

History of Homecoming & Stout Ambassadors

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UW-Stout Marketing Communications

Season 1, Episode 4

Show Notes:

What's the point of Homecoming? Why do Stout students have a history of taking over roads? What is a Stout Ambassador and what do they have to do with yacht cruises? Find out all this and even more on this episode, dedicated to Homecoming Week!

Guests:

Heather Stecklein, UW-Stout Archivist

Willa Rodencal, Student and Stout Ambassador

Transcript:

Speaker 1: 0:07

Hi, everybody. Welcome to inside stout, a UWC stout podcast that focuses on the stories of students, faculty, staff, and others from our campus community. I'm Rachel Hall , Grimson

Speaker 2: 0:19

Pam powers, and we are members of the marketing communications team here to share with you everything that makes UWU stout unique. Rachel, the leaves are turning vibrant colors. There's a slight nip in the air it's fall, and we all know what that means. Homecoming, homecoming Rachels and alum of UWS stout. I am talk a little bit about what homecoming means to you. Well,

Speaker 1: 0:49

I'm still here, so I'm not really, you know, going home I'm already here, right? So that's why it's called homecoming, but I loved it so much that I never left, so that can tell everyone who's listening. How much I love stout, but I'm very excited. I love the energy that happens on homecoming week. The events that all the different Orks put out and that the university plans are so fun.

Speaker 2: 1:14

Well, today we have two guests who are going to talk about homecoming and also the stout ambassadors. Please introduce yourselves.

Speaker 3: 1:22

Hi, I'm Heather stack line . I'm the university archivist here at stout. Uh , and I will have Redensyl , uh , I'm a student here at stout. I'm a junior and I'm a stout ambassador. So

Speaker 1: 1:35

Wella , can you tell us a little bit about yourself and where you're from your major, why you get, why you got into your major and a little bit about being a stout ambassador? Yeah ,

Speaker 3: 1:45

Of course. Um, so I'm a junior in the retail merchandising and management program with a concentration in fashion marketing. I'm originally from Waukesha, Wisconsin, which comes , uh, just outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Um, I got into my major because I always loved walking past window displays and just being like, oh, I want, I want that item. And I just want to inspire other people with fashion, just how I was inspired growing up. Very cool.

Speaker 1: 2:15

So how did that lead you since you're at stout? How did that lead you to becoming a stout ambassador?

Speaker 3: 2:22

Um, I was recommended for the stout ambassador program actually by my English professor. Um, and he reached out to me and said, I think you'd be really good for this program. And you would represent the campus and the student body really well, and you should apply for this program. Um, and I did, and I was lucky enough to be interviewed and then selected for the ambassador program last October. So October of 2020 , um, and this year I'm a returning ambassador and I actually get the chance to be the co lead ambassador with , um, one of our other lovely ambassadors. Her name is Madeline. Um, and so I'm really looking forward to that opportunity.

Speaker 4: 3:02

Very cool. Heather,

Speaker 2: 3:04

Talk with us a little bit about how the stout ambassador program started because it kind of came out of formal former king and queen .

Speaker 4: 3:14

Yes. Uh , so we kind of had a long tradition of having students be chosen as leaders to represent our campus. Um , starting in the 1930s, we had homecoming Queens, and that was an initiative by our stout student association. Uh , and the idea behind that was that , um, it was only girls and they would be nominated by other students. And then there would , there would be a homecoming court, a lot, like a lot of high schools do it, and then there would be a homecoming queen. And so for , um, up until the early eighties, it was just homecoming Queens. Um, by the early eighties, we decided that we would also like to have a homecoming king. And around that

time it started to be more of a student work sponsored initiative. So rather than having individual students nominating their candidates, it was actually, this club will be , um , backing this candidate. And so that's what we see in the eighties, nineties. And the early part of the century is these homecoming, Kings and Queens being nominated by individual clubs and organizations. And it's funny because we can actually see some of the YouTube videos from homecoming king and queen candidates are still up there. So you can look for homecoming queen candidates from 20 10, 20 13 in 2016, around the time that stout had its 120 fifth anniversary. We decided to take things in a different direction because one thing that we were noticing as that a lot of these candidates, these wonderful people weren't being honored, even though they were being chosen by these organizations. And so now we have a much larger, much more representative group of people who are representing our campus, not only during homecoming weekend, but throughout the year. And I think we'll , I could tell you a lot about the things that you do. Yeah .

