

A LOVE FOR LEARNING FOUND IN THE LOVE FOR FAMILY

A photography scholarship in hand, Bridget Novak attended a community college in a Chicago suburb near where she grew up.

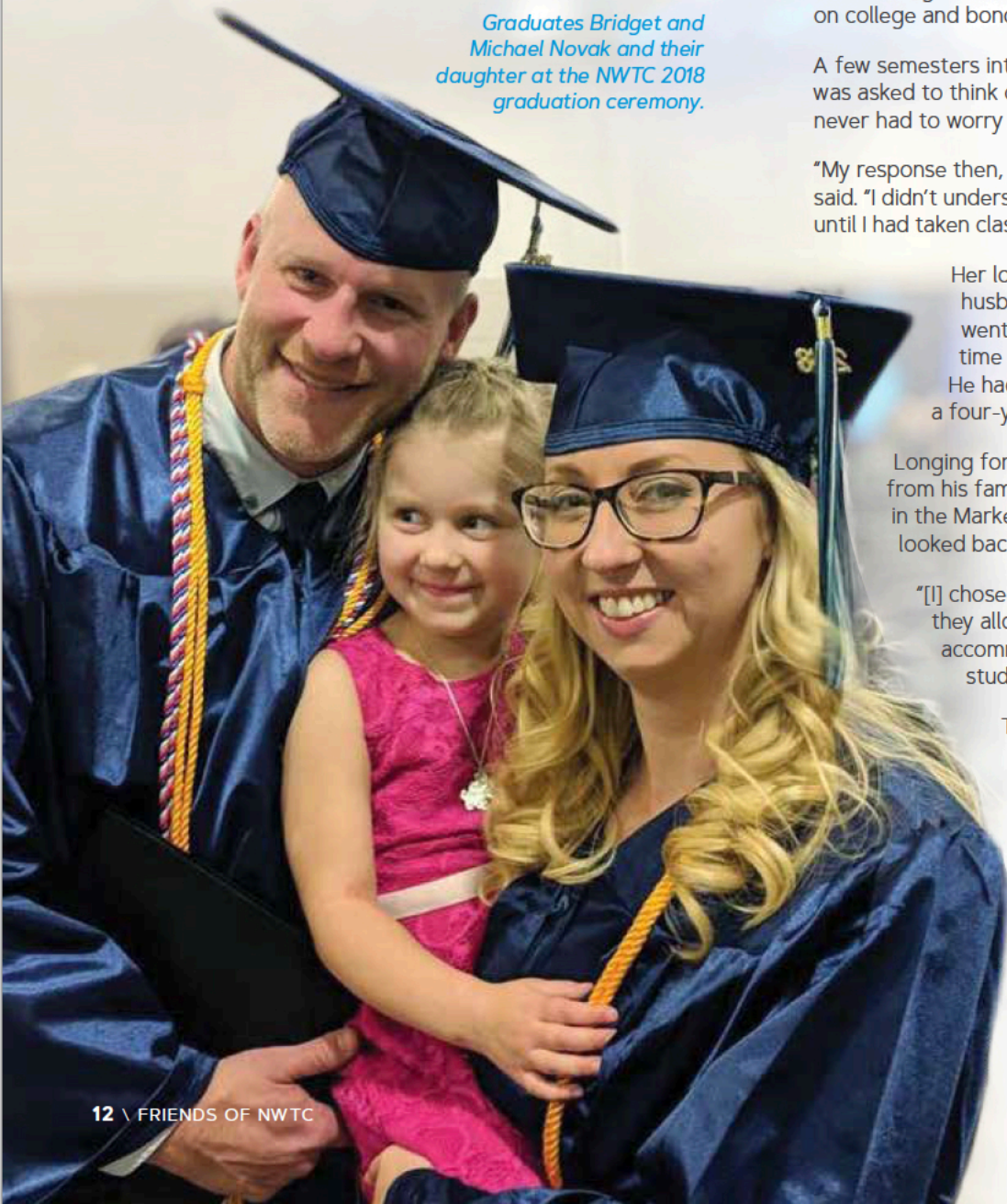
But the timing was not right.

"I wasn't ready to continue my education at that point," Bridget said. "Looking back, I really wish I was, but I just didn't have the right mindset. So, I made mistakes and failed out, in turn losing my scholarship."

So, she began bartending. She moved to Wisconsin at the age of 22 to open a bar with her sister in Kewaunee. In 2007, the pair opened Blue Door Sports Pub, which is still up and running today.

As great as running a successful small business was, Bridget admits she never really stopped thinking about College.

Graduates Bridget and Michael Novak and their daughter at the NWTC 2018 graduation ceremony.



"In my eight years operating the pub with my sister, probably the last five I had talked about going back to school," Bridget said. "It was always on my mind, but it took me so long to commit."

It was after giving birth to her daughter, Sylvia, that Bridget got serious about making a change. She wanted a more regular "9 to 5" schedule that would allow her to spend time with her growing family.

"It was hard not being the one to put my baby to bed every night," Bridget said. "That's when I chose Northeast Wisconsin Technical College."

In the fall of 2015 — while raising her young daughter — Bridget enrolled part-time in the Design and Graphic Technology program at NWTC. She stopped working at the bar and began nannying. The change gave her time to focus on college and bond with her daughter.

A few semesters into her time at NWTC, Bridget said she was asked to think on this question: What would she be if she never had to worry about money?

"My response then, and still now, is a lifelong student," she said. "I didn't understand just how empowering learning was until I had taken classes at NWTC."

Her love for learning had an impression on her husband, Michael. Just two years after Bridget went back to school, Michael decided it was time he too completed his college education. He had previously taken classes at NWTC and at a four-year institution, but did not earn a degree.

Longing for a career that would not entail being away from his family for long periods of time, he re-enrolled in the Marketing program at NWTC and has never looked back.

"[I] chose NWTC for the convenience and flexibility they allow for working parents, and the many accommodations they fulfill for returning adult students," Michael said.

The duo attended NWTC together for about a year.

Bridget is candid about the ongoing challenges her family faces. Working and raising a toddler is tough enough. Both parents going back to school at the same time adds another obstacle. But, she said, "if you want something, you can always make it work."

Make it work they did. Bridget's passion for design led her to



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- BRIDGET NOVAK
Design and Graphic Technology graduate

become a design and graphic technology intern at NWTC. She worked in the College's print lab, designing marketing materials for the 2018 fall Digital Arts Student Showcase in the College of Business.

"At the showcase, I met my current boss, who emailed me the next morning asking if I'd like to come in for an interview," Bridget said. "I had a job lined up before I even graduated."

When graduation day came in 2018, the Novaks both felt extremely proud and accomplished not only for themselves as individuals, but for the life they were building together as a family.

"I knew going back to school meant statistically my daughter was more likely to get a degree," Bridget said. "And that night, I thought about how much I wanted her to love learning like I do."

She added that being able to tackle college with her husband at the same place made the process that much more special.

Bridget works at Creative Sign Company. She said she loves seeing her designs come to life in real-world spaces. Her future goals include earning a bachelor's degree. Michael now works in sales at Lamar Advertising in De Pere. 📌



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