

Alumni Newsletter

Issue No. 1 | Spring 2025

Distinguished Hall of Honor, Class of 2025

The A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools will honor the Distinguished Alumni Hall of Honor recipients on April 25 and 26. This year's inductees—Dr. Paul Eccher (Class of 1981) and Col. Richard Taylor (Class of 1996)—will be formally recognized during the celebration.

On Saturday, April 26, at 5:30 PM, the public is welcome to attend a banquet at the Aurora Country Club, where the honorees will be celebrated alongside their families and friends.

Dinner tickets are \$85.00 per person. For further details about the banquet contact Randi Ochenschlager at 630-897-6785 or [CLICK HERE](#) to purchase tickets to attend. Read the full bios here: <https://aplusfoundation.sd129.org/alumni/hall-of-honor>



COL Richard P. Taylor
Class of 1996

Dr. Paul Eccher
Class of 1981

Do you know of a deserving Alumni who should be considered for the Hall of Honor?
NOMINATE AN ALUMNI HERE: <https://tinyurl.com/WAHSHallofHonor>

Alumni All Class Reunion Friday, April 25, 2025, 6–9 pm



West Aurora alumni are invited to join the All Alumni Reunion hosted by the A+ Foundation Alumni Committee. The event will be held from 6 to 9:00 PM at the Pine Room in Open Range Restaurant in Sugar Grove. This casual gathering is designed to bring West Aurora High School alumni together in celebration of the Hall of Honor weekend, with light hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar available for all.

A+ Alumni Association can assist with:

***REUNIONS * TOURS *
WEBSITE ADVERTISEMENT***

A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools Senior Celebration Fund



Make a donation to support West Aurora High School's Class of 2025! Your generous contribution will help fund exciting end-of-year events like Prom, the Senior BBQ, and the Farewell Fireworks celebration. Thank you for helping create lasting memories for our seniors!

SCAN ME



<https://tinyurl.com/WASeniors>

Alumni News

In 2023, the A Plus Foundation's Alumni Committee launched a five-year initiative to honor West Aurora High School's veterans for their service during wartime.

Our first priority was to recognize Vietnam-era veterans. So far, we have identified 340 service members and presented them with their medallions, with approximately 190 more still to be found. These veterans come from the graduating classes of 1959 through 1971.

In the coming years, we will extend this effort to honor alumni who served in the Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan conflicts. We take great pride in this mission, as few—if any—foundations have so directly recognized their veteran alumni.

Tom Herget '68, Alumni Chair



Alumni & Family share heart felt THANK YOU messages...

From Gina Briney Grabel, daughter of Bob Alcorn '65:

I want to sincerely thank you for the lovely letter and medal you sent as an appreciation for my father, Bob Alcorn's service in the US Air Force during the Vietnam War. I was so young when he was taken from us (10 years old) and so any and all memories others have to share are always a welcome and happy commodity. They are the most special treasures I have left of him.

It really meant so much to me to receive your handwritten note and my husband and I (also both veterans) will frame it with the medal when the school year winds down and we have the proper time to give it the attention it deserves. This was such a special surprise and I cannot truly convey with words my deepest appreciation for your kindness. Great Big Appreciative Hugs.

From Wendy Brown Kissick, widow of Scott Brown '68:

Received your letter and I thank you for informing me of the award. I would receive it but I think it better to send to our daughter. She was 6 when he died and has little memories to hold on to. It is a very kind gesture.

From Carolyn Garrison, widow of Steve Garrison '69:

I want to thank you for the wonderful gift I received in the mail in honor of my late husband, Steve, and his service in the US Army during the Vietnam conflict. I was very surprised. I know he would have been honored and humbled to receive this. I, too, wish you could have presented this to him in person. Thank you again for this wonderful gift.

From Jeff Musgrave '69:
It was great to hear from you after all these years. Thank you so much for the medallion. It does have special meaning for me.

From Bill Habermeyer '60:

Thank you very much for the Veteran's Medallion. I appreciate the thoughtfulness and am sorry that I did not make it back for the Hall of Honor meeting this year. I hope to do so in 2025. Please thank the WAHS Alumni Committee.