Speaker 3: 5:03

Um, as a stout ambassador, we get to work with all the alumni at any alumni event on campus. Um, during homecoming we'll particularly be helping out with the ice cream social that Tommy Thompson is doing on campus, as well as chancellor Frank. And , um, we get to help out with breakfast at the book and socialize with all the alumni there , um, kind of being that link between the student body and the alumni. Um, so we get to represent our campus and all the best ways possible.

Speaker 1: 5:35

Well , uh , how has that impacted you being a part of those events and talking with alumni? Like what have you gained from it as a student?

Speaker 3: 5:42

I have gained so much , um, just last weekend we did a riverboat cruise with a bunch of alumni, which was so fun and we got to go out on a boat and have dinner and just talk with all the alumni and hear all of their stories from, you know , when they in 84 93 and they get to tell us about when, you know, places like heritage hall changed their name to, you know, it was previously known as the home EC building. And so they get to kind of recount their memories to us and we get to tell them how campus has changed. And it's really fun. And you learn a ton through this program.

Speaker 1: 6:18

I manage the UWA stout, social media accounts, and I sometimes feel like I'm a stout ambassador because alumni love to share how things were when they were a student on, in our comments. Like when I share a news story about something new happening on campus. So I can totally see where you're coming from.

Speaker 3: 6:40

Yeah. Every alumni from stout , uh , reasonably so is so proud to have been a stout alumni and they love telling anyone that will listen about every one of their stories. And so, I mean, as a

current student here, it also just gives me something to look forward to knowing that I will leave with amazing memories and stories that I also get to pass on for generations. Love that.

Speaker 4: 7:04

So Heather tell us some fun stories of homecoming's gone by , okay. Yeah. So we are approaching the hundredth anniversary of our first homecoming at stout. Our first homecoming was actually a banquet. And , um, so it was held in one of the major halls on campus in 1922 and president Harvey spoke at it. And then he kind of surprised people at the end of it and said, okay , um, every, all the students who are present, you can actually stay up until 11 o'clock tonight and you can dance. And so everyone was super stoked about that. So that was the Friday night before the football game. And then , um, the following year, it really started to, to ramp up to what we think of now. So there were events , um, one really typical events of the 1920s was, do you have a well , it's called a night shirt parade. And so students would ring the bell in the clock tower . And when they heard the bell ring, they would know that they could put on like what I picture as like an Ebenezer Scrooge outfit, like a long white gown . And then they were group up as, as , uh , like a parade that would, that would pre-assess up Broadway and then down main street. And then there would be a bonfire at the end. And so they would actually sometimes have like F you know , torches that had flames on them. And , and it would just be something that the community would always expect the night before the homecoming football game. And that happened for a number of years, probably the 1920s until the early 1960s is when we see that not always with the night shirts, but definitely the bonfire and the , the procession up main street. Um, another thing that we saw a lot in homecoming games, and there are great pictures of it from the twenties and thirties is the snake dance. So after there was no real snakes were involved, Willa got concerned, but it's not my thing , but if you ever picture people out on an ice , uh , ice skating rink playing crack the whip, it looked a lot like that. So people would hold hands and just make this massive long line and they'd kind of walk sideways and then run sideways and just kind of like, wait , it kind of wiggle around in this kind of snake-like pattern. And in some accounts that I've read in Sao Tonia , the student newspaper and the tower yearbook, they actually talk about the snake dance processing up the street too. So there was a lot of stout taking over roadways , uh, which is something else that we hear a lot about , um, is in the 1970s, there was an attempt by stout students to actually close down the interstate. They were not successful. Um, so, and I'm glad cause I, we wouldn't want that to be a , a longstanding homecoming tradition, but a lot of the alumni from the seventies, remember that.

