DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

2026

DEDICATION LEADERSHIP INSPIRATION

CLASS OF 1998
JOSHUA ANDERSON

Joshua Anderson, Master Sergeant (Retired), is a proud member of the Geneseo High School Class of 1998 and a dedicated veteran who devoted 20 years of service to the United States Army. Enlisting in June 1998 shortly after graduating high school, Anderson began a career defined by discipline, leadership, and an unwavering commitment to those he served alongside. He retired from active duty in June 2018, closing two decades of honorable service.

Throughout his Army career, Master Sergeant Anderson served in both conventional and special operations units, gaining a broad range of operational experience. His assignments included service with the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), one of the Army's most storied combat formations, as well as the elite 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). In these roles, he supported complex missions requiring adaptability, precision, and teamwork at the highest level.

Anderson deployed overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, contributing to missions critical to U.S. and coalition objectives. His overseas service placed him in challenging environments where leadership, resilience, and trust were essential not only for mission success, but for the safety and well-being of fellow Soldiers.

In the final chapter of his military career, Anderson transitioned from operational roles to developing future leaders. He completed his service as an ROTC instructor at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida, where he mentored and trained college students preparing to become commissioned officers in the U.S. Army. His experience, professionalism, and practical leadership perspective left a lasting impression on the cadets he guided.

Beyond his military accomplishments, Anderson values family above all else. He is married to Isabel Cantu, a native of La Feria, Texas, and together they are raising three children. After retiring from the Army, the family chose to return to Geneseo, reinforcing Anderson's lifelong connection to his hometown and community.

Today, Master Sergeant (Ret.) Anderson continues to exemplify the values of service, integrity, and leadership that defined his military career. His journey from Geneseo High School graduate to seasoned noncommissioned officer and mentor stands as a testament to the impact of dedication, perseverance, and a commitment to developing others.

CLASS OF 1998
THOMAS N. ANDERSON

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Thomas N. Anderson's life reflects a deep commitment to leadership, service, and family. A native of Geneseo, Anderson distinguished himself early through academics, athletics, and service-minded involvement. He graduated fifth in the Geneseo High School Class of 1998, serving as team captain in football, wrestling, and track during his senior year. He was named wrestling MVP, led the school's Key Club as president, and set a standard of excellence that would define his future path.

Anderson went on to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, graduating 12th in the Class of 2002. While there, he competed at the Division I level as a member of the Army wrestling team from 2000 to 2002, balancing elite athletics with the rigors of one of the nation's most demanding academic and leadership institutions.

Commissioned as an Infantry officer, Anderson served 20 years on active duty in the U.S. Army, retiring in 2022 as a Lieutenant Colonel. Commissioned as an Infantry officer, Anderson served 20 years on active duty in the U.S. Army, retiring in 2022 as a Lieutenant Colonel. His career included two combat deployments. One was a year-long deployment to Iraq as a company commander, leading 178 infantry Soldiers, and then a combat deployment to Afghanistan. He also served six-month deployment to Kuwait and Jordan. A 2003 graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School, Anderson consistently led Soldiers in complex, high-risk environments around the world.

Throughout his career, Anderson lived and served across the globe, including assignments in Georgia, Alaska, New York, Italy, Guam, and Colorado. From 2019 to 2022, he served as Director of the ROTC Program at the University of Guam, mentoring and developing the next generation of military leaders. His commitment to leadership development extended beyond uniformed service, including his work as a Veteran Intern in the Local Government Management Fellowship with the City of Geneseo in 2022.

Anderson is also an accomplished writer and editor, contributing to professional military and leadership discourse. His publications include articles in Infantry and Armor magazines, as well as his role as co-editor of the Leadership Journal of Micronesia, published in 2021.
Despite a career marked by global service and professional achievement, Anderson considers his greatest accomplishment to be his family. He is the devoted husband of Crystal and father to four children Tommy, Addy, Teddy, and Everly. Today, he remains deeply engaged in the Geneseo community, serving as Vice President of the St. Malachy Parents Club and coaching Geneseo Youth Football, youth wrestling, and tee-ball.

Lieutenant Colonel Anderson's life exemplifies disciplined leadership, humility, and service both in uniform and at home.

CLASS OF 1963

SUSAN (LODGE) BACKS

From the very beginning of her military career, Army Lieutenant Colonel Susan (Lodge) Backs, class of 1963, knew exactly who she was, where she was headed, and how she would get there. She heard the word “no” only once along the way-and in hindsight, that moment proved to be the Air Force’s loss and everyone else’s gain.

Born in Geneseo, Illinois, Backs initially sought to join the U.S. Air Force. That plan changed quickly. “I didn’t pass their beauty board,” she once said with trademark candor. “They wanted tall, willowy nurses who fit the model of a flight nurse. I’m a short little lady-so I joined the Army.” It was a decision that launched a remarkable career in military nursing and leadership.

