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Stampede: E-newsletter for students

Western Michigan University

6-2-2020

Stampede June 2, 2020

Western Michigan University

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June 2, 2020



WMU will return to campus fall semester, creating health and safety protocols

WMU is committed to continuing to deliver the high-quality education you have come to expect. In his May 15 message, President Montgomery said the University intends to welcome students back to campus this coming fall semester. Before this anticipated return, students can take advantage of summer II classes at a distance. Course registration closes July 2. [Read the president's message](#)



Critically needed online cybersecurity degree program launches this fall

Beginning in fall 2020, WMU is offering a new bachelor's degree program in cybersecurity. The interdisciplinary major is designed to incorporate the computer science and business aspects of online security. The COVID-19 pandemic is further fueling the need for specialists to keep digital data and interactions secure.

[Start your degree](#)

Mentorship and externship opportunities remain available in the COVID-19 era

More than 130 students are beginning business externships to explore future career opportunities. The Zhang Career Center's peer mentors are helping students remotely.

[Discover the options](#)

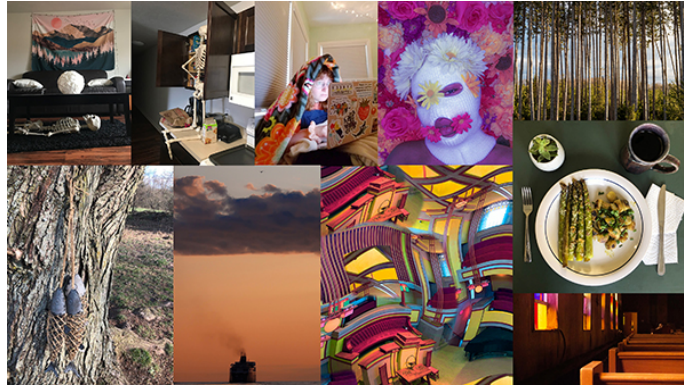


Professor unites health care heroes, Broadway stars to raise spirits and funds



Spearheaded by Director of Music Theatre Performance Jay Berkow, The Resilient Project features more than 60 performers, including WMU alumni, with doctors and nurses from across the United States.

[Hear their song](#)



Digital photo students excel at adapting to distance learning through art

Students in Bill Davis' Digital Photo I course transitioned to distance education in the middle of the semester, some without necessary camera or editing equipment. Using their experiences and whatever tools they had at home, they found ways to express themselves and become better artists despite having limited resources.

[View the Pandemic Art gallery](#)

Broncos giving back



National Guardsman alum helps lead effort to feed thousands of Michigan families

Instead of annual training, 2nd Lt. Hunter Davidson, a WMU alumnus, and his team of Michigan National Guard soldiers are feeding those in need during this uncertain time.

[Rally the troops](#)



[Broncos tapped to help address racial disparity in COVID-19 outcomes](#)



[Life-saving innovation crafted by engineering alum](#)



[Luggage for Love: Grad students pioneer project to help foster children](#)

WMU students in the news



Fraternity raises money to operate restaurant for college students in need

The WMU Chapter of Delta Sigma Phi is collaborating with a nonprofit to launch a fundraising effort to help feed WMU and Kalamazoo College students during the school year.

[WWMT](#)



A Moment of Magic Foundation continues to bring joy to sick children amid pandemic

WMU's chapter of A Moment of Magic Foundation is adapting its programming to ensure children fighting serious illnesses get the support they need.

[FOX 17](#)

Summer II session via distance education, CARES Act student relief

Dear students and families,

The entire WMU community remains focused on delivering the high-quality education you have come to expect here. You are at the center of every decision we make.

I'm writing today with several important updates. First, as part of our continuing response to the effects of COVID-19, we have decided to offer WMU's summer II session via distance education. Though we are all eager to return to pre-pandemic life, we haven't yet arrived at that stage in the effort to end the outbreak. At present, the governor's "Stay at Home" order continues to restrict our activities, and social distancing continues to be a necessary and effective practice to safeguard campus health and stop the spread of the disease.

Classes for summer II begin June 25, the day after the conclusion of summer I. These summer months may present an opportunity to continue making progress toward graduation. They provide a convenient way to earn credits while you may be sheltering in place and away from campus. Undergraduate courses will be offered at the University's online rate. Some graduate courses that allow for social distancing will be provided on campus, so graduate courses will be offered at the rate determined by the location of registration, main campus or online. Provost Jennifer Bott will send more detailed information about rates to currently enrolled graduate students.

Our full intention is that we will welcome you back to campus and be fully operating this coming fall semester, assuming government directives and public health constraints beyond our control allow us to do so. We have teams working on contingency planning to ensure that WMU can safely provide in-person instruction to the fullest extent possible. In the period ahead, more information about the fall semester and related decision-making will be forthcoming.

I also want to let you know that we are now accepting applications for students who may be eligible for financial assistance through the federal CARES Act. Please visit the [CARES Act Student Emergency Assistance webpage](#) to learn about eligibility and application processes before the **Friday, May 29, 2020**, deadline.