Speaker 3: 9:44

Yeah, I actually, that was one of the stories that was told to me by an alumni was that they tried to close down the highway during homecoming.

Speaker 4: 9:54

Did they have any like specific memories of it, like where they arrested or what happened? You know, I don't know .

Speaker 3: 10:00

I think it got to the point of being arrested. Um, but definitely that there was an attempt and a March to the highway where then everyone kind of went, what do we do now? And so they made it there, but they didn't get it all to shut shutdown . So yeah .

Speaker 4: 10:16

So the original bell they were ringing is that the actual bell that's down by was my question. Yes. Um, so the shorthand, the short history of the bell and the clock tower is that Bowman hall was built in 1897. And there was this big bell up in the clock tower. And it had a mechanism that worked until around 1915 and then, and it would ring routinely then after that, that broke. And so stout students would sneak up to the clock tower to ring the bell for special occasions like that night shirt parade or on a dare. Um, so that's what you're hearing you hearing about in those stories. As people sneaking up into the moment hall clock tower ringing the bell, and then if people heard that that's unusual for them. So then they would come out and be like, okay, it's time for the parade. Okay. Yeah. Quick question then. So back then, was the bell

Speaker 3: 11:05

Manually rung every

Speaker 4: 11:08

15 minutes? No, no. The clock tower was pretty much silent unless people were playing pranks. Um, and so, or, and again, a lot, a lot of the traditions were to , to celebrate football victories or to major events. You'd send somebody up on a dare. Um, and what ultimately happens in the 19 early 1930s is a student breaks. The bell , uh , bells are shaped with kind of like a waist and a hip where it starts to , um, take her out and you're supposed to hit it where it tapers out, but someone hit it too high on the bell and then it cracked. And so , uh, after that, the bell worked for a bout 15 years where you could ring it and you could hear it nearby the clock tower , but it didn't resonate as much as it did when it was a full bell. And then by the early 1950s, it was totally silent. And so it was cracked and they put in a speaker system to replicate what the bell would sound like. And then people started to hear it on every 15 minutes. Then in the late 1990s, a group of alumni got together and installed the bell system that we have today, which is real bells. And they took down

Speaker 2: 12:08

The original bell at that time too. Cause I can remember actually standing there watching them take the bell out of the bell tower.

Speaker 4: 12:13

Yeah. I'll have to look in the footage to see if you're there. I actually have the footage of the bell coming down. Um, so the bell , uh, the original bell, when it came out of the Bowman hall, Clark tower, a group of students , um, designed a monument just south of the student center. And so it's hanging there and it's actually a very great focal Pope , uh , point on campus. There are four benches around it and a lot of students like to sit there, I see them between classes. People love to hammock there as well. Yes they do. Yeah.

Speaker 3: 12:41

Well as a stem ambassador, I think my next initiative is going to have to be bring back the nightshirt parade. I know I'd love to see it. I think we're going to have to do that this year for homecoming. That sounds super fun.

Speaker 2: 12:52

So what is the process? How do I be , how do you become a star ambassador? If there's someone out there who says, Hey, you know, I want to do that.

Speaker 3: 12:58

Yeah. So , um, well I was the special case of being recommended by a professor. Um, but you can actually just Google the UWA stout ambassador program and apply online , uh , to all current UWS stout students had actually also got sent out , um, in the involvement center email just a few weeks ago for applications. Um, the only requirement are that you are taking six credits worth of classes and that you have a 3.0 GPA. Yeah. And the process just requires like a resume and , um, uh , short answer essay questions that , um, and then if you're selected, you'll be reached out for interview , um, and then be selected by a hiring committee of our faculty advisor , Jenny Smith, and one ambassador or a couple of ambassadors that will be interviewing you with her.

