



Western

Annual **IMPACT**



A journey of success



Justin Alexander, BEng'21, grew up in a home he describes as abusive and impoverished. With no family to turn to and too embarrassed to ask for help, Alexander was failing high school and feeling hopeless.

But after earning his pilot licence through the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, Alexander dared to imagine a better future for himself. His grades improved, and he set his sights on university – a goal deemed unrealistic by many. “A lot of people had written me off,” Alexander said.

That was a mistake. In June, Alexander graduated from Western with an engineering degree and delivered a speech at the Engineering Class of 2021 virtual celebration.

There were times, however, when Alexander feared the naysayers were right. At his lowest point, he couldn't summon the will to get out of bed. “Getting through the program was just as hard a mountain to climb as getting into it,” he recalled.

Though he struggled, Alexander didn't give up. With the help of university staff, Alexander's mental health improved, and he obtained financial aid. He made the Dean's Honour List and varsity fencing team. He completed an internship in China and became an officer with the Canadian Armed Forces.

In recognition of his accomplishments in the face of many obstacles, Alexander received the *Anna Toner Award for Academic Resiliency and Determination*. A dedicated engineering student, Toner died of brain cancer in 2019. More than 25 donors came together to establish the annual award in her honour.

After receiving her diagnosis, “Anna decided that whatever life threw at her, she was going to meet it head-on and do her best,” said her mother, Louise Toner.

Anna actively participated in class and earned high marks while being treated for her illness. The award in her memory is an opportunity to express “awe at the achievements that students faced with adversity can overcome,” said her father, Bruce Toner.

Now enrolled in the Master of Science in Management program at the Ivey Business School, Alexander said the *Anna Toner Award for Academic Resiliency and Determination* would serve as a reminder of his strength, should self-doubt return.

“The award is validation that no matter what happens, you can get through it,” he said. “That's what Anna did. She didn't stop, and neither will I.”

If you would like to support a student award in engineering, contact **Terra Ahrens** at **519.661.2111 x 83743** or **tahrens@uwo.ca**.

Purple and proud



“It doesn't get much better; an education, opportunity, career and life-long friends,” said Anne Baxter, BA'91, when reflecting on her 36 years at Western. Her positive experience at the university – and her belief in the life-changing value of education – prompted Baxter to include a gift to Western in her Will.

Baxter's strong connection with Western began when she landed a secretarial job with the psychology department in 1969. She had just received her medical secretary diploma and planned to join a doctor's office after gaining work experience at Western.

But Baxter stayed at Western because the work was meaningful, and she continued learning through secondments, studying for her degree part-time and serving as president of the Professional and Managerial Association. Baxter concluded her Western career as manager of the President's Office, leaving the university to become director of marketing and communications for the YMCA.

Accepting Western's job offer was “one of the best decisions of my life,” said Baxter. Now retired, she gives back to the university as a monthly donor and volunteer, including serving as an Alumni Association representative on the University Senate.

She intends to enhance the Western experience for future students, staff and faculty by donating to the Western Fund through her Will. The Western Fund supports the university's highest-priority needs, such as upgrading labs, enhancing libraries, assisting struggling students and creating a more equitable and inclusive campus.

More than 50 years since she started working for the university, Baxter remains a proud member of the Western community.

“Western has been a significant part of my life. I still feel like I belong; it's that purple and proud spirit.”

If you would like to make a legacy gift to Western, contact **Sheri Cole** at **519.661.2111 x 88856** or **scole5@uwo.ca**.

Inspired by students



In her extensive work with refugees and other vulnerable communities in London, family physician Dr. Bhooma Bhayana, MD'85, regularly witnesses the inequities of Canada's health-care system.

On top of finding the system difficult to navigate, marginalized people — including the homeless, those struggling financially and people living with mental illness and addiction — often experience stigma, racism and a lack of understanding of the circumstances in which they live.

Today's medical students are "very aware of inequity and social justice," Bhayana said. "In my work in refugee health, I've met many students who are really inspiring."

Bhayana works alongside students who volunteer with Western's Newcomer Health Program, a student club through which medical students assess the health of newly arrived refugees. Bhayana recalled one student who scheduled other volunteers, delivered workshops and went on to become a leader in refugee health in London after obtaining her degree.

"When you watch a student flower like that, you want to water that flower," said Bhayana.

For Bhayana and her husband, Vipin Bhayana, a faculty member with the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, that water comes in the form of a student award they recently established.

Each year the *Drs. Vipin and Bhooma Bhayana Award in Family Medicine* will provide \$1,000 in funding to a fourth-year medical student working with marginalized communities. The couple hopes the award will reinforce that addressing health inequities is a "credible area of study and one worthy of attention." Their goal is to inspire students as much as students have inspired them, and to nurture their desire to work with marginalized populations.