Along with disbursing these federal relief funds, by [keeping the costs of tuition and campus housing down](#), we aim to ease the

financial strain students are experiencing as a result of the outbreak. The pandemic's economic fallout has been one of its greatest repercussions. Universities throughout the state and nation are contending with this formidable health and financial crisis. WMU is not immune, and we've taken necessary but difficult action, including significant personnel reductions and employee wage cuts, to address the associated budgetary challenges.

These proactive steps are designed to protect the University's core mission of providing the first-rate, high-impact experiences that lead our students to exceptional outcomes. Because of WMU's academic and co-curricular programming, our statistics show that 9 of 10 new alumni are employed quickly, working in their field, in jobs they like. We're proud of that. We're proud of our students.

And as we make decisions guided by what's in their best interest, we are buoyed by the examples of their many successes:

[Kassidy Davis](#), a recent exercise science graduate who is ready to pursue a doctoral degree in physical therapy.

[Johnny Anderson III](#), who earned a bachelor's degree and is now pursuing his master's degree while working at his dream job in health care.

[Noam Morgenstern](#), an aviation alumnus who flies for Alaska Airlines and delivers critical supplies and personnel for pandemic response.

[Kobe Brown](#), who will begin a nine-month contract in August as a vocalist at Disneyland Tokyo.

And you.

We will not compromise on what makes this University special. As we navigate this unprecedented period, we will model the resilience, grit, determination and hard work we help ingrain in our students, and through this experience, emerge stronger.

Thank you,

Edward Montgomery
President

WMU launches online cybersecurity undergraduate degree

Contact: [Joy Brown](#)

May 15, 2020



KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Beginning fall 2020, WMU will offer a fully online [Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity](#) that will benefit graduates and organizations in multiple ways. Enrollment is now open for the four-year degree program designed to help meet the increasing workforce demand for digital security specialists in areas ranging from government defense to supply chain operations.

Demand for cybersecurity experts has been growing for years as online professional and personal activities have increased. According to the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics**, information security analyst jobs are expected to grow by 32% through 2028. As of 2018, the median annual pay was \$98,350. Available positions are only expected to increase as organizations recognize how vital cybersecurity specialists are to their operations.

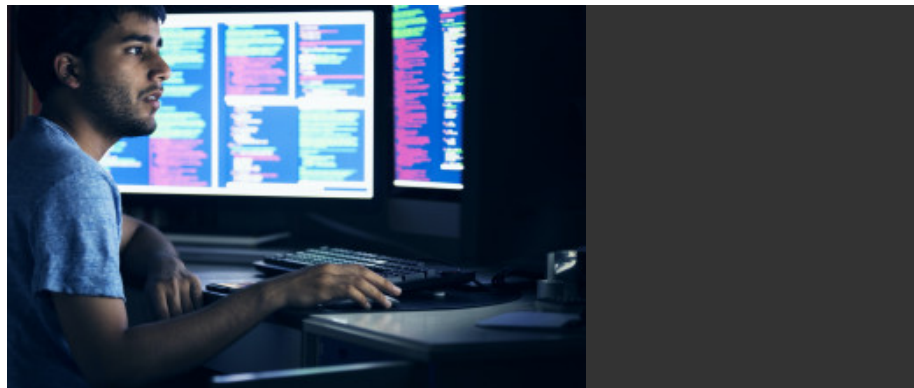
“We developed this degree based on the demand from industry,” says **Jason Johnson**, lecturer in the **College of Engineering and Applied Sciences**.

Companies, nonprofits, governments, schools and more need individuals skilled in technical disciplines, such as network

security and data protection, to avoid breaches that can jeopardize physical safety, security and finances.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased the number of online users and exposed the safety vulnerability of software and videoconferencing platforms, is further fueling the need for specialists who know how to keep digital data and interactions secure.

Students in WMU's program will have the added advantage of acquiring invaluable skills that extend beyond the screen. Rather than developing curricula solely from a computer science perspective, WMU's interdisciplinary cybersecurity major also relies on the Haworth College of Business for a business viewpoint on cybersecurity. The academic collaboration, program organizers say, will offer essential learning for today's cybersecurity professionals who work in both realms.



"Companies are hungry for graduates who have tactical skills but also the ability to strategize, collaborate and communicate. As we have seen with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, data security is more important than ever as organizations provide remote work environments and the required security for their operations. Recent events will serve to accelerate and expand the demand for qualified cybersecurity professionals," says **Dr. Alan Rea**, professor of business information systems.

"Security lies in this unique area where you have to understand the business side and the technical side" rather than one or the other, says Johnson. "You can get away with being a manager of a division and have no idea how software is written, and you can be a software engineer who just codes all day, but with security, you

absolutely have to understand how to translate between those two worlds.”