Also, brother Kent was a Navy pilot from 1970 -1986 and flew P-3C anti-submarine aircraft. His wife is Mary Ann. Thanks for remembering Kent. Bill

From Bob Ochsenchlager '64:
Thank you for the military medal and recognition of my service in the Army. It was a difficult time for our country.

From Nettie Agnew, widow of Ed Agnew '70:

I want to let you know that I received the medallion and very much appreciate this recognition of Ed. It was a lifetime ago that Ed and I wore Air Force blue. Thank you for remembering.

From Gina Briney Grabel, daughter of Bob Alcorn '65:

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From Rick and Pete Smith, next-of-kin nephews of Eddie Potteiger '59:

Good morning, Tom, thank you very much for your message and associated effort to find us. I would be thrilled to receive Uncle Eddie's medallion!

It was quite some time ago that Eddie passed; I believe 1988. He never really talked about his experience in Vietnam. Pete and I felt that, not long before his death, he was just starting to open up about it. We both really looked up to him.

Thank you for your respect and diligence with this initiative and thank you to WAHS as well. We really appreciate it!

Note: Eddie succumbed to agent orange, stateside.

From Kathy Coughlin, widow of Tom Coughlin '70:

I recently received your letter and the medallion you sent in honor of Tom, from the West Aurora Foundation. Thank you so much for this!!! I know Tom's brother, Jack, remained quite active with his fellow graduates in Aurora. It was so wonderful to receive your letter and understand the feelings of honor and respect you have for our Tommy. Thank you again for taking the time to write and send this recognition of his service to our country.

God bless you!

Note: Tommy died from agent orange. When Tom's brother Jack was drafted, Jack didn't have to go to Vietnam since Tom was already there.

From Tom Hoover '67:

This is to thank you and my contemporaries for the recognition the medal you sent signifies. I keep it in my pocket at all times except when I pull it out to show everyone with whom I come into contact, what it is. The reaction is thanks. My admiration to you and all who thought of this great idea.

When I think of West, I think of my lifelong friends who populated the halls of that great school with me. We learned so much more than what is in the books.

Both my parents and a number of neighbors were teachers in the district. I've worn the title of Doctor because of all of them.

From Dave Stolley '65:

Dear Tom, thank you so much for sending me the medallion thanking me for my service. I had the privilege to partake in an "Honor Flight" to Washington with a group of veterans from the Green Bay Area a few years ago. I was able to visit the "Wall" on its 40th anniversary and make tracings of my classmates' names that gave their lives in Vietnam. It was a very moving experience and this coin brings back memories that I treasure. I appreciate the thought and recognition it expresses and your efforts to make it happen.

To read more messages, click the below icon.

CLICK HERE



Upcoming Reunions

- **Class of 1995**, Friday, September 26
- **Class of 1985**, Saturday, October 11

Connect with us, if your class is planning a reunion by filling this out:

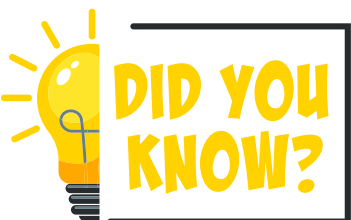
<https://tinyurl.com/WAHSReunions>



The A Plus Foundation's Alumni Committee pursues several endeavors.

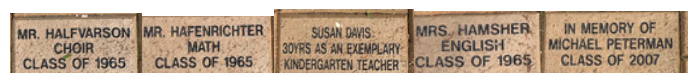
- **Facilitating Class Reunions.** The AC organizes and publicizes class reunions, providing location options, arranging school tours, and hosting end-zone gatherings during football homecoming events.
- **Organizing an Annual All-Class Reunion.** Every April, we reach out to as many alumni as possible to invite them to a three-hour social gathering, reconnecting classmates and fostering school spirit.
- **Identifying and Securing Speakers.** We work to identify relevant topics and secure speakers who address both the immediate and future concerns of high school students, ensuring valuable and impactful presentations.
- **Building an Alumni Database.** We are actively building a comprehensive alumni database, which will include addresses, phone numbers, and emails. We've already collected information for 3,000 alumni, with a goal of reaching 30,000.
- **Awarding Service Medallions.** We honor alumni who have served in the military by identifying and presenting service medallions. To date, we've located and awarded 350 Vietnam-era veterans. We have 150 more to find, after which we will focus on honoring those who served in more recent campaigns.

