RISE & LEAD
Alumnae lead the way and inspire others to achieve their dreams.
TO THE IU KOKOMO CLASS OF 2021!

While earning a college degree is a challenge in the best of times, this class has confronted obstacles none of us could have imagined when they first enrolled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In earning their degrees, these graduates have shown remarkable persistence and flexibility, and I am proud beyond measure of their success.

This class went on spring break last March expecting only one additional week away from campus, as the pandemic began. Instead, they finished the spring 2020 semester from their homes, adapting to remote learning nearly overnight. I would be remiss if I did not commend our faculty, who completely reworked their classes during spring break, to be ready to continue high-quality instruction in a new format.

Amidst these challenges, IU Kokomo did not just survive — we thrived. We built our new Student Activities and Events Center (SAEC), and hosted volleyball and basketball games. When we returned to campus August 24, we offered the largest percentage of in-person classes of all IU campuses, and saw record-breaking enrollment of 3,227 students, thanks to the diligent efforts of our admissions and academic advising offices.

I am especially excited about the opening of our new Multicultural Center last fall, which provides resources for our growing population of students of color, international students, and those in the LGBTQ+ community. The Center promotes a welcoming and positive campus climate, and cultivates a diverse, inclusive environment that supports equal access, participation, and representation on our campus.

We celebrated our 75th anniversary, and IU’s Bicentennial, even if the commemoration had to be cut short. Our Bicentennial campaign netted more than $16 million, far surpassing our original goal. Funds raised created more than 140 undergraduate scholarships, that supports equal access, participation, and representation on our campus.

We were also ranked among the top regional campuses in the Midwest, in the 2020 U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges Rankings, tied for the 7th through 11th spots in the Top Public Schools Regional College Midwest.

As we prepare to return to a more “normal” year this August, we look forward to the accomplishments ahead. A large percentage of our graduates stay and work in this region, teaching in our schools, providing health care in our hospitals and health care centers, starting and leading new businesses to grow our economy, and much more. We couldn’t be more proud.

Congratulations, graduates!

Susan Sciame-Gieseke, Ph.D.
Chancellor
Indiana University Kokomo

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Admin, IU Kokomo
What’s your story?

Looking back on this past academic year, I have been impressed with the stories I have heard of our recent graduates, as well as alumni, and how they have persevered through unusual times.

Many have overcome obstacles, tried new things, and reached milestones they never thought possible. Others have dug deep into their careers and found ways to continue to excel.

This issue of Legacy highlights a few IU Kokomo alumnae who have risen to the top, despite what has been going on in the world around them. These stories are most likely very much like your own.

These leaders have made strides to lead from where they are, and plant themselves in places where they can flourish. You’ll get a glimpse of their leadership styles and what drives them on a daily basis. I hope you’ll enjoy reading about these amazing women.

So, I’m curious. What’s your story? I’m always eager to learn more about you, your career path, your growth and accomplishments. Please drop me a line to share your journey. Who knows, you may be featured in the next edition!

Until then, I hope you’ll take advantage of the warmer weather, get outside and breathe the fresh air! I know I’m ready!

Benjamin Liechty, BA ’06
Director of Alumni Relations
and Campus Ceremonies
alumni@iuk.edu
Indiana University Kokomo celebrated the academic achievements — as well as the resilience and dedication to persevere in the face of a global pandemic — of both 2020 and 2021 graduates during Commencement on Tuesday, May 11, during an outdoor ceremony at the Pavilion.

**CLASS OF 2020**
- 654 Graduates
- 41 Indiana counties
- 12 States
- 16 Countries
- 34% First generation

**CLASS OF 2021**
- 706 Graduates
- 39 Indiana counties
- 10 States
- 17 Countries
- 34% First generation

For more Commencement photos search @IUKOKOMO on Flickr
Mehreen Tahir
BS ’21

“You are blessed to be born in a country that values freedom, your universities that value students, and your professors that value your success, so never forget to give back to this entire community.

I pray you never face the adversity of oppression or a situation where your right to freedom of speech is threatened.

I urge you to passionately pursue your dreams and never give up on your goals. May you always be the pride of your campus, family, and your country.”

Mehreen Tahir represented the graduates as class speaker. She grew up in a small village in Pakistan and came to the United States because of her dream of an education. An honors graduate in biochemistry, she will continue her studies at Arizona State University, pursuing a Ph.D. in environmental biochemistry.

To watch Mehreen’s powerful speech, as well as the rest of the commencement ceremony, visit go.iu.edu/3Pde.