WMU’s cybersecurity students will also acquire practical experience as they earn their degrees. For instance, they will be required to complete a senior capstone project with a yearlong collaboration between student teams and organizations working to develop some aspect of their overall cybersecurity posture.

“This might be a software development project, network infrastructure hardening or an overall risk assessment of their technology, people and processes,” says Rea.

Overall, the program will offer the utmost in timing and location flexibility, thanks to an asynchronous learning platform. Students will be able to access presentations and other material to meet deadlines, but will be able to do so at their most convenient times. Meanwhile, online input and interactions between students and instructors will take place during each course.

Talks are progressing with regional community colleges for articulation agreements that would allow students to easily transfer to WMU.

The program is designed to be taken anywhere in the world, and to be expansive enough to train for a wide variety of cybersecurity positions that keep important online information and transactions secure.

“Hackers are evolving. It’s gotten away from the kid in his mom’s basement defacing websites. That was petty vandalism in a lot of cases,” says Johnson. “Now, it’s corporate espionage. It’s nation-states. Things are getting much more organized and the attackers are finding many more ways to profit by breaching security at all different levels.”

Program organizers, however, point out the need for cybersecurity experts is not just one of immediacy.

“Cybersecurity professionals will be in demand for the long term. Even after the pandemic subsides and organizations strategize to determine which virtual offerings worked well and which ones did

not,” says Rea, “cybersecurity specialists are one of the best ways to mitigate or manage risk in a company or organization.”

Mentorship and externship in the era of COVID-19

Contact: [Stacey Anderson](#)

May 7, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—More than 130 pre-business students are about to embark on business externships, despite the challenges COVID-19 presents. Whether those externships are virtual or delayed to later this summer or early fall, they are a key way that students determine if the career pathway they are interested in is right for them.



Arayana Janson

The [Business Externship Program](#), offered through the [Zhang Career Center](#), is a career exploration opportunity, but it is about much more than the connections made with employers in a variety of industries. Students receive intensive coaching on professionalism, informational interviewing, etiquette and more.

Behind the scenes are the staff of the Zhang Career Center, including student peer mentors who have previously completed the program. These students provide one-on-one mentorship to pre-business students progressing through the program. This year, being a peer mentor took an unexpected turn, with mentors helping to provide workshops and preparation events through Elearning and other means.

“We had already been planning to pilot some online components for the Business Externship Program this year,” says Zhang Career Center Director **Geralyn Heystek**. “We had to rapidly move the program online at the same time that students were adjusting to finishing their semester via distance learning. When we asked whether peer mentors felt they could fulfill their roles as both students and mentors, they answered ‘yes’ with a commitment that was truly impressive.”



James Rubio

Arayana Janson, a junior from Kalamazoo, Michigan, finds that she gets as much out of the experience as the students she is mentoring, “Being a peer mentor is a great experience because the role incorporates servant leadership into our personal pathways to success. We not only get the reward of knowing we’ve reminded other students that they are not alone in their efforts toward building a brighter future for themselves, we also continue to foster our own attitudes of professionalism through reinforcement.”

One way that the program has changed is being “on call” for the business externs at all times. In the past, students attended workshops that were scheduled and had most of their contact with their mentors in-person at scheduled times. “Transitioning how I handled my role as a peer mentor involved much more communication with my group of externs,” says **James Rubio**, a senior from Canton, Michigan. “I was emailing, calling and sending multiple messages every day. I made my schedule open so I could talk to different students whenever they were available instead of them trying to schedule a meeting in a small window of time I allow. I found that students really responded to the open

availability—the ability to talk any time made them feel more comfortable and supported.”



Khansa Shaikh

Organization and balance has helped **Khansa Shaikh**, a senior from Portage, Michigan, to be both an outstanding student and an outstanding peer mentor. “One of the things that I had to do was get even more organized than I already was. Offering all the workshops and programs remotely becomes challenging with many different demands. I have never used Apple calendar as much as I did in the past two months. There was also the challenge of separating your work and school life from your personal life, which is harder when it all happens in one location. I had dedicated Mondays through Thursdays for only work and school and a long weekend every week to spend time with my family. That way I had the best of the both worlds, and others had the best and most balanced me.”

All three of these peer mentors say they want to stay involved with this program and others in the college—as students and alumni—so that they get the chance to connect with business students and help them on the path to success.

And for the externs about to start these nontraditional, hybrid, fluid externships, they are about to get an experience that will be valuable professionally and personally. “The externs I met through my mentor role are dedicated to making the most of this experience, despite or because of COVID-19,” says Janson. “Companies have reported that they have a high degree of respect for students who stick with a commitment like the Business Externship Program despite uncertainty. Some companies have already indicated greater potential for jobs or internships for

candidates who have demonstrated resilience as we emerge from COVID-19. This extern group is actually quite lucky because they may have more one-on-one time with professional mentors at their respective externship companies—extern hosts are really stepping up to provide a world-class experience with even more attention this year. With all of the online pivoting involved, it speaks well for this year’s externs that they adapted and are ready to learn as much as they can through their externships.”

