



Photo by Jeff Frey

\$uccess by the numbers

By Shawnda Schelinder and Deborah Anderson



Photo by
Greg Dahl

In today's challenging job market, flexibility truly is key. Accounting and finance – the building block of any business – are trades that provide a certain occupational agility. And for WITC grads Kara Fryer and Norb Christman, it provided a formula for success.

It may seem like a huge leap across the career spectrum: cosmetologist to accountant. But for Kara Fryer, it all added up.

A single mom of two, Fryer had completed the cosmetology program at Gogebic Community College in Ironwood, Mich., and was immediately employed by the college as the salon manager.

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Kara Fryer

“I ended up working two jobs because the work at GCC was only during the school year,” Fryer says. Leaving the cosmetology field wasn't easy, but Fryer wanted to be able to spend more time with her family and friends.

The next stop for Fryer was A to Z Plumbing, where she served as the office manager. It was there that she was unexpectedly bit by the accounting bug. “I was doing some accounting work and I really liked it,” Fryer says.

Part of her duties included payroll, accounts payable and accounts receivable. Fryer found that she really enjoyed the work and knew she could take her skills to the next level. “I wanted to understand it better. So I enrolled the Accounting program at WITC-Ashland,” Fryer says.

Once there, Fryer immersed herself in her studies. It wasn't always easy, and some sacrifices had to be made from time to time. “I was really dedicated,” Fryer says. “It was hard to juggle school, family and friends. In the end, I had to choose what was most important. I had a responsibility.”

Fryer's primary responsibility was to her family and providing a solid foundation for her children. And, in the end, her dedication certainly paid off. Even before graduation, Fryer had found a great career.

Now the office administrator for Port Superior Marina in Bayfield, Wis., Fryer is doing what she loves.

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Fryer continues to discover more about her chosen profession, and she knows she's not done learning. Eventually a bachelor's and master's degree are on the horizon. Fryer is pleased with the flexibility her Accounting degree affords her.

“Knowing the financials aspects of business is a huge edge,” she says. “There are a lot of opportunities. I'm not at a standstill.”

