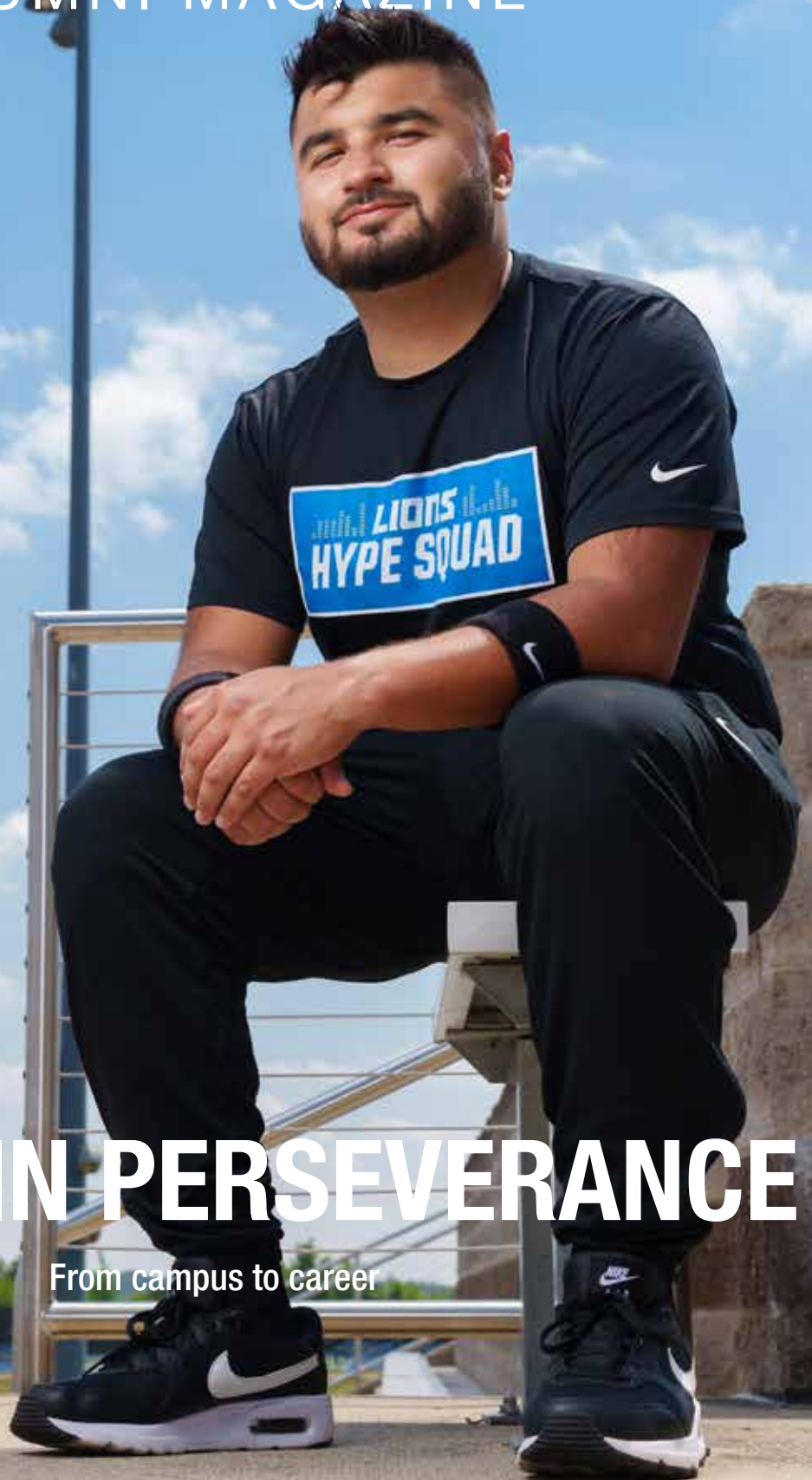


Fall 2025

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

ALUMNI MAGAZINE



POWER IN PERSEVERANCE

From campus to career

Meadow Brook Amphitheatre

Every summer, Meadow Brook Amphitheatre on Oakland University's campus hosts a variety of live performances from emerging stars to world-renowned artists. Learn more about this beloved outdoor music venue at 313Presents.com.



CONTENTS



09

Taking Flight

From coursework to copters, Carolyn Jordan elevates her mechanical engineering skills with the National Guard and beyond



14

In the Gold Seat

Meet Mackenzie Reese Nichols, biology graduate and Leader Dogs for the Blind volunteer, in this recurring Q&A that reveals an alum's favorite campus memories

CONNECT WITH US

oumag@oakland.edu



OaklandU

Oakland-University



22

Dancing into the Lions Den

Ernesto Duran-Gutierrez finds success through his childhood passions

20

Class Notes

Discover updates about your classmates





32

News

Find out what's new around Oakland University's campus

37

Art Through Anatomy

Looking at the world through two lenses, Thy Hoang simultaneously pioneers art through science



48

OU Moment

Opened in 1964, the Meadow Brook Amphitheatre solidified OU as a cultural hub



ACRONYMS

CAS | College of Arts and Sciences
OUWB | Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine
SBA | School of Business Administration
SECS | School of Engineering and Computer Science
SEHS | School of Education and Human Services
SHS | School of Health Sciences
SON | School of Nursing
oakland.edu/acronyms

ALUMNI VOICES

- Bringing a Love of Language to Life, pg. 13
- Launching to Success, pg. 15
- An Everlasting Impact, pg. 16
- To Connect and to Serve, pg. 19
- More than Skin Deep, pg. 28
- Residing Resilience, pg. 30

CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

- Centered in Community, pg. 34
- Advocates for the Unheard, pg. 37
- Research, pg. 38

ACADEMIC SPOTLIGHT

- School of Education and Human Services, pg. 42
- School of Health Sciences, pg. 43
- Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, pg. 44
- School of Business Administration, pg. 45
- School of Engineering and Computer Science, pg. 46
- School of Nursing, pg. 47



STAFF

VICE PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING
John Young

EDITOR
Kelli M. Warshefski, CAS '13 and '16

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Debra Lashbrook

DIRECTOR, PRODUCTION SERVICES
Shelby Kramer, CAS '07

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Kathy Angel, CAS '09 and '18

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Robert Hall, Josh Scott

PROOFREADER
Adam Lawrence

CONTRIBUTORS
Michael Downes, Writer and Web Services; Thy Hoang, CAS '26, Illustrator; Kristina Lindberg, Writer; Emily Morris, CAS '21, Writer and Coordinator; Aaron Neighbor, Media Producer; Amy Ritt, Writer

EDITORIAL OFFICES
Anibal House, Oakland University
630 Pioneer Drive, Rochester Michigan 48309-4482
Phone (248) 370-3184
Fax (248) 370-3182

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

VICE PRESIDENT, ADVANCEMENT
Michael Westfall

Oakland University Magazine is a biannual publication distributed free to alumni, staff and friends. See current and past articles on oakland.edu/oumagazine.

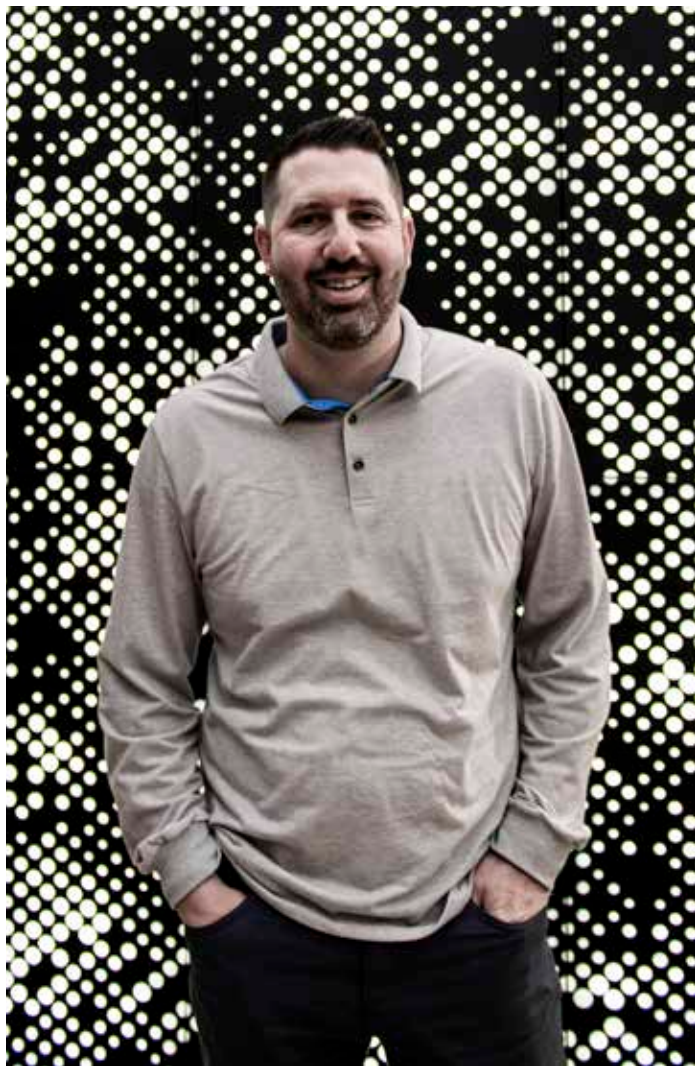
Reproduction without permission is prohibited.

UCM-28285 | Spring '25 Online Issue No. 116

UCM-28330 | Issue No. 117

17270 | ISSN: 1054-6480

Address changes, call (248) 364-6133 or email ouaa@oakland.edu.



This year, the university launched its 2030 Strategic Vision, establishing five intersecting pathways: Our People, Student Success, Discovery, Stewards of Place and Sustainable University. “Each pathway is supported by initiatives that improve university operational efficiencies, strengthen finances and present pragmatic steps toward achieving aspirational goals,” says Oakland University President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D., “Collectively, the pathways and initiatives evoke the vision of the ongoing transformation of Oakland University and positions the institution as a preeminent ‘global university’ as we move into the mid-21st century.”



POWER IN PERSEVERANCE

Not everyone begins their college journey at the same place. You might have arrived at Oakland University as a first-generation student, a community-college transfer or an adult learner. You might have known your dream career since childhood or were still searching for your path. You might have relied on financial aid or earned scholarships. But no matter how your journey started, we all share the same goal: reaching the moment we receive our diploma and taking a step toward our future.

The value of higher education is immeasurable. Beyond the soft skills learned through teamwork, adaptability and time management, each of us left OU equipped with the technical knowledge to pursue and obtain our dream jobs. And it’s because of that education that we’ve been able to overcome obstacles, rise through the ranks and use our degrees to have meaningful, successful careers.

This issue explores the journeys alumni took to persevere in pursuit of their careers. Kendell Jefferson, CAS ’18, discovered her passion for law enforcement in middle school. That drive led her to a criminal justice degree — and now to the Detroit Police Department, where she’s building trust and connection within the community. Noah Edwards, SBA ’06, juggled accounting classes with a job at a local pool company. Today, he’s the chief accounting officer at Rocket Companies. Caroline Roberts, M.D., CAS ’20 and OUWB ’25, and Madison Romanski, M.D., CAS ’21 and OUWB ’25, co-founded a program as med students providing skin hygiene kits to people experiencing homelessness. Now, they’re beginning residencies in dermatology and family medicine — carrying forward that same spirit of service.

These, and other alumni stories, are testament that persistence pays off; that an Oakland University education doesn’t just prepare you for a career, but equips you to help make an impact in the field that matters to you.

And the numbers back it up. With nearly 140,000 alumni — 79% of whom call Michigan home, and over 90% who complete an internship related to their major — OU has robust, early career preparation. In fact, a recent economic impact report shows that OU generated more than \$1.9 billion in economic activity in fiscal year 2024, supporting 6,417 jobs across Oakland and Macomb counties. This impact is fueled by students, alumni and the lifelong earnings unlocked by your degrees.

In a time when higher education is under pressure, your work and resilience help showcase its continued value. Your stories and success are at the core of Oakland University’s mission as we seek new opportunities to strategize and find forward-thinking ways to advance educational opportunities for students, faculty, staff and fellow alumni.

As you turn these pages, I hope you’re reminded that perseverance is a force in all of us. And in times when challenges arise, it is the most powerful tool we have. ➤

— Kelli Warshefski, CAS ’13 and ’16, editor

Share your stories at oakland.edu/oumagazine.

Photos left to right: Kendell Jefferson, CAS ’18; Noah Edwards, SBA ’06; Caroline Roberts, M.D., CAS ’20 and OUWB ’25 and Madison Romanski, M.D., CAS ’21 and OUWB ’25

Spring 2025 RECAP

Last spring, the Oakland University Alumni Magazine released an online-exclusive issue, where we shared stories of alumni who are making a difference in the world by pursuing their passion and connecting with nature. Find these stories and more at oakland.edu/oumagazine.