2019-2020 BUSINESS EXTERNSHIP PEER MENTORS

Rachael Crutchfield
Cooper Frost
Arayana Janson
James Rubio
Khansa Shaikh
Allison Smith
Nick Stamper
Jodi Stoffer
Novena Sutiono

WMU professor unites health care heroes, Broadway stars to raise spirits and funds during pandemic

Contact: [Erin Flynn](#)
May 22, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Dramatic gestures of heroism are unfolding across the country as medical professionals risk their lives to care for others during the pandemic. Now, Broadway stars are bringing their own dramatic flair to honor those frontline medical workers. [The Resilient Project](#), spearheaded by **Jay Berkow**, director of music theatre performance at Western Michigan University, and composer/lyricist **Dave Ogrin**, unites a star-studded company of more than 60 performers with doctors and nurses from across the country. Participating from emergency rooms, critical care units and even their

own living rooms, they join together to sing Berkow and Ogrin's song, "Resilient."



Jay Berkow holds a tablet playing the [Resilient Project video](#).

"It's a powerful ballad about finding positivity and triumph out of a disastrous situation," says Berkow. "It's intended to show that you have to fight for positivity."

The project itself is a product of resilience. Having worked together on a rock-opera called "[Mata Hari](#)" for the past few years, Berkow and Ogrin were ready to debut it for potential investors in New York before the pandemic inserted an abrupt intermission.

"When the reading was canceled, David and I were talking about how 'Resilient' (a song from the musical) actually has a really strong message for health care workers," Berkow says. "We decided to donate the song to organizations to use as a fundraiser."



WMU alumna Cassandra Sandberg, top center, sings with other Broadway stars.

Enlisting the help of New York casting director **Stephen DeAngelis**, the pair quickly had dozens of Broadway stars lining up to participate—performers like **Charl Brown** of "Motown the Musical," Tony Award winners **Cady Huffman** and **Gregory Jbara** (who currently stars in "Blue Bloods" on CBS) and **Daphne Rubin-Vega**, Tony Award nominated for "Rent," among many others. WMU music theatre alumni **Cassandra Sandberg**, B.F.A. '09, and **Patrick Connaghan**, B.F.A. '13, also joined the chorus.

"Given the unprecedented impact of this crisis, which is still unfolding, our goal was to salute the true heroes who are at the forefront of the battle for human lives. The tireless health care professionals—doctors, nurses, hospital personnel—who are literally risking their lives every day to take care of all of us," Berkow says.



WMU alumna Patrick Connaghan, top right, sings with other Broadway stars.

The team wanted to feature some of those heroes, so they reached out through friends and family and recruited several doctors and nurses to show off their singing talents on the video as well. They represent health care facilities from across the country, from New York to New Mexico. The video will benefit their colleagues through the [American College of Physicians, Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS' COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Fund](#) and the [Emergency Nurses Association](#).

"I just love that we are singing along with health care providers and frontline responders through this whole thing," says Sandberg. "I love how it creates a sense of community that we're all in this

together, and we're so obviously indebted and grateful for the work they're doing."

"I couldn't believe that this song was written years ago before all this hit, because the lyrics line up so perfectly with what we're all feeling in some capacity," adds Connaghan. "It's basically a beat that you're feeling in your body and it's kind of taking you through the day. It's motivation for me."

HUGE UNDERTAKING

Seemingly overnight, a fundraising idea snowballed into a massive project. **Todd Tuche**k, a 2015 WMU music theatre alumnus who now works for NBCUniversal in Los Angeles, volunteered his video editing talents to turn more than five dozen individual clips into a polished, synchronized music video. Tuche estimates he dedicated about 72 hours to the project—a challenge motivated by his own personal experience.

"My mother was an emergency room physician assistant when I was growing up, so I know firsthand how demanding those jobs are without [the added stress of] a national pandemic." Tuche's mother is currently the head physician assistant at an urgent care facility in St. Johns, Michigan, which he says is overwhelmed with patients right now.



Todd Tuche works on the video at his editing station.

He's also watched his own industry uprooted by COVID-19 production cancellations, and says this project was the least he could do to inspire and encourage others during a national crisis.

"We are all in this together. If we all sacrifice something we took for granted before the outbreak, we can—hopefully—return to a form of normalcy."

The video is already having an impact around the globe.

"I hope ... it shares the mission of the fundraiser but also shares the essence in the sense of building community and being in this together—that in greater numbers we can be strong and get through this together," Sandberg says.

Berkow says he's received messages from health care workers as far away as Pakistan who were moved by the lyrics.