Grant Gaylor Makes School History as First National Champion

When Grant Gaylor enrolled at Indiana University Kokomo, he thought his days throwing shot put were likely behind him. The campus’s track team was new, and only included running events at that time. Not ready to give up throwing and hoping it might be added before he graduated with his nursing degree, Gaylor continued to train on his own, with help from his Northwestern High School coach and some video instruction programs. When he was asked to be on the first throwing team last spring, he was ready.

Two weeks after graduation, he secured his place in campus history, winning shot put at the NAIA men’s outdoor track and field national championships.

“My story is unique, but almost anyone could do this,” he said. “It just takes the right motivation and drive. People can be a lot more than what they think. It just comes down to you. An outcome isn’t promised, but are you willing to do the work to get the outcome you want? I was willing to do the work and hope it would be meaningful and impactful.”

Gaylor dominated the field at nationals. His throw of 18.74 meters in the finals was 72 centimeters better than the next competitor and beat his previous school record of 18.02. He also won River States Conference (RSC) titles in shotput and discus, and was named its Outstanding Field Athlete of the Year. He was runner-up in shot put at the NAIA indoor championships.

He’s balanced a full training schedule with his senior nursing program, throwing and then lifting weights after class each weekday, and then competing in meets on Saturdays.

“It’s been challenging, but it was rewarding at the same time,” he said. “I’m just grateful for the opportunity to be able to compete and represent my university and be part of the team atmosphere again. It’s an important individual thing for me, but also to be part of something greater than myself.”

After graduating in May, and with nationals behind him, he looks forward to beginning his career as an emergency room nurse at Community Howard Regional Health. He also hopes to continue to impact IU Kokomo’s track program as a volunteer coach.

Stay up-to-date on all things athletics at IUKCOUGARS.COM

To watch Grant’s powerful speech, visit iuk.edu/alumni.
The long-awaited Student Activities and Events Center received its official welcome to campus during a dedication ceremony led by IU President Michael A. McRobbie. “This much needed and very welcoming center will further strengthen the already vigorous spirit of community, scholarship, and fellowship at IU Kokomo,” McRobbie said, noting that it is “at least a dozen facilities in one,” because not only is it a gym, but also a resource center, a commons, a classroom, a training center, a proving ground, a lounge, and more.

The SAEC opened for the fall 2020 semester, just in time to also serve as a much-needed classroom space due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Chancellor Susan Sciame-Giesecke added that the campus has needed a gathering space for many years and is pleased to finally have it.

“}_This truly is something to celebrate,” she said. “In my mind, the campus is now complete. We’re ready for the 21st century.” Representing student athletes, Jaela Meister, from the women’s basketball team, said they are grateful for the gymnasium. “I cannot wait until we are able to fill up this gym with hundreds of students and staff, while also competing in front of our friends and families,” she said. “I hope to be able to raise another banner to represent this university, and to show how thankful I am to have witnessed the building of our new facility, and to play in it.”

Located southeast of Hunt Hall on the eastern edge of campus, the 26,000-square-foot building accommodates up to 1,200 spectators, and offers athletic offices, athletic training and locker facilities, a large lobby/reception area, and a three-story-high assembly space/gymnasium.

For more information go to iuk.edu/eventscenter

**SAEC RECEIVES OFFICIAL WELCOME**

**HOOPS FORGES FRIENDSHIP**

The friendship between Dr. Richard Lasbury and Cliff Hunt began with a shared love for Indiana University basketball. The two recall both attending IU Bloomington in 1953, and the excitement of attending basketball games there. Both have become IU Kokomo sports fans and have supported the programs with scholarships funds, while also funding student travel programs.

When IU Kokomo announced plans to build the Student Activities and Events Center (SAEC), Lasbury and his wife, Betty, knew they wanted to support it — and that their gift should honor their friend. When the SAEC opened in fall 2020, it included a men’s basketball coach’s office named for Hunt.

“Cliff has done a lot for IU Kokomo,” Richard Lasbury said. “He was the first basketball coach, and he’s important to the campus. I’m happy we did it.”

Hunt called the honor “overwhelming and surprising,” but appreciates it. “I have a long history at IU Kokomo, and I even took some classes there when the campus was at the Seiberling Mansion, in 1952,” he said. “I wanted to lay a base for IU Kokomo to compete in the NAIA. I think I placed a foundation for that to happen.”

Hunt coached the IU Kokomo Knights from 1981 to 1991, starting the team as a club sport, and growing it to play against other schools. The campus’s athletic programs, now branded as the Cougars, earned NAIA membership in 2013.

