WISCONSIN
ACHIEVERS

Vol. 25, No. 12
July 2025

Wisconsin Achievers is published by the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU)

Carroll Junior Find His Career Passion in Physical Therapy

For Carroll University junior Luke Ristow, physical therapy is more than a career—it's a calling rooted in personal experience. "As someone who received lots of physical therapy in high school, I knew it was a career I wanted to pursue," he says.

Luke Ristow

"The Wisconsin Grant has taken a huge weight off my shoulders and allowed me to focus on my goals."

Luke, a native of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, has been accepted into the university's highly regarded Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program.

This is a significant milestone in his journey toward a career in pediatric physical therapy. Inspired by his own recovery process, Luke now hopes to make a difference in the lives of children facing medical challenges. His dream is to work at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to help kids recover from injuries and surgeries. He's particularly interested in working on the fifth floor where the MACC Fund Center supports children undergoing cancer treatment. "I want to help kids improve their quality of life, especially those dealing with long-term effects post-chemotherapy," he says.

Currently majoring in exercise science, Luke will begin the graduate program in the fall of 2025, with plans to complete his undergraduate degree in the spring of 2026 and graduate with his DPT in the spring of 2028. Luke first learned about Carroll University as a high school junior and was immediately drawn to its healthcare-focused academic programs and close-knit campus environment. "Carroll's physical therapy program stood out because of its accelerated 3+3 model, direct admit structure, and cost-saving benefits," he says. The

continued on page 2

Shy Freshman Blossoms Into Lakeland Student Leader

Lauryn Johnson came to Lakeland University as a quiet, shy person who thought she knew her intended career path.

Thanks to consistent encouragement from some key fellow Muskies, "LJ" has blossomed into a campus leader with a clear vision for her post-graduation plans.

One step of her transformation came when the senior from Kenosha was hired as a resident assistant (RA), following the path of her freshman year RA who encouraged her to consider the role.

"My freshman year I never stepped outside of my room," Lauryn says. "I was scared. I was nervous. My RA, Bella Westerholm, pushed me outside my comfort zone. She was a role model, a very important person who helped me get where I am today."

Lauryn Johnson

"Thanks to the Wisconsin Grant, I can focus on my education and athletic career. I can focus on graduating."

Another step was taking a class with Lakeland Campus Chaplain the Rev. Julie Mavity Maddalena, which helped shape her career path. Lauryn came to Lakeland as a criminal justice major with hopes of becoming an attorney to represent wrongfully convicted individuals. Now she plans to enter the police academy and eventually become a detective.

"Her class helped me figure out the difference between a career and a vocation," says Lauryn. "I love watching documentaries on criminal justice with my mom and understanding why people commit crimes and how people go about solving them. I feel called to work in that field.

"Julie is an important role model, and I've learned a lot

continued on page 2

WAICU
Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

122 W. Washington Avenue
Suite 700
Madison, WI 53703-2723
608.256.7761
editor@waicu.org

Eric W. Fulcomer, PhD
President & CEO

Rebecca Larson
Executive Vice President for External Relations

Pamela Seelman
Director of Marketing and Communications

Our Members

Alverno College
Bellin College
Beloit College
Carroll University
Carthage College
Concordia University Wisconsin
Edgewood University
Herzing University
Lakeland University
Lawrence University
Marian University of Wisconsin
Marquette University
Medical College of Wisconsin
Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design
Milwaukee School of Engineering
Mount Mary University
Ripon College
St. Norbert College
Viterbo University
Wisconsin Lutheran College

The Wisconsin Grant Program

Our private, nonprofit colleges and universities operate without direct taxpayer support, but provide invaluable public service to the state, educating more than 52,000 students a year. Many of Wisconsin's best and brightest need financial help to attend the college of their choice.

Since 1965, the Wisconsin Grant has help qualified Wisconsin citizens succeed. Wisconsin Achievers share success stories of Wisconsinites at WAICU-member campuses for whom the Wisconsin Grant Program has made a significant difference.

Luke Ristow

program allows students to complete three years of undergraduate coursework followed by three years of graduate study, with the first year of the DPT program charged at undergraduate tuition rates.

Looking back, Luke emphasizes the crucial role the Wisconsin Grant Program and additional financial aid has played in his ability to attend Carroll. "Without the financial aid I've received, I probably wouldn't have been able to come here," he says. "The Wisconsin Grant has taken a huge weight off my shoulders and allowed me to focus on my goals."

Looking ahead, Luke is excited about the future and grateful for the foundation Carroll University has provided. "Carroll has helped me break out of my shell and live life to the fullest," he says. "I truly can't imagine myself attending any other university."

He also fondly recalls the warm welcome he received as a first-year student. "That first week before classes started was filled with events that helped me adjust and make friends. It made the transition to college life so much easier."

Lauryn Johnson

from her in classes and in one-on-one discussions. She pushed me outside my comfort zone to go to events and learn what I wanted to do. I have learned from and been inspired by a lot of people." Lakeland recruited Lauryn in high school to play basketball for the Muskies. She attends Lakeland thanks to a financial aid package that includes funds from the Wisconsin Grant Program as well as Lakeland's Ulrich Scholar program.

"I didn't want my mom to have to focus on the cost of college because she has two others at home that she needs to focus on," Lauryn explains. "I can focus on my education and athletic career because I don't have that in front of my face. I can focus on graduating."

Her campus involvement is significant. She is a senior RA, a key member of the women's basketball team and a Blue & Gold Champion helping new Lakeland University students. She co-chaired the annual Blue & Gold Awards that recognize students and organizations. Her efforts have been noticed. Lauryn won a 2025 Lakeland Student Advocates award, a 2024 Demonstrating Excellence award, and was named a 2023 Emerging Leader. She's also received a Lakeland Community Service Award for mentoring and is a multi-time Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference Scholar-Athlete Award winner.

"I went from never coming out of my room to stepping into all these roles, roles that I'm very grateful for."

FACT OF THE MONTH

56,941 students from around Wisconsin attending institutions in all higher education sectors receive the Wisconsin Grant.

Source: IPEDS Completion Survey, 2023-2024.