

Adams-Friendship Academic Hall of Fame



***Alexis Pheiffer Bhatheja
Distinguished Alumnus***



***Lisa Ann Robinson Massen
Distinguished Alumnus***



***Sandra Swisher-Pheiffer
Distinguished Educator***



May 2021

Lisa Ann Robinson Massen (Distinguished Alumnus)

Class of 2002

Lisa Robinson Massen felt extremely confident about future aspirations on graduation day in May of 2002. She credits her experiences throughout her school years for giving her the confidence and courage to step out of her comfort zone and explore new avenues. Her understanding that the path to success includes the ability to overcome challenges with hard work helped her reach her goal to become a Registered Nurse.

Ms. Massen noted that many of her teachers provided her with experiences and opportunities. Though some of her memories were monumental, others were small, simple things that she believes helped her flourish as an adult. Mrs. Nina Zelenski having her participate in a music presentation as a fourth grader gave her courage. Her shock in failing Mr. Rogers eighth grade math class made her stronger. “This experience made me a stronger person. I was actually able to fully understand the math class. I always thank him for this as I use this every day in my nursing career. He may not know this as he helped shape me into the person that I am today. I now know that I won’t always succeed at everything the first time but, eventually, if I work at it hard enough, I will succeed.”

During high school, Ms. Massen took advantage of opportunities to earn college credits. Her selection of Health Occupations classes inspired her to pursue a career pathway in the field of medicine. Along with courses taught by teachers Tanya Kotlowski and Christina Patrin, she credits her extra-curricular participation in Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) as being most beneficial. “I placed two years in a row at state for medical terminology and first aid and CPR. We went to Nationals in Cleveland, Ohio one year. I felt so independent and able to take on the world. It’s those experiences that every student should have. It really shapes a person and allows you to get to know yourself on a deeper and more personal level.”

Mrs. Patrin introduced her to the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class—a start to her future. Due to the CNA program and assistance from guidance counselor, Ed Anderson, she was able to meet more of her goals during her senior year by going to school in the morning and working in the afternoon. “I was so excited to make more than minimum wage as a senior and was able to save for college and a new car.” These experiences gave her the “wings” and confidence to conquer the “Real World” before venturing into it after graduation.

The timeline of experience, service and acknowledgment for Ms. Massen is extensive. After high school, she earned her initial credentials at Mid-State Technical College. In 2016, she achieved a Master of Science in Nursing Degree-Nursing Education from Western Governors University. She has utilized her credentials locally at Gundersen Moundview Hospital and Clinics initially as a Certified Nursing Assistant and Nurse Intern. She served as a Medical Surgical RN from 2011-2012 and in 2012 moved to the Emergency Department, first as an RN and later into the positions of Emergency Department Supervisor and RN Manager. She completed her state of Wisconsin Leadership Residency program in August of 2017. In 2018, she became Gundersen Moundview’s Specialty Clinic RN Manager. Ms. Massen holds Lean Six Sigma Green Belt Certified Advanced Cardiac Life Support and Basic Life Support Instructor qualifications.

Our local community benefits from Ms. Massen’s various awards and acknowledgments. With her leadership, Gundersen Moundview now has the capabilities of being identified as an acute stroke ready hospital. She was recognized by former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVoss and her team in Congress for reducing the rate of narcotic prescriptions sent home with patients by half. Other certifications include Safe Sitter Instructor, Trauma Nursing Core Course Certification, and Certified National Institute of Health Stroke Scale Certification. The community also benefits from her training in trauma nursing, emergency pediatric care, and advanced burn life support.

Alexis Pheiffer Bhatheja (Distinguished Alumnus)

Class of 1995

Ms. Alexis Pheiffer Bhatheja graduated from Adams-Friendship High School as Co-Valedictorian in 1995. During her high school years, she was active in a variety of activities including Band, Student Council, Forensics, DECA, and Spanish Club. In addition, she served as Class President.

After high school, Ms. Bhatheja pursued a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Psychology and a minor in Spanish. In December of 1998, she graduated *magna cum laude* from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. During her undergraduate years she was a member of *Psi Chi*, International Honor Society in Psychology. She was also a member of *Alpha Sigma Nu*, an honor society of Jesuit colleges and universities open to students in the top 15% of their class academically with demonstrated record of service and loyalty. Only 4% of each class are inducted. During her time at Georgetown, she served as a research assistant for the Psychology Department (Research Methods & Statistics) and volunteered as a tutor for the DC Schools Project. In the spring of 1999, Ms. Bhatheja interned with the Washington, DC Public Defenders Office. Between college graduation and beginning law school at the University of Minnesota, she interned in the education department at FCI-Oxford.