After completing her training, Backs fully expected to deploy to Vietnam as promised. When her first orders instead sent her to Fort Bassett Army Hospital in Fairbanks, Alaska, she pushed back. Determined not to trade Illinois winters for Arctic ones, she met directly with a personnel officer and successfully had her orders changed. Soon after, she was on her way to Vietnam.

In Vietnam, Backs served under intense and often unpredictable conditions. She vividly recalls the sound of incoming helicopters, likening it to scenes from MASH. The brief, tense pause as everyone wondered what was coming next heightened the anxiety of dealing with who and what might be aboard that helicopter.Early in her assignment, she worked in a POW hospital, a role that placed her in situations far outside normal nursing experiences. Though she insists, and medical evaluations confirm that she does not suffer from PTSD, she openly acknowledges that Vietnam demanded actions and resilience unlike anything else in her life.

Backs served the Army for 23 years, across two continents and in a wide range of medical specialties, including female surgery, the newborn nursery, and the operating room. Her career reflected both adaptability and dedication to patient care. After her military service, she continued nursing in Kansas, working at Lansing Correctional Facility and later concluding her professional career as a registered nurse at St. John Hospital in Leavenworth.

In 2010, like many Vietnam veterans, Backs returned to Vietnam with a battlefield tour group, revisiting the site of her former unit and standing once more where her hooch had been decades earlier-a moment of reflection and closure.
Today, the retired lieutenant colonel leads a new and equally meaningful mission: commanding a joyful “army” of nine grandchildren, carrying forward a legacy of strength, service, and determination.

CLASS OF 1984

BRAD GERICKE

Major General (Ret.) Brad Gericke, class of 1984, is widely respected as a visionary senior leader whose career combined strategic rigor, original thinking, and an affirmative, people-centered leadership style. Over decades of service in Joint and Army commands, he built a reputation as an action-oriented thought leader who consistently challenged the status quo to prepare the force for the future.

Gericke holds a doctorate from Vanderbilt University and is a graduate of the National War College. His academic grounding, paired with deep operational experience, positioned him as a leading change agent within the Department of Defense. Throughout his career, senior leaders regularly sought his inclusion in major initiatives, trusting his ability to translate complex ideas into executable strategies.

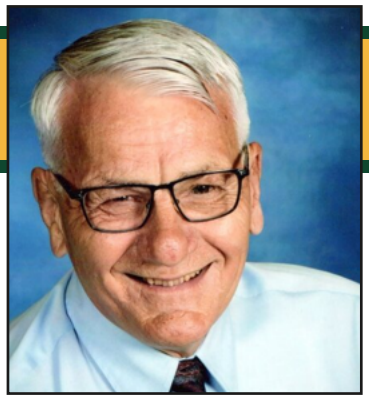
Serving as the Army’s longest-tenured Senior Strategist and Chief of Plans, Gericke was tasked by Army leadership to “own the future.” In that role, he used enterprise-wide authorities to design and validate new structural models through scenario-driven experimentation, ensuring the Army could maximize its capabilities and operational effectiveness. He led the development and implementation of more than fifteen major Joint and Army strategies, papers, and plans, including the Chairman’s National Military Strategy, the Army Campaign Plan, and the Army’s Arctic Strategy.

Gericke also reshaped professional military education and training approaches, strengthening the Army’s counter-weapons of mass destruction readiness and issuing Army-wide directives to implement lasting change. He routinely advised senior leaders on emerging trends affecting land power, global security, and national defense.

As a Joint leader at the Pentagon, Gericke chaired the Department of Defense’s primary war-planning and global force posture forums. He was the principal architect of the DoD’s first worldwide campaign and operational plans designed to integrate crisis response with cross-domain and cross-boundary challenges, including disruptive technologies, rising state actors, and the accelerating flow of global information.

Beyond strategy and planning, Gericke served as a special assistant to multiple senior executives, offering trusted counsel at the highest levels of decision-making.
He is also an accomplished writer, having authored numerous professional and historical essays, three college-level instructor resource manuals, two urban warfare anthologies, and a military biography.

In retirement, Major General Gericke continues to serve as a Senior Mentor to the U.S. Army and as a Distinguished Fellow at several national security institutes and forums. From his home in Tennessee, he remains deeply engaged in shaping the future of defense leadership and strategy.



CLASS OF 1956
WARREN HADLEY

Warren Hadley was raised on the family farm between Geneseo and Cambridge, Illinois. From an early age, he developed a strong work ethic and deep connection to agriculture values that would guide both his professional life and his service to the community. He graduated from Geneseo High School in 1956 and went on to earn a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Iowa State University in 1961.

