



2025

Recipients of the Centralia College

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS AWARD

Since 1925, Centralia College has maintained a strong tradition of academic excellence and opportunity. Over the years, more than 130,000 students have turned to the college to help them reach their educational or training goals. Since 1978, the college has honored an alumnus each year for his or her achievements. We proudly present the recipients of the Centralia College Distinguished Alumnus Award.



Brandy Clark



Musician Brandy Clark has written countless hits for some of country music's most popular artists, including Miranda Lambert, Sheryl Crow, the Band Perry, Reba McEntire, LeAnn Rimes, Billy Currington, Darius Rucker, and Kacey Musgraves, and is one of the country's most sought-after performers and songwriters.

Clark grew up in Morton and attended Centralia College starting in January 1995. She completed her Associate in Arts degree in 1997 and transferred to Belmont University in Nashville to study music in 1998.

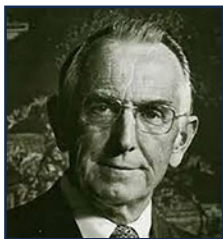
She had her first hit as a songwriter in 2011 with "Mama's Broken Heart," which she co-wrote with Shane McAnally and Kacey Musgraves. The song was a hit for Miranda Lambert and earned Song of the Year nominations from the Country Music Association (CMA), the Grammy Awards, and the Academy of Country Music (ACM). A follow up song, "Follow Your Arrow," co-written by Clark and performed by Kacey Musgraves, was the 2014 CMA Song of the Year.

Clark released a self-titled EP in 2012 and her debut album, 12 Stories, in 2013. For that album, the acclaim was immediate, and Clark was nominated for multiple awards in the year following its release. She was a 2014 nominee for New Artist of the Year from the CMA, a nominee for Female Artist of the Year from ACM in 2015 and nominated for Best Country Album and Best New Artist at the 2015 Grammy Awards.

She has since released several more albums, including Big Day in a Small Town (2016), Your Life is a Record (2020), and Brandy Clark (2023), earning a total of 17 Grammy nominations overall. She won a Grammy in 2025 in the Best Americana Performance for her song "Dear Insecurity" featuring Brandi Carlile from her self-titled 2023 album.

She also wrote the score for the Broadway musical "Shucked," a comedy about a young woman who sets out to save her small town when the corn starts dying. The show received nine Tony Award nominations, including Best Original Score.





1978

Gordon H. Sweany '31 (deceased)

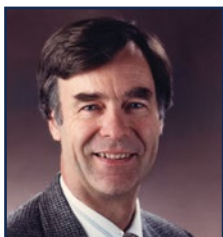
Gordon H. Sweany rose through the company to become Chairman of the Seattle-based Safeco Corporation, one of America's largest insurance companies.



1979

Patti A. Morton (deceased)

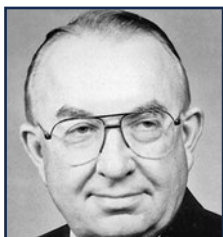
Patti A. Morton was America's first female Special Agent/Security Officer with worldwide responsibility for U.S. Department of State overseas missions. She served as Acting Director of the Emergency Plans & Exercises Office, and of the Equal Employment Opportunity & Civil Rights Office. She was also the Federal Women's Program Director worldwide. She was active in community, artistic and historic endeavors.



1980

Dr. Alan E. Waltar '59

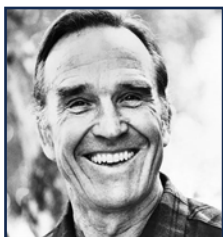
Dr. Alan E. Waltar served as Senior Advisor to the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland. He was a professor and Head of Nuclear Engineering at Texas A&M University. A leading authority on nuclear reactor design and safety, he also authored a book on nuclear energy. He served as President of the American Nuclear Society (ANS), the world's largest professional association of nuclear scientists and engineers.