He hopes to see the stands packed with student fans when games can go on without COVID-19 restrictions. “This is something IU Kokomo has needed, and I’m proud to be part of it,” Hunt said. “I could never have imagined it when I was borrowing gym space for games from elementary schools and the Armory.”

Lasbury said he drove by regularly during construction to watch progress, and is happy with the finished center. “IU Kokomo’s growth is amazing,” he said. “It used to be just one building, and now look at it. It’s a real campus.”
There is no force more powerful than a woman determined to

—Bosa Sebele
writer, activist, and law scholar

INTEGRITY.
ACCOUNTABILITY.
EMPATHY. HUMILITY.

These are just a few qualities of a great leader. And many alumnae of Indiana University Kokomo exude these traits every single day.

Often times, it’s a person like Alexius Babb, who is about to complete her Ph.D. to become a counselor, so she can be a trustworthy face of a health care system to other people of color. Or it’s someone like Amanda Bagwell, who has overcome great obstacles to attain employment, and now reaches a hand back to lift others.

Brianne Boles also qualifies, as CEO of Bona Vista, where she leads one of the largest employers in Howard County, as they impact the lives of people with special abilities. And Priyanka Singh Deo heads up a team of Microsoft Engineers, in a field typically dominated by men.

Continue on to be inspired.
Amanda Bagwell with her guide dog Buddington.

Understanding those challenges, Bagwell has made it her life’s mission to help. She co-owns a web accessibility compliance business, and also works as a counselor for vocational rehabilitation through Indiana’s Family and Social Services Administration. Her goal is to earn her law license to help write policies that make employment easier.

“Just because we have disabilities doesn’t mean we don’t deserve a life,” she said. “I want to help. I believe the best way I can do that is to help adjust existing policies, write new policies, and bring my knowledge to the table regarding regulations. Whether I’m blessed to do that in vocational rehabilitation or somewhere else, I want to serve.”

Bagwell said many times, there are small accommodations that can make a huge difference. For example, she uses a larger computer monitor. She also has a guide dog, a yellow lab named Buddington.

“Most people, I have found, once they are given the correct tools in their toolbox, can do very well,” she said. “I’ve enjoyed helping them have their basic needs met, and then watch them grow and develop, to become their own advocate for their rights, handling it professionally moving forward. It’s fulfilling to me to see they can stand on their own and move forward and be part of society.”

Bagwell sets an example for her clients, with her own persistence, tenacity, and independence.

“There’s a creative way for everything,” she said. “I’m used to doing things by myself. When my parents got sick, I would walk to the school bus by myself, I was cooked, cleaned, and walked home from law school. It’s all by trial and error. You have to figure out a way to do something, when push comes to show.”

Bagwell has challenged herself since she lost her sight, shortly after her fourth birthday, due to a connective tissue disorder.

“I had to re-learn how to live,” she said. “I had to learn how to feed myself, and how to navigate my surroundings. I was already reading and writing, but then had to learn to read Braille with my hands.”

Her mother and stepfather pushed for her needs at school, but when her health struggles left them unable to do so, she had to take that job on herself at a very young age.

“When they got sick, I learned that someone had to get up and do it, and it was going to have to be me advocating for myself,” she said.

After graduating from high school, she first earned a community college degree, then enrolled at IU Kokomo. She found a welcoming environment while earning her bachelor’s degree in psychology, graduating in 2015 — with her guide dog, Roscoe, accompanying her across the stage.

“It set the trend for what I should ask when I went to graduate school,” she said of her IU Kokomo experience. She was able to receive documents in an electronic format, allowing her to read them on her computer, which she was allowed to use in class for note taking. She also received extra time on tests, to accommodate for her screen reader, which was essentially talking software, to read the information.

“I got the hands-on help I needed, which allowed me to mature and grow up in a more family-based setting,” she said.

Law school was harder, because she had to push for many of the accommodations she needed. On top of the rigorous class schedule and hours of study she and her classmates had to do, she also spent countless hours scanning print textbooks into a program that read them to her, or contacting publishers to send her PDFs to scan. She took exams either in Braille or on a Word document where she could type answers — often folding the screen down so her classmates couldn’t read her answers, because of professors’ concerns.

Sarah Sarber, IU Kokomo’s chief of staff, who is also a law school graduate, talked her through career options, leading her to policy and regulation. Bagwell gained experience in that area as an intern with Congresswoman Robin Kelly in Chicago.

In her role, she drafted policies for local companies, networked, helped with programs to get children from low income families access to college, spoke with constituents, and organized educational events.