Following college, Warren embraced an adventurous chapter of life as a field secretary for Delta Chi Fraternity, traveling across the country while working out of the national office in Iowa City. During that time, fraternity brothers arranged a blind date with a nursing student named Catherine Kemp. The match proved lasting. Warren and Cathy were married on December 23, 1962, in Cedar Falls, Iowa, beginning a partnership that shaped the rest of his life.

In 1963, Warren returned home to the family farm, where he worked alongside his father-and later with his daughter and son-in-law farming 540 acres and feeding more than 2,000 head of cattle annually in Henry County. A forward-thinking producer, he invested significant time in developing and adopting modern methods of feeding and finishing beef cattle in the Midwest.

His leadership extended beyond the farm as a partner and vice president of Empire Equipment, NA, and through active involvement in numerous agricultural organizations, including the Henry County Beef Association, Illinois Beef Association, Illinois Beef Council, National Livestock Feeders Association, and the National Cattlemen's Association.

Warren was deeply civic-minded and believed strongly in giving back. He served as a director for Geneseo Cooperative Gas and Oil, the State Bank of Osco, and the Hammond Henry Hospital Foundation. Education was especially important to him. He served on the Black Hawk Community College Board and the Geneseo Board of Education, and was a founding member of the Geneseo Endowment for Excellence in Education. He was also a devoted member of the First Presbyterian Church in Geneseo.

In retirement, Warren and Cathy embraced travel, exploring the Rhine and Mediterranean rivers, viewing fall colors in Canada, glaciers in Alaska, and the ancient wonders of Machu Picchu. Warren enjoyed golf, reading, and his morning coffee group. He also discovered a passion for woodturning, joining the Quad Cities Woodturners, with his work displayed at regional art shows and RutabagA Art.

Warren Hadley's life reflected dedication to family, agriculture, education, and community-leaving a lasting impact on all who knew him.

CLASS OF 1998
SCOTT ROKIS

After 13 years in the high-pressure corporate world, Scott Rokis chose a radically different path, one that led him behind a camera lens and onto the open road. Today, Rokis is a freelance photographer specializing in long-distance endurance pursuits and commercial photography, living and working full-time out of a self-converted van he drives throughout the states west of the Mississippi River.

Rokis is the son of Tony and Deb Rokis of Colona, Illinois. He graduated from Geneseo High School in 1998 and later from the University of Illinois, where he earned a bachelor's degree in management information systems with a minor in technology management. While at Illinois, he was deeply involved in music, performing as a snare drummer with the Marching Illini Drumline and playing drum set for men's and women's basketball and women's volleyball teams.

Just two weeks after graduation, Rokis joined General Electric through its prestigious Information Technology Leadership Program. His career with GE spanned 13 years and took him across the country and abroad, including assignments in Minneapolis, Dallas, and Melbourne, Australia. It was during a six-month stint in Australia that he purchased his first DSLR camera and began teaching himself photography-quietly nurturing a parallel passion.

Rokis later joined GE's corporate auditing staff, working demanding 80-hour weeks auditing everything from television productions in Los Angeles to hydroelectric turbines in Montreal. From 2007 to 2014, he led a global business intelligence team of 30 people, overseeing analytics across 27 systems that supported a $3.5 billion business. Despite professional success, he grew disillusioned with corporate leadership and longed for more meaningful, human-centered work.

In 2015, Rokis bought his first van and began pushing the limits of remote work-traveling cross-country, visiting GE factories, running local trails in every state, training for an ultramarathon, and photographing life along the way. That journey changed everything. In January 2016, he left GE to pursue photography full-time.

Today, Rokis works with clients ranging from local race organizers to national brands such as Home Depot, Altra Running, and Backcountry Magazine. Having traveled nearly every U.S. state and more than 35 countries, he remains driven by one goal: to observe, capture, and share meaningful human stories.

Scott Rokis's journey is one of courage, reinvention, and lived experiences that prove fulfillment often begins where certainty ends.

CLASS OF 1995
TONY VANDEMORE

Tony Vandemore, class of 1995, has worn many titles over the course of his life: professional baseball player, commercial insurance salesman, farmer, entrepreneur, outfitter, guide, and business owner. Yet the roles he values most are husband and father. Known worldwide as one of the premier waterfowlers of his generation, Vandemore has built a career and legacy rooted in passion, discipline, faith, and an unwavering commitment to conservation.

Before founding Habitat Flats, Vandemore spent time playing professional baseball in the minor leagues before realizing his future lay elsewhere. After attending Truman State University, he entered the commercial insurance industry, structuring his work so he could dedicate mornings to hunting during duck season. At the same time, he quietly operated a snow goose hunting outfit through word of mouth, laying the groundwork for what would become one of the most respected waterfowl operations in the world.