Joy of Water

Aquatic life support technician Ryan Nirganakis, CAS '13, finds his calling close to home, caring for marine-based wildlife at the Detroit Zoo. ➤



Perspective is Everything

Sada Reed, CAS '25, uses art to represent them in some manner, including nods to their childhood, indigenous roots or current curiosities. ➤



Preserving the Preserve

Oakland University faculty discover new ways to help animals thrive and prosper inside Oakland University's biological preserve. ➤

Do you prefer digital over print?



Use code to remove your address from the Oakland University Alumni Magazine print mailing list and receive the online edition only.

ALUMNI *Voices*

“

I was fortunate to have incredible professors at OU who inspired me to take the leap and move abroad after graduation. I see a bit of each of them in the way I teach, connect with students and approach challenges every day.

”

KEVIN EDGELL, CAS '20
page 13

Oakland University alumni emit pride, empowerment and resilience. Your diverse careers speak to the wealth of knowledge instilled in all graduates. Despite varying paths, however, it's evident by your alumni voices that you took the tools you learned at OU and used this knowledge to become leaders in your fields.



Come TO CAMPUS

CONNECT with fellow alumni at a program or event.

CHEER ON your favorite Golden Grizzlies sports team.

WATCH a play at the newly renovated Varner Hall.

LEARN from innovative speakers and community conversations.

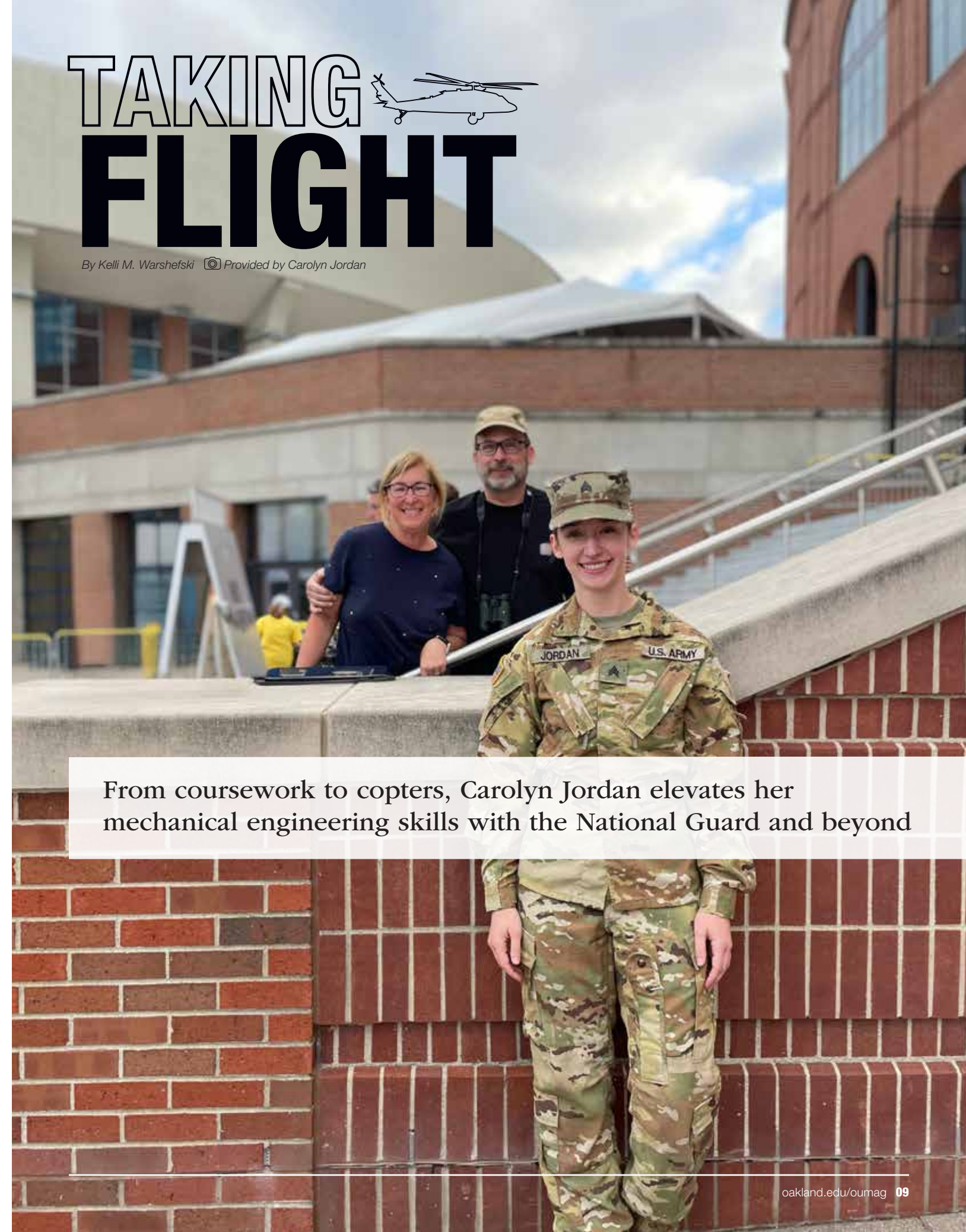
TOUR THE HALLS of the historic Meadow Brook Estate.

Explore the variety of events on OU's campus at calendar.oakland.edu



TAKING FLIGHT

By Kelli M. Warshefski © Provided by Carolyn Jordan



From coursework to copters, Carolyn Jordan elevates her mechanical engineering skills with the National Guard and beyond



In Lincoln, Nebraska, during a cross-country flight, Carolyn Jordan finishes troubleshooting and fixing an aircraft.

Bracing for the vertical liftoff, Carolyn Jordan, SECS '22, sits in the back of a Black Hawk helicopter, exhilarated by her first ride in the aircraft. Donning her uniform, she looks out over the expansive horizon, capturing photos of this first of many flights to come.

“It’s a really weird feeling to just be going straight up into the air all of a sudden,” Jordan says. “It was exciting when I first came back from training in the National Guard to learn that I was slotted into a flight company and had the opportunity to fly in a Black Hawk helicopter for all those years that I was in school.”

Charting a Course

Jordan’s journey to becoming a Black Hawk helicopter crew chief — and later, a federal aviation technician — for the National Guard began at Oakland University. Gravitating toward her passion for math and science, Jordan came to OU to pursue a degree in engineering. But though she was unsure of her future career path, her introductory classes offered a chance to test out the different facets of engineering. While she enjoyed them all, Jordan found that her greatest interest lay in mechanical engineering.

“With mechanical engineering, I enjoyed the classes, material and everything I had the opportunity to learn about,” says Jordan. “I was excited at the multitude of opportunities with that degree.”

Jordan came to OU as an Honors College student and a recipient of the prestigious Presidential Scholarship that helps alleviate the stress of tuition, room and board, awarded to incoming students with outstanding academic records. Additionally, “The Honors College gives you more opportunities outside of learning your coursework to connect you with professionals in your field and try to set you up for success after graduating,” explains Jordan.



Carolyn Jordan (right) with fellow soldier/crew chief Sergeant Madeline Rambo (left) at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.



“The engineering professors were also really helpful,” she continues. “Along with teaching you coursework, they give you an insight as to what life would look like in these different engineering roles and help you figure out what you want to do.”

SECS Instructor Steven Thrush, Ph.D., SECS '10, '12 and '20, and tribologist with the U.S. Army DEVCOM Ground Vehicles Systems Center, met Jordan during her freshman year. “She told me she had aspirations of serving in the military,” he says. “I encouraged her to enlist, saying if she feels the urge to serve her country, she should or it would always be a regret.”

During a career fair, Jordan was given the chance to pursue this interest. She enlisted in the Michigan Army National Guard and took a semester off in January 2020 to attend basic training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. Jordan spent three months with little access to the outside world and, upon completing her training at the end of March 2020, found a very different world. “We were all supposed to see our families at basic training graduation, but [the National Guard officials] sat us down and told us there was a pandemic and the whole country was shut down,” Jordan recalls.

Jordan and her comrades were quarantined to the barracks, unable to see family or gain access to buses that would transport them to

specialized training schools. Nearly three weeks later, Jordan was granted transport to the 15 Tango School, a U.S. Army Advanced Individual Training program for Black Hawk helicopter mechanics in Fort Eustis, Virginia. There, she was trained extensively in Black Hawk helicopter maintenance, including inspections, preventative maintenance and troubleshooting issues. After graduating from the 15 Tango School, Jordan returned to OU to continue her bachelor’s in mechanical engineering.

“One of the things that I found fascinating and unusual about her, particularly as a woman engineering student, is that she was a part-time member of the Army National Guard as a student,” says Mechanical



Engineering Professor Laila Guessous, Ph.D. “She brought interesting insights to the fluid mechanics class when we were discussing topics of aerodynamic lift and drag, and angular momentum based on her experience with helicopters.”

Ready for Liftoff

Coming out of training, Jordan was slotted into a flight company as a crew chief, spending her weekends as a passenger in a Black Hawk helicopter. “My first few drills were continuing to learn about the aircraft and basic maintenance, but it wasn’t long before I started flying on the aircraft, sitting in the back providing support for missions,” Jordan says.

“When I enlisted, I was definitely interested in a role as a mechanic on an aircraft because I knew what a unique work experience that would be,” she adds. “So I was excited at the opportunity to work on the aircraft, learn about their systems and be able to apply this hands-on knowledge in the future.”

On top of her National Guard duties, Jordan was also a member of the Oakland Robotics Association, the Emerging Leaders Program and the Golden Grizzlies Band. Even with her busy schedule both on and off campus, though, she continued to excel in her coursework, graduating with a 3.98 GPA and receiving the OU SECS Exceptional Achievement Award. Her professors described Jordan’s work as meticulous and nearly flawless.

“She was still maintaining the absolute highest level of academic success at OU while serving with the National Guard,” recalls Dr. Thrush. “There have been times of adversity for her. Being a female in the male-dominated profession of mechanical engineering as well as in our military has presented her with challenges, but she is strong, resilient and dedicated.”

“During the first year or so that I was at my National Guard unit, I did face challenges,” Jordan explains. “I came into my unit with one other female, and there were times that we were told that we didn’t belong in a flight company and that we would never be good crew chiefs. But over the next few years, when a new male would come to our flight company from training, we would hear those same people say that he seems like a solid guy. The juxtaposition was frustrating at times.”

Her dedication to the field, however, continued upon graduating from OU, when Jordan pursued a full-time position with her National Guard unit as a federal aircraft technician, gaining further experience in aviation maintenance. She spent her days doing inspections on postflight, corrosion and scheduled preventative maintenance. She also worked through complicated projects that involved rigging flight control systems, tracking and balancing rotor systems, as well as troubleshooting issues involving subsystems such as fuel, avionics, hydraulics, pneumatics and more.

After serving five years in the National Guard, however, Jordan is setting her sight on her next adventure. This summer, she started a new position at Ascential Technologies — a medical and life sciences, transportation and specialty industrial manufacturing company — as a manufacturing engineer, excited to use her unique skills and experiences from OU and the National Guard in a new way.

“My experiences have been extremely valuable to me,” Jordan says. “The skills and knowledge that I gained from my degree have set me up to be successful in my new role, and my time in the National Guard gave me the opportunity to work with many different types of people; a skill that will be useful as I regularly communicate with operators, quality, management, programmers, supervisors, and more.”

“I am excited to take everything that I have learned and move back to the field of engineering,” she says. 🌟

During an annual door gunnery drill, Carolyn Jordan flies in an aircraft along an aerial gunnery range in Camp Grayling, Michigan.



BRINGING A LOVE OF LANGUAGE TO LIFE

By Amy Ritt 📷 Provided by Kevin Edgell

Little did Kevin Edgell, CAS ’20, know that a high school course would ignite a love of language that would shape his career path. “I took Spanish for the first time in 10th grade and fell in love with it,” Edgell says. “My teacher was very inspirational and spoke to our class about studying abroad, so that’s when the seed was planted in my mind.”

Having always excelled in math and science, Edgell planned to follow in his brother’s footsteps and major in engineering at OU when he transferred from Macomb Community College. But his special interest in Spanish only intensified after he spent two weeks in Madrid taking a summer course. “When I found myself spending all my free time studying Spanish, I knew that’s what I wanted to pursue,” he says.

At Oakland, Edgell declared his major in Spanish language and literature with a minor in linguistics. After sharing with OU faculty that he wanted to explore possibilities for grad school and work in education, he was further motivated by their encouragement and support. “My OU professors said, ‘We’ve done it and we can help you,’” Edgell says. “I didn’t plan to be as involved on campus as I was, but they were adamant that I be involved.”

Edgell immersed himself in countless campus activities. He served as president of the Spanish and Linguistics clubs; was treasurer for Sigma Delta Pi, the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society; served as student chair of the Multicultural and Hispanic Heritage Month Planning committees; and published work in *Nuestras Voces*,

OU’s Spanish-language journal. “These experiences gave me a strong passion to pursue language, research and leadership opportunities beyond the classroom, and ultimately helped to shape my decision to become an educator,” he explains.

As a senior at OU, Edgell took the next step toward fulfilling his dream to teach abroad. He applied and was accepted into a teaching program in Spain and moved there after graduation. “I began my time in Madrid as an English language assistant and used what I learned at OU to help students strengthen their language skills,” he says.

