

**AURORA**

**Getting people to stay and  
do good things: Adam Wool**

**'88**

By Theresa Bakker



*Above: Adam Wool served four terms in the Alaska State Legislature representing District 5. Photos courtesy of Adam Wool.*

**In the summer of 1982, Adam Wool arrived in Fairbanks. He had been attending Boston University as a pre-med student in the same city where he'd grown up.**

"My dad was a doctor," Wool said. "He died before I was born, but he was a psychiatrist, and I wanted to follow his lead. I like solving problems, fixing things and knowing how things work. Being a doctor would have fit right in."

Then he decided to visit his brother in Alaska. Wool got a weekend job at the hospital in the radiology department developing X-rays. During his breaks, he hung out in the doctor's lounge, chatting with them as they came in to do emergency surgeries. It turned out the profession wasn't what he had thought it would be like.

"In hindsight, it was a small slice of the profession, but I also saw a lot of returning customers who were chronically sick. That soured me," he said.

Wool decided to try physics, a pure science. It was more interesting. And it brought him to UAF. He liked the smaller classes and the opportunity to talk to the professors and ask questions. He could also afford it, paying his tuition out of pocket. "I valued the experience a little more because I was paying for it myself," he said.

By the next fall, he had enrolled full time. He pursued a degree in physics and got a minor in music. He started playing gigs around Fairbanks.

## **Turning to business**

It was a natural progression to begin a business. First came Hot Licks, a premium ice cream shop

that he started with his brother. They had a flavor called Nanook Nosh, an homage to the local university.



## Bar owner seeks balance in business, life

AS FISCHER

at Sunday night in the  
and Adam Wool sitting  
very familiar set of

rose to rafters. Feed-  
ed softly from the

at Curtis Cunningham  
some idle strings while  
on "Rif" Hanson stood  
cool in shades and a

about some Bo Diddley,"  
request from the audi-  
ence. It was  
the last song  
of the night.

The blues  
band briefly  
conferred,  
considered  
"Hand Jive"  
but settled in-

B.B. King's version of  
a

who owns the club,  
not to alienate his clien-  
telle. He promised to work a Bo  
break into the middle.

ingham cast him a disap-  
plook. Diddley in the  
King? "I can't wait to  
be said with a laugh.

ried subtly. Wool, on  
p-toed from the flowing  
a" into "Hand Jive's"  
ed beat. After a few mi-  
Rafson caught on,

his bass into line. Cur-  
cracked a grin and  
right in Seven stacato  
ater, the trio returned—  
to "California."  
—a lot of fun," said saxo-  
Hunter Judkins, who  
y that night but is a  
of Wool's other groups,  
icks Jazz Band.

me of the overall sound



FINDING BALANCE—Adam Wool, entrepreneur and musician, is the owner of the Marlin on College Road.

Top: Adam Wool, left, and his brother Geoff are pictured at Hot Licks, the Fairbanks ice cream business they started in the 1980s.

Bottom: The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner profiled Wool in the March 25, 1996, edition. Wool minored in music at UAF and

*performed regularly in Fairbanks before opening live music venues like the Marlin and the Blue Loon.*

“I was interested in being part of the community,” Wool said. “I wanted to make it better by providing things that I would like to have access to, like live music. Even at Hot Licks we had a jazz night.”

Wool eventually sold his share of the business to his brother, taking some time off to return to Boston and enroll in classes at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Before leaving, he loaned a friend some of the funds from the Hot Licks sale so that he could open a music venue. When the loan wasn't repaid in time, Wool returned to Fairbanks and leased the site of the former Blue Marlin.

“I had always wanted a music venue,” he said. “When the Marlin was a success, pulling business away from the Crazy Loon, the owner declared bankruptcy. I bought the business and saved my initial investment.”

He wanted to name the club something similar while identifying that it was under new ownership. So, he took the “Blue” from the Blue Marlin and merged it with the Crazy Loon Saloon to create the Blue Loon.

Wool ran both businesses for a while, until he sold the Marlin to focus on incorporating movies, food and big outdoor concerts into his business model. The Blue Loon had a run of 21 years featuring national music acts such as Snoop Dogg, Imagine Dragons and Brandy Carlisle, along with hosting cultural events and comedians like Jerry Seinfeld.



*Wool featured many top artists during the 21 years he owned the Blue Loon, including Snoop Dogg (bottom left) and Jerry Seinfeld*

*(bottom right).*

## **Off to Juneau**

Wool still owned the Loon when he was persuaded to run for the Alaska House of Representatives, using his fame to his advantage to win the election in 2014 even though he entered with only a few weeks left to campaign.

Wool's first term in the legislature was marked by a drastic reduction in state revenue, as the world price of oil, Alaska's primary revenue generator, crashed. The resulting fiscal crisis created an atmosphere of austerity for the state government.



*Wool and his children pose during the first days of his first term in the Alaska State Legislature.*

“As a business owner before I was in politics, I was concerned about the economy,” he said. “I had friends who were builders and they were having a hard time. I was concerned about how that would affect my business.”

Wool started to build a reputation as a forceful advocate for university funding on the finance subcommittee. He served as a member his first two terms and helped fight off most of the severe cuts that many of his colleagues advocated. In January 2019, Wool was appointed to the full House Finance Committee for the 31st Legislature.



Just in time, according to **Tom Brice '90**, vice president of the UAF Alumni Association. State revenues were not in a strong position when a new administration elected on a platform of larger dividend checks tried to meet that goal at the expense of funding state services.

The university became a primary target as the administration hired outside budget analysts to attack state expenditures.

“They presented a scenario that the university budget was high-dollar and low-impact government spending,” Brice said. “Through Rep. Wool’s endeavors in House Finance, the university was able to defend itself and rebut the narrative being presented.”

By the end of Wool’s fourth term, the House of Representatives was talking about how the University of Alaska would play an integral part in laying groundwork for Alaska’s future economy.

## **Getting people to stay**

Wool said it made sense for him to advocate for the university. “Fairbanks is an education hub, with the university leading the way. I came to

Fairbanks and, after taking classes, I stayed. If you get people going to school there, they will stay and do good things for the community.”

It is this advocacy that inspired the UAF Alumni Association to present Wool with the 2023 William R. Cashen Service Award, which honors outstanding service to the university and its alumni association.

**Ashley Carrick '14** worked in Wool’s office for several years and has since been elected to fill his seat. She said his commitment to ensuring that the University of Alaska remains a thriving institution is palpable from the moment you meet him.

“It is one of the qualities that drew me to seek employment in his legislative office in Juneau five years ago and has also been a major reason that Adam was able to serve four consecutive terms in the Alaska State House,” she said.

“I have watched him work diligently with his colleagues of all political stripes to achieve the best possible outcomes for our state. I have also worked alongside Adam as he advocated to ensure that the same higher education opportunities in Alaska that helped bring him up here initially would be available to generations of incoming students,” she said.



*Wool sits outside the Akasofu (left) and Elvey buildings on UAF's Troth Yeddha' Campus. Wool sought to maintain university funding during his four terms in the Alaska State Legislature.*

Wool said he is proud of his time in the legislature. Every year, there was some struggle. And every year, he was right there to fight for university funding.

"I want people in Fairbanks to value what they have and make sure it prospers," he said.

*Adam Wool will receive the 2023 William R. Cashen Service Award from the UAF Alumni Association at a ceremony during the [Nanook Rendezvous alumni reunion](#) on July 13, 2023.*



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