

Taft

B U L L E T I N

Conserving the
West

FALL 2016

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▲ A human pyramid during Taft's annual Super Sunday, a field day where new students enjoy fun competition events and camaraderie with the school's returning students. ROBERT FALCETTI

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ON THE COVER

Crazy Woman Creek, oil on canvas, 38 x 50 in.

This beautiful painting is by Jenny Glenn Wuerker '83, who has been painting the Wyoming landscape since 1993, and lives in the shadow of the Bighorn Mountains with her husband and two children. Wuerker generously donated use of this image for our cover because Taft has meant so much to her throughout her life.

In the 1990s, Wuerker began teaching art as well, including at Taft and the Smithsonian Institution and the Connecticut Community College system. Her paintings can be viewed frequently at the The Nicolaysen Art Museum in Casper, Wyoming, The Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, Montana, and Bradford Brinton Museum in Bighorn, Wyoming. Her work is in private collections across the U.S. and has been featured in *Southwest Art Magazine*. For more visit www.CrazyWomanFineArt.com.

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Taft BULLETIN

FALL 2016
Volume 87, Number 1

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SEND ALUMNI NEWS TO
Taft Bulletin | Alumni Office
The Taft School
110 Woodbury Road, Watertown, CT 06795-2100
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DEADLINES FOR ALUMNI NOTES
Winter–November 15 | Spring–February 15 | Summer–May 15 | Fall–August 30

SEND ADDRESS CORRECTIONS TO
Cathy Mancini | Alumni Records
The Taft School
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860-945-7777 | WWW.TAFTALUMNI.COM

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We may edit your letters for length, clarity, and content, but please write.
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The *Taft Bulletin* (ISSN 0148-0855) is published quarterly, in February, May, August, and November,
by The Taft School, 110 Woodbury Road, Watertown, CT 06795-2100,
and is distributed free of charge to alumni, parents, grandparents, and friends of the school.
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On Main Hall

A WORD FROM HEADMASTER WILLY MACMULLEN '78

ON NICENESS

My office is on the Main Hall, and if you look at my door, you see a red and white bumper sticker that reads, “Be Nice.” My door is open a lot, and that means anyone walking the hall sees it, right under the framed photograph of last year’s graduating class.

Being a campus where niceness is a central value may sound odd at a place known for being terrifically challenging and demanding, but I’ve always asked rhetorically, “Why can’t you be a really demanding and competitive school where excellent achievement, high standards, and rigorous debate are prized, and also be considerate, warm, supportive, respectful—nice?”

If you say that being nice is something we want our students to be, as with other core values—for instance, the desire to serve others, or an insistence on academic honor—there should be *formal and explicit ways* you seek to teach niceness. That happens at Taft, and the bumper sticker is just one place.

A few years ago, I rewrote the introduction to the Student Handbook, saying that if you did three things at Taft, you would do well, and we would have a healthy community: “Be Nice. Work Hard. Follow the Rules.” I fleshed out my thinking in a paragraph on each of those, but it was hardly necessary. What’s hard to understand with the admonition, “Be Nice”?

Or take, for example, the opening-of-school training we do for our dormitory monitors, where considerable discussion focuses on what it means to be a happy and healthy campus. They take part in case studies, like the one where the monitors come into a room and hear the faculty actors in a conversation about another student that is, well, not very nice. The exercise requires them to ask

“So we consciously try to create a nice culture, a place where an observer would say, “There’s a lot of nice kids on the campus.”



“I reject the idea that seeking to be nice somehow means we have given up something, that you somehow don’t value achievement or excellence or competition or drive.”

tough questions: What role do you have as a student leader here? In what way will your response shape culture?

Consider the audience participation exercise Assistant Headmaster Jeremy LaCasse led during one Assembly in Bingham: Any student or teacher could offer (a) a story that would better our community, (b) a problem with a solution, or (c) an appreciation. For 10 minutes students stood up and shared stories, mostly about people being nice: an advisor who had been helpful when the student fell ill; the monitors who had greeted a new lower mid; the girl who wanted to thank her older sister. True, it may sound a little artificial, but when the exercise is happening in the most important space in campus, there’s a really good message.

Witness the monthly “Recognize the Rhino” club announcements. This club has a simple mission: to recognize acts of niceness on campus. There’s a suggestion box at the Dean’s Office. Anyone can propose a recipient, so the Bingham announcements are eagerly anticipated and fun: “Today we recognize two Rhinos: John, who turned in a \$20 bill he found on the floor of the serv-ery when he could easily have kept it; and Jill, who cleaned up a messy table at lunch so the dining room staff wouldn’t have to.”

Think of our teaching in our I-Block class, a student-and-faculty-taught middler course on val-ues and decision-making, where considerable focus is on respectful relationships, the value and dangers of social media, and the damage of bullying. These are just a few of the ways niceness is part of the school program.

Of course, the importance of being nice is found in more pervasive and *informal, unscripted* ways. There’s a magic to the way there’s eye contact in the hallways, a stranger is asked, “Can I help you find something?” and students seem to say Hi even when they don’t know a name. There’s something really nice about the HDT monitor who made crepes in the common room for the younger boys, or the senior girls who stayed up late talking with a lower mid who was homesick. There’s something nice about older players walking down to campus with younger kids to the din-ing hall, or the note of welcome written on the chalkboard on a dorm room.