1981

Dr. Richard E. Ice '50 (deceased)

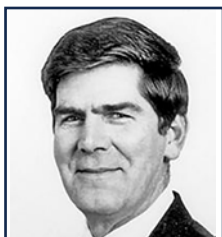
Dr. Richard E. Ice served as President of American Baptist Homes of the West, retirement communities providing care for 4,000 residents. From 1990 to 1991, he was also Vice President of the 1.6 million member American Baptist Church/USA.



1982

Ford Rainey '30 (deceased)

Ford Rainey was an actor for nearly 50 years. He was a member of the Richard Boone Repertory Theater on TV. He performed a variety of character roles on many major network comedy shows and was a standard in commercials. He also performed on stage.



1983

James O. Lonborg '50 *(deceased)*

James O. Lonborg was a 41-year veteran of the JPL engineering staff that worked in the U.S. space program since its inception. He worked on the Cassini spacecraft, the Saturn orbiter/probe, and other mission projects for JPL and its parent organization, California Institute of Technology.



1984

Jennifer S. Williams '65

Jennifer S. Williams founded and directed the British-American Arts Association, which strengthens links and increases opportunities in the arts among the United States, European countries, and Great Britain.



1985

Donald E. Fowler '58

Donald E. Fowler was CEO of two early stage companies and a Senior Executive with Tandem Computers, Bechtel Group, and IBM. He mentored CEOs of technology companies and served on several boards.



1986

Dr. Peter J. Ristuben '53 *(deceased)*

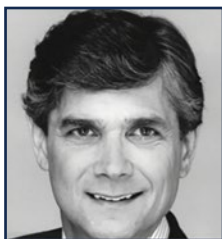
Dr. Peter J. Ristuben was President of Bethany College. He was knighted by the Swedish King, His Majesty Carl XVI Gustaf, for his contributions as National Chairman of the U.S. Jubilee Cities Program celebrating the 350th anniversary of Swedish settlement in America.



1987

Orin C. Smith '63 *(deceased)*

Orin C. Smith was the CFO and CEO of Starbucks Corporation, based in Seattle. He served as Chairman of the University of Washington Foundation Board and the University of Washington Medical Center Board. He was also Chief Financial Advisor for Washington State Governors Dixie Lee Ray and Booth Gardner, as Head of the Office of Financial Management.



1988

Gary Justice '62

Gary Justice was a news anchor for Seattle's KIRO-TV Eyewitness News at Five, which has been named the best local news show in the nation by United Press International. He was also an estate financial planning firm associate.



1989

John G. Mulligan '63

John G. Mulligan was the Regional Postmaster General for the U.S. Postal Service. He also served as the Senior Assistant Postmaster General and as President of a consulting practice dealing with postal policy and strategy for domestic and international mailing issues.



1990

Margaret Staeger-Woods '30

(deceased)

Margaret Staeger-Woods was a leader in the field of creative education for children. She directed children's activities at the Seattle and New York World's Fairs and founded a creative preschool program in the Seattle Public Libraries that ran for 23 years.



1991

Delford M. Smith '50 *(deceased)*

Delford M. Smith founded Evergreen International Aviation, Inc. in Oregon. Near its peak, his company had more than 200 aircraft, 2,300 employees, and 125 bases of operations worldwide. He pioneered innovative commercial applications for helicopters and airplanes.



1992

Susan M. Dunn '67

Susan M. Dunn was Vice President of Patrick Dunn & Associates, LTD, a government relations firm, and was an active volunteer in a number of state and community organizations. She retired from Washington State government in 2001 with 30 years of service.



1993

Everett Macomber '58

Everett Macomber was a senior partner in a Centralia veterinary practice, active in community organizations. He served as President of the American Veterinary Medical Association.



1994

Dr. Marion Oppelt '35 *(deceased)*

Dr. Marion Oppelt was one of the organizers and the founding President of Pierce College (formerly Fort Steilacoom Community College). Dr. Oppelt was a longtime educator, former professional baseball player, musician and community activist. He was also named to the Centralia College Sports Hall of Fame for his athletic achievements.



