

Steak dinner bet whets this family's appetite for learning



Janna Rasmussen is one mom who bet on higher education and won – for herself and her children.

Janna Rasmussen confesses she didn't go back to college to launch a new career or even to fulfill a desire to earn her degree. The Fort Atkinson mom returned to college at age 47 because of a steak dinner bet with her son Patrick.

When Patrick graduated from high school, Janna was working as a locomotive engineer with Union Pacific Railroad. Patrick announced that he didn't need to go to college because his parents didn't, and they turned out just fine. That was enough for Janna. She returned to school as a role model for her four children. And she made a bet with her son: The first to drop out owed the other a steak dinner.

Janna's job required her to travel for days at a time. She practically lived in hotels and was on call 24/7. Attending a traditional college campus was out of the question. Since she had always enjoyed science and ecology, she enrolled in the online [Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Management](#) [1] program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. She turned her hotel room into a study hall, reading, doing her assignments, and participating in class discussions – all online.

The degree completion program she chose is just one example of how UW-Extension is creating opportunities for Wisconsin workers to reach their educational goals while balancing work and family responsibilities. The online Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Management combines the strengths of four University of Wisconsin campuses – UW-Parkside, UW-River Falls, UW-Stout and UW-Superior – to craft a program that equips workers with the management skills needed to lead sustainable business initiatives. Demand has been so strong that, in addition to launching two online certificates in sustainability, UW-Extension has an online master's degree in the works. Both programs develop the competencies required for graduates to help businesses meet the triple bottom line requirements of “people, profit and plant,” resulting in viable businesses that support vibrant communities within a healthy environment.

Janna graduated in August 2012 with a B.S. in sustainable management and plans to pursue a master's degree in environmental management and adult education. Her goal is to expand sustainable tourism in Central America. As a volunteer in Costa Rica, she saw firsthand the need to protect the beautiful countryside in the face of an economic boom.

“Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry. It's so important to balance those pressures with preserving the environment,” she says.

And what about that steak dinner bet? Janna's “I-don't-need-college” son graduated from music

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school and is pursuing his master's degree, and her daughter is a third-year nursing student. No one has collected a steak dinner, but the whole family is satisfying their appetite for learning.

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