“How else can you be part of your society, unless you have knowledge?” she said. “If you don’t know what you’re advocating for when you talk to your employer, you can’t protect yourself.”

Amanda Bagwell works in her office with guide dog Buddington close by.

iuk.edu/alumni

INDIANA UNIVERSITY KOKOMO ALUMNI MAGAZINE — summer 2022
A conversation around her kitchen table changed Alexius Babb’s life — and the lives of her family.

Her husband, Leon, asked her if there were any goals she wanted to achieve. She wished she had finished college, and he suggested she just pick up that same drive, perseverance, and resiliency we have. “The most important thing we hope we instill in our children is hard work and determination,” she said. “We want them to know that we weren’t born with those things. It takes effort to achieve and maintain personal and professional success. As Chief Executive Officer of Bona Vista, a non-profit organization that serves people with developmental disabilities, she has the opportunity to witness every single day, regardless of what’s going on in our local community, let alone nationally,” she said. “I definitely have grown in the area of patience, and celebrating the small moments. It’s important to celebrate those small victories, and we have a lot of them here.”

She encourages other women to look for opportunities to serve, both personally and professionally. “Put yourself out there, challenge yourself, be open to anything that comes your way.”

CEO finds growth through challenges

If you’re comfortable, you’re not growing, in my opinion,” she said. “You can’t challenge yourself if you’re comfortable. If you’re comfortable, you’re not growing. If you’re comfortable, you’re not learning. If you’re comfortable, you’re not growing professionally.”

While her original plan was to be an elementary teacher, Babb reached back to childhood experiences, volunteering in the community with her mother, Vicki Babb, a long-time Kokomo teacher.

“Going back to our community was in my blood,” she said. “When I decided to switch, I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do. I turned to what we did as volunteers, began working for the American Red Cross, and fell in love with it.”

As she figured out her career, mentors from campus all advised her, leading her to the Master of Public Management program as it was getting off the ground.

Armed with her graduate degree, Babb began her career at Bona Vista as a vice president in communication and development — with plans to continue growing into new roles. She discussed these goals with Jill Dunn, the CEO who hired her.

“I told her that I would want to grow. I had professional goals and that Kokomo was near and dear to my heart, and I would like nothing more than to grow and give back to my hometown professionally,” she recalls telling Dunn.

She began stretching herself by moving from communications into programming for the individuals served by the organization, starting out in the employment division. In that position, she helped people with disabilities secure and maintain employment.

“Families had a very troubled legacy relationship-wise with the United States,” Babb said. “Years of generational trauma can cause a lot of trauma to the human psyche, and to overall health outcomes.”

“We’re thinking of where we are generationally. When we had these discussions in our family, I don’t think anyone in our extended family could imagine that any of us would go this far.”

Babb hopes that she and her husband have set an example not only for their own children, but for others in their family, about the possibilities education opens for them.

“The most important thing we hope we instill in our children’s hard work and good effort, because that will help you pass many things in life,” she said. “We really hope they see how hard we worked, and they would pick up that same drive, perseverance, and resiliency we have.”

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found Azure Consultants. It started as a pilot program, and now it's an integral part of Microsoft and Azure for Start-Ups.

It almost seems like too much for a woman who grew up in a British boarding school in India — but that background gave her the tools she needed to seek out new opportunities.

"Moving away and starting new was instilled in me from a really young age," she said. The experience was similar to what Americans see in the Harry Potter movies, she said, with students assigned to houses, and earning points for their house in the classroom and on the athletic fields.

"It was really wonderful," she said. "In a sense, it taught me to be flexible. This still stands true today. You must be willing to be flexible with your approach to projects and people. Change is inevitable and necessary for growth and innovation. I would also encourage having a mentor. Identify someone you define as successful and ask them to lunch. We all need someone to be our cheerleader, sounding board, and shoulder to cry on when needed.

"This is my pride and joy at Microsoft," she said. "At this point, I've helped more than 5,000 start-ups be successful. When we started Azure, I saw an opportunity to help developers adopt our program and

Ann Millikan
BA'99

Major: Elementary Education

Current Occupation:
I was a first-grade teacher for 19 years at Bon Air Elementary, worked with the school to develop elementary guidance program, and the administrator for Kokomo Schools’ Title 1 program.

What advice would you give a woman who is starting her career?
Look at all the options and take all the classes that you can take. Do everything you can to help clarify what you really want to do. It’s wise to get every opportunity you can to do any kind of job or volunteer experience in any area you think you might be interested in. Look around and see what options are available.

