

## **Sustainability pioneer to receive UWO honorary doctorate, speak May 11**

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/18461/sustainability-pioneer-to-receive-uwo-honorary-doctorate-speak-may-11/>

An international partner in the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's award-winning renewable energy endeavors and a global pacesetter in the pursuit of a more sustainable planet will receive an honorary doctorate during the institution's spring Commencement on May 12.

Renewable energy pioneer Dr. Martin Viessmann, who leads The Viessmann Group of Allendorf, Germany, will receive the honor during the morning UW Oshkosh Commencement ceremony. Also during the 138th spring Commencement ceremonies, nearly 1,500 graduates - including the first four doctoral graduates from UW Oshkosh - will receive degrees.

Each semester, faculty, staff, students and private citizens are invited to nominate candidates for a UW System honorary degree, bestowed on faculty, staff, students and private citizens of exceptional accomplishment and distinction who have made significant contributions to the university, region, state or nation. The UW Oshkosh Honorary Degree Committee recommends recipients to the Chancellor, who forwards the nomination to the University of Wisconsin System President for finalization and sharing with the Board of Regents.

UW Oshkosh's honorary doctorate recipients are the personification of excellence and accomplishment. The Mercury 13 women, secretly trained as astronauts in the space program's infancy, received honorary doctorates in 2007 for their pioneering spirit and efforts in the advancement of women's rights. In 2010, Muriel Howard, president of the American Association of State Colleges and University, received the degree for her work on diversity and inclusivity in higher education. A year ago, UW Oshkosh alumnus James VandeHei '95, was honored for his innovative work as cofounder and executive director of POLITICO, a thriving nonpartisan media company covering national politics.

Viessmann's successful nomination for the UW Oshkosh honor cites his tremendous track record of innovation and collaboration inside and outside his industry. The family-owned, nearly \$2.5 billion Viessmann Group's dedication to renewable energy initiatives and training within the industry have helped dramatically advance Germany's goal of carbon neutrality. The company and its leader have worked just as diligently with educational partners such as UW Oshkosh, sharing expertise and state-of-the-art technology to develop environmentally sound biogas energy facilities on campus and in the Oshkosh area.

"UW Oshkosh's faculty, staff and students have benefitted incredibly from working so closely with a man and a company that have been among the global leaders in the renewable energy revolution," UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells said. "The knowledge and technology Dr. Viessmann and his partners have shared with us have given our institution the opportunity to develop, refine and demonstrate the kind of green, biogas production advancements that will power our communities, reduce our impact on the

earth and help renew a way of life in rural Wisconsin and rural America.”

**See a few recent UW Oshkosh honorary doctorate recipients in this video:**

<httpv://youtu.be/4GiydLpbixo>

### **Collaboration in energy innovation, research**

The Viessmann Group and that company’s Wisconsin subsidiary, BIOFerm Energy Systems of Madison, have been essential partners with UW Oshkosh’s College of Letters and Science and UW Oshkosh Foundation in the establishment of Biodigester facilities on and off campus. These state-of-the-art renewable energy facilities range from the University’s on-campus dry fermentation anaerobic Biodigester -- the first in the western hemisphere -- to a [proposed plant and public education center at the 9,000-cow Rosendale Dairy](#) to the smaller [“Titan 55” unit planned at the 150-head, family-owned Allen Farm](#).

Each of these biogas production facilities is working, or will work, in concert with the student-and-faculty biogas research conducted in UW Oshkosh’s related [Environmental Research and Innovation Center \(ERIC\)](#). There, a new generation of environmental and energy scientists is developing – students who work alongside faculty to better understand how to maximize biogas production already occurring inside the campus’s dry fermentation anaerobic Biodigester off Witzel Avenue across the Fox River in Oshkosh.

“Dr. Viessmann is an individual of exceptional achievement and distinction, and he and his company have made significant contributions to our campus regarding biogas facilities and research,” said UW Oshkosh College of Letters and Science Dean John Koker said. “Our partnership with the Viessmann group is key to the campus reaching its goal of becoming carbon neutral, and this work is aligned with the teaching, research and service goals of the University.”

### **Reducing a footprint, advancing an economy**

UW Oshkosh expects the second state-of-the-art biogas facility at Rosendale Dairy, in concert with the campus’s array of other sustainability initiatives, can significantly accelerate UW Oshkosh on its carbon neutrality timeline, a goal currently targeted for 2025 in the University’s [Climate Action Plan](#). The 2.8 megawatts that digester is expected to generate could power approximately 1,600 homes per year, according to BIOFerm. The company also projects that, based on UW Oshkosh’s current annual consumption of electricity, the new plant could cut the campus’s 2025 carbon neutrality target by more than half, reducing it from 13 years from now to seven.

“In Germany, more than 6,000 biogas plants generate renewable energy and millions of jobs,” said UW Oshkosh Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs Tom Sonnleitner. “UW Oshkosh’s collaborative development of digesters is just beginning to demonstrate how this green technology can serve as an economic powerhouse for the renewable energy job market here in the United States.”

Nadeem Afghan, president and CEO of BIOFerm, said Viessmann’s innovations through UW Oshkosh also show tremendous opportunity for growth in the state’s workforce and economy.

“The biogas plants at UW Oshkosh are already contributing to the job market by creating jobs in construction, biological and chemical sciences, plant operation and other technical and maintenance trades, including plumbers and electricians,” Afghan said. “This is the central mission for our collaboration with UW Oshkosh as continued education and workforce training is deeply embedded in Viessmann culture lead by Dr. Viessmann. After all, we cannot create a thriving biogas industry without the institutions like UW Oshkosh that educate our future workforce.”

### **Free, public presentation May 11**

Viessmann will give a free, hour-long public presentation on his and his company’s commitment to sustainability at 1:15 p.m. Friday, May 11 in UW Oshkosh’s Sage Hall, a day before he receives the honorary doctorate. His resume of accomplishments is remarkable, particularly in Germany where Viessmann is already a national award-winner.

The Viessmann Group’s “Efficiency Plus” sustainability project showed that the German Federal Government’s energy and climate policy goals for 2050 could be accelerated based on present day technology. For this work, The Viessmann Group received the German Sustainability Award in 2009 for “Most Sustainable Production” and the German Energy Agency’s Efficiency Award in 2010. Dr. Viessmann additionally earned the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of German 1st Class, the highest tribute his government pays individuals for their service to the nation.

The company’s “Viessmann Academy,” has also trained and educated more than 90,000 industry specialists including contractors, planners, architects, property developers and the employees of his company on regenerative heating technologies.

UW Oshkosh Foundation President Arthur H. Rathjen said the University welcomes a wide audience to partake in Dr. Viessmann’s May 11 presentation. The UW Oshkosh Foundation asks all guests to RSVP for Dr. Viessmann’s presentation by Monday, May 7 by emailing [johnsojo@uwosh.edu](mailto:johnsojo@uwosh.edu).

“Our campus, our community, our region and our state, are incredibly grateful to have directly benefitted from the collaborative vision and spirit of a man like Dr. Viessmann,” Rathjen said. “His May 11 presentation will be a wonderful opportunity for local businesses small and large, and the general public, to hear him speak about our shared pursuit of a more sustainable Earth.”

Read more:

- [UW Oshkosh Commencement](#)
- [Honoring the Mercury 13 women](#)
- [UWO honors higher education advocate](#)
- [Innovative leaders to receive honorary doctorates](#)