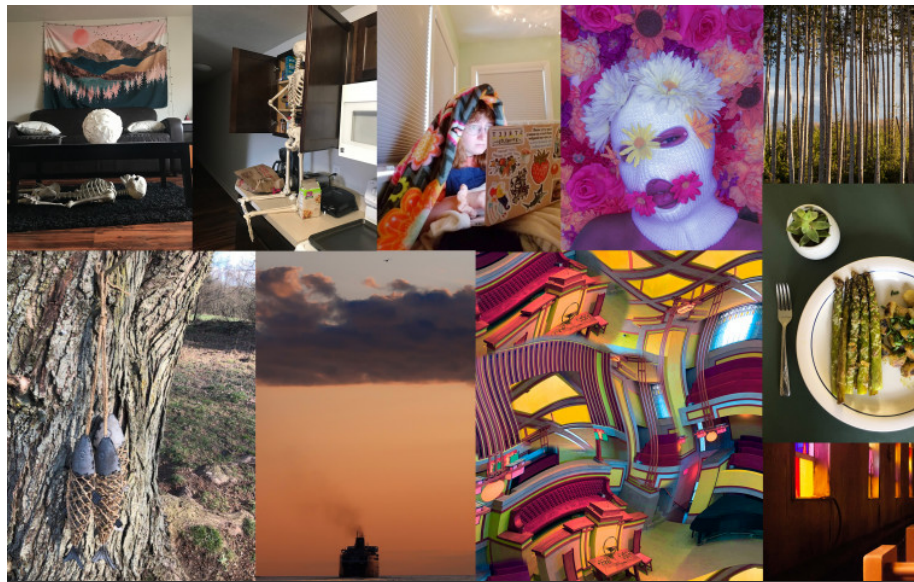
"Through history, through all these major crises we've had, people always turn to artists. They're looking for inspiration, emotion, whatever it is," Connaghan says. While artists can't help physically on the front lines in emergency rooms, they can raise awareness and money and join people together. "That's just the start. Once that's all in place, you keep going. I think this is the domino that starts the effect."

"The more nurses and doctors who actually see it and say, 'Okay, I'll go back into the hospital for one more day,' that makes a big difference."

Seeing beauty amid the chaos, WMU photography students tell their stories

Contact: [Megan Looker](#)

May 15, 2020



Works of art created by students in Digital Photo I in spring 2020.

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Like the flash of a camera, students in WMU **Digital Photo I** course suddenly found themselves in very unfamiliar territory this spring. They were budding artists with little access to cameras and editing software. But as their **Frostic School of Art** friends would say, the show must go on.

“We were all collectively shocked,” says **Bill Davis**, associate professor and area co-coordinator of photography and intermedia. “I asked students to summon their grit, empathy and creativity. They used any tool possible to make images.”

Davis found himself spending hours at a time trying to convert his course plans to virtual instruction while being mindful of his students’ limitations. This is a beginning digital photo course, meaning many students are just starting out and don’t have the essential equipment.

“I quickly realized this was going to become a ‘one-size-fits-one’ situation, because some students had cameras, some had software, some had tablets and, to my count, only three or four had everything needed,” Davis explains. “We found ways to cope, though.”



"Can I Get a Dr. in the House?!" - Mandy Weiss

One of those coping mechanisms was found in sharing experiences. Davis began telling tales of his storied career, including working in the Amazon basin, North Africa, Korea and Eastern Europe.

"I wanted students to know that we all face adversity and compromise. In many ways, that is the definition of being an artist. My hope was that they could see compromise and social distancing as a creative opportunity."

Not only did he tell his own stories, but Davis tried to create assignments based on other perilous periods in world history. "Unfortunately, there are many parallels between the Great Depression and 2020," he adds.

With hopes that this period of instability would foster a creative genius of sorts, Davis pressed on, encouraging his students to continue responding and creating to assert their identities, which he says is the "key ingredient" to learning photography from a distance.

As he suspected, Davis says some of his students made more visually and conceptually strong work as a result of social distancing. However, that wasn't all.

"The real talent was in how they maintained composure in the face of adversity. They became inventive and independent—using whatever they had to make artwork," Davis says. "My students are my heroes in a lot of ways. I so admire their determination."

PANDEMIC ART



"Abandoned" - Anna LeChard



"Indistinguishable Reality" - Carolyn Wilson



"Pandemic Meals" - Emma Somers



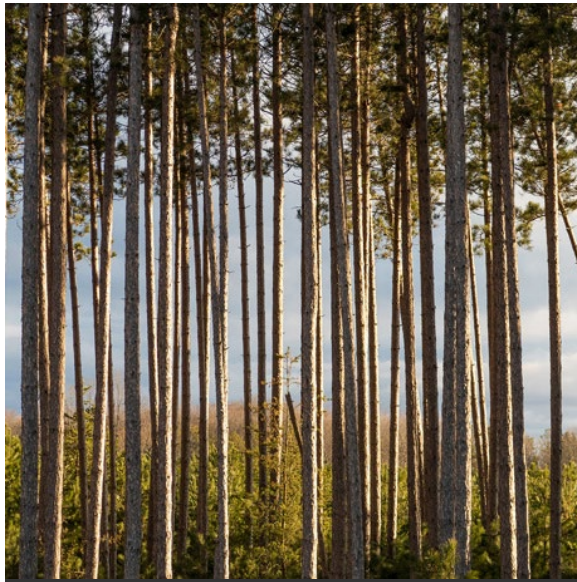
"I Thought I Had More Ramen" - Jaylynn Mittig