In May of 2002, Ms. Bhatheja graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Minnesota Law School with a Juris Doctorate (JD). As part of the top 10% of her class, she was included in the Order of the Coif. During law school, she maintained “A” average Dean’s List status, served as a Note & Comment Editor for the *Minnesota Law Review* and worked as a Legal Writing Student Instructor.

In the Fall of 2019, Ms. Bhatheja earned a Certificate in Dispute Resolution from the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law in Malibu, California. During her time at Pepperdine, she earned CALI Awards for the highest course grade in Mediation Theory, Psychology of Conflict Communication, Negotiation Theory, and, Forgiveness & Reconciliation.

Since graduating law school in 2002, Ms. Bhatheja has practiced labor & employment law and general litigation in both Wisconsin and Arizona. For seven years, she worked with the legal team for *PetSmart* as Senior Counsel for Labor & Employment. She then spent four years at *Sprouts Farmers Market*, a natural and organic grocery store chain based in Phoenix, Arizona where she served as Deputy General Counsel. In that role, she managed a team of attorneys, paralegals, and claims professionals and provided legal advice and counsel to the company on a wide range of matters. Ms. Bhatheja recently opened her own law firm so she can focus on mediation, facilitation, and training. She speaks nationally on a variety of topics ranging from legal ethics issues and wage and hour law to COVID-19 litigation and resolution of high conflict disputes.

Ms. Bhatheja serves as a volunteer judge pro tem in Maricopa County, Arizona and also sits on the executive council of the State Bar of Arizona’s Dispute Resolution Section.

In addition to legal activities, Ms. Bhatheja is involved in parent organizations at her daughters’ schools, including time spent as treasurer and yearbook co-chair of various parent boards. She enjoys hiking, swimming, yoga, traveling, reading, painting, music, and spending time with her husband and two daughters. Though she lives in Arizona, Ms. Bhatheja shared that she misses Wisconsin every day and cherishes her visits home. “*I am proud of my school, I am proud of my town, and I am always proud to represent AFHS.*”

Distinguished alumnus responded to the question, “How did Adams-Friendship Schools prepare you to perform for life?” The following response was submitted by Ms. Bhatheja:

First, I learned the value of hard work. One of the things that stands out about my A-F education – and particularly about my high school years – is that we all worked hard in many different ways. Some of my friends were multi-sport athletes

who spent hours at practice. Some of us worked hard learning instruments or practicing with the Dance Team. Some of us were a bit competitive about our grades. Some were leaders in student council and many other clubs. We worked hard together to build floats, write skits, and decorate the gym for homecoming, spirit week, and prom. And many of us (myself included) had paying jobs on the side. We were always busy, and generally speaking, our hard work paid off. Learning and growing in a hard-working environment leaves a mark, in a good way. You learn to keep going, no matter how hard things get. You learn not to expect to get more than you put in. You learn not to give up. If I did not have these skills, I would not be where I am today. It's really that simple.

Second, I had countless opportunities to explore my interests and develop my skills. I benefitted from advanced placement classes in high school and was able to graduate college a semester early thanks to AP credits. I was fluent in Spanish by the end of high school thanks to AF's amazing Spanish program and had no trouble taking literary criticism classes in Spanish as part of my Spanish minor in college. In short, I had the academic foundation I needed to succeed in both college and law school, and because my teachers had always encouraged me to think (rather than just repeating information), I was comfortable sharing my opinions.

I also participated in DECA, forensics, band, and student council, and served as class president - all activities that involve speaking or performing (sometimes with little time to prepare) in front of large groups of people – something I have done frequently throughout my legal career. I loved these activities when I was in school, and even now, I look forward to every speaking opportunity. Each time I train a group of employees, give advice to my clients, or pitch a new approach on a case, I am drawing on skills I learned in speech class and concert band and while preparing for DECA state competitions. These experiences shaped me and put me on the road to being an effective communicator.

Finally, I benefitted greatly from the many people within the Adams-Friendship School District who believed in me and pushed me to do my best. My teachers and classmates encouraged me, challenged me, and supported me. I was surrounded by people who pushed me harder, who wanted to see me succeed, and who helped me build the confidence necessary to reach my goals. In true teenage fashion, I did not appreciate this unique environment as much as I should have at the time. It was really a blessing to have such a supportive place to learn, and it has taken me some time to understand just how special this time in my life really was. Every student should have a safe place to learn and grow, a place where your teachers know more than just your name and your grade point average, and a group of friends that will cheer you on. I had that in AF, and I know growing up in this environment gave me the confidence to keep learning through college and beyond.

