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Family History

Across the generations, family legacies have grown into an Illinois Wesleyan tradition.

Story by **KRISTIN FIELDS '12**



From left, are brothers Garrett '10, John '03 and Craig '14 Rapp.

This fall, Illinois Wesleyan welcomed 587 first-year students to campus. Of those students, 32 have siblings, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and generations farther back who call Wesleyan their alma mater. Often referred to as legacy students, this year's class is the largest legacy class in the University's history.

Craig Rapp '14 describes attending the University as "a family extravaganza." With his two older brothers — John '03 and Garrett '10 — as well as his father Randall '73, he had spent a fair amount of time visiting the campus prior to becoming a student. Choosing IWU was an easy decision and a gut instinct, he says.

"My dad pushed me to look at other schools to make sure this was the right fit for me," says Rapp. "He was delighted that I was looking at IWU, but he was also very firm that he would be fine with whatever school I chose."

Wanting a small university with a good accounting program, Craig was drawn to Illinois Wesleyan, but there was something else about the University that caught his attention. "Some of my dad's best friends are from IWU. For me, it formed the connection between Wesleyan and lifetime friendships," he says.

Garrett Rapp noted that Wesleyan makes the bonds of his family stronger. "We have had the entire family on Illinois Wesleyan's campus more than once," he says. "In this way, IWU has not only been a home for my brothers or myself, but literally the whole family."

Samantha Olson '14 is more than aware of her family legacy. On the side of father J.D. Olson '84, she is the fifth generation to attend Wesleyan. Her mother Carla (Livingston) Olson '83's side of the family extends as far back as 1902, when Samantha's great-great-grandmother Mattie Elizabeth Wilcox Stoddard graduated from the University. Over the years, Illinois Wesleyan and the idea of college became synonymous to her.

"My parents did not pressure me to attend Illinois Wesleyan," says Samantha, who is a double major in biology and art. "However, my grandmother couldn't help talking about how wonderful her time was at IWU. When we would attend Homecoming or other events, my grandpa would be so excited to show us around."

"Our main concern was making sure she selected a school that lined up with her needs, aspirations and ambitions," says Carla Olson. "We would like to think she would have found IWU on this basis alone, but given that her parents, grandparents and several other extended family members have attended the University with good success, it would have been impossible for her not to consider IWU."



First-year student Samantha Olson's great-great-grandmother (above) was a 1902 Wesleyan graduate.



Fall 2010 Homecoming brought together the Olson family (above, from left) J.D. '84, Jane (Burt) Livingston '51, Samantha '14 and Carla (Livingston) Olson '83.

practices at the Shirk Center."

When Katy Seibring '14 began looking at colleges her junior year of high school, she knew she wanted to attend a school like Illinois Wesleyan. "She liked the University," says her father Scott Seibring '85, who is director of financial aid at IWU. But Katy was also concerned "that the combination of her mother and father being graduates, the University's locale being near her hometown of Towanda and having her father work at the school may have been too much."

However, after visiting 11 schools in five different states, she felt that Illinois Wesleyan was the best fit for her. "I knew I felt more comfortable here," she says. "Growing up, I took piano lessons at Presser Hall and had basketball

Todd Szerlong '14, whose father Tim Szerlong graduated from IWU in 1974, is also glad he chose Illinois Wesleyan. "I love it here. It's a great place to go to school," he says.

Like his dad, Todd is pledging to one of IWU's social fraternities. Growing up, he heard a lot of stories about fellowship and brotherhood from his father and hopes to have a similar experience, promising "there will be more stories to come."