"E-Learning" - Jules Kupperman



"Value"
- Leray Posey



"Eyelashes of the Forest" - Olivia Novak



"Material Nature" - Sarah Wheaton

National Guardsman, a WMU alum, helps lead effort to feed thousands of Michigan families

Contact: [Erin Flynn](#)

May 5, 2020



PONTIAC, Mich.—Feeding the growing number of Michiganders in need during the COVID-19 crisis is no small task. **2nd Lt. Hunter Davidson** and his team of Michigan National Guard soldiers are up to the challenge. Initially scheduled for annual training in Morocco, the global pandemic shifted their plans.



2nd Lt. Hunter Davidson packs food into boxes.

“We were used as a quick deployable unit to do anything that the state would need” for COVID-19 response, says Davidson.

His team from the 1433rd Engineer Company began [work at the Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank](#) in Comstock Park in late March. They packed emergency boxes full of food for smaller food pantries to distribute to Grand Rapids-area families. Davidson also had a chance to facilitate two drive-up events, where the team distributed boxes to hundreds of people in their cars.

“It was really nice to be out in public and actually see the people who we were putting the food together for,” he says. “Part of the reason we joined the guard was to be able to give back to our neighbors. We are also civilians ourselves most of the time, so being able to serve our communities is really important.”

A little more than a week into their orders in West Michigan, Davidson’s 10 soldier unit was deployed to Pontiac. They’ve spent the past few weeks at a food bank in Pontiac, assembling 1,000 quarantine boxes per day for senior citizens.

“Packing boxes isn’t easy; it’s pretty difficult. But, at the end of the day, we all know it’s for a really good cause,” Davidson says, estimating his team has assembled more than 400,000 pounds worth of food boxes. “We’re helping thousands of people.”

A TRADITION OF SERVICE



Aerial photo of cars at a drive-up distribution event at Woodland Mall in Kentwood, Michigan.

Davidson knew early on he wanted to serve in the military. The son of a Michigan National Guard officer, a sense of duty to his country was in his blood. He chose Western Michigan University, across the state from his hometown of Croswell, specifically for the ROTC program.

“I knew Western had the best ROTC program in the state,” he says. “My wife, Rachael—my girlfriend at the time—got into the occupational therapy program at WMU, which also was the best in the state. It just worked out.”

While participating in the ROTC program, Davidson explored several possible fields of study—from biology to education—before he chose political science. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in 2019, he landed a job as a manager at Amazon right away. That job, paired with the experience he gained at WMU, set him up for success in the uncharted territory he's leading his team through now.

"The ability to remain resilient, flexible and handle all of the changes that have been happening throughout this COVID-19 crisis, Western really helped with that," says Davidson. "Everything changes here every single day. So, if I wasn't resilient or able to adapt, it would be pretty difficult."



Soldiers assemble emergency boxes at the Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank in March.

That innovative and adaptable mindset helped Davidson lead a reorganization effort at the food bank's warehouse that doubled production ability, from 600 to more than 1,200 boxes per day.

"The benefit of the National Guard is you have people from all walks of life that work in (industries like) manufacturing or engineering or operations. So, we've been able to come in and all the civilians where we've worked have been blown away with how efficiently we're working and how fast we're able to do our job."

Davidon's team will continue providing critical support to food banks through the end of May, wrapping up more than two months of service.

"We've been extended a few times. They keep asking who wants to keep going, and we keep volunteering."

Two Broncos tapped to help address racial disparity in COVID-19 outcomes

Contact: [Erin Flynn](#)

May 18, 2020

LANSING, Mich.—Across the nation, COVID-19 is infecting tens of thousands of people daily, but it's impacting communities of color particularly hard. A new study conducted by a team of epidemiologists and clinicians found while Black Americans represent just 13.4% of the U.S. population, they make up more than half of all novel coronavirus cases, and nearly 60% of deaths nationwide and 40% in Michigan. Two WMU alumni are helping lead the charge to address the troubling disparity.



Studies show Black Americans in particular are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
(Getty Images)

Dr. Renée Branch Canady, who is CEO of the [Michigan Public Health Institute](#) and **Celeste Sanchez Lloyd**, Community Program Manager at [Strong Beginnings](#), are among a diverse group of two dozen medical professionals, health and community leaders appointed by **Gov. Gretchen Whitmer** to the Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities. Led by **Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist**, the group is tasked with developing strategies to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color in Michigan.

"This virus is holding a mirror up to our society and reminding us of the deep inequities in this country," Whitmer said in a news release. "From basic lack of access to health care, transportation and protections in the workplace, these inequities hit people of color and vulnerable communities the hardest. This task force will help us start addressing these disparities right now as we work to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Michigan."

