

2012 UWO alumni award winners named

by Natalie Johnson - Monday, May 21, 2012

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Nine stellar alumni—including educators, communicators and business executives—will be honored by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Alumni Association during Homecoming 2012.

Five graduates will receive the Distinguished Alumni Award and four will receive the Outstanding Young Alumni Award at a reception and dinner Oct. 12, at Reeve Memorial Union. The event is open to the public.

“We are pleased to honor such exceptional alumni who are making great contributions in their professions and in their communities,” said Alumni Board President Steven Buss.

The Distinguished Alumni Award—the Alumni Association’s highest honor—is given to those who are active in their professional fields and widely recognized for their career and civic accomplishments. Recipients for 2012 include Anton “Tony” Hopfinger ’66, Lake Forest, Ill.; Robert Kleinschmidt ’71, New York, N.Y.; Leah Lechleiter-Luke ’92, New Lisbon; Ronald Schreier ’68 and MSE ’70, Neenah; and Todd Teske ’87, Pewaukee.

Recipients of the Outstanding Young Alumni Award—given for professional and civic accomplishments and future promise—include Corey Baumgartner ’02 and MS ’05, Appleton; Amber Genett ’98, Kaukauna; Rebekah Pepler ’08, Brooklyn, N.Y.; and Vanessa Virbitsky ’08, Colorado Springs, Colo.

The following are the accomplishments of the Distinguished Alumni Award recipients:

- After graduating from UWO with bachelor’s degrees in both math and physics, Hopfinger went on to earn a doctorate in biophysical chemistry from Case Western Reserve University. He currently serves as a distinguished research professor of pharmacy at the University of New Mexico, professor emeritus of medicinal chemistry and pharmacognosy at the University of Illinois and founder/chief technical officer/secretary of The Chem21 Group. Hopfinger’s research has changed the face of chemical information and computational chemistry.
- Kleinschmidt followed up his bachelor’s degree in accounting from UWO with a master’s in economics at the University of Massachusetts and post-graduate studies at Columbia University. He is president, chief executive officer and chief investment officer of Tocqueville Asset Management in New York City. This top financial investor who manages \$12 billion in assets believes in “paying it forward” in both his public and private life.
- Lechleiter-Luke, who has a bachelor’s degree in secondary education /English from UWO, works as an English and Spanish teacher at Mauston High School. There, she has developed several notable programs, including a highly successful Key Club and a freshman transition course that combines English and social studies. She served as the 2010 Wisconsin State Teacher of the Year

and was selected by the U.S. Department of Education as a national Teaching Ambassador Fellow for 2011-2012.

- With a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degrees in guidance, Schreier served as an educator, counselor and administrator for 43 years, before retiring as associate principal of Appleton West High School. He was instrumental in starting many successful programs, including the Student Council, Golden Tassel Awards and the Post-Graduation Party. Schreier's many professional and community service activities include more than 30 years as a member of the Phi Delta Kappa.
- Teske has a bachelor's degree in accounting from UWO and an MBA from Northwestern University. As chairman, president and chief executive officer of Briggs & Stratton, he leads the world's largest producer of gasoline engines with revenues exceeding \$2 billion annually. Teske serves on 10 boards of directors as well as the UWO College of Business Advisory Council.

The following are the accomplishments of the Outstanding Young Alumni Award recipients:

- Baumgartner has both a bachelor's and a master's degree from UWO in special and elementary education and educational leadership, respectively. He is a strong leader who advocates for young adults in the Fox Valley, where he serves as the associate high school principal and the activities director with the Kaukauna Area School District.
- Genett, who holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from UWO, serves as the vice president/director of process and learning management with Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Last year, she was named one of The Future 15 Young Professionals in the Fox Cities.
- After earning a bachelor's degree in journalism from UWO, Pepler continued her education in New York City, where she completed the classic pastry arts program at the French Culinary Institute. She works as the food editor of Tasting Table, a daily emailed publication that blends the tradition of high-quality food writing with the fast-paced style of online journalism.
- With a double major in journalism and political science from UWO and a master's degree in public relations with an emphasis in sport communication from Ball State, Virbitsky serves as a communications manager for the U.S. Olympic Committee. She will play a key role in the upcoming 2012 London Olympics, working with the international media covering the 600 American athletes participating in the games.

For more information about the alumni awards dinner or Homecoming 2012, please contact the Alumni Relations office at (920) 424-3449 or email alumni@uwosh.edu for information.