The Bhayana's gift exemplifies how students, donors and Western come together to make our communities better. The *Drs. Vipin and Bhooma Bhayana Award in Family Medicine* will be presented for the first time in 2021-2022.

If you would like to support a student award in medicine, contact **Heather Thomas** at **519.661.2111 x 24290** or **heather.thomas@schulich.uwo.ca**.

A performance for one



Susan Agranove wants music students to know she cares about them. That's why she frequently attends performances — whether a studio recital or full concert — by recipients of the award she established to honour her husband, Larry, BA'50, PhD'71, following his death nine years ago.

When audiences could no longer attend performances because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Agranove missed seeing the results of the students' hard work and their exuberance as they performed on stage. Recordings, while appreciated, just weren't the same.

Then, on a beautiful sunny day this past April, the music came to her.

Wearing a blue face mask, Kevin Ye, a second-year Don Wright Faculty of Music student and a 2020-2021 recipient of the *Larry and Susan Agranove Award*, played his violin for Agranove on the patio outside her London apartment.

His performance was a surprise for Agranove, who had invited Ye for coffee. Sitting at a round table across from Ye, she listened, delighted to be serenaded, as the music floated through the air.

"I felt immensely grateful for her donation, and this was the least I could do for her," said Ye. "It was a tough year due to COVID, so I thought it would be nice for her to see me perform in person."

When Ye returns to Western in the fall, Agranove intends to be a friendly face in the audience for his performances. She hopes their relationship will flourish, as it has with many other recipients of her award.

"I try to encourage the students to reach their goals," she said. "I get tremendous satisfaction from connecting with younger people. It's a way of keeping up with the world. And I also get to hear great music, which is good for my soul."

The *Larry and Susan Agranove Award* is valued at \$2,500 and distributed annually to three music students who have an exemplary performance record and are well-rounded academically.

If you would like to support a student award in music, contact **Karmen Ferraro** at **519.661.2111 x 85695** or **karmen.ferraro@uwo.ca**.

From tragedy, a lasting legacy



It was a Friday night in 1979. Marjorie Bogaert, BScN'79, was in a pub with some of her nursing school classmates after another demanding week of lectures, assignments and caring for patients. The tight-knit group of 40 students was weeks away from graduation – eager to launch the next chapter of their lives. Then someone ran into the pub with horrific news.

Two of their classmates were travelling in a car on Highway 401 when a truck crossed the median and collided with their car. Linda Lees died and another classmate, who was driving, was seriously injured. The pair were planning to go shopping, excitedly preparing for Lees' upcoming wedding, when everything changed in an instant.

When the Nursing Class of 1979 convoked, Lees was recognized with a posthumous degree, received by her fiancé. "Everyone stood," recalled Bogaert. "There wasn't a dry eye in the room. We all remember it like it was yesterday."

Determined to see Lees' memory live on, her classmates created a student award in her name. Established shortly after her death, the *Linda Frances Lees Award* is given annually to a nursing student who exemplifies characteristics often used to describe

Linda, such as selflessness, compassion, enthusiasm for life and seeing the good in others.

The classmates from 1979 have remained close since graduation — Bogaert has a photo of their graduating class, which includes Lees, displayed in her home office — and two years ago at their 40th class reunion they decided to raise additional funds to strengthen Lees' award. The effort, spearheaded by Bogaert, was successful and the endowed award now provides \$1,200 annually.

"We will provide support to students forever. That's amazing," said Bogaert.

Lees continues to inspire the Class of '79. With a 45th reunion under discussion, and the upcoming Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing's 100th-anniversary celebration, Bogaert anticipates raising even more funds to increase the award's value.

"Linda's legacy is far-reaching and enduring," Bogaert said. "Something good has come from a tragedy that stays with us to this day."



You can contribute to the *Linda Frances Lees Award* at westernconnect.ca/lindafrancesleesaward or by contacting **Stephanie Cyros** at **519.661.2111 x 88828** or **snoble6@uwo.ca**.

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Give today at westernconnect.ca/give.

How will you be remembered?

Including Western in your Will is an affordable way to make a difference to a cause that matters to you.

Whether you opt to help students thrive or to help accelerate research, your gift will have a lasting impact. Learn how you can create a legacy that supports your values even after you're gone.

Contact **Sheri Cole** at **519.661.2111 x 88856** or **scole5@uwo.ca**.

To request the kind of contact you want to receive, please contact Advancement Operations by phone (519.661.4176 or 1.800.420.7519), by fax (519.661.4182) or by email (advser@uwo.ca).

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