Edgell went on to earn a master’s in teaching and later obtained his Michigan teaching license while living in Madrid. “That journey opened the door for me to work at an international American school, where I now teach middle and high school math in a completely bilingual, multicultural environment,” he says. “I’m fortunate to work with incredible groups of students from Spain and all over the world.”

Edgell shares the profound impact of his OU education and faculty mentorship with his own students by providing meaningful learning experiences that inspire their curiosity and personal growth. “I was fortunate to have incredible professors at OU who inspired me to take the leap and move abroad after graduation,” Edgell says. “I see a bit of each of them in the way I teach, connect with students and approach challenges every day.” 🌟



MAJOR: Bachelor of Science in biomedical sciences, 2023; Master of Science in biology, 2025

FAVORITE STUDY SPOT: In The Honors College in their focus room — the bean bag chairs are so cozy

GO-TO PARKING LOT: The second floor of the parking garage in front of the Engineering Center is the only correct answer; there are always spots, and you never have to fight to get in or out

FAVORITE FOOD OR PLACE TO EAT ON CAMPUS: The omelet bar in Vandenberg Dining Hall; also, shout-out to Denis with OU Eats for operating this dining station, and ensuring our omelets are cooked to perfection and our bellies are full

FAVORITE MOMENT ON CAMPUS: Walking the stage at my undergraduate commencement ceremony with one of the future leader dogs I raised during my time at OU

BEST CLASS: DHC 1000 Making Discoveries course I took as an incoming freshman

FAVORITE PROFESSOR: Dr. Sang Hoon Rhee in the Department of Biological Sciences — he was a phenomenal professor, research mentor and role model

SONG(S) YOU LISTENED TO WHEN STUDYING: “Beige” by Yoke Lore is one of my all-time favorite songs, and it frequents most of my study playlists

SOMETHING UNIQUE ABOUT YOURSELF? I raised and trained four future leader dogs for Leader Dogs for the Blind during my undergraduate and graduate studies. 🐾

Having originally come to OU to become a human medical doctor, Nichols' time at Oakland shed light on a new path: veterinary medicine. She is currently applying for veterinary schools, and hopes to work in a mixed animal practice, serving small and large animals in more rural areas.

Metro Detroit native Noah Edwards, SBA '06, learned discipline and dedication growing up in a military family. After graduating from high school, he considered becoming a member of the U.S. military, like his grandfather, father and brother — but his mother had other ideas.

LAUNCHING TO SUCCESS

By Amy Ritt
 Josh Scott

“Mom said, ‘Military life is hard. There’s a lot of uncertainty that comes with it. Maybe you should think about going to college,’” Edwards says. He then began to explore his options as a first-generation college student.

At the time, his father was deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom, his brother was in the U.S. Navy and his sister was away at college. His mother was also very sick. “I decided to live at home during college to care for my mom and handle things that my dad normally would, like mowing the lawn and fixing the cars,” Edwards says. He also wanted to work for a local pool company to earn money while learning the ins and outs of running a small business.

Having heard good things about OU’s business school, Oakland became Edwards’ No. 1 college choice. The proximity to his home enabled him to commute and get involved on campus. “Oakland offered me the chance to work and balance the entirety of my life, which I couldn’t have done if I went away to school,” he notes.

Edwards’ decision to major in accounting at OU was influenced by a renowned investor’s theory about its impact on business. “Warren Buffett said it best: Accounting is the language of business — no matter what business you have, no matter how well it is performing or what stage it is in,” he says. “Accountants not only perform the accounting, but they also translate that into business decisions or data that people can use to drive outcomes.”

Edwards focused on building industry connections at OU in addition to juggling his classes, work and responsibilities at home. As vice president of Beta Alpha Psi — OU’s professional accounting fraternity — he coordinated events for the business school. Those networking opportunities helped him to land an internship at Deloitte, one of the nation’s largest accounting firms, during his junior year, which resulted in a full-time job offer upon graduating.

After working at Deloitte for six years, Edwards held positions with various other companies before being hired in 2018 at Rocket, a Detroit-based fintech company that handles mortgage, real estate and personal finance. He moved up within the company, and in 2024, he was promoted to chief accounting officer of Rocket Companies, leading the vision, strategy and execution of all accounting, financial reporting, internal controls, tax, financial systems and treasury activities.

As his career continues to flourish, Edwards looks back on his time at Oakland with gratitude. “Choosing a college that equipped me for a successful career has been a huge blessing,” he says. “Oakland had a small enough community where you got to know everyone but still provided big opportunities for me to graduate from college and achieve my goals. As it turns out, mom was right.” 🐾





© Chuck Cloud

AN EVERLASTING IMPACT

Through his giving spirit and grit, Mitch Shaver leaves a legacy that lifts others

By Kristina Lindberg



Mitch Shaver, 2023

“You can’t waste your life dreaming about the cards you wish you had; you have to play the hand you are dealt.” This is a mantra that Mitch Shaver, CAS ’96, SHS ’96 and ’00, embraced throughout his life.

Shaver embodied the spirit of giving and resilience during his journey from a dedicated physical therapy student to an inspiring advocate for the ALS community, after his own diagnosis with the disease in 2018. Through each chapter, Shaver always put others first. “He always loved interacting with people and helping them be the best that they could be,” his wife, Rhonda Shaver, says.

Mitch, who passed away in January 2025, used his diagnosis to empower others, continuously concerned for the welfare of those around him. “He always felt like no matter what he was going through, someone else might be having a harder time,” Rhonda says.

This mindset became evident in his day-to-day interactions with family, friends, coworkers and even strangers, such as Mitch checking in on a friend who was battling a sinus cold in the week leading up to Mitch’s passing. “Mitch texted his friend to ask how he was feeling,” Rhonda says. “His friend responded that it was only a cold and he would heal soon, and then asked Mitch how he was doing. Mitch responded that he just had ‘the worst day of his entire life.’ It is a testament to Mitch’s character that on the ‘worst day’ of his whole life, when it would have been so easy to think about himself, the one thing he wanted to do was check in on his friend.”

True to his conviction of helping others, Mitch and his family raised funds for ALS-related organizations and established the Mitchell Leland Shaver Foundation in 2023 to provide financial assistance, education and awareness for those affected by ALS. The original mission to provide one scholarship for an individual who is pursuing higher education and has a parent or caregiver with ALS, as well as giving two grants to individuals with ALS, was soon surpassed — so far, the foundation has awarded seven additional scholarships and 15 grants.

Mitch is a proud, three-time OU alumnus with bachelor’s degrees in biology and health sciences, and a Master of Science in Physical Therapy, and his giving spirit also extends to his alma mater. In conjunction with a former OU



Left: Mitch Shaver graduating from Oakland University in 2000.

Above: Shaver family photo in San Diego, California in 2018: (left to right) Mariah, Rhonda, Merick and Mitch

Mitch Shaver (third from left) competing in a triathlon in 2017 with friends (left to right) Curt Clauson, Mike Morgan and Jeramie Shaver.



classmate and the School of Health Sciences, he launched in 2023 the Mitchell Shaver Scholarship Endowment for Physical Therapy, which financially supports OU students who wish to pursue physical therapy with a focus on helping patients with orthopedic and neurological conditions. Fundraising efforts for all of Mitch's philanthropic efforts were, and continue to be, raised through events like cornhole tournaments, golf outings and March Madness brackets.

A football player, wrestler and track athlete in high school, and an assistant wrestling coach at Kettering High School later on, Mitch carried his love for athletics into his chosen career. Combining his love for movement and a passion for helping others inspired the Waterford native to pursue a future in physical therapy.

At OU, Mitch forged connections with fellow students and faculty in the PT program, leading to his eventual wish of establishing a scholarship to impact students for years to come. "He loved his time at OU. The PT program was so supportive," Rhonda says. "He felt the knowledge base was top notch and he always had a great camaraderie with the PT students as well."

During his studies, Mitch started volunteering as a tech at a PT company, where he was hired as a physical therapist upon graduation. A promotion led him to open his own clinic, and he oversaw locations in Michigan and Ohio later on.

Whether as a student, physical therapist, husband, father or ALS advocate, Mitch formed connections throughout his life, leaving a lasting legacy.

"He always thought of himself as a very fortunate person," Rhonda says, "Even when things didn't go well, he always put his best foot forward. He did everything he could to max out his potential so that he could give back to other people in the long run." 🐾



Mitch and Rhonda Shaver, 2019



Mitch Shaver celebrating the Mitchell Leland Shaver scholarship for physical therapy at the School of Health Sciences' physical therapy alumni dinner in 2023.

WHAT IS ALS?

ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. Also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS causes muscle weakness and eventually paralysis. Though treatments can manage symptoms and slow progression, there is currently no cure for ALS.

Source: als.org

TO CONNECT AND TO SERVE

By Kristina Lindberg 📷 Josh Scott

Determined to pursue law enforcement since middle school, Kendell Jefferson, CAS '18, never looked back. Jefferson was recently promoted to sergeant within the Detroit Police Department (DPD), and her work focuses on community and connection.

Jefferson found her footing for the field at OU, where the track student-athlete studied criminal justice and immersed herself in hands-on internships and on-campus employment as a police service aide. "It was really cool to work closely with law enforcement," Jefferson says. "One of the Oakland officers was a former DPD officer, so he took me under his wing and would coach me through certain things to get me prepared for the mindset of being a police officer."

A senior year internship at Detroit's Office of the Inspector General further opened the door to networking opportunities, setting the stage for Jefferson's future and igniting her love for the city. "You know how to be a student, you know how to be an athlete, but I think what really refined me is knowing how to be professional, especially being as young as I was," Jefferson says.

Before her promotion to sergeant in May, Jefferson made an impact as a neighborhood police officer in DPD's 6th Precinct. Her work has focused on community engagement, such as establishing positive relationships with citizens, connecting people and businesses to resources, community policing and mentoring youths in schools — and learning the ropes as a young officer with the support of her colleagues. "It was like family," Jefferson says. "No matter where you are, the camaraderie of the Detroit Police Department is insanely amazing. I felt at home."

As part of her work, Jefferson also helped establish the 6th Precinct Community Closet, a resource that offers food, toiletries, clothes and toys. Her contributions to her precinct have earned Jefferson the Chief's Merit Award and the Spirit of Detroit Award. Reflected in her service, establishing rapport with the community and building positive relationships is one of the most important aspects of the job to Jefferson.

"Nine times out of ten, when you come across somebody, they're not having the best day," Jefferson says. "So when you see us, we're kind of connecting them back to a more positive look on law enforcement ... I don't know how many times I got called a 'niece' or 'the baby,' 'my grandchild' or something like that. You form these bonds with people, and it definitely changes the way I police." 🐾



CLASS NOTES



Mariah Chandler, CAS '15

Dance

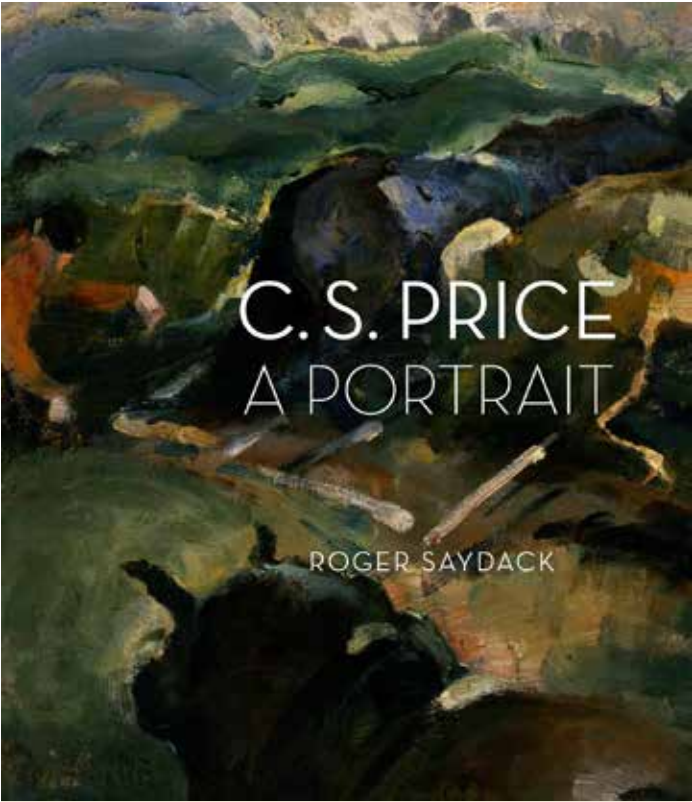
Chandler moved to Los Angeles shortly after graduating in 2015 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance. In 2018, she officially joined the Dana Foglia Dance Company, a professional dance company that performs and teaches intensives across the world. Chandler performs with her company and has an agent that helps her book other jobs, like dancing for Billie Eilish at Coachella. Chandler has also worked on several different music videos and done work with the LA Follies, who perform at private events and functions. ➤