Speaker 4: 13:51

So we'll , uh, or Heather, what plans do you have for homecoming the whole week or the game or breakfast at the bug ? What do you want to do? I'm really excited about the night run. We're having a low run on campus, which is new this year. Um , so I think that I'll probably walk most of it, but I would love to participate in that glow in the dark run on Thursday night. I think it is. Yes.

Speaker 3: 14:13

Yep . Yeah. Um, I'm always looking forward to the football game. Um, I was able to go to one homecoming football game my freshman year, and then unfortunately last year , uh, due to the pandemic, I was not able to attend. Um, so I'm looking forward to that coming back on campus and being able to do in-person events. Um, I'll be at breakfast at the buck and the ice cream social that we're having on campus as well. Um, we are also doing a coffee and donuts with your favorite faculty and alumni, which I'm looking forward to as well. Um, so I'll be busy all week doing things on campus and help , uh, volunteering at events for students and faculty and alumni.

Speaker 1: 14:57

Yeah, that's very cool. If anyone listening wants to know what events are happening around homecoming week can visit Uwstout.edu/homecoming. And there's also going to be a link on there for the blue devil productions events. Cause they have a lot happening. I believe they have some entertainment events as well. They have blue devil trivia with blaze, I believe, or blaze trivia. I don't know if blaze will be there, but I think blaze is involved in the actual information of

the trivia. So Heather, I don't know if they'll let you in, cause you'll know all the answers, but you can, you can try it .

Speaker 2: 15:34

So Heather, do we have any famous homecoming, Kings or Queens who went on to do things that

Speaker 4: 15:41

You're pointing at me as though? I should know. I , um, I actually don't know what, where, where a lot of the homecoming Kings and Queens have gone on to . So I was just curious

Speaker 2: 15:53

If there's any that

Speaker 4: 15:54

Come to mind . The closest thing I can think of is we had a winter carnival king who ended up being our chancellor, Bob Meyer . Um, but , uh, but homecoming, Kings and Queens, I haven't what happens a lot in the archives is that we know we have this like snapshot of people when they are here at stout. And a lot of times we don't know where they went on in life. Um, the alumni association gathered some of that information, but it doesn't always come to us until much later. So, yeah. Sorry, I can whip on that one.

Speaker 2: 16:21

Well , I'm just curious how the whole concept of home can I even started because it's one of those just about every high school college.

Speaker 4: 16:28

Yeah. It really seems to have grown out of football and just this whole idea that football became the sport that a lot of people would come back to campus to watch. Um , and it was a great social event and it was also a nice, the , the pacing of it , um , is very close to the beginning of the school year before the snow starts to fall, particularly in this part of the world. Um , so it is a great time to travel a great time. The students who are here are that our new students have become adjusted and this has really started to become their home. So a lot of times their families will want to come and visit around them anyway. And it's also a nice, just a nice time of year for people to travel and meet up with their friends from school. So I think that that's really how it happened and it just made more sense to have something in the fall when we also have something book-ending the year with commencement, because a lot of people come back for commencement as well because they have relatives or friends graduating.

Speaker 1: 17:25

I've noticed that a lot of families and parents and support systems of students have been requesting, or I guess just asking about a family weekend in the fall because family weekend traditionally is in the spring. So homecoming is a great thing to invite people to and to invite

your family or invite your friends to back home , uh , to visit campus because all week long, there are things happening, but on the weekend, there's a lot going on, especially the small businesses in town. They've also very graciously given people discounts on homecoming day, which is also on the homecoming website. So you two should check that out, but anyone listening, check out the website for some good discounts of our awesome local businesses, show them some love. So Wella as a part of the stout ambassador program, you're also a part of something that is launching this fall. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Speaker 3: 18:21

We are launching the stout impact project , um, this fall, which I'm super excited for as a retail major. Um, so it kind of gives me a chance to get my hands dirty in a retail project. Um, so the stout impact project is actually, we're creating a wearable item this year. It's like a , it's a winter hat , um, that is customized just for this program. Um, and if you purchase and support the staff impact project , um, half of the proceeds will be going to the stout emergency fund, which offers scholarship opportunities to stout students who maybe are a little short on tuition due to extenuating circumstances. Um, and so we asked out ambassadors are doing our part to help contribute to that fund. Um, and so we're launching the impact project. So go buy your wearable hats at sell fitters . And I'm really, really excited for this project. I'm super passionate about it. Um, and they look fantastic. They're so fun.

