

CPE BRIEFING

RUSSELL G. WEIGAND
CENTER FOR
PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

FALL
2017

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WEIGAND CENTER CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

Hannah (Wahlen) Roberts '11 didn't know much about Elmhurst's career development opportunities when she joined the College's Honors Program as a first-year student at Elmhurst.

But as she got more involved in Honors activities, she couldn't help but notice that the Center for Professional Excellence, which housed the Honors Program, had a lot to offer.

"I spent a lot of time in the CPE's space because that's where the Honors Program was," Hannah said. "Because I was there, I became aware of the Center's resources and got more involved."

With the support of the Center (now known as the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence), Hannah took on four internships with organizations such as the Kellogg Company and the Republican National Convention. She also connected with a mentor who was instrumental in her decision to go to law school and launch a high-powered legal career. (*See story, page 6*)

Building 'True Professionals'

That's exactly the kind of synergy that then-President Bryant Cureton had in mind 20 years ago when he called for the creation of a comprehensive new academic center devoted to building true professionals.

At the time, career services at colleges like Elmhurst tended to be both narrowly focused and isolated from the rest of the educational enterprise. For many students, a "career center" was about nothing more than helping them land their first full-time job.

As envisioned by Cureton, the new Center for Professional Excellence would take on a much larger role in the life of the campus. In addition to preparing seniors, it would integrate services and resources from across the campus to help students think more broadly about their life's work in the world.

From Vision to Reality

Larry Carroll, then professor of business at Elmhurst and now executive director of the Weigand Center, was charged with turning Cureton's vision into reality. Carroll and his team set to work, looking for untapped synergies on the Elmhurst campus around the concept of professionalism.

"First we looked at the idea of integrity and character," Carroll said. "In many ways, the history of Elmhurst is the history of the Niebuhr brothers and social justice. So we incorporated the idea of service into our new center—service that has roots in academics."

Next, the team incorporated the College's existing programs in



Top: The Center of Professional Excellence 10 years ago
Bottom: The CPE Team: Julie Gonzales, Larry Carroll, and Peggy Killian.

international study, intercultural education, Service-Learning, career education and Honors education.

“All of these services already existed on campus, in various forms,” said Peggy Killian ’94, director of career education. “What made the Center unique is that it pulled them all together to provide a holistic experience. A student might come to us for career advice, then connect in the same area with study away or the Honors Program. It makes for a much broader experience.”

“It’s not just about learning the skills of your profession,” Carroll said. “We believe part of our job as a college is to educate people to be in charge of their own careers.”

Expansion and Growth

In the years since its founding, the center has dramatically expanded its offerings and increased its reach. In 1997, the center connected 54 students with internships and sent a handful overseas. This year, 216 students participated in internships with employers ranging from investment banking firm William Blair to the Miami Dolphins.

The international education program, meanwhile, has grown to include opportunities in more than 60 countries on all seven continents and sends approximately 200 students abroad each year. In addition, the College’s international student population has reached nearly 50 students.

The Honors Program, which had 40 students in 1997, now has 360. The Mentoring Program provides more than 200 opportunities for students each year. Service-Learning has expanded its list of services sites from 14 to more than 35.

Last year, in honor of a \$2.25 million gift pledge from Elmhurst College Trustee Russell Weigand ’64 and his wife, Joyce Slone Weigand, the Center was renamed the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence. The funds will be used to create an endowment to support programs and initiatives in perpetuity.

“It all made a lot of sense to me, all of the things that have become part of the Center,” Weigand said when the gift was announced. “The way it integrates liberal arts and professional preparation makes it one of the most distinctive parts of Elmhurst College.”

Staff members say that students are embracing the idea of career development as an ongoing process upon arriving at Elmhurst, whether they arrive as first-year students or as transfers from another institution. “In recent years we’ve seen a lot more students coming to us early in their academic experience,” Killian said. “That gives us the opportunity to guide them through all of our different initiatives and create a plan for each year they’re here and beyond.”

Along the way, the Center has served as inspiration for similar centers at other colleges.

“We have always been considered innovative and different,” Killian said. “Over the years, a lot of other institutions have come to benchmark us—to see what we were doing and make changes to their own programs as a result.”

Looking to the Future

As the Weigand Center celebrates 20 years of equipping Elmhurst students to launch successful careers and become effective contributors to society, Larry Carroll says the future looks bright.