Michael Murri, SBA '82

Management

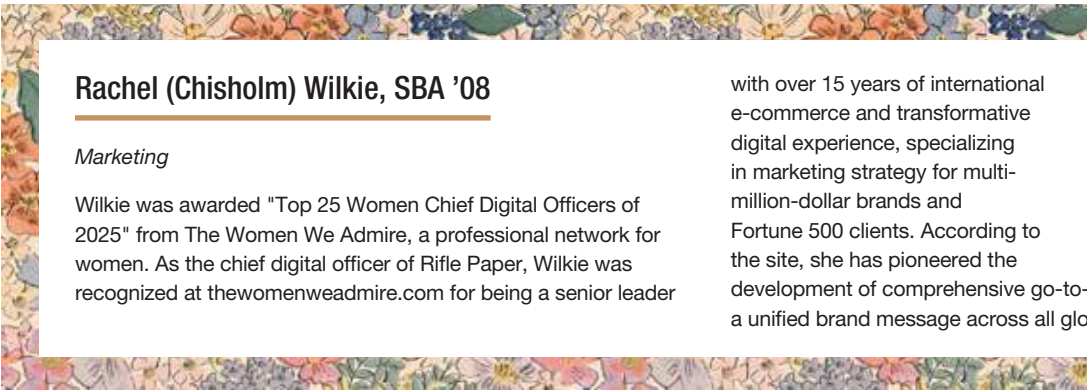
Murri is the vice president and general manager of WXYZ and WMYD, and Scripps regional vice president. In June 2025, he was named a 2025 Michigania of the Year by The Detroit News, and was also named as The Most Powerful Business Leaders in Metro Detroit from DBusiness Detroit 500 the previous year. Murri is a dedicated broadcast professional, devoting more than 40 years at WXYZ-TV (Channel 7). ➤



Roger Saydack, CAS '71

Studio Art

Saydack is a retired attorney and professor, and recently authored a biography on C.S. Price titled "C.S. Price: A Portrait," released June 2025. The biography chronicles the life and work of early Portland modernist painter, C.S. Price, who was considered one of Oregon's most important and influential artists. According to OSU Press, Saydack has maintained a lifelong interest in the visual arts, curating exhibitions and writing articles on Oregon artists. ➤



Rachel (Chisholm) Wilkie, SBA '08

Marketing

Wilkie was awarded "Top 25 Women Chief Digital Officers of 2025" from The Women We Admire, a professional network for women. As the chief digital officer of Rifle Paper, Wilkie was recognized at thewomenweadmire.com for being a senior leader

with over 15 years of international e-commerce and transformative digital experience, specializing in marketing strategy for multi-million-dollar brands and Fortune 500 clients. According to the site, she has pioneered the development of comprehensive go-to-market strategies, ensuring a unified brand message across all global regions. ➤



Kaniqua Welch, CAS '04

Communication

Kaniqua Welch has been named vice president of communications and marketing at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM), effective February 25, 2025. A Detroit native with a journalism degree from Oakland University — where she previously served as an adjunct instructor — and an M.A. from Wayne State, she most recently served as communications officer at The Kresge Foundation. Currently earning a public leadership certificate from Harvard Kennedy School, she's ready to advance CFSEM's strategic vision. ➤



Alumni Night of Excellence 2025

Congratulations to the 2025 Oakland University Alumni Night of Excellence honorees. A total of 17 alumni and friends were recognized in May for their achievements in business, community service, volunteerism and more, including a special group of young alumni who've graduated within the last 10 years. A gracious crowd of alumni and friends gathered to celebrate the awardees at a special reception and dinner at the Oakland University Oakland Center. Special thanks to the Oakland University Credit Union for their sponsorship of this event.

Community Engagement Award: Kate Rougeau, Ph.D., SHS '07

Spirit Award: Anthony Gallina, SBA '08 and SEHS '16

Odyssey Award: Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, CAS '75

Honorary Alumni Award: Pete Hovland

Pioneer Award: Department of Physics

Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award: Ashok Prajapati, Ph.D., SEHS '11

Distinguished Alumni Service Award: Sharman Cobb-Davenport, Ph.D., CAS '80

Young Alumni 10 within 10 Awards: Justen Daniels, SHS '20 and '22; Joshua Linneburg, SBA '19; Lauryn Magno, CAS '21; Collin Mays, CAS '20; Joseph T. Namou, SBA, '15; Yujin Oh, M.D., OUWB '18; David Tobin, M.D., CAS '13 and OUWB '17; Aurora White, SECS '20; Alaina Korreck Zeigler, SBA '24; Zach Zuchowicz, SHS '15 and '17, SEHS '20 ➤

BROADCAST AND BYLINES: A WXOU, OAKLAND POST AND CJPR REUNION

**Saturday, October 11
3-5 p.m. in the Oakland
Center Habitat**

Reunite with fellow Communication, Journalism and Public Relation alumni alongside former Oakland Press and WXOU students. Learn more at oakland.edu/alumni/reunion-weekend. ➤



Paula Sunanon Webster, SEHS '96 and '01

Reading and Language Arts

Webster, Ph.D., retired in January 2025 after spending 35 years in the field of education. She had two mentors at OU, Drs. Toni S. Walters and Jane M. Bingham, who traveled with Webster to her rural Jamaican community in an effort to introduce Literacy through Literature in schools. Through their literacy initiatives in collaboration with Jamaica's Ministry of Education, She provided many Jamaican Teacher Educators opportunities to pursue graduate studies in reading education. ➤

Dancing into **THE LION'S DEN**

Ernesto Duran-Gutierrez finds success through
his childhood passions

By Michael Downes  Robert Hall



The garage was a stage, shuffling feet kicking up dust and debris, clouding the illuminating headlight beams from the cars in the driveway. The air was filled with enthusiastic cheering, chanting and a beautiful, rhythmic blend of percussion, vihuelas and harps.

But Ernesto Duran-Gutierrez, CAS '20, isn't focused on watching his family folklórico performance — he's sifting through the crowd looking for his next opponent. With an unbridled confidence, he searches for anyone courageous enough to accept his challenge: a dance-off.

"It could have been cousins or my mom's friend's kids, whoever I could find and convince to battle me," says Duran-Gutierrez.

His passion, drive and competitive spirit are the driving forces behind Duran-Gutierrez's life. These traits, instilled by his family and those around him, allow him to keep reaching beyond his goals.

Finding Rhythm

The son of two Mexican-American parents who were both dancing fanatics, Duran-Gutierrez couldn't escape dancing in his early years. His father was a trumpeter in a jazz band and avid '80s hip-hop fan, while his mother was a '90s rap aficionado.

"Growing up, we'd go to parties, quinceañeras or weddings, and there's always music playing and people dancing," explains Duran-Gutierrez. "My parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, everyone would be out there dancing."

While his family has a rich history in hispanic and latin dance styles, they're not afraid to venture off into different, newer forms. "My grandma, who's in her 70s and partially deaf, will destroy anyone in the Wobble," laughs Duran-Gutierrez. "She can't hear the song too well, but can feel the bass and knows what to do."

Dance didn't become a serious part of Duran-Gutierrez's life, though, until second grade, "Which is honestly, pretty late to start," explains Duran-Gutierrez. "Most people start ballet around three, so I had to play a little bit of catch-up."

The mid-2000s was the prime era for hip-hop dancing, making it the perfect time for Duran-Gutierrez's interest in dance to explode. Music videos were still being shown constantly, MTV debuted a dance competition show and movie theaters were chock-full of dancing movies including "Stomp the Yard" and "You Got Served."

"I was constantly watching," explains Duran-Gutierrez, "whether it was movies, music videos, YouTube, it didn't matter. I remember watching Gene Kelly in 'Dancing in the Rain' and the one where he danced with a mouse, 'Anchors Aweigh' ... I was just fascinated. It was so different from sports, different from anything I knew."

While those aforementioned ballet dancers were getting their formal start at a young age, Duran-Gutierrez's parents were getting him involved in sports. In high school, he was a three-sport athlete — a bowler, a running back for the football team and a thrower on the track team — allowing him to scratch his competitive itch.

Duran-Gutierrez went to two different high schools. He didn't move or switch high schools after sophomore year, however; he went to two different high schools at the same time. "It wasn't like a co-op or anything. It was literally just two different high schools in two different districts," says Duran-Gutierrez. "One was where I did my conventional schooling and all my sports, and then the other one was a performing arts school."

Doing this allowed Duran-Gutierrez to get the best of both worlds — dance and be heavily involved in sports — and it only cost him a couple of extra classes over the four years. Being able to do both also helped him achieve the goal his parents laid out for him. "They told me, 'we don't care where you go, we don't care what you do, but you're going to college. But we can't afford it, so you have to get it paid for,'" Duran-Gutierrez says.

While Duran-Gutierrez was attending the Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy for their dance program, Oakland University's student dance company performed for them. He was familiar with it, knowing a fellow classmate that had gone on to attend in the dance program, but it wasn't until that performance that he started looking into attending.

"Everything just kind of fell into place with the financial aid and auditioning," says Duran-Gutierrez, who was accepted into the dance program and excelled at OU.

While at Oakland, Duran-Gutierrez was a Keeper of the Dream winner in 2019; MaTiDa winner in 2020; Admissions Ambassador and Programming Assistant; OUTAS Scholar; a member of The Honors College; the president of OU's D.A.N.C.E.R.S. student organization; a member of the Student Advisory Group in the School of Music, Theatre and Dance; and an Orientation group leader. He was a valued member of his 10-person dance cohort.

"I got super lucky I had my cohort," recalls Duran-Gutierrez. "Each of us was so different and unique in our styles. We just fed off each other, never overly competitive or comparing ourselves to one another, just focused on bringing the best out of each other."

In 2020, Duran-Gutierrez graduated with a BFA in dance and, as a well-decorated student, achieved more than he could have imagined. But he walked away with a stunning realization. "My least favorite part about being in a college dance program was physically dancing," says Duran-Gutierrez. More intrigued by the theory of it than the action, he wanted to focus on how to push the envelope conceptually. "With acting, there's a script. With singing, there's lyrics. You can't replicate dance. You can't. I mean, people have tried to, but you can't codify it."

He found himself enjoying dance more while researching and studying different techniques and styles, expanding his knowledge of dancing as a whole rather than perfecting it on stage. He uses that knowledge he gained at OU to help inform others and choreograph new and exciting dances that go far and beyond for his students across the state.



© Mike Ferdinando/Detroit Lions

Duran-Gutierrez’s ability to turn a childhood obsession — a part of his family’s culture, a skill that he dedicated nearly all of his free time to, practiced, studied, became infatuated with — into a career is what people dream of. He used this skill to not only make his way through college, but it also allowed him to thrive in other ventures at Oakland, as well as achieve what his parents challenged him to do.

Yet somehow it wasn’t enough. He had to go a step further and find a way to combine that skill with his other passion: sports.

Motown Moves, End Zone Grooves

“During my junior year at OU, a couple of my classmates were cheerleaders for the Lions,” says Duran-Gutierrez. “They told me the Detroit Lions are looking for some guys to run flags, and asked if I was interested.”

He applied for the job as a member of the Detroit Lions Hype Squad in 2019, landing the gig as a flag runner. Duran-Gutierrez and the crew lead the team out of the tunnel before every home game, sprint across the end zone with the flag after touchdowns, interact with the crowd to keep the energy high, and help set up and break down halftime performances and promotional events in the stadium.

Ford Field is unique in that it only has one tunnel, so both the Lions and the opposing team come out of the same place before each game. Duran-Gutierrez is smack dab in the middle of the Lions players and whoever they are playing pregame. He gets a close-up look at those intense conversations and interactions between players before kickoff. “You get to look the players in the eyes before they play,” says Duran-Gutierrez. “You can feel the tension in the air.”

The early years were tough. The Lions struggled in Duran-Gutierrez’s first two seasons with the team, going 8-23-1 with Matt Patricia as head coach. “Those years were brutal,” he says. “We would start off full staff, both end zones were running flags. By the end of the season, we were only running one end zone because we just didn’t have enough guys that would stick around.”

The tides have changed with Dan Campbell being hired to lead the Lions, though, going from the Lowly Lions to Super Bowl favorites. Over the past three seasons, Campbell led the Lions to a 36-15 record, winning the NFC North for the first time since 1991 and in back-to-back years for the first time in the division’s 57-year history.

In 2024, the Lions were the top team in the NFC with a 15-2 record, securing the Lions a first-round bye for the playoffs and home-field advantage in their games. They didn’t have a storybook ending, losing to the Washington Commanders in the Divisional Round, but it was still a historic year for the team.

Quarterback Jared Goff came in fifth in Most Valuable Player voting, leading the No. 1 scoring offense in football, meaning Duran-Gutierrez and his team ran

plenty of laps in the end zone with their flags, while the notoriously raucous Detroit fans erupted.

“I remember for the playoff game,” says Duran-Gutierrez, “they set off pyrotechnics as we ran out. They warned us to be ready, that we might hear some loud bangs. The fans were cheering so loud it drowned out all the noise. I couldn’t hear anything else.”

