

Congratulations to local graduates

Bernie Patterson, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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What a special time of year this is. Congratulations to the graduates of SPASH, Pacelli and each of our regional high schools, and to the 1,312 Pointers who graduated May 20.

Allow me to share a few highlights from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point commencement ceremonies last Saturday:

- Our commencement speaker was Bob Whitsitt, a 1977 graduate of UW-Stevens Point who has been called “the most influential figure” in Northwest professional sports. He has been president and general manager for the Portland Trail Blazers and Seattle Supersonics basketball teams, and most recently of the Seattle Seahawks.
- From both academic and work ethic perspectives, Whitsitt said UW-Stevens Point gave him the tools he needed to succeed. Much of his career has focused on converting “no” to “yes.” “When you hear the word ‘no,’ that’s not the end, that’s just the beginning,” he told graduates.
- I had the honor of recognizing Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs Greg Diemer, who is retiring in June after 50 years in higher education. Greg has served UW-Stevens Point for 30 years, putting students first. He always looked for ways to say ‘yes’ rather than reasons to say ‘no.’ Greg will be missed.
- A bittersweet moment in the morning ceremony was the awarding a posthumous degree to the family of Daniel Zurawski of Stevens Point. Daniel was majoring in resource management when he died tragically in an accident in 2009 during his sophomore year. His family created a scholarship in his memory, funded by an annual fishing tournament in Stevens Point. These scholarships are awarded to seniors from local high schools who will study natural resources at UW-Stevens Point. Daniel’s memory motivated his brother, Brent Zurawski, to complete his bachelor’s degree in urban forestry. As Brent received his diploma Saturday, he also was presented with his brother’s posthumous associate degree.
- Commencement is steeped in tradition, from the gowns, mortarboards and regalia worn by participants to “Pomp and Circumstance” performed by the orchestra. One of the symbolic traditions of UW-Stevens Point’s ceremony is having our graduates touch a miniature replica of the cupola that sits atop Old Main.
- Many of the May 20 graduates were among the first class to touch the cupola when the tradition of Convocation was revived in fall 2013. Convocation celebrated the start of the academic year, with a commitment to each other and to learning. Touching the cupola at commencement completes the “bookend” of this iconic symbol.



Earning a college degree is a major milestone. It takes an investment of both time and money to complete a degree. Research continues to show a solid return on this investment. Those who attain a

bachelor's or higher degree will earn \$1 million to \$2 million more in their career than those without a college degree.

An increasing percentage of young people are completing bachelor's degrees. In 2016, four in 10 Millennial workers ages 25 to 29 had at least a bachelor's degree, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of Current Population Survey data. In 2000, 32 percent of Generation X workers had at least a bachelor's degree. In 1985, 26 percent of Baby Boomer workers had a bachelor's or more.

Those who complete degrees find economic payoffs and a richer quality of life. At UW-Stevens Point, we prepare students for successful careers. They learn the skills to think critically, communicate well, solve problems and work with others. They learn to be effective employees, managers and citizens in their communities. This wise investment pays dividends to society.

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<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/education/2017/05/26/chancellor-congratulations-local-graduates/347839001/>