It's a task Canady has been preparing for her entire career. Having served in a number of capacities in local and state government as well as higher education, she says she's honored to apply what she's learned and experienced to advance the task force's agenda. Canady and Sanchez Lloyd both earned a master's degree in public administration from WMU.



Dr. Renée Branch Canady

"There's one thing to see a problem and there's another thing to seize the problem as an opportunity," says Canady, whose master's degree in public administration had a health emphasis—a degree she says set the trajectory of her public health career. "I think we're really endeavoring to seize this opportunity and, if we do things well, it improves systems and situations for many Michiganders beyond COVID-19."

One of the biggest challenges facing the task force is time. The group is working at a fast clip, meeting twice a week. Immediate issues members are working to address include examining COVID-19 testing and working on a strategy to implement a comprehensive program, as well as increasing access to primary care.

"The longer it takes, the more lives are impacted," Canady says. "We are working to identify effective and expedient solutions to protect the lives of Michiganders who've been affected disproportionately by this pandemic."

Public health issues are inherently difficult because they play out in public, says Canady, and they can often lead to an overly cautious—and slower—approach as health professionals double back on discussions before taking action. In an urgent pandemic situation, they don't have that luxury.

The fight is personal for Canady. While her entire career has focused on cultural competence, health disparities and health inequities, the loss of her own infant son heightened both her understanding of and commitment to the issue.

"As a young African American mother, I learned that college-educated black women were more likely to experience an infant death than white women who had not completed high school," she says. "My own experience with infant mortality and the memory of my son gave me a passion and purpose that has allowed me to fight for the well-being of communities and people who have often been marginalized or oppressed in our society."

Life-saving innovation crafted by WMU engineering alum

Contact: [Erin Flynn](#)

May 4, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Managing moving parts. It's **Andy Bornhorst's** life—both professionally and personally. Now that those two worlds have merged amid stay-at-home orders during the pandemic, time is in short supply. Still, Bornhorst, manufacturing engineering manager at Parker Hannifin's Pneumatic Division in Richland and father of four young boys—one of them just weeks old—found time to volunteer his innovative skills to improve safety for frontline health care workers.



Andy Bornhorst

It started with a social media post from a friend. **Brady Beauchamp**, a local nurse anesthetist and clinical instructor for the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine, posted a link to an article about an aerosol box designed by a Taiwanese doctor to protect health professionals from aerosolized COVID-19 droplets while intubating and extubating patients—[something a team of WMU faculty members had also conceptualized](#). Beauchamp was looking for help building a box to help protect himself and his co-workers.

"I can't sew, so this was my way of helping during this time of need," says Bornhorst, a 2009 alumnus of Western Michigan University's mechanical engineering program. "I was looking for a way to lend my skill and resources to help others during this pandemic."

On his own time, Bornhorst built a prototype box with a couple of friends. A local hospital put it into action the next day.

"After that, I called Schupan Aluminum and Plastic Sales to see if they would be interested in donating the material to build more of the boxes," says Bornhorst. **John Barry**, the

company's president, enthusiastically joined the cause, committing to donate 20 to 30 boxes to Ascension Borgess Hospital and Bronson Healthcare.

"One of our core values is being inspired to help others. This has been such an exciting project on a number of different levels," Barry says.

DESIGN THINKING



A demonstration of the Aero|Guard intubation box in use at Bronson.

Finding the help necessary to fulfill Beauchamp's request was easy. Getting the boxes to the health care facilities proved more challenging.

"We started looking at how much space the boxes took up, how difficult it would be to ship them and store them," says Bornhorst, whose engineering ingenuity kicked in. "I came up with a locking design that allows (the box) to be taken apart by removing some of the pins."

Bornhorst's hook-and-slot design not only makes the boxes collapsible to easily transport, it's also easier to sanitize the devices between uses. The technology is currently patent-pending and being marketed and manufactured by Schupan as Aero|Guard. For every 10 units ordered, the company is donating one to an organization in need. Right now, about 100 of the devices are in use in the field—many of them at two hospitals in Kalamazoo.

"During this stressful time, having innovative protective measures gives us an added layer of comfort," says **Dr. Scott Gibson**, medical director of Trauma and Emergency Services at Bronson Methodist Hospital. "Airway intubations are crucial for critically ill patients, but anxiety producing and risky for physicians and staff. These boxes allow us to test and refine physical barriers and they provide extra protection against exposure to the COVID-19 virus during these procedures."

The versatility of Bornhorst's design has drawn interests from people across the country, and not just those involved specifically in intubation.



Bornhorst developed a versatile hook and slot design that is currently patent pending. (Aero|Guard product photo)

"There's a potential for any procedure that's being done when you're close to a patient's airway," says Barry. "We've talked to dentists, to ophthalmologists, to gastroenterologists—anyone that's going to be close to a patient's airway has a potential solution here."