Field-level access has not gotten old for Duran-Gutierrez. “Does it get old? No, no it does not,” he says. “There’s always something, we always try to take it one step further. Each game just raises the bar by that much.”

“One step further” — words that Duran-Gutierrez could use to sum up his life. For some, winning dance battles in the garage at family parties would be enough. Using a skill you developed over the early years of your life to make your way through college: That’d be fulfilling. Being able to share your experience and influence a new wave of dance students: It’d scratch the itch. Being paid to combine your two childhood passions is an extraordinary accomplishment.

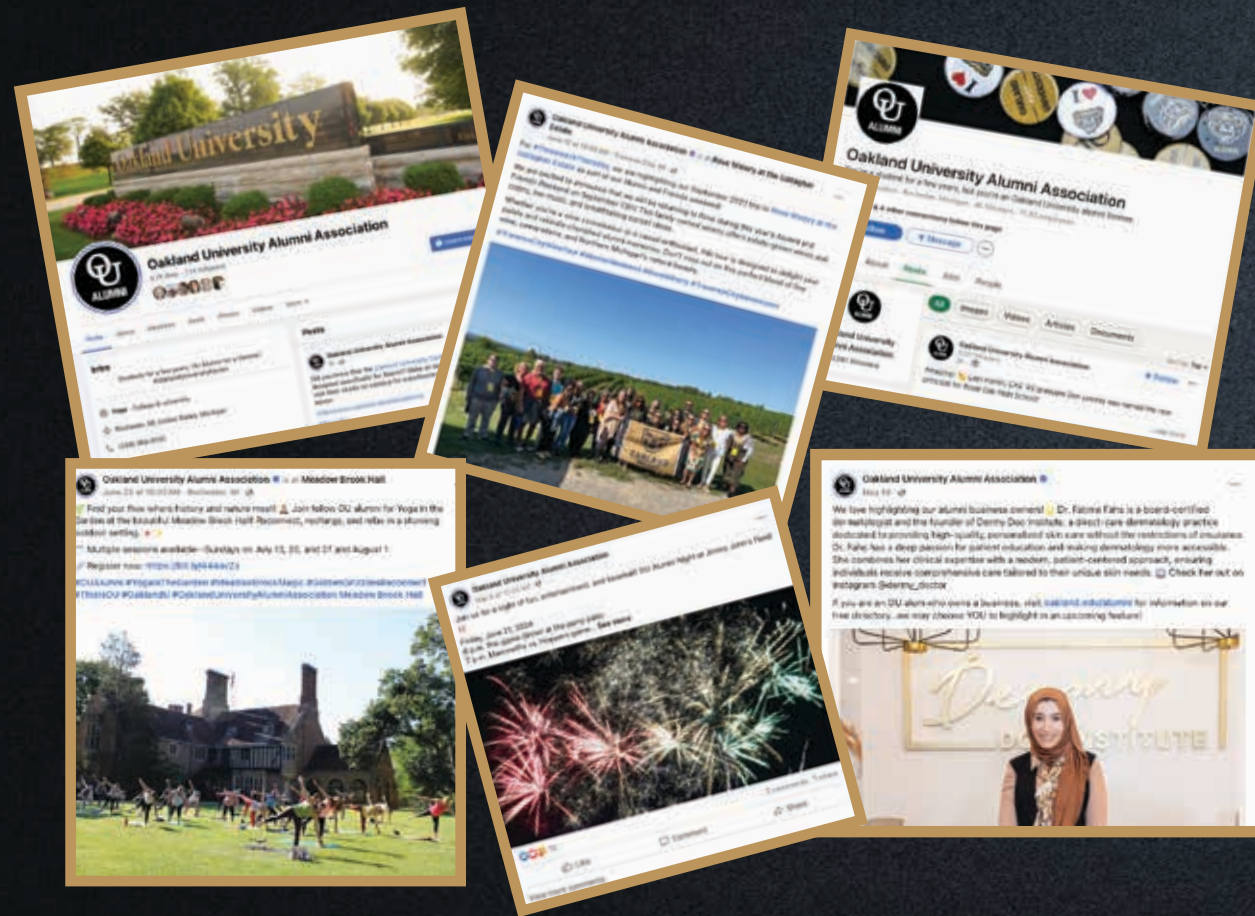
Yet for Duran-Gutierrez, it’s not enough. He continues to thrive in his endeavors while still looking to do more.

“Oakland University has already provided so much for me to grow in all aspects of my life,” Duran-Gutierrez says. “Although the present allows me to fuel so many of my passions in my current roles, soon I hope to return to the classroom and earn a master’s degree from OU.”

“Dance continues to be the driving force no matter which role I’m in, because it teaches you to constantly be inspired, to look at things from all angles and to take action when words aren’t enough,” he adds. “My goal is to use every platform I’ve found myself in to keep those skills strong.”

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Join our ONLINE COMMUNITY!



STAY ENGAGED WITH THE OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AT

- [f oualumniassociation](#)
- [in oaklanduniversityalumni](#)
- [oaklanduniversityalumni](#)

Connect with us by visiting
oakland.edu/alumni.



ucm28582/7.25

MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

By Emily Morris 📷 Robert Hall

OUWB medical graduates create a community ripple effect as they provide skincare for underserved populations

Grabbing an umbrella on your way out, smoothing in sunscreen on a bright day or dabbing your face with micellar water at the end of a day — these small, unremarkable actions are woven into the fiber of average days. But Caroline Roberts, M.D., CAS '20 and OUWB '25, and Madison Romanski, M.D., CAS '21 and OUWB '25, noticed that these core commonalities were unavailable to people they were helping through the Student-Run Free Clinic at the Gary Burnstein Community Health Clinic as well as the Street Medicine Oakland teams.

“With the street medicine team, there was a gentleman I met who was really only asking for medication for his joint pain and reviewing his blood pressure,” Dr. Romanski says. “But I noticed his sunburnt legs as well, and I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, this is another need that we can meet here, right now.’”

Many shelters shift accommodations during the day, sometimes only providing shelter in the evenings. The man that Romanski and Dr. Roberts interacted with relied on the support of shelters, and thus, during the day, he remained continually outside. He was wheelchair-bound, which gradually led to severe sunburns on his legs as he spent each summery day with little shaded relief.

Shelters and clinics focusing on underserved populations initially prioritize “brushing your teeth and staying clean, which are really important needs,” Roberts explains. Even on an individual level, they saw many people overlooking sunscreen when they would buy products because a “sunburn is just an initial consequence of sun exposure” and doesn’t hold the same weight as other challenges their patients faced, according to Romanski. Long-term effects, including the risk of skin cancer, are much more daunting, but even in the short term, the student pair believed that their patients deserved these everyday comforts.

“I wish we were able to provide things that make people feel good about themselves,” Roberts remembers.

Acting on this wish, the two OUWB medical students responded to the additional patients’ needs by applying for two community engagement Compass grants and a grant through the OU-Pontiac Initiative. All grants awarded their innovative thinking and thoughtfulness, and they used the funds to coordinate care packages, initially including sunscreen and hats.



“We went out and distributed them in person to all the recipients,” Roberts says. “Then we asked them, ‘Is there anything else that would be helpful?’ and we received feedback asking for face wash and moisturizer too. Our next phase was themed after their requests.”

Most recently, skin hygiene kits have included 10 pieces, including a canvas bag to carry everything, moisturizer, face wash, sunscreen, body lotion, a tube of petroleum jelly, lip balm, an umbrella, cotton pads and micellar water. The product brand, consistency and cost were thoughtfully balanced when deciding each item, understanding that “the best skin protection is the protection that you actually use,” Romanski says.

Moreover, the sunscreens sported high SPF numbers, ranging from 50 to 70, but the formulas remained light and wearable, ensuring protection that was versatile for people of varying skin tones too. Romanski and Roberts aim to provide protective products that people actually want to wear consistently.

Graduating in 2025, the OUWB medical students now prepare for their clinical residencies, where they’ll specialize their practice. Romanski is fittingly pursuing dermatology, continuing to advocate that skincare makes up mental and physical care, and Roberts will focus on family medicine, drawing from her emphasis on caring conversations with patients.

While their residencies take precedence in their health care journeys, their skincare project both uncovered vital needs in the community and inspiration from others. Furthermore, the waves they made in local health care had such a strong impact that it is continuing: the OUWB chapter of the Dermatology Interest Group intends to grow their endeavors further.

“We didn’t have any sort of expectation that it was going to be as big and successful as it was,” Roberts says. “We saw a need — there are people that need sunscreen and don’t have access — and we wanted to help. That was only the start. Even if we could help a few people, awesome, but I’m thankful more opportunities came.” 🌞





RESIDING RESILIENCE

By Emily Morris Robert Hall

An unwavering whisper to return to her studies echoed every day for Amiesha Williams, CAS '23. The mother of seven found her footing as she watched her eldest son Marcellous prepare for his college journey, and he nudged her to join him.

“When he was starting college after high school, I filled out his FAFSA, and he asked me when I was going to do mine because I always wanted to go back to school,” Williams says. “But with so many children, the timing never seemed right. I’m not sure what made me think the best timing was starting when my seventh child was just four months old, but I did. I started going full time with my son Marcellous.”

Just as they began their journeys, her son suddenly died. His memory only strengthened Williams’ commitment to stay the course. “I knew I had to continue, initially for him, and then ultimately for myself,” she says.

After completing her associate’s degree, Williams sought the next step in her education and found her balance at Oakland University. Pursuing a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies, she embraced designing her own plan of study, incorporating human resource management, communication and deaf studies.

Easing toward the finish line in her bachelor’s program, tragedy struck her family once again: Her husband unexpectedly lost his sight, rendering him unable to work. Even so, Williams did not waver. In fact, her challenges “fueled” her to persevere for a firmer foundation for her family.

“In the face of devastating loss, I continued to encounter numerous setbacks ... and I was thrust into the role of sole provider for my

household and primary caregiver to my husband,” Williams says. “Despite these hardships, I persisted, successfully obtaining my degree.”

As homework deadlines inched closer, some of her elder children would offer a coffee refresh, taking on dinner for the night or directly dissecting the homework together. While Williams’ children tried to elevate some juggling, her role as a mother always came first.

“The funniest thing is remembering our kitchen table being riddled with books and papers and calculators because we were all doing homework, and in the midst of a timed test, my children would still require me to be their mom, their present mom,” Williams says.

In one instance, Williams considered how she would help her daughter get braces, not wanting her to miss out on any milestones. Seeking a solution, she decided to explore substitute teaching as an intermediate option. Eventually this choice established her as a regular substitute teacher at L’Anse Creuse Middle School East and influenced her path to American Sign Language instruction for the American Sign Language Club at the International Academy of Macomb. Without missing a beat, each thread of her coursework began to weave into her life sooner than she could’ve expected.

“Nothing happens by coincidence,” Williams says. ➤



CAMPUS *Highlights*

“
In the lab, I am able to see the physical human condition in detail, and so I transfer the feelings that can’t be scientifically described — during dissection when you’re holding someone’s essence, their life force — and I put them into my artwork.

”
THY HOANG
Page 36

The Oakland University campus community is ever-evolving. Through keeping in touch with your alma mater, you can witness these changes firsthand. Your memories keep OU rooted in its rich history, and your love for campus continues to help it grow.



Oakland University Powers More Than \$1.9 Billion in Economic Activity Across Michigan

Oakland University continues to be a powerful driver of economic growth in Michigan, generating a net new economic impact of \$1.9 billion in fiscal year 2024, according to a new report released today by Anderson Economic Group, an economic consulting firm based in East Lansing, Michigan. The study highlights the university’s vital role in boosting regional development and supporting jobs across Michigan.

In FY 2024, OU generated more than \$1.9 billion in net new economic impact (more than doubling its economic impact over the past five years) and supported nearly 6,500 jobs in Michigan. This represents direct and indirect economic activity and employment that would not have occurred without OU’s operations.



OU Recognized as ‘Education Innovator’ by Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency

Oakland University is honored as a 2024-25 Education Innovator by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, receiving three Innovation Awards for its collaborative, forward-thinking efforts to support student veterans. The awards recognize academic institutions or staff who develop a new process, method, technology or innovative service that will radically improve or transform on-campus experiences for military-connected students. OU receives this award for collaborating with Lear Corporation to launch an internship and mentorship program specifically designed for student veterans. The initiative aims to ease the transition from military service to academic life and civilian careers by providing personalized guidance, hands-on experience and professional mentorship.



Amy Thompson, Ph.D., Named Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Oakland University appoints Amy Thompson, Ph.D., as executive vice president for academic affairs and provost. With 20 years of higher education experience, Dr. Thompson previously served as provost and senior vice president of academic affairs at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. She was selected to become OU’s chief academic officer following a national search that welcomed 116 candidates from public and private universities across the country and the world. Oakland University President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz says it was the outstanding breadth of Thompson’s experience and the quality of her accomplishments that singled her out as the best fit for OU’s next provost.