1995

Dr. John R. Stewart '61

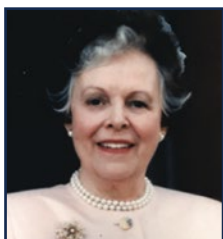
Dr. John R. Stewart dedicated his life to providing excellence in education and innovative concepts. He demonstrated a strong commitment to higher education as a University of Washington professor, public speaker, editor, writer and honored educator.



1996

John L. Deichman '53

John L. Deichman was an engineer with the Westinghouse Hanford Company, serving as an innovator, manager and leader in his field. He was an international expert and consultant on nuclear waste management. He was also a noted systems expert.



1997

Marion McCaw Garrison '35-36

(deceased)

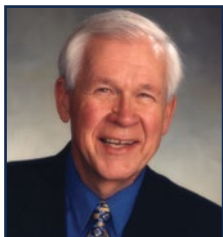
Marion McCaw Garrison was the Chief Financial Officer and Secretary/Treasurer of McCaw Enterprises, Inc., a holding company managing the McCaw business domain. She helped found ACT (A Contemporary Theater) and was a founder of Corporate Council of the Arts, and organization bringing support to the arts.



1998

Howard F. Batie '57-58

Howard F. Batie was Program Manager for the development and operation of satellite communications used by Naval Forces worldwide. He received national recognition for developing computer systems for those living with physical disability. He also served as Director of the Evergreen Healing Arts Center in Chehalis.



1999

Bill T. Brumsickle '53-54 (deceased)

Bill T. Brumsickle was a school administrator, teacher and Washington State legislator. He served as the Planned Giving Coordinator for the Centralia College Foundation, responsible for raising money to help fund new buildings on the college campus. He represented the 20th Legislative District in the Washington State House of Representatives for four consecutive terms beginning in 1989.



2000

Brian Valentine '79

Brian Valentine served as Senior Vice President of the Windows Core Operating System Division. During his career as Senior Vice President of the Microsoft Windows Division, Windows 2000, he led the team that rolled out the largest computer operating system in history.



2001

Major General Reginald Clizbe '34-36 (deceased)

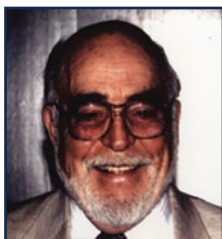
Major General Reginald Clizbe entered West Point and was commissioned in the Army Air Corps in 1940. During World War II and the Korean War, he was one of the most highly decorated command pilots in the nation. He later graduated from the War College and earned a master's degree from the Harvard School of Business. He was Deputy Chief of Staff, Headquarters U.S. Air Force at the Pentagon.



2002

Bruce D. Carter '62-63

Retired United States Attorney Bruce D. Carter was Assistant Regional Director for litigation for the Federal Trade Commission. He was the first federal prosecutor west of the Mississippi to receive the National Legal Award. He served as Judge Pro Tempore for the Seattle municipal court and was active in charity and church work.



2003

Ellis W. Oliver '37-38 (deceased)

Ellis W. Oliver was a well-known business owner, leader, financial advisor and broker who set high standards in business and personal endeavors. He attained the rank of Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy during WWII and served in elected and appointed public offices in the community.



2004

Dr. Elliot K. Wicks '60

Dr. Elliot K. Wicks had a distinguished career in economics and health care as a researcher and policy setter. He was a nationally known expert on issues relating to regulation of health insurance, health care delivery, and managed care. He wrote health policies and advised on issues of health care for several states.



2005

Dr. Steve Webster '60 (deceased)

A nationally known forest researcher, Dr. Steve Webster pioneered forest soil research. He conducted groundbreaking studies that changed commercial forestry in North America, Asia and Europe. His discoveries led to practices that produced healthier forests through nutrients that provided genetically superior trees.



2006

John M. Wright '62

John M. Wright is a leading Electronic Design Engineer, inventor and business leader. He worked for Boeing on the Minuteman Missile project and became a pioneer in integrated circuit design. He helped develop infrared thermal imaging systems, forerunner of the ubiquitous Ground Positioning Systems used around the world today.