So we consciously try to create a nice culture, a place where an observer would say, “There’s a lot of nice kids on the campus.” And I reject the idea that seeking to be nice somehow means we have given up something, that you somehow don’t value achievement or excellence or competition or drive. Or that you shy away from disagreement and discomfort. Spend a day on campus and you will be amazed at student accomplishment, competitiveness, debate, and rigor. It’s a very demand-ing environment. Again, can’t you be both?

We are not a perfect place. This is a school with incredible diversity of personality, background, and opinion. In and out of the classroom, we wrestle with ideas and issues that are complex, and disagreements can be profound. And teenagers can sometimes be petty and even cruel. So teachers have to teach when students say and do things that aren’t nice. But it may be that these moments are the most potent places for learning. I believe this because I once watched Ferdie Wandelt ’66, one of the great figures in our school’s history, talk to an advisee who had been not very nice. He had a favorite phrase, and he used it here: “Remember,” he said, “it’s nice to be important, but it’s more important to be nice.” It’s a bit long for a bumper sticker, but I can still hear him saying it.

Willy MacMullen ’78

LETTERS

Crew Coach Remembers Coach Small

Ed. note: We received this letter and reminiscence of Coach John Small related to the summer class notes sent in by former Olympic rower Andy Larkin ’64.

I coach women’s crew for the Great Bay Rowing Club in Durham, New Hampshire, and in May, I coaxed Andy Larkin ’64 into coming to spend time with me in the coaches’ launch. Andy had a great time out on the Oyster River watching the crews train.

Andy has created a video called the *10-Stroke Challenge* in which he demonstrates how to operate a Hula-Hoop and then sits on a physioball and does 10 sculling strokes. In addition to him demonstrating this challenge to the crews, both men and women, he spoke to them of his experiences rowing for Harvard Crew Coach Harry Parker and then in the eventful and difficult 1968 Olympic Games in which Harvard rowed in the final of the eights’ competition.

You would not believe the spellbound looks of our rowers as they watched Andy balance without support on this giant rubber ball, pulling off 10 sculling strokes without landing on the tarmac tail first! Equally they were awed by his stories of the 1968 Games. (Remember, these are teenage athletes, and 1968 might as well be 1066.) But it all sank in, and we had created a great team-building exercise.

The common thread over the two days while Andy was with us was simple: coaches who had made a difference in our lives. While 10 years apart at Taft, we both ran for John Small, and we both rowed in college and still row today. We discussed the different styles of the coaches: Parker, quiet and legendary; Small, more talkative and legendary; and my crew coach, only a year older than our team, but quiet and driven to make us better, to win, which we did. All of them demanding and unrelenting in their efforts to pull every last bit of physical and mental strength out of us to achieve at the highest levels that we possibly could.



Thus, when I was given this photograph by parents at the end of season banquet for the GBRC junior crew program, which they had titled “Coach,” the image of John Small came rushing into my mind. I had often wondered what he thought in prac-tices and how he felt during meets, as we got ready to compete and run for him.

Well, I don’t have to wonder any-more! I bet he used to think, Am I getting through to these jokers? During races he must have been nerve-wracked, thus the funky little cigars he smoked during race day. Having the good fortune to experi-ence some of those same thoughts and nerves now, I count myself extremely lucky to have been at Taft and run for Coach Small, and for that experience leading me to have Andy Larkin ’64 as a friend.

So, to my mind, the connective tissue of The Taft School, including our coaches, reaches across class years in really diverse and interesting ways. “Not so?” as John Small would have said.

—Charlie Wemyss, Jr. ’74



► Congratulations to Bill Hudders ’82, who, along with several others, correctly guessed where the music groups’ murals were located when they were made. Bill wrote, “I remember painting those murals for the Taft radio station, which was located in the basement of CPT. I believe I may have painted those with Fran Holland ’82 and Chris Kenney ’82. We wanted to cover the entire room, but ran out of gas after doing three. I loved DJ-ing for that radio and exposing everyone to my twisted taste in music.”

Taft TRIVIA ?

To go along with our western theme in two features for this issue, where is this bronze sculpture located at Taft? And for “bonus points,” does anyone know the sculptor’s name or the family who donated it?

Send your guess to the editor (lindabeyus@taftschoo.org). The win-ner, whose name will be randomly chosen, will win a surprise Taft gift.



Alumni **SPOTLIGHT**



▲ Howe with another of his sculptures.

◀ The spectacular kinetic sculpture cauldron designed by Anthony Howe '73 for the Rio Olympics during the opening ceremony.
GEORGEANA GODINHO

Burning Brightly in Rio

THIS CAULDRON BURNS THE brightest—if you can take the heat.

Be forewarned, it's melted the best-laid plans, from a hydraulic fail in Vancouver to a singed dove in Seoul.

But this inferno has forged its share of transcendent showstoppers: Muhammad Ali in Atlanta, an archer in Barcelona, and a Peter Pan-like high-wire act in Beijing.