New B.S. in Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology Degree Program Prepares Students for Diverse Careers

Through an innovative blend of lecture, lab and field-based learning, Oakland University’s new Bachelor of Science in Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology degree program equips students with a versatile skillset to pursue a variety of careers in the life sciences. The program’s flexible curriculum is designed to prepare students for professional roles in zoology, botany, conservation biology, agricultural ecology, ecosystem science, ecological sustainability, bioinformatics and natural resource management. Students gain key skills such as lab and field experiment design, data analysis, science communication and teamwork, positioning them for career success and providing a strong background for graduate-level studies.



OU Chapter of Sigma Xi Celebrates 50th Anniversary

The Oakland University chapter of Sigma Xi — the national scientific research honor society — celebrated its 50th anniversary this year with a special presentation that highlights recent and past accomplishments during the annual Sigma Xi Lecture and Student Research Poster Celebration. Founded in 1974, OU’s Sigma Xi chapter is nationally ranked for excellence in recognition of chapter activities and active members. Its mission is to enhance the health of the research enterprise, foster integrity in science and engineering, and promote public understanding of science for the purpose of improving the human condition.



OU West Center Space Provides Havenwyck Hospital Patients Additional Access to Mental Health Support and Programs

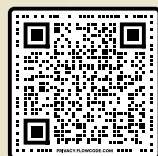
Oakland University has leased approximately 8,000 square feet of space in its West University Center to Havenwyck Hospital so that the hospital can launch Branches Auburn Hills, a Service of Havenwyck Hospital, and expand its ability to offer outpatient step-down care and improve the mental health of more teens and adults from across the state. Branches Auburn Hills specializes in patients needing a step-down transition from acute inpatient care or as an alternative to inpatient treatment through a partial hospitalization program (PHP). Havenwyck’s PHP offers short-term treatment tailored to the specific needs of the patient and provides more intensive treatment while allowing patients to return home in the evening.



Stay Golden AT ALUMNI REUNION WEEKEND

As Oakland University alumni, we are a community of doers. We worked hard as students and continued to evolve, adapt and hone our crafts well beyond graduation. This is what ties us together. It's how we, as alumni, stay golden. And it's what brings us together, time and time again.

Join us on campus October 10-11 for Alumni Reunion Weekend 2025.



Share your triumphs.

Explore the expanding campus.

Meet with old friends.

Find events at oakland.edu/alumni/reunion-weekend.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

- Golden Celebration Reunion
- All Alumni Reunion: Oktoberfest at Meadow Brook Hall

SATURDAY OCTOBER 11

- Broadcast and Byline: CJPR Reunion

Benjamin Schutz



CENTERED IN COMMUNITY: FILMMAKING WORKSHOP

By Emily Morris Aaron Neighbor

Each summer, Meadow Brook Elementary students make their film debut with a glance into professional production from Oakland University.

The Meadow Brook Elementary Filmmaking Workshop offers elementary-aged students the chance to learn about and produce films, while also allowing OU students the opportunity to give back to the community and spread their love for film storytelling. Teaching ignites an early spark in these budding film enthusiasts and helps OU's film scholars realize the knowledge and skills they have gained.

The youth outreach workshop was founded nearly a decade ago by the Director of Film Studies and Production Adam Gould and Associate Professor of Film Kyle Edwards. The film workshops have seen continued excitement and engagement ever since through a partnership with Before & After School Enrichment Services (BASES) and Rochester Community Schools.

Zach Tse, CAS '19 and '21 — who currently works in OU housing — is an alumnus of the university's film studies program and lead instructor for the workshop this year. He's coordinated five workshop days throughout five weeks, where kids produce six different films and gain foundational skills to continue their talent.

"The most exciting part is just seeing the kids light up when they realize they can do this," Tse says. "They can make films."

Each day of the workshop builds upon the last, beginning with a single-shot silent film to a 2-minute film with thoughtful dialogue and pre-production coordination. This format allows kids to see film production in pieces and eventually put them together for a polished final film. While Tse and a team of OU film student volunteers guide the process through tools and technique, the kids choose their story, making unique films each year.

"My biggest priority in the program is making sure to spark these kids' imagination and give them the tools that they can use to go forward and create," Tse says. 🍌



Watch a video about the Meadow Brook Elementary Filmmaking Workshop.





ART THROUGH ANATOMY

By Emily Morris
✍️ Thy Hoang

The human body tediously ties together, from cell to organ systems. Grasped by the science surrounding us, Thy Hoang, studio art and clinical and diagnostic sciences student, looks further in her human science studies and sees art pulsing through anatomy.

“I’m inspired to pursue these paths because I genuinely believe that these two disciplines inform and strengthen one another,” Hoang explains. “I’ve always been prone to becoming obsessed over the ‘whys,’ and I found that art and medicine are two very different pieces to the same puzzle.”

As high school valedictorian and accomplished artist, Hoang initially approached Oakland University torn between two paths: the hard sciences she excelled at or the art that allowed her fullest expression. Skimming through the admission applications, she noticed OU offered two boxes for fields of study. Without a second thought, she selected studio art and clinical and diagnostic sciences, noting in the back of her mind that she’d forfeit one passion once her path became clearer. “That never happened,” she says. “I realized that I couldn’t compromise who I was: both an artist and scientist. My goal is to tackle each as if they were my only major.”

Hoang dove into each area wholeheartedly, and that was the moment she realized her struggle to choose was actually her strength. “I had doubts the first semester,” she admits, “There wasn’t a day

I went home and didn’t think about how I needed to make a choice.” When she took an anatomy course in the winter semester of her freshman year, everything clicked.

Her thoughtfulness resonated in the class, and she was offered a teaching assistant position for the course. These initial inspirations confirmed her perspective: “Learning about art strengthens any career,” Hoang says.

“In the lab, I am able to see the physical human condition in detail, and so I transfer the feelings that can’t be scientifically described — during dissection when you’re holding someone’s essence, their life force — and I put them into my artwork,” she explains.

The unique ability to understand the human condition in science and spirit captures vast audiences. Notably, her series “Telling Asian Stories,” which spotlights the Asian American experience, reached millions of people and even won her the Congressional Art Competition twice. Locally, she was also recognized with the Detroit Society of Women Painters and Sculptors scholarship for her original ideas.

Taking the road less traveled opened Hoang to see each discipline in its fullest breadth, pulling distinct communities together one piece at a time.

“I was told by everyone I knew that this path would not be easy, but I’m not scared of that,” Hoang says. “I don’t believe that anything truly worth doing is easy.” 🍷

ADVOCATES FOR THE UNHEARD

By Kelli M. Warshefski 📷 Robert Hall

“Learning the aspects of forensic nursing is important for nurses within the community, and it is imperative to also teach the community about the resources and services available to them,” says Brenda Dzierzawski, SON ’19, director of the forensic nursing program at Oakland University.

The forensic nursing program at Oakland University’s School of Nursing is advancing the education of future nurses, thanks to Dzierzawski and Associate Professor Kelly Berishaj, DNP, SON ’13. The program held its first classes in 2015, and since then has grown to train and educate 78 nurses (as of June 2025) who specialize in the care and treatment of survivors of sexual trauma, violence and maltreatment.

“In order to minimize and prevent the effects of trauma, violence and maltreatment, our forensic nursing students complete clinical and service-learning experiences within the community,” explains Berishaj. “I feel really proud that we can continue to advance the specialty through our work at Oakland University and through community partners, like Turning Point.”

Beyond hands-on education, Dzierzawski and Berishaj also instill confidence in their students through direct instruction and participation. “I have seen education improve the way the students carry themselves and are able to share knowledge on the subjects they’ve learned,” says Dzierzawski.

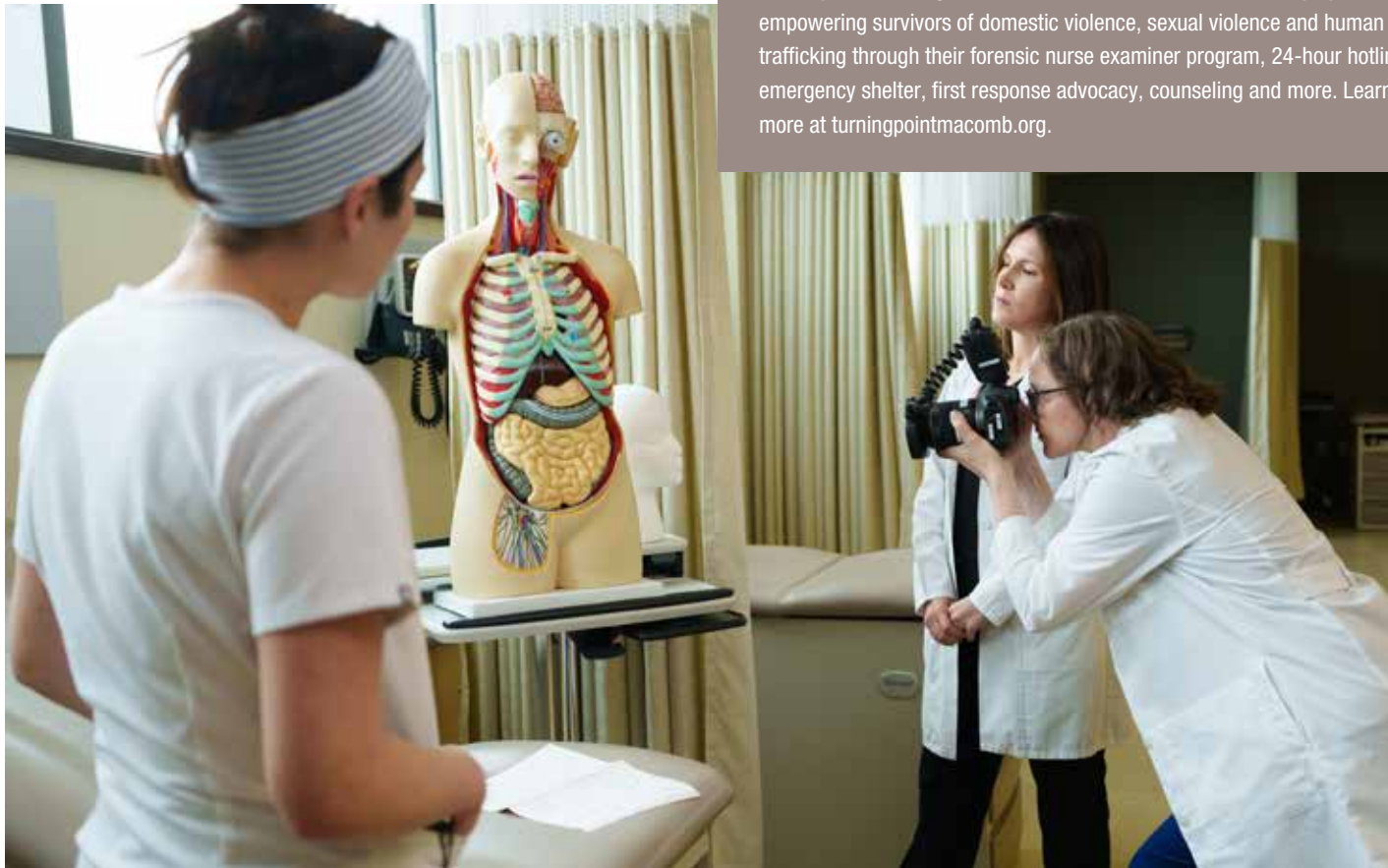
“I wanted to develop the forensic nursing program at OU to help other nurses become educated in how to provide trauma-informed care and services to victims of violence and to better meet their health and legal needs,” says Berishaj.

Before coming to Oakland University, Berishaj worked in an urban, inner-city hospital for 13 years, caring for and seeing the struggles that victims of violence faced. “I wanted to help provide better care to them and our community,” she says, discovering that forensic nursing would offer her that opportunity.

Crossing paths at a nursing conference with Berishaj, Dzierzawski says she “was deeply interested in addressing the gaps in care” she experienced as a critical care nurse and was motivated “to pursue further training and growth in the field of forensic nursing.” Dzierzawski was among one of the first cohorts to enter the program and began teaching at OU a few years after graduating.

“Throughout my time in the forensic nursing program, I realized just how large these gaps were,” says Dzierzawski. “I now feel a strong sense of responsibility to advocate for those whose voices often go unheard.” 🍷

For 45 years, Turning Point Macomb has served the community by empowering survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking through their forensic nurse examiner program, 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, first response advocacy, counseling and more. Learn more at turningpointmacomb.org.