Lisa Taylor-Weaver
BS ’99

Major: Finance and Economics

Current Occupation:
Director of Engagement at The Cellular Connection. I have held several positions over my 22 years with the company including accounts receivable, accounting team lead, assistant controller, and director of administration.

What advice would you give a woman who is starting her career?
One nugget of wisdom that I was given when I began my career after graduating was to be flexible. This still stands true today. You must be willing to be flexible with your approach to projects and people. Change is inevitable and necessary for growth and innovation. I would also encourage having a mentor. Identify someone you define as successful and ask them to lunch. We all need someone to be our cheerleader, sounding board, and shoulder to cry on when needed.

"Finding good mentors is really important," she said. "They are already where you want to go, and can give you the best direction for how to get there."

Emilee Miller-Norris
BA13, MPM 16

Major: Communication, Public Management

Current Occupation:
I’m the Chief Executive Officer at Clinton County Family YMCA. I do a little of everything. It’s a nonprofit, so anyone who works in that world knows you wear many hats when you do any job there. I do strategic thinking, long-term planning, and overall long-term health of the facility.

What advice would you give a woman who is starting her career?
I think the biggest thing is to advocate for yourself. You hear about women trying to break the glass ceiling and, really, I’ve found more that it’s women trying to make sure that they don’t shatter in these positions. It’s tough to be a woman in male-dominated fields. It’s difficult to sit in a room and be sure of yourself, speak up, and advocate for your own worth. You’re the only one that’s going to do it. Nobody is going to swoop in on your behalf and advocate. You need to be well rounded and very well prepared to have fierce conversations.

"I knew I wanted to be a program manager, so when I saw someone on LinkedIn who had that title, I would message them and say, ‘I’m in college, and I want to get to where you are. I would appreciate it if you would take some time to talk to me.’

LinkedIn is where she learned about her first job at Microsoft. Within a week of receiving a job offer after she packed everything she owned into her Toyota Corolla and set off on a marathon 32-hour drive to the west coast — with no place to live lined up, but with plenty of faith in her own ability to work out the details, because she wanted it badly enough.

"I feel truly fortunate with coming this far, and finding a job I love," she said. "I’ve worked other places where it was just a job. Now, I can wake up in the morning and start doing something that’s almost second nature. This is my passion, this is what I want to do.

"I do feel really blessed and lucky to be here."
JUST KEEP running

By: Tyler Lucas
BS ’17

Everyone can agree that this last year has been different. Everyday life has changed. The way we see each other. How we all interact with each other. How we handle our stresses.

Due to this pandemic, everything was closing and cancelling. All races were put to a stop and I was over halfway through a marathon training period. I would have people say, “Tyler, you run! Nothing is changing too much for you.” Well, sure. I run, but I only like running when there is a race on my calendar. And given the circumstances, there were no REAL races on the horizon. Virtual races became a big thing.

My motivation was completely drained. The crowds, all the runners lining up, the water stations, GONE. Not to be seen. Not only that; my job traveling was put to a stop AND my wife and I were blessed with a beautiful baby girl during this time. My life was (and is) crazy and it felt okay to put running on the back burner. But as time went on, I could definitely tell that stress and anxiety were becoming more common in my everyday life.

About a month and a half passes into being at home and I had decided that running had to come back. It also helped that my father-in-law was running more than me (and he is good at letting me know that). So the process began of getting back into running. Wake up, get my coffee, work, and immediately after that, RUN. It doesn’t matter how far or how long. I just had to do it. And having my wife cheering me on was a definite motivator.

With races slowly coming back, it is easier to find the motivation. If you’re looking for an easy way to start running for better physical and mental health, here are some tips to get started:

1. **DON’T WORRY ABOUT DISTANCE, JUST FOCUS ON YOUR TIME.**
   Aim for 10 minutes. Get used to that and throw in more time once it feels natural to you. Countless ‘Couch to 5k’ programs exist online with a simple Google search that can be helpful to beginners!

2. **PUT RUNS IN YOUR CALENDAR.**
   It gives you a goal to get out the door.

3. **TELL FRIENDS THAT YOU ARE STARTING TO RUN.**
   They may become supportive and be a source of motivation!

4. **DON’T START OFF SPRINTING!**
   You are trying to become a runner, not break any world records.

5. **SIGN UP FOR A RACE.**
   Even if it’s virtual, it will give you something to look forward to (and chances are you will get a t-shirt).

6. **PUSH THROUGH.**
   Just remember, it is important to have time to decompress through these hard times. And putting yourself through a workout may be tough, but you won’t regret it after.
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