2007

Dr. Jill Wakefield '72

As the President of South Seattle Community College, Dr. Jill Wakefield implemented a bachelor's degree program in Hospitality Management – one of the first in the state for a two-year college. She also put in place the popular Northwest Wine Academy, an innovative program at the community college level.



2008

John Y. Sato '53 (deceased)

John Y. Sato built his reputation and his firm into a major Pacific Northwest name. He served in the army after experiencing the hardships of WWII U.S. Japanese internment policy. Despite this hardship, he and his family remained staunchly patriotic.



2009

Jean L. DeSpain '48 (deceased)

Jean L. DeSpain served as a civil engineer and national leader in public works administration. As County Engineer and Director of Public Works for King County, he was responsible for roads and streets, managing Boeing Field, overseeing solid waste, and establishing flood control. He helped evolve public works into a modern civil service employee accountability mode that gained him national attention.



2010

Dr. Jerris Hedges '69

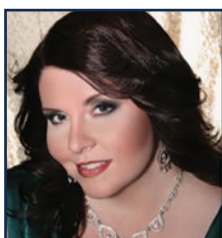
Dr. Jerris Hedges was instrumental in writing the book on emergency room procedures, setting a worldwide standard. He helped elevate emergency room medical procedures to a separate branch of medicine. His groundbreaking research led to the development of the pacemaker. He also served as Dean of the John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii.



2011

Rick Anderson '71

As Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Moss Adams LLP, one of the largest accounting and consulting firms in the United States, Rick Anderson led a combined staff of more than 1,700. He was named to Accounting Today's 2010 list of Top 100 Most Influential People. He chaired the high-profile national Blue Ribbon Panel on Private Entity Accounting Standards and was a trustee of the Financial Accounting Foundation.



2012

Angela Meade '98

Angela Meade became a star in the opera world. She won the Beverly Sills Artist Award for young singers and the Richard Tucker Award, given to an American singer poised on the edge of a major national and international career. Her credits include an impressive debut at the New York Metropolitan Opera and critical acclaim for a range of subsequent roles, performing on stages around the world.



2013

Laura Dowling '79

Laura Dowling's work in floral design captured the eye of First Lady Michelle Obama, who appointed her White House Chief Floral Designer in 2009. Her first career began with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. She became Senior Manager of Strategic Communications at the Nature Conservancy, the world's largest environmental nonprofit agency, before turning to her passion in floral design.



2014

Pat Kemp '73

Pat Kemp began his career with the Alaska Department of Highways in 1971 as a rear chainman on a survey crew. During his first 30 years, he worked on the management and design development of highways, airports, buildings, harbors and ferry terminals. He became a Preconstruction Engineer, the highest engineering classification in the state. Kemp retired in 2006 but was invited back in 2012 to serve as Deputy Commissioner of Highways and Public Facilities.



2015

Dr. David Carsten '77

Dr. David Carsten provided mobile anesthesia for patients who were disabled, very young, fearful, or who desired anesthesia during a dental procedure. Empathy and compassion were the core values of his practice, Pacific Dental Anesthesia, in Vancouver. Before transitioning to dental anesthesia, he served 24 years in dental practice and 13 years as a faculty member at several universities.



2016

Ron Podmore '87

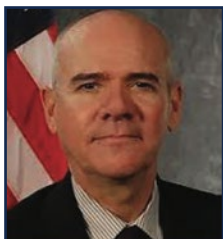
Ron Podmore was the first deaf teacher to receive the Golden Apple Award from PBS/KCTS. In 2009, he became the first deaf American to achieve National Board Professional Teaching Standards certification. An arts and humanities professor at Bellevue College, he also taught college-readiness, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), and American Sign Language for Federal Way Public Schools. He published two books and has participated in multiple humanitarian trips to Guatemala.