RESEARCH



Novel Medical Imaging

Alexey Tonyushkin, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Physics

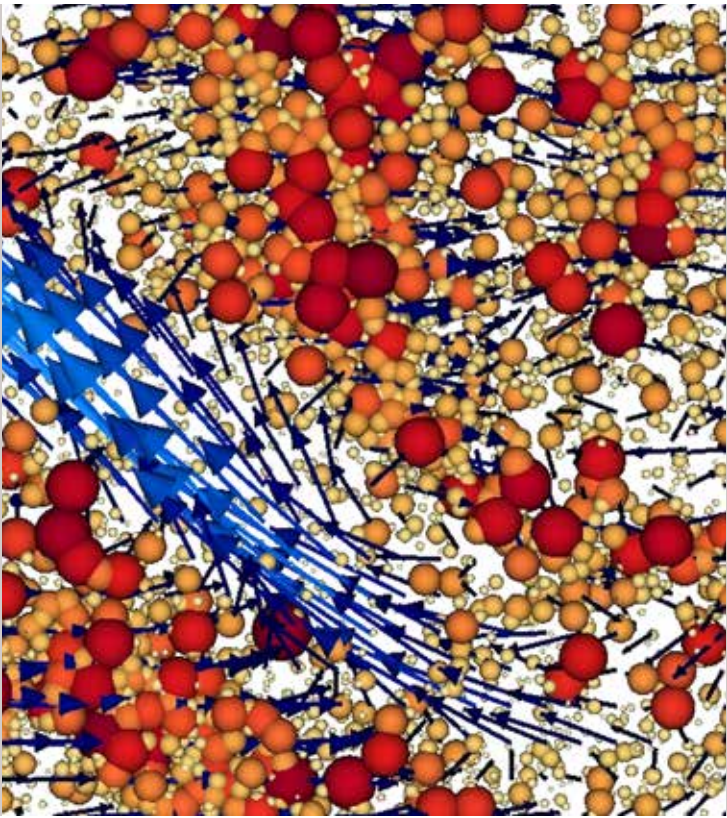
Alexey Tonyushkin, Ph.D., conducts research in instrumentation and clinical applications of Magnetic Particle Imaging (MPI). MPI is an emerging biomedical imaging technique similar to Computed Tomography (CT) and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), but it has the potential to meet clinical and research needs without the risks of ionizing radiation or toxic tracers. This makes it valuable for cancer detection and staging. Traditionally, medical imaging advancements have relied on major technological innovations to bring new modalities into clinical use. For instance, MRI required superconducting magnets to become a practical diagnostic tool. Unlike MRI, MPI cannot use superconducting technology for its rapidly switching magnetic fields, which results in high power demands for typical whole-body scanners. Through his research, Dr. Tonyushkin and his team address these challenges with innovative approaches in physics, engineering and imaging techniques to develop a highly sensitive, non-invasive tool for breast cancer diagnosis. This could improve biopsy accuracy and long-term treatment outcomes, significantly impacting women's health. ➤



Electric Vehicles and AI

Jun Chen, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering

Electric vehicles (EVs) are projected to make up 31% of the global fleet by 2050, with each vehicle reducing over 3,000 kg of carbon dioxide emissions annually. Despite considerable development over the past decade, EVs continue to face challenges related to driving range, thermal efficiency and the environmental impact associated with retired EV batteries. To address these issues, the ELectrified and Intelligent Systems Automation (ELISA) Lab at Oakland University focuses on developing advanced AI and control techniques to improve the efficiency, safety and comfort of EVs, and more broadly, intelligent cyber-physical systems. Led by Jun Chen, Ph.D., the ELISA Lab is developing innovative model predictive control and reinforcement learning-based algorithms, with applications in battery state estimation, balancing control, thermal management and second-life EV batteries. This research contributes to the advancement of control theory, optimization, artificial intelligence and statistics. ➤



Environmental Flow Modeling

Sarah Beetham, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Mechanical Engineering

The vast majority of flows that occur in nature and engineering are extremely complex. They often include several types of interconnected physics and many contain more than a single state of matter — for example, the solid particles that are expelled out of a volcano along with its hot gas or the conversion of solid agricultural waste or microalgae into biofuels. Because these systems are intrinsically difficult to study, models that predict them have historically fallen short. To address this, Sarah Beetham, Ph.D., and her team leverage high performance computing and data-driven modeling techniques to both advance our understanding and develop improved models for complex flows of environmental and societal importance. In particular, her lab's current research focus is on predicting the most hazardous volcanic process (pyroclastic density currents) and developing models to guide increasingly efficient algae production for biodiesel feedstock. ➤

Studying Traditional Cultures of Health

Deidre Hurse, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Foundational Medical Studies

As a health researcher, Deidre Hurse, Ph.D., examines the influence of social and cultural factors on health. Her recent area of focus is on African American communities, particularly among descendants of West and Central Africans in the coastal South. Her work highlights how traditions like plant-based healing, food sovereignty, spiritual practices, and kinship networks have supported well-being across generations. Currently, Dr. Hurse is leading a study titled Rooted in Resilience: Exploring Health and Heritage in Gullah Geechee Communities. Through in-depth interviews with members of the Gullah Geechee community, she gathers stories and perspectives on how health and heritage are intertwined. Rather than focusing on gaps or deficits, her research highlights the resilience and health protective practices embedded in cultural identity. Elevating these traditions will promote respectful health care practices and inclusive public health policy, preserving the legacy of healing in Black communities as a foundation for health equity. ➤



WERE YOU INVOLVED IN RESEARCH?

What do you want to read more about? Is community research important to you? Let us know at oumag@oakland.edu.

MAKE YOUR GIFT GO FURTHER

The Greatest Impact For Tomorrow (GIFT) Fund addresses the immediate needs of OU students that influence their success. With your help, students can stay enrolled, focused and on track to reach their goals, no matter what obstacles arise



MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY AND WELLNESS CARE

Helps provide students with timely access to mental health services, crisis intervention and overall wellness support.



EMERGENCY FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Provides essential assistance to students facing unexpected hardships that may disrupt their education.



STUDENT HOUSING SUPPORT

Ensures that students have access to campus housing without worry and can immerse themselves in the OU experience.



STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

Helping to reduce financial barriers, allowing more students to stay on track and reach their academic goals.



**YOUR GIFT.
THEIR FUTURE.**

Support the GIFT Fund today.



ucm28582/7.25

ACADEMIC *Spotlight*

Oakland University's academic programs do exceptional work every day – not only in educating students, but through community advocacy, securing grants and creating new programs. These schools are empowering the next generation of OU alumni.

“

*Careers don't always
move in straight lines.*

*The detours often turn into
defining moments*

”

BOB BRODERDORF, SBA '02

page 45

A Legacy of Leadership

Jessica Jannaman, a three-time Oakland University alum, has built a distinguished career in environmental health and safety, inspired by her father's legacy and fueled by her own passion for leadership and learning. Starting with a bachelor's in environmental science, she later earned a master's in safety management, a doctorate in organizational leadership, and Lean certifications. Now the global director of health and safety at TE Connectivity, Jannaman oversees safety initiatives across 60+ global sites. She credits OU's programs and faculty for shaping her leadership approach. In addition to her corporate role, she gives back as an adjunct professor and advisory board chair at OU. Driven by a lifelong commitment to growth, Jannaman hopes to inspire future leaders through her work and mentorship. ➤



Two Languages, One Path: A Bilingual Bridge to Early Education

Oakland University and Pontiac High School have launched Michigan's first bilingual Career and Technical Education (CTE) program in early childhood education, enabling high school students to earn up to 13 OU college credits. Unique for its direct credit award and bilingual instruction, the program supports Pontiac's predominantly Spanish-speaking population by offering flexible, inclusive learning in both English and Spanish. Co-taught by OU's Katie Sloan, Ph.D., and CTE instructor Betsy Spiker, the program encourages cultural appreciation and academic success. It also introduces students to university life, career paths and future employment opportunities. The initiative recently earned the 2024 Excellence in Practice Award from the Michigan Department of Education and is being hailed as a model for similar programs statewide. Leaders hope this approach will address the early childhood educator shortage while expanding equitable access to higher education and career pathways. ➤

Infant-Toddler Childcare and Resource Hub at Pontiac High School

Oakland University and the Pontiac School District are partnering to launch Baby PEACE, a culturally sustaining infant-toddler childcare and resource hub at Pontiac High School, targeted to open in fall 2025. Funded by a competitive \$400,000 Spencer Foundation grant, the initiative aims to support teen parents, students, staff and community members by providing accessible, high-quality childcare for children up to age 3. Co-led by OU faculty and developed through community-based research, Baby PEACE also serves as a practicum site for students in both OU and Pontiac High School's Early Childhood Education CTE program. The project addresses high teen pregnancy and dropout rates in Pontiac while expanding career pathways and educational equity. Community leaders see it as a transformative step toward building resilience and educational success. Baby PEACE is part of the broader OU-Pontiac Initiative, reinforcing the university's commitment to supporting lifelong learning from cradle to career. ➤



Advising Future Health Professionals

Zachary Barclay, Ed.D., director of Academic Advising and Student Services, provides students with exceptional guidance as they explore academic and career options. Taking a "career-focused" approach, Dr. Barclay encourages advisers to recognize and encourage the positive impact they have on students' future health careers. By also implementing Pre-Health Professions Advising, he further supports students and even alumni to explore, find their fit and pursue professional programs. Barclay's impact extends even beyond SHS — he played a key role for undecided students by changing the description to exploring, improving student engagement and retention. Oakland's unique approach has the university at the forefront of a national exploring initiative, with Barclay and Jamie Franklin, senior adviser at First Year Advising Center, presenting at statewide, regional and national conferences. Barclay and his team are truly driving student success through their innovative, exploratory and ultimately career focused efforts. ➤

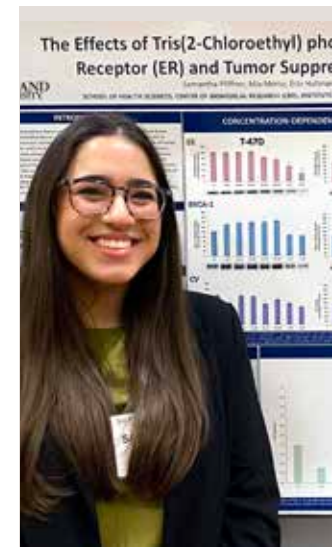
Explorations in Health Careers

The School of Health Sciences' summer camp, Explorations in Health Careers, invites high school students to explore future education pathways and health careers, matching their developing interests. Campers engage in hands-on activities and interactive problem solving, tour Oakland University's campus, and have meaningful conversations with advisers, current students and recent alumni. Students of the 2024 camp enjoyed learning about different careers through practical knowledge application and discussing the general college experience, ultimately resulting in a broadened perspective of career exploration and university program choices. Held for the second time in 2025, this camp continues to draw student interest as the SHS strives to expand the horizons of future health professionals to think beyond only the careers and programs that they currently have knowledge. ➤



To Medical School and Beyond

Samantha Pfiffner is pursuing her medical residency, a culmination of the journey she began with Oakland University's School of Health Sciences. Graduating with a Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences (CDS) degree in pre-clinical professions as a Presidential Scholar, Pfiffner's education provided her with an excellent foundation for medical school and licensing exams, as it allowed her to focus on practical clinical and laboratory knowledge used in patient care. Upon graduating, she pursued medical school at Wayne State University and now a diagnostic radiology residency. Throughout her undergraduate and medical education, Pfiffner has continued successful breast cancer research with CDS chair Sumi Dinda, Ph.D. This has led to multiple publications, presentations and prestigious awards, while enhancing her residency applications as she pursues her medical career. ➤





Medical Students Practice Teaching Skills Suring Reach Out to Youth

Medical students at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine's displayed their commitment to community and service during the annual Reach Out To Youth (ROTY) mentorship program designed to support Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Medicine. Elementary school-age youths from Oakland County listened to each other's hearts with a stethoscope, ate sour foods to learn about their taste buds and even saw a sheep's brain close up. ROTY aims to inspire young children about medicine, and it provides medical students the chance to work on their teaching and clinical skills. "We're going to have to educate our patients, whether they're older or they're younger, and this [event] gives us exposure to be able to do that," said Josh Thomas, class of 2027. Wanees Hannan, class of 2028, learned a few things that day as well. "I get really great energy from the kids," Hannan says. "It reminds me to stay curious." ➤



OUSB Alum Applies Her Passions to OB-GYN Residency

Fighting anesthesia as a child before surgery to catch a glimpse of the operating room, Kala Seawright, M.D., OUSB '21, remembers her curiosity for medical sciences sprouting and sparking her passion very early. "I've always been someone who's interested in the why," she says. "I wanted to know why I needed surgery. I wanted to know why my body wasn't working the same way it used to anymore." That fascination persisted for Dr. Seawright into her adult career. She received her Doctor of Medicine at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, and today, she is in the fourth year of an obstetrics and gynecology residency at Corewell Health William Beaumont University Hospital in Royal Oak. In addition to her general curiosity about the workings of the human body, Seawright says she has appreciated that OUSB has given her "more than enough medical education and clinical education to become a great physician." ➤

Researchers receive NIH funding for diabetes-damaged eyes

Treatment for eye damage caused by diabetes could improve for millions with a \$375,000 National Institutes of Health grant that will help fund a collaboration between OUSB's Eye Research Center (ERC) and OU's Department of Chemistry. The two-year grant will allow principal investigator Mohamed Al-Shabraway (founding director of ERC), Colin Wu, Ph.D., (associate professor of Biochemistry) and Ngong Kodiah Beyeh, Ph.D., (associate professor of Organic Chemistry) to study the affinity of bioactive lipids for the proposed receptors in retinal cells under both normal and diabetic conditions. Additionally, they will work on developing macrocyclic receptor molecules to mitigate the harmful effects of bioactive lipids on retinal cells in diabetes and preserve visual function. ➤