Bornhorst has been blown away by the response.

"My initial intention in this was just to help out a friend and some of the local doctors and frontline medical workers," Bornhorst says. "It's turning out to be bigger than I expected."

He credits the basic skills he honed at WMU for his ability to adapt and rise to engineering challenges, like those presented in this project. The program also opened the door to internships and job training opportunities that put him on the path to career success. Now, he's happy to be able to use his knowledge for the greater good.

"I think it's important for people to look for ways to use their skills in a productive way rather than getting on social media and complaining about the situation," says Bornhorst. "It's important to do whatever you can to help."

Caring cases: Luggage for Love seeking donations for foster children

Contact: [Joy Brown](#)

April 24, 2020



The Luggage for Love team at Western Michigan University collects suitcases for foster children in need of a way to transport their personal belongings from one foster home to the next.

KALAMAZOO, Mich. — Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, a noble community service project, conceived by graduate students from the School of Social Work at the spring semester's start, is forging ahead.

Called **Luggage for Love**, the effort supports a simple concept: Foster children deserve and require compassion from the moment they enter the system.

From the child's perspective, removal from their home can happen suddenly. When officials do so for abuse and neglect reasons many of us cannot fathom, those destined for the foster care system often rely on a repurposed product of last, but convenient, resort for transportation: garbage bags. Instead of holding rotting food, used tissues or soggy leaves, such bags are hastily filled with precious and necessary possessions like pajamas, school clothes or maybe a cherished stuffed animal.

Unightly, flimsy trash bags are the standard carry-all containers for foster children throughout the country, even when they relocate from foster home to foster home, as some do throughout their formative years, according to those with personal and professional insight.

That's why four WMU Master of Social Work students launched Luggage for Love. Funding to [purchase luggage](#) is being collected on the group's GoFundMe page. When pandemic-

related distance mandates are lifted, Luggage for Love will make purchases and distribute the luggage, including the pieces that were collected prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, to foster children in need.

Foster care carries on while the COVID-19 crisis advances. According to **Dr. Jim Henry**, a co-founder of WMU's Southwest Michigan Children's Trauma Assessment Center, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is continuing to manage foster care caseloads as best it can. In most instances, case workers and caregivers are having to schedule virtual appointments, which is causing disruption to routines and grief for many. Therefore, children remain in need, even for items as basic as luggage.

There is another emotional element to this project: Luggage for Love has also teamed with WMU's Seita Scholars Program to provide encouraging letters to luggage recipients; Seita scholarships support students who have lived some or all of their teenage years in foster care.

PERSONAL BAGGAGE

Leslie Hutchins, one of Luggage for Love's organizers, and a former Seita Scholar who is now a social worker for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, knows firsthand what it's like to be a foster child forced to use trash bags to carry their belongings.

"You kind of feel like you're nothing, bouncing from one place to the next; and then you're given trash bags. It just feels like you're not really cared for in the system," says Hutchins, who even used garbage bags to move to WMU her freshman year.

Had she possessed a sturdy piece of luggage as a foster child, Hutchins says she would've felt like "someone actually cared."

"This may seem minor to some people, but to someone who's literally coming from a home that doesn't have anything, it means the world," says Hutchins, who received a bachelor's degree in social work in 2015.

RELOCATION WITH DIGNITY

"I think we can all rally around this idea that dignity and respect are the two biggest things that really any human being desires and needs. They are the foundational things that we need to be happy, healthy and functional members of society," says another luggage program founder, **Stephen Weaver**, a clinical trauma interventionist at the Children's Trauma Assessment Center. "If you don't have those two things, you're not going to be able to build a self-esteem strong enough to get through the hard times. So, Luggage for Love is just a start, but I think it's a really strong start."



Hutchins and Weaver say letters from Seita Scholars will also emotionally help the foster children who will be served; those experiencing multiple housing transitions and behavioral issues caused by trauma, some of it compounded and complex, will realize they are not alone in facing those challenges.

“To think that there would be a letter in the luggage, and knowing that someone experienced this already, will mean so much to them,” says Hutchins.

“We’re not there to say, ‘Your troubles are all over,’ because we know that we can’t promise that,” Weaver says. “So, I think these letters really are there to say, ‘We see you, and we know you because we are you in some sense of having been there.’”

Luggage for Love was developed from an assignment for the spring course Social Work in Task Groups and Organizations. The four students, who also include **Liz Powers** and **Alexis Brannan**, decided to pursue something that would have an immediate and positive impact on some of the region’s most vulnerable youth. Each student has a passion for working with children, and for the project they created.

“I love this,” says Hutchins of Luggage for Love.

“It is really exciting, and it’s a conversation starter,” says Weaver, who in 2013 received a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on religion. “People might know that foster care kids don’t come from the best places and that maybe they don’t have all the things that they need. But when you open up the floor to that conversation, there’s a lot of advocacy and education that can happen about what it’s actually like for them and what they’re up against.”