Committee Members: Tom Herget '68 (chair), Nancy Wyatt '87, Neal Ormond '58, Stan Rayford '91, Jill Brown Smith '89, Dave Richert '91, Keith Johnson '88, Emma Wilson Parker '16 and Chrissy Ormond DeSwardt '02. **New members are welcome.**



You can leave your mark at West Aurora High School by purchasing a brick on our **Pathway of Honor**, outside Door 22. Honor a loved one or commemorate a milestone with a personalized brick.

- 3 lines, 15 characters per line
- \$50 for 1, or 3 for \$129



https://cfrv.formstack.com/forms/pathway_of_honor_brick

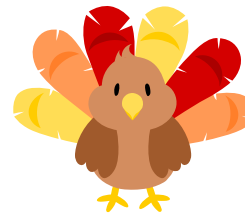


A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools



5th Annual
Tom-A-Hawk Run/Walk 5K
Turkey Trot
Saturday, November 22, 2025

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL

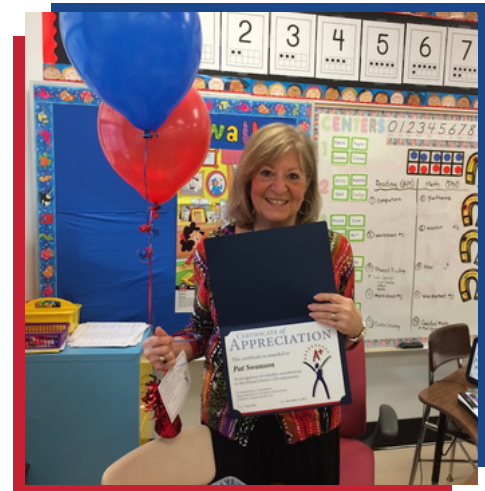


**Registration
Opens
May 22, 2025
\$25 - 1 Day
ONLY!**

<https://runsignup.com/Race/IL/Aurora/TomAHawk5k>

The A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools Pat Swanson Educational Endowment Fund

Pat Swanson has lived in Aurora all her life and is a West Aurora Alumna, Class of 1961. She and her husband Bert have four daughters, 10 grandchildren, and one great grandchild. She went to college later in life and graduated when her third daughter graduated from college in 1992. It was then she began her teaching career at Freeman School. She received her Masters in Teaching in 2004 as well as a Masters in Clinical Psychology. Her true passion was teaching, inspiring every student to believe in their potential, achieve their goals, and, most importantly, build their self-esteem. While teaching Kindergarten, Mrs. Swanson's all-inclusive teaching style left a lasting impact on countless five and six-year-olds.



She is also the author of 15 Red Hot Minutes, a parent and teacher guide to building self-esteem and confidence in reading and phonics. Her book was used in multiple classrooms and preschools on both sides of the river. In 2002, she was the recipient of the Wal-Mart Illinois State Teacher of the Year award.

Even after retiring in 2015, Mrs. Swanson remained committed to her philosophy that every student deserves to learn at their own pace and gain the confidence to succeed. She founded the My Genius after-school program, which helped middle school students develop their reading skills while not only focusing on intellectual ability, but creativity, and specialized talents as well. The program ran for four years.

The Pat Swanson Education Endowment was created to honor Mrs. Swanson, who devoted her life to education and the growth of young learners. This endowment will support West Aurora teachers through the A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools Fund-A-Need program.

MAKE A DONATION HERE



**WHAT IS AN
ENDOWMENT
FUND?**

An endowment is a fund designed to be self-sustaining. The principal remains untouched, while interest or dividends are used to support school programs. Additional donations grow the principal, increasing funding for these programs.



CONNECT WITH US: <https://aplusfoundation.sd129.org/>



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**To join our
MAILING LIST!**