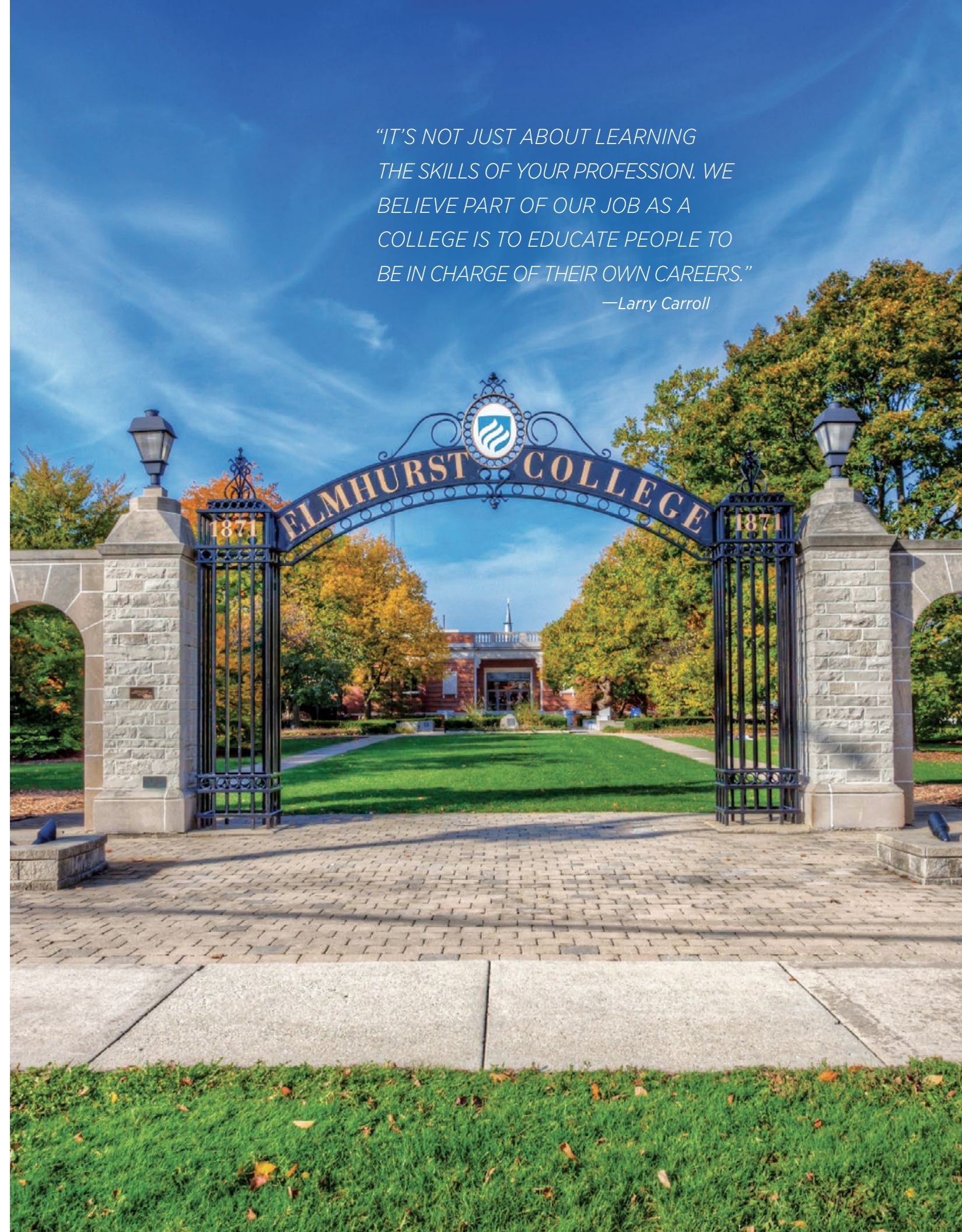
“I take a lot of pride in the fact that any student can use the Weigand Center,” he said. “Anybody can walk in, from a pre-med to a student looking for work in government, and we’ll reach out to our connections to get the help that student needs.”

For her part, Peggy Killian takes pride in the number of alumni who have reconnected with the Weigand Center to receive assistance in career transition or to assist current students.

“We have had so many alumni who are successful professionals reach out to help bring others along,” she said. “That’s kind of what life’s all about. When you can see that happen, it’s very heart warming.”

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—Larry Carroll



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

In its 20 years, the Weigand Center has helped thousands of students explore their passions and launch extraordinary careers. Here are some of their stories.