Speaker 1: 19:22

Yeah, they do look great. And that will be launching around November, I believe. So give us a little description of what

Speaker 3: 19:31

Yeah. Um, if you know, what a Carhartt had is it's kind of like a knit winter beanie , uh , they're like similar to that style and they have a leather patch logo of the S logo on it , um, right on the front. And they're really cool. They're like a charcoal gray with like a natural leather patch. Um, and they're really cute and gender neutral, which makes them fun for everybody. So yeah, I'm really excited. I can't wait to wear mine.

Speaker 1: 19:57

So I just wanted to, to highlight that too, because that's coming up and it's a huge, it's a huge part of the stout ambassador program. Now.

Speaker 3: 20:06

It is, it definitely is. Um, you know, as doubt ambassadors we like to give back to campus and to its students. So , uh, the impact project just gives us a chance to kind of, you know, maybe give back to students who have extenuating circumstances and we don't want anyone to not be able to come to stout. We want everyone to be here and be proud to be here. Um, and so that's what the stout impact project is for.

Speaker 1: 20:29

Yep . And every year you get to choose the fund that it goes to, which is so cool. It's like for students by students, which is Sony , I forgot to mention one thing . Go ahead, Heather.

Speaker 4: 20:40

I am actually collaborating with the alumni association for a virtual event where we talk about stout history with alumni and that is happening on Thursday. Um , and we are also having a second event two weeks from that on October 21st. And those events, the first event is themed on pranks and our mascots and , um , legends at stout like the iron night. And , um, I , a student at stout who , uh, was in 1959 on a nationally televised game show. Um, and then the second event we'll be showing , um, an , uh , really up close and personal interior tour of the clock tower and a retrospective of some of the famous visitors that we've had on campus and anyone who, who , uh, registers can join in with us virtually , um, we tend to have about 50 or 60 participants in our virtual sessions and we get to hear great stories from alumni during that time too. So it's my chance to be a stout ambassador like Willa. So Heather, is there any chance the stout secret tours are going to be coming back someday? Someday? I, I did do one with , uh, some tour guides on campus. Um, I did one, one live in person and it was nice to see that again, but just , uh, with social distancing requirements and masking, it's kind of difficult right now, tell people a little bit what those tours kind of entailed. Sure. So the stout secrets tour is it walks you around campus. It starts in the student center and there are five different stops and we just kind of stop and look around at things like that. Bell monument. We look at things like the tunnel between Bowman hall and Harvey hall, and a lot of the public art that we have on campus that we walk past on a daily basis and don't know what it's called or why it's there. Um, I explain those things and in a lot of cases, I'll show you buildings that used to exist on campus and what used to happen in them. And some of the stories of what's happened inside them. And that's something I typically do during homecoming week and also during family weekend in the spring.

Speaker 1: 22:35

Awesome. You're a busy, busy lady here on campus that I

Speaker 4: 22:39

Archivist a busy stout alumnus. So yes,

Speaker 1: 22:43

Very true. Awesome. Well, thank you both so much for coming. This was such a fun conversation. I'm so excited for homecoming, and I hope that everyone listening gets involved in some way or another. So I want to thank you all for listening to inside stout a podcast devoted to the stories of our students, faculty, staff, and campus community. We want to thank Heather and Willa for visiting with us today and sharing about the history of homecoming and about being a stout ambassador. Don't forget to subscribe to us on Spotify and Google podcasts, and don't forget to tune in next time when we share even more stories that go inside step.