Habitat Flats was born from a willingness to take risk and an all-in mindset. Vandemore and his partners committed fully to the vision, managing and farming tens of thousands of acres with one goal: creating the best possible habitat for waterfowl. “Farming for ducks” is not a slogan-it is year-round work involving crop planning, wetland management, invasive species control, and constant adaptation to weather and water conditions. The result is an operation with an exceptionally high rebooking rate, a testament to both the quality of the hunting and the experience provided.

Vandemore’s success is driven not by complacency, but by a desire to continually improve. He thrives in the off-season, viewing habitat management as both science and art. His conservation ethic was shaped early, influenced by family members who worked in wildlife management, and reinforced by a lifetime spent outdoors. To him, waterfowling is about far more than harvest-it is about stewardship, heritage, and gratitude for the natural world.

Habitat Flats remains a family endeavor. Tony’s wife plays a critical role in the business, contributing her expertise in marketing while balancing family life. Vandemore credits his partners, guide crew, lodge staff, clients, and his faith as essential to the operation’s success. Known for his humility, he is quick to share credit and emphasize teamwork.

Today, Vandemore continues to expand Habitat Flats, including new lodge locations along the Missouri River. His vision extends decades into the future, with a deep hope that conservation, hunting traditions, and outdoor opportunities remain strong for generations to come.

Tony Vandemore’s story is one of relentless work, deep passion, and purpose-proof that when vocation and calling align, success follows naturally.

CLASS OF 1953
RAY WIRTH

Ray Wirth, class of 1953, built more than a business in Geneseo. He built a legacy of craftsmanship, family, and community trust that has endured for generations. As the founder of Wirth Plumbing & Heating, Wirth has been a steady presence in the Geneseo area since 1965, helping shape the region’s heating and cooling industry through decades of change.

A defining moment in the company’s history came more than 50 years ago during a family vacation to the Black Hills of South Dakota. Traveling along U.S. Route 6, Wirth noticed something that stood out to him: nearly every town they passed had a Lennox dealership. To him, that consistency spoke volumes. If Lennox was that widespread, it had to be a company worth standing behind. Acting on that instinct, Wirth reached out to Lennox and later met with a territory manager at the former Baker Cafe in downtown Geneseo. That meeting marked the beginning of a partnership that continues today.

Lennox Heating & Cooling has since honored Wirth, Inc. as a 50-year “Premiere Dealer,” recognizing the company as one of the longest-tenured Lennox dealers in the state of Illinois. The distinction reflects both loyalty and a long-standing commitment to quality service.

Wirth’s career spans a period of major transformation in the industry. “When we started selling furnaces, there were four replacement parts,” he recalled. “Furnaces were sold by the pound because they were made of cast iron.” Air conditioning, now a household standard, did not become widely popular until the late 1960s. Through each shift in technology, Wirth Plumbing & Heating adapted while staying true to its core values.

Despite growth and expansion, the company has remained rooted in downtown Geneseo. Ray Wirth continues to spend time in the office each day, a visible reminder of the hands-on leadership that built the business. “We’re proud to still be here,” he has said, expressing gratitude for loyal customers and fellow contractors many of whom have supported the business since its earliest days.

Today, Wirth, Inc. serves customers within a 50-mile radius of Geneseo and employs 37 people. The business remains firmly family-centered, with Wirth’s children Wendy, Cory, Ki, Jodi, and Jason working alongside a son-in-law and grandchildren. Under the leadership of General Manager Theresa Moody, the company continues to thrive.

Ray Wirth’s story is one of vision, perseverance, and community connection-proof that strong relationships and steady values can stand the test of time.

OUR MISSION & PURPOSE

THE

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

IS THE HIGHEST HONOR BESTOWED ON AN ALUMNUS/ALUMNA BY THE GENESEO HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION. THIS AWARD IS GIVEN TO ALUMNI WHO HAVE REACHED THE PINNACLE OF THEIR CAREER AND HAVE BROUGHT CREDIT TO THEMSELVES AND THE GENESEO SCHOOL DISTRICT.

THE PURPOSE OF THE

HALL OF FAME

IS THREEFOLD.

FIRST, TO RECOGNIZE AND HONOR THE GREAT INDIVIDUALS WHO BROUGHT FAME TO GENESEO HIGH SCHOOL.

SECOND, TO ESTABLISH IN THE HEARTS OF OUR YOUTH A MOTIVATING INFLUENCE TO EXCEL IN THEIR CAREER.

THIRD, TO FOSTER PRIDE, PRESERVE A GOOD WORK ETHIC, SCHOLARSHIP, AND CITIZENSHIP IN OUR SCHOOL, CITY, AND COMMUNITY.