LAUREN WILLIAMS '11

Major/Minors

Biology/Chemistry and Art

International Experiences

Comparative Health Care:
Europe Fieldwork in Australia

CPE Programs

Honors Program
Mentoring
Shadowing

After Graduation

Taught English in Thailand on a Fulbright award

Medical School

M.D., Rush University, 2017

Current Position

General Surgery Resident,
Rush University Medical Center

An Overseas Adventure

“After graduation I went to Thailand on a Fulbright fellowship. I lived in a small village in Chiang Rai province, near the Myanmar border, and taught English to kids ages 11 to 19. I also did an internship with a local hospital, working with residents and learning about the Thai health care system.

Working in Thailand was an amazing experience, but if I hadn’t been in the Honors Program I wouldn’t have known to apply for it. Coming from a rural area, I had never even heard of the Fulbright Program. My professors helped me figure out what assets I had to offer the program and how to point them out in my application.

I owe a lot to Elmhurst. I’m grateful for everything the College did for me and continues to do since graduation.”



HANNAH (WAHLEN) ROBERTS '11

Major/Minors

Philosophy/Economics and Political Science

Internships

Kellogg Company
UBS Financial Services
Republican National Convention
Office of U.S. Representative Paul Ryan

CPE Programs

Honors Program
Mentoring

First Job

Teach for America

Graduate School

J.D., Emory University

Current Job

Litigation Associate, Schiff Hardin LLP

The Big Picture

“The CPE set me up to be successful by giving me tangible opportunities to explore my career interests. I thought I wanted a corporate career, so I interned at Kellogg Company and UBS Financial. Then the CPE gave me an opportunity to intern at the Republican National Convention. When I started thinking about a career in law, the CPE connected me with an attorney who helped me decide whether law school would be a good fit for me.

Most of all, my advisors in the CPE were instrumental in helping me look at the big picture: not just what I was good at, or where I could easily find a job, but also what I was passionate about. At every step of the way, I knew I could pick up the phone and talk to someone about my next steps. By the time I went to law school, I was confident that was where I wanted to be.”

SHELLY RUZICKA '06

Majors

Intercultural Studies
Political Science

Internships

American Friends Service Committee
Arise Chicago

Study Abroad

Oxford

Service Learning

Ecuador

Activities

International Club
Foreign Language Club
Progressive Organization of Women
SAGE (Straights and Gays for Equality)
Spiritual Life Council

Current Job

Communications & Development
Director, Arise Chicago

A New Worldview

“Studying at Oxford shaped my worldview and sparked my academic and career interests. It was at Oxford that I saw real student activism for the first time. I went to Amnesty International meetings, I learned about the fair trade movement, and I connected with other students who were passionate about issues like farmers getting paid a decent wage.

I came back to Elmhurst all excited about getting involved in fair trade, and the CPE helped me create an internship around those issues.

Today, I do communications and development work for Arise Chicago, an interfaith workers’ rights organization. Looking back, it was the experiences I had through the CPE that put me on the path to where I ended up--working to build a diverse local and national working class movement.”



DAN ZARLENGA '10

Major

Finance

Internship

Opportunity International

CPE Programs

Honors Program
Mentoring
Mock Interviewing

Activities

Founder, Global Poverty Club

First Job

Prospect Researcher, Opportunity International

Current Job

Associate Director, Prospect Research & Management, Northwestern University

From Finance to Poverty Relief

“When I started at Elmhurst I wanted to pursue a traditional finance career. Then I attended a lecture by a poverty alleviation economist, where I overheard a college student say that she wanted to help fight poverty but she didn’t know how. That inspired me to start the Global Poverty Club on campus.

I discovered that I had a passion for this issue, so Holly Coffin in the CPE worked tirelessly to set up an internship for me with Opportunity International, a microfinance nonprofit that works to end global poverty. Technically the organization didn’t have an open position, but she got me an interview. That led to an internship, which in turn led to a full-time job—which launched my career.

As an Elmhurst graduate, I’ve gotten involved in the CPE as a mentor to current students. It’s a great experience to be able to pay it forward and support a student’s career.”



THE VALUE OF A MENTOR

For Ashley Cichlar '13, the benefits of the Weigand Center's mentoring program have far outlasted graduation day.

Ashley Cichlar graduated from Elmhurst College in 2013. Four years later, she's still benefiting from the advice and guidance of the mentor that she met through the Weigand Center.

Cichlar, an accounting major, came to Elmhurst as a nontraditional transfer student after earning an associate degree at Waubensee Community College and taking a few years off to raise her daughter. One of the first things she did at Elmhurst was sign up for mentoring through her major.

"I started out in a group-focused program where you were partnered with three or four classmates and assigned a mentor in your field," Cichlar said. "I liked being able to meet someone in the profession while building relationships with classmates. But I wanted more, so I signed up for the Weigand Center's mentoring program."