2017

Alicia Wicks '64

Alicia Wicks served as an attorney for San Francisco for 15 years. After her retirement, she worked at the University of Livingstonia in Malawi, where she assisted with the first graduation of teaching candidates. In 2013, she traveled to Liberia to work with girls in the slums of Monrovia. She then went to Ghana, where she taught young unmarried mothers to sew. She later founded Maasai Made and Karibu Beading Collective, two organizations that allow traditional Maasai women to sell their crafts in the United States.



2018

Robert Dowling '79

Robert Dowling spent 13 years as a U.S. Special Agent for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). He served as Counterintelligence Director for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, supported Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, provided travel security to United Nations and NATO missions, and served as a Senior Special Agent worldwide. He later served as a Federal Air Marshal and on the FBI National Joint Terrorism Task Force and the President's National Infrastructure Protection Plan. In 2015, he founded Tactical Institute, a real-time social media monitoring service staffed by combat-wounded veterans.



2019

Dr. Dan Haskins '73

Dr. Dan Haskins offered veterinary and humanitarian work in Washington State, Haiti, Brazil, Belarus, the Ukraine and Kenya. He served as CEO and President of Northwest Veterinary Group. He was a member of the Washington State Veterinary Board of Governors and a Washington State University Adjunct Professor. He was the 2005 Washington State Veterinarian of the Year. He also helped found MAVANA, which endows independently-owned veterinary practices with the benefits of corporate structure.



2020

Jimmy Ritchey '90-91

Growing up in a musical family in Centralia, Jimmy Ritchey began playing in childhood and went on to master the mandolin, acoustic guitar, banjo, bass, fiddle and electric guitar. He started performing and traveling in his teens and went on to become a country music songwriter and record producer. He has worked with some of the biggest superstars in country music over an impressive career spanning more than 25 years in Nashville.



2021

The Watterson Family

All four Watterson siblings – Ed, Bill, Marilyn, and Jim – attended Centralia College and went on to build strong careers and a legacy of service. The three brothers each distinguished themselves in construction, with Ed building much of the Centralia College campus, and Bill and Jim founding and leading one of Alaska's largest construction companies, Watterson Construction. Marilyn Watterson Weinstein became a pioneer in business education, teaching computers and eventually designing and implementing custom software systems.



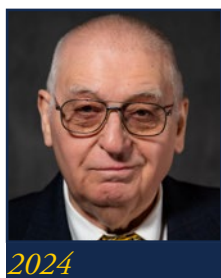
Col. Lynne Clark Thompson, US Air Force (Ret.), Ed.D. '68-70

Retired Air Force Colonel Lynne Clark Thompson, Ed.D., served more than 44 years in the Department of Defense, both in the Air Force and in Federal Civil Service, primarily as an educator and administrator for high-level leadership training and education. His work led to the development of US Strategic Command in 1992 and his leadership courses at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and the Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy at National Defense University in Washington, D.C. were internationally recognized.



Judith A. Greeley Hendrickson '58-60

Judith A. Greeley Hendrickson had a decorated 22-year career in juvenile and adult corrections in Washington State. After relocating to North Carolina, she was Corporate Secretary for 19 years for the International Lead Zinc Research Organization, which required worldwide travel. For four years, she was Director of Development for the North Carolina Opera Company. Throughout her time in NC, she was involved in a variety of activities with the U.S. Olympic Committee. She has been a lifelong advocate for education, trades, sports, and the arts.



Tim Browning '60-62

After earning valedictorian honors from Centralia College, Tim Browning went on to earn his bachelor's and master's degrees in Speech. He had a successful 18-year career teaching and directing competitive debate programs at the University of New Mexico, Furman University, and the University of Arizona. He returned to Centralia in 1983 to own Browning's Office Supply, Browning's of Washington, and Centralia PostNet. He is a founding member and past president of the Twin Cities Rotary and was twice named Rotarian of the Year. He served on the Centralia City Council from 1997-2012 and was mayor from 1999-2010. He also served on the Centralia Planning Commission and the Board of Adjustment and is a founding member and past president of the Twin Cities Chamber of Commerce.



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All past nominees are considered each year.

This information is accurate at time of publication.