And now Rio, where sculptor Anthony Howe '73 ensured his place in Olympics lore this summer with his scintillating twist on the focal point of the Games, the cauldron. The 61-year-old designed the kinetic sculpture that for 17 days in August provided a resplendent backdrop for the flame with its kaleidoscope effect.

No pressure—only 26.5 million viewers tuned in to the opening ceremony on NBC. "I was sobbing when they lit it," Howe says. "I had about three cameras in my face."

The cauldron lighting culminated a yearlong project, from visualizing a dozen design concepts to shipping the 6,000-pound, 40-foot-diameter aluminum, fiberglass, and chrome finished sculpture from a prefabrication facility in Montreal to Rio. Howe was recruited for the once-in-a-lifetime assignment by Marco Balich, the ceremony's executive producer. He collaborated on the design with the show's creative director, Fernando Meirelles.

"Fernando said he wanted to do something that resembled the sun," says Howe, who lives on Orcas Island, Washington, in the San Juan Islands. "The emphasis on everything was to get it as shiny as possible to better reflect the light of the flame."

In contrast to previous Olympic Games and in a nod to the environment, global warming-minded organizers eschewed a massive flame inside Maracanã Stadium.

The thrust of the whole thing was to have a very small flame," Howe says. "They wanted to use as little gas as possible."

A team of artisans started assembling the sculpture under Howe's direction in the spring. It was dismantled and put into crates for the 5,000-mile journey to Rio, where Howe's pièce de résistance was put back together in July.

"Everything had to happen pretty fast," says Howe, who flew with his family to Brazil in early August to watch a rehearsal of the lighting.

Life has indeed imitated art for Howe—it's kinetic. He started out as a painter, drawing inspiration from the late Mark Potter '48 in the art studio at Taft. It wasn't until Howe moved to Chelsea in New York City that he bought a welder and started making things with steel. He stretched two elevator cables between buildings and started hanging his sculptures.

Now, they grace prime real estate, from the Dolomites in Italy and beach-front promenade in Dubai, to palaces and the store window of Barneys in New York. Many of them have names. Rio was a notable exception.

"The inspiration is always the piece itself," says Howe, who is married with a son in college. "There is no other inspiration."

Appearances can be deceiving, however.

"It's not powered by heat," Howe says. "The *New York Times* printed that it was wind-powered. That was pretty funny. It did have motors.

"You don't want to leave that to chance," Howe says. "Is the wind blowing enough to power it?" ■

—Neil Vigdor '95

A Renaissance Man



Derek Brereton '63 hand built the handsome birch bark canoe, *Muskrat*, using skills taught to him by a Chippewa craftsman.

DEREK BRERETON '63 is a student of humans. That's the easy way to describe his lifelong interest in what forms humanness. Now retired, the former adjunct professor of anthropology and evolutionary psychology at Adrian College in Michigan holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in anthropology (ethnology), and has been fascinated by three areas that make us humans: the head, the heart, and the hands.

It all started the summer he was 17,

when he traveled to Spain to live with a Spanish family and study Spanish. Being able to experience another culture helped spark an interest in just what sets humans apart from other species: the ability to be aware that we are having experiences, and to understand these experiences, is what makes humans a truly different creature.

Brereton's travels included a stint in the Peace Corps in Thailand, teaching English at a university. In his spare time he also studied Thai dramatic

arts, including shadow puppetry and live theater. "I was entranced," he says. "Thai dramatic forms were so different from anything I'd ever seen. It's simply beguiling on the surface." He also speaks fluent Thai.

That fascination with another culture propelled him into an academic career focused on anthropology. His contributions to the world of anthropology—his "head" work—include a fascinating theory on the evolutionary benefit of dreaming: that we dream to restore cerebral plasticity that helps us when we are awake to adapt quickly to unusual events.

In other words, the weird associations that happen in dreams (that seem to make no sense when we're awake) are our brain's way of opening neural pathways that can't be developed when we're awake, which can help when we're confronted by unusual circumstances when we are not asleep. One of his life's lasting accomplishments was developing an analysis of the evolutionary nature of experience.

His "heart" work includes performing art songs from the 19th century, accompanied by his wife, Pam, on the piano. He's also learning to play flamenco guitar.

And his "hand" work is truly

impressive: he has built, by hand, a dugout canoe, a birch bark canoe, and a pirogue, a small vessel of the style French fur traders used to navigate the waterways of what was once the frontier in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. To build his birch bark canoe, Brereton spent a week in northern Michigan with a Chippewa canoe craftsman who has won awards for his work.

He's hand carved more than 40 canoe paddles. Then there's the matter of a little log cabin he built on land he and his wife own in southeastern Michigan. He and his wife made the cabin from dead ash trees Brereton felled with a chain saw.

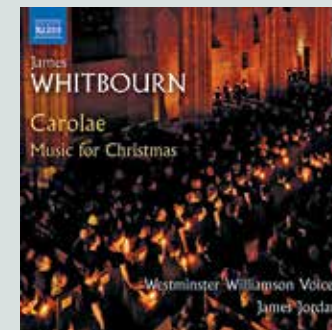