The Weigand Center's program matches students with experienced professionals who offer insights into specific careers or the professional world in general. More than 260 professional mentors participate in the program, which is accredited at the Gold level by the International Mentoring Association Accreditation.

Cichlar met her mentor, E.J. Donaghey '88, in the fall of her senior year. President and CEO of the University of Illinois Credit Union in Champaign, Illinois, Donaghey serves on the board of the College's Alumni Association.

"E.J. was not in my field of study, but he has contacts in a lot of different places," Cichlar said. "He gave me a lot of help throughout my career-development process in both personal and professional areas."

When Cichlar was preparing for her first internship, E.J. helped her with her resume. When she was exploring career options, he arranged for her to visit the credit union he leads—meeting with the accounting staff and learning about banking operations. And when she was interviewing for her first job, he coached her through the entire process.



And three years after graduation, when Cichlar was contemplating a career move, she turned to her mentor once more.

"E.J. knew I was ready for a change, so he connected me with a retired partner of an accounting firm," she said. "That connection led to other connections and then to a job offer."

In the end, Cichlar didn't take the job, opting instead to accept an offer that had come out of her own network. Still, her mentor provided support and guidance as she weighed her options.

"I was trying to decide whether to stay in public accounting or go in a different direction," Cichlar said. "E.J. was there to help me walk through all my fears and reservations and make a decision. And once I made my choice, he was there to coach me through salary discussions and how to leave my former employer with my integrity intact."

Today, Cichlar is a senior tax associate at Weiss & Company, a public accounting firm based in Glenview, Illinois. Looking back, she says that the mentoring relationship was instrumental to her success.

"If I hadn't met E.J., my career path could have gone very differently," she said. "He helped me grow my network and offer a great sounding board, but the most important thing is that he's given me confidence that I'm on the right path."

THE PAY-OFF OF PLANNING AHEAD

Four internships and a study-abroad experience helped John Overton land his dream job.

Even as a first-year student at Elmhurst College, John Overton understood the value of real-world experience.

"School is great, but classes don't necessarily teach the professionalism that you find in the work place," said the business administration major, who graduated in December 2016. "I knew I wanted to get professional experience right off the bat."

So he jumped right in, scheduling a meeting with Holly Coffin in the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence to explore internships. That meeting led to a summer internship at a small manufacturing firm in his home town, Nashville, Tennessee.

"I did sales work and marketing research in the marketing/sales department," Overton recalled. "Every day I talked to professionals in the field about their goals and objectives. I had a great experience and learned a lot about what I wanted to do."

That first internship was the beginning of a long and productive relationship with the Weigand Center for Overton.

His next priority was studying abroad. With the help of the College's international education staff, he spent Spring Term of his sophomore year studying and traveling in Barcelona.

"Studying in Barcelona was an unbelievable experience," he said. "I learned so much about myself, about culture, about having an open mind."

Even while he was in Spain, Overton was planning ahead for his next internship, emailing Holly Coffin to ask her advice in lining up a summer position.

"Holly sent me some contacts, and I set up interviews over Skype," Overton said. "I ended up getting an offer from Weber Grills in Palatine for a full-time, paid summer internship. It was a fantastic opportunity."

Weber invited Overton to return the following summer for another internship, this time working in the global marketing department on strategies like promoting custom grills for Harley Davidson and the Chicago Cubs.

"I was put on a project with the head of Asia Pacific, so I was involved in conference calls at 5 am with manufacturers in China," he recalled. "It was an unbelievable summer. I met even more mentors and connected with a ton of people."

Returning to Elmhurst for his senior year, Overton set his sights

"STUDYING IN BARCELONA WAS AN UNBELIEVABLE EXPERIENCE. I LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT MYSELF, ABOUT CULTURE, ABOUT HAVING AN OPEN MIND."

—John Overton

on one last internship. Working once more with Holly Coffin, he lined up a position with Bosch, an engineering firm that had offered him an internship the previous summer.

The Bosch internship turned into a full-time co-op experience after Overton graduated in December. By May, when the co-op ended, he had lined up a full-time position with brewer MillerCoors.

Today, Overton lives in Minneapolis, where he sells MillerCoors products to 62 bars, restaurants and taverns in the northern suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

"I couldn't be more excited about my new home and market," he said. "We sell a lot of beer here! Not to mention, the Super Bowl is here this year."

Looking back, Overton credits the Weigand Center with helping him build a strong network and gain the experience he needed to succeed. "Without the Center I never would have gotten in to Weber or Bosch," he said. "They helped me get some amazing opportunities, and I can't thank them enough."