Sandra-Swisher-Pheiffer (Distinguished Educator)

Distinguished Educator Sandra Swisher-Pheiffer was born in Richmond, Virginia and before the age of eight counted North Carolina, Ohio, New York, and Maryland as home. In 1970, she graduated from Wilson College in Pennsylvania with a major in Music Composition, Theory and Performance and a minor in French and Psychology. She attended Goucher College graduating in 1971 with an M.Ed. in Elementary Education.

The range of Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer's resume mirrors her varied interests and zest for new experiences. Her adventures include time as a fourth-grade teacher, tour guide for the National Zoo in Washington D.C., public and private school music teacher, member of the National Cathedral Choral Society, and proprietor of her own music studio. After moving to Wisconsin in 1984, she developed a relationship with music teacher, Nina Zelenski who introduced her to the Sand County Players. Eventually the two musicians were able to job share an elementary music teacher position for the Adams-Friendship School District. Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer transitioned into the position of Gifted and Talented Coordinator.

Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer's expertise brought a variety of opportunities to students in the Adams-Friendship community. Endeavors ranged from community Christmas concerts in basements of rural schools to applying for an Opera Grant through the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. This grant was the beginning of a partnership with teachers Diana Johnson, Donna Burke, Harriet Dehlinger, Lois Briggs, Peggy Werner and LeAnn Jungenburg-Klumb. The cohort received in-depth training in every aspect of creating and performing an opera—music, script writing, lighting, and set construction. Students benefited by creating and running their own company acting as Production and Stage Managers, actors, composers, writers, lighting techs, set builders, and public relations coordinators. Over the run of the project, 21 operas were created and performed by A-F students in grades 1 through 8. Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer went on to serve as the Midwest Representative on the National Board for Creating Original Opera Program for three years.

As Gifted and Talented Coordinator, Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer collaborated with other area coordinators. Through their efforts, programs such as the Creative Arts Festival, August Derleth Young Writers Conference, High School Arts Weekend at APT in Spring Green, Math Competitions, Spelling Bees, discussion groups, and distance learning book clubs became available to many students. In addition, Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer coordinated ACT and AP testing as well as online learning options. Students benefited from opportunities to visit art museums, participate in portfolio reviews, musical performances, creative arts night at schools, and a wide variety of other innovative projects.

In addition to Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer's efforts to enhance student learning opportunities, her leadership in the Beginning Teacher Assistance Program (BTAP) gave support to new teachers—a critical piece to their success in the profession and a way to introduce them to the community. As a member of the administrative team, she also served as an active member of the District School Improvement Team (DSIT). Members of these leadership teams worked to build sustainable programs that were both educational and fiscally responsible.

Following retirement, Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer has joined with other Adams-Friendship School District retirees to support the Adams Community Theatre. This group established a facility that provides a variety of cultural experiences for the area. Volunteers are involved in all aspects of the project—business management, plumbing, electrical work, technology, carpentry, grant writing and participating in entertainment! In her "free time" she can be found playing organ and directing the choir at the Arkdale Trinity Lutheran Church or possibly participating in an event for the Adams County Historical Society.

Ms. Swisher-Pheiffer shared, "In the end, what it all comes down to, is how blessed I've been to have worked with such wonderful people for the 22 years I served here. Mrs. Zelenski has always said it was like Camelot, and I have to agree. So many kids, so many lessons learned (by me!), so many wonderful opportunities to help make good things happen for all of us."

Past Honorees

<p style="text-align: center;">2016 Honorees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Alumni</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tania Bonnett, J.D.</i> (1997)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Neda Esmaili, M.D.</i> (1997)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Legacy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Richard and Verla Lysy</i> (1947 and 1948)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2017 Honorees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Alumni</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rebecca Grabarski, B.S.</i> (1993)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>David Janssen, M.D.</i> (1977)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Educator</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Richard Colby</i> (1960)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Legacy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Martin and Carole Janssen</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2018 Honorees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Alumni</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tanya Kotlowski, B.S./M.S.</i> (1990)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Kathleen Theisen B.S./M.M.</i> (1986)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Educator</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Clark Staehling</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2019 Honorees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Alumni</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Audra Hovorka Mead,</i> <i>B.S./M.B.A.</i> (1988)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Robert Warren, B.S./B.A.</i> (1981)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Educator</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Linda Webster Machan</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Legacy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Harvey Wagner (1956)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2020 Honorees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Legacy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Charles and Alice Parr</i> (1957)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2021 Honorees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Alumni</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Alexis Pheiffer Bhatheja,</i> <i>B.A./J.D.</i> (1995)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Lisa Ann Robinson Massen, M.S.</i> (2002)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Distinguished Educator</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sandra Swisher-Pheiffer</i></p>

