done in the past to maintain and strengthen those relationships with alumni. The college has long recognized a need for an alumni relations director to help bridge the gap between the college and its alumni, but various circumstances prevented the need being realized. The wait, however, is over.

Alpena Community College, together with the Alpena Community College Foundation, is pleased to welcome ACC graduate Mary Eagan as the new Director of Alumni Relations, a position made possible by the Strengthening Our Institutions Program grant awarded to ACC by the U.S. Department of Education. Mary has extensive experience in mass communication and broadcasting, as well as media production and marketing, content editing, and fundraising. She is a graduate of Alpena Community College and the University of Iowa who looks forward to building relationships with alumni, students, and staff to facilitate better connections with the college and the people it serves.



*Mary Eagan, ACC Director  
of Alumni Relations*

"Alpena Community College has served as a stepping-stone for so many people and has helped them go further in life than they dreamed possible. I want to build relationships with alumni and tell the stories of the people who have benefited from the small class sizes and personal, practical instruction that is the hallmark of ACC. That nurturing academic atmosphere has been so important to the tens-of-thousands of ACC graduates who have gone on to rewarding careers. And it's important for our current students to realize that a small-town education can take them all over the world."

On the job since March, Eagan has created a monthly e-newsletter, *Campus Crosscut*, which is emailed to thousands of alumni and friends of ACC. To sign up to receive *Campus Crosscut* or to touch base with Mary, email her at [eaganm@alpenacc.edu](mailto:eaganm@alpenacc.edu).

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