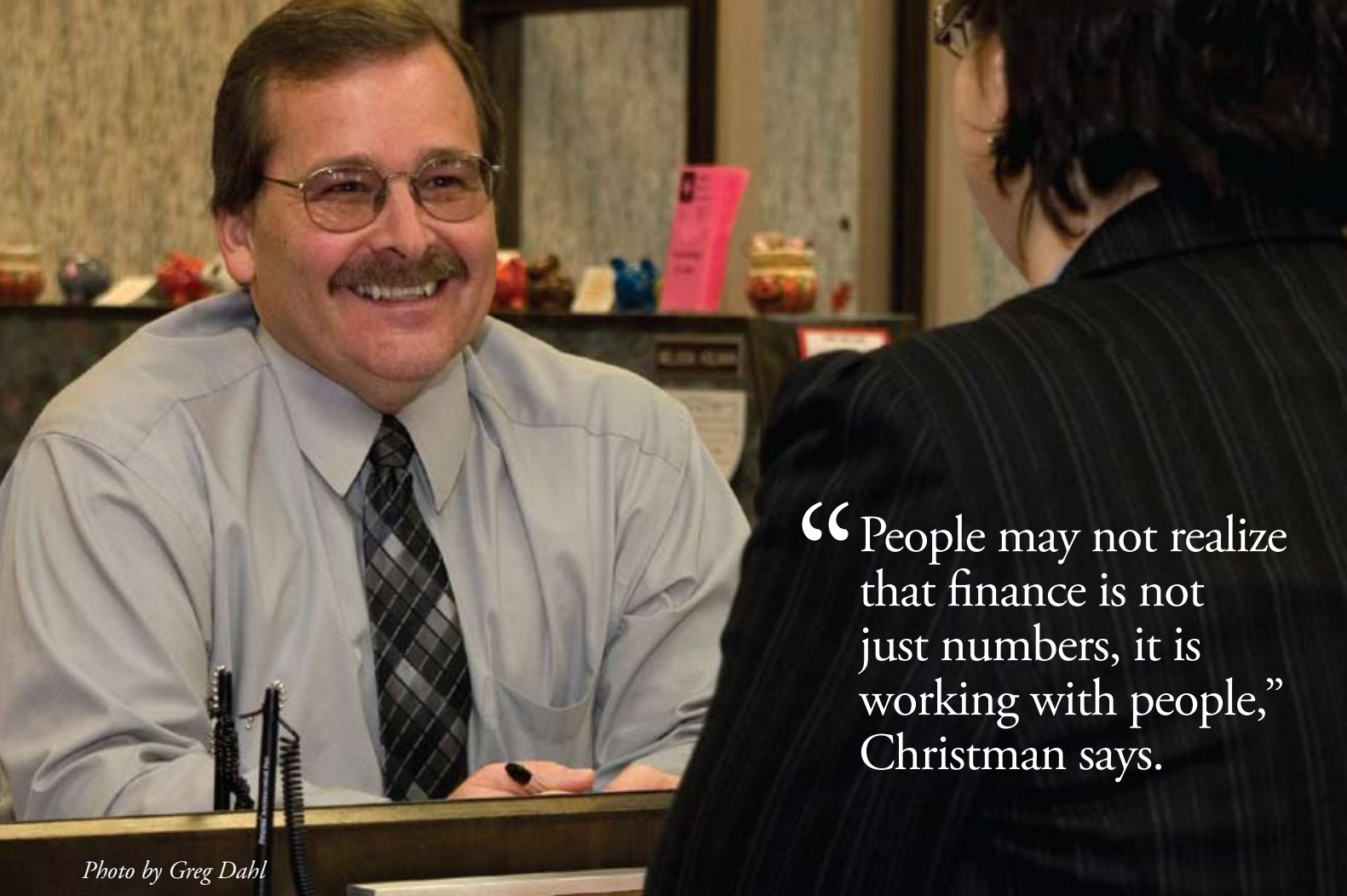
Much like Fryer, Norb Christman found himself at a crossroad. After running his own hardware store in Ladysmith, Wis., for 20 years, the store needed a substantial financial investment or Christman would have to close. That and a grueling 80-hour workweek pushed the married father and grandfather to close the store.

Looking at the closing of the hardware store not as a failure, but as the end of a successful 20-year career, he was now able to pursue the

next chapter in his life.

Taking stock of his strengths and interests, Christman realized that even in the small amount of spare time he'd had in the last years, he still found time to indulge in a passion for investment and finance, which included

WITC's flexible learning options make pursuing a degree in Accounting or Finance more convenient. Accounting is now offered entirely online.



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following economic trends and the stock market.

Christman soon enrolled at Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College’s Rice Lake campus and set his sights on a Finance Associate Degree. With a broad focus on accounting, banking, insurance, real estate and the stock market, he was confident that his choice would provide a variety of career options after graduation.

While at WITC, he was an outstanding student, relates Hugh Harris, Finance, Accounting, and Marketing instructor. Christman served as an officer for the Business Professionals of America and earned first place at the Wisconsin state competition in Banking and Finance, Financial Math and Analysis, and first place at the national competition as a member of the Financial Analyst team.

“Norb is a consummate professional, responsible and capable of completing independent work,” says Harris. “He takes a leadership role among his peers and is very motivated to succeed. In addition, he possesses strong mathematical, oral and written communication skills. Norb exemplifies what WITC is all about.”

He completed his degree with a perfect 4.0 grade point average, which placed him with high honors upon graduation.

Christman reflects fondly on his days at WITC as “fantastic” and notes that many fun times were mixed with a lot of hard work. Christman also continues to work with WITC, serving as a member of its advisory committee and taking continuing education classes to stay current with his career in finance.

Immediately after graduation, he was offered a job with an investment firm where he worked for a year. He then accepted a position as a loan officer at Pioneer Bank in Ladysmith, where he has been for five years.

“People may not realize that finance is not just numbers, it is working with people,” Christman says.

He enjoys developing relationships with the commercial, agricultural, municipal, non-profit and individual customers of the bank. Christman is also able to incorporate his old passion of researching the financial “big picture” and relating it to his customers on the local level.

“When all the pieces of the loan puzzle come together, there’s no better feeling,” he says. ■