How the OU Golf Classic Drives Impact

The annual Oakland University Golf Classic, set for September 8, 2025, at the R&S Sharf Golf Course, is more than just a golf outing: it's a tradition rooted in impact. Hosted by the School of Business Administration and the College of Arts and Sciences, the event unites alumni, faculty and community members to raise funds for student-focused initiatives, including global learning, hands-on projects and emerging technologies. Golfers of all skill levels participate in a day of friendly competition, culminating in the Afterglow Reception. As Alexandria DeSano-Salvaggio, director of philanthropy, notes, "The Golf Classic is a meaningful way to connect those who believe in the power of education and want to be part of something bigger." More than a game, the event reinforces OU's mission by turning generosity into opportunity — fueling student success and building a stronger future through education. ➤



Lessons from Grizz in Biz

Whether you're just getting started or navigating a career shift, Bob Broderdorf offers a timely perspective. In a recent episode of the School of Business's "Grizz in Biz" podcast, the OU alumnus and CEO of Jeep at Stellantis reflected on his path from picking parts at a distribution center to leading one of the world's most iconic automotive brands. His advice to students and alumni? Build real relationships — networking isn't just about collecting contacts, but creating meaningful connections that can shape your future. He also spoke to the importance of patience and resilience. "Careers don't always move in straight lines," he says. "The detours often turn into defining moments." From helping revitalize the Dodge brand to navigating the evolving auto industry, Broderdorf's career is a testament to strategic thinking, adaptability and staying grounded in your strengths and passions. ➤

A Legacy of Excellence: 25 Years of the Executive MBA

Oakland University's Executive MBA program is celebrating 25 years of developing bold, forward-thinking leaders, and the School of Business Administration is marking the milestone by highlighting the alumni who define its legacy. From leading global teams to launching successful ventures, EMBA graduates have taken the skills, confidence and connections built in the program and turned them into lasting impact. In this special anniversary highlight, alumni reflect on how the program shaped their careers, challenged their thinking and empowered them to lead with purpose. The stories span industries and generations, but they share a common thread: the transformative power of Oakland's EMBA. As we look back on a quarter-century of leadership, this feature honors the people who brought it to life. ➤



OAKLAND ENGINEER

oakland.edu/oaklandengineer

Toward Victory

There is a battlefield where soldiers seamlessly collaborate with autonomous robots while new cutting-edge technology is tested in real-time. This is not a distant future. The U.S. Army has partnered with Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering Geoffrey Louie Wing-Yue, Ph.D., and industry partners to develop more dynamic and scalable solutions for autonomous military technology testing. By combining immersive gaming environments with military-grade simulations, the team has developed a virtual experimentation platform that allows soldiers to interact with robots in real-time, video-game-like scenarios. Not only does the new platform reduce the time and costs associated with traditional prototype development but it also features an interface that engineers and military leaders can observe, analyze and replay interactions — something not feasible in traditional testing. ➤

Engineered Empowerment

At Oakland University, the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) is a transformative community that empowers women in STEM through mentorship, leadership and career development. Former chapter Vice President Sivasakthi Muthukumar, SECS '24, credits SWE with launching her career. "We've had big companies such as Stellantis, General Motors, Ford, Aptiv and Mahle collaborate with us to network with our members, share industry insights, and offer current job and internship opportunities," she explains. Through these events, Muthukumar secured interviews and honed her job-searching skills — an experience she describes as pivotal to her early professional success. The chapter's Adviser and Professor of Mechanical Engineering Laila Guessous, Ph.D., notes the group's growing influence, with female engineering enrollment rising and record-turnout at events. As SWE continues to expand, its members remain committed to supporting each other and inspiring future women engineers even after graduation. ➤



Genes Behind the Clots

Thrombosis is a complex biological process regulated by a balance between the formation and the breakdown of blood clots. But what if the key to preventing these clots lies in our genes? Using mouse models, Professor of Bioengineering and Biological Sciences Randal Westrick, Ph.D., uncovered that different, inbred mouse strains exhibited substantial variation in the levels of two key proteins — PAI-1 and TLT-1 — both involved in blood clotting, suggesting that genetic differences can influence an individual's risk for thrombotic disease. Within the framework of this research, Kailey MacFadyen and Arina Rodionova, undergraduate bioengineering students, undertook studies of different proteins — Plcb4 and F3 — unveiling another layer of genetic control over thrombosis, where small shifts in cellular processes can influence the risk of thrombotic diseases. The overarching goal of these studies is to develop targeted therapies for clotting disorders by tailoring treatments to an individual's unique genetic profile. ➤



PULSE

oakland.edu/pulse



Celebrating the 2025 Nightingale Awards for Nursing Excellence

With a strong history in tradition, the Oakland University Nightingale Awards for Nursing Excellence has applauded the constant advancement of nursing through the work of outstanding professionals for their contributions in going above and beyond in strengthening Michigan's nursing community. This year, they continue to celebrate the invaluable contributions of the awardees for their resilience, dedication and unwavering commitment that defines their noble profession. Every day, nurses confront challenges head-on, embracing the highs and lows of patient care and challenges in nursing education with resilience and grace. Daniel Lara, SON '09, is the winner of this year's Distinguished Alumni Award. Lara is the Critical Care Education Coordinator at Trinity Health Ann Arbor. Congratulations to all the 2025 Nightingale Awards for Nursing Excellence winners and runners-up. ➤



Oakland University School of Nursing Celebrates 50 Years of Excellence

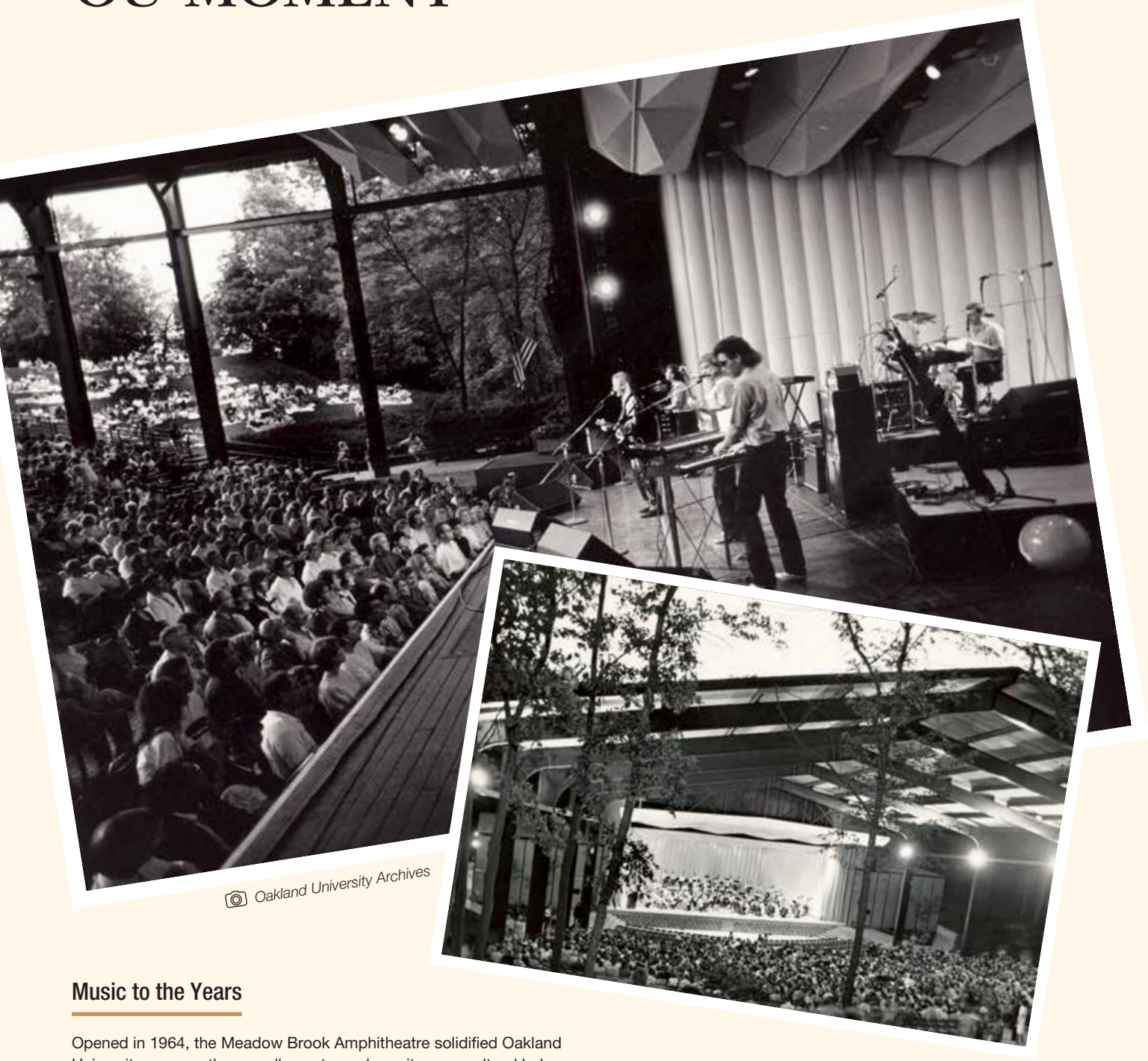
Oakland University's School of Nursing celebrates its 50th anniversary, marking decades of excellence in nursing education, innovation and service. The school has prepared thousands of compassionate, skilled nurses who continue to make an impact in health care across Michigan and beyond. Over the years, the School of Nursing has grown to meet the evolving needs of the health care industry by expanding academic programs, embracing new technologies and strengthening clinical partnerships. From undergraduate to doctoral studies, the school remains committed to developing leaders in patient care, research and education. This golden anniversary is a celebration of the students, faculty, staff, alumni and partners who have helped shape the school. Here's to 50 years of excellence and to many more to come. ➤

Diane Noack Retires from the School of Nursing



After 17 years of service to the School of Nursing, Diane Noack, MSN, RN, has retired from her role as director of Nursing Laboratories. With a nursing career spanning 45 years, Noack has played a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience of countless students. Known for her warmth and expertise, Diane has been a steady light, shining brightly for all those fortunate enough to cross her path. Reflecting on her time at Oakland, Diane shares, "I hope, in some small way, I have touched the life of a student to make them a better nurse." Noack's contributions to the SON will be long remembered, and while she will be deeply missed, her legacy will continue through the many nurses she helped mold and inspire. ➤

OU MOMENT



© Oakland University Archives

Music to the Years

Opened in 1964, the Meadow Brook Amphitheatre solidified Oakland University as more than a college atmosphere; it was a cultural hub. The classic outdoor venue is nestled between the heart of campus and the historic Meadow Brook Hall and hosts 7,701 patrons, drawing diverse audiences and spreading music throughout OU’s community.

Originally built to support the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Meadow Brook Amphitheatre hosted their summer residency for over 25 years. Even so, the venue sought a new variety and welcomed new musicians in the 1990s, eventually amounting to the ranging set list today.

Modern genre-spanning concerts have included timely performances like The 1975, Rex Orange County, Band of Horses, Wilco, Vampire Weekend and Charlie Puth. Additionally, the venue continues to support

classic acts such as The Beach Boys, Sublime, Steely Dan, Peter Frampton, Weird “Al” Yankovic, John Denver, The Cranberries and Barry Manilow.

Meadow Brook Amphitheatre cements itself as a seasonal memory for many. Vast audiences find a venue that invites the sounds of their youth, whether a Pioneer, Golden Grizzly or simply a passing-by patron struck by the music. The amphitheater uniquely not only welcomes communities of all ages and interests but has created a sense of community at OU for over 60 years. 🍷



Be Dazzled
at Meadow Brook Hall this holiday season
November 28–December 30, 2025

Located on the campus of Oakland University, historic Meadow Brook Hall will be the most dazzling destination this holiday season. Explore the historic mansion decked in shimmering splendor for Holiday Walk during the day or let your nights be bright with an evening light show at Winter Wonder Lights. Evening visitors also have the opportunity to tour the main level of Meadow Brook Hall.

OU ALUMNI AND THEIR GUESTS WILL RECEIVE A DISCOUNT ON SPECIAL DAYS.

Visit meadowbrookhall.org/ouholidays for full details.

Join us for the most wonder-filled time of year at Meadow Brook Hall.

Book tickets online at meadowbrookholidays.com

Meadow Brook Hall
350 Estate Drive | Rochester, Michigan | 48309-4481
(248) 364-6200 | meadowbrookhall.org



17270

Do you prefer digital over print?



Use code to remove your address
from the Oakland University Alumni
Magazine print mailing list and
receive the online edition only.

DANCING INTO THE LION'S DEN, page 22

Passion, perseverance and a competitive spirit are the driving forces behind Ernesto Duran-Gutierrez's, CAS '20, life. These traits, instilled by his family and those around him, allow Duran-Gutierrez to keep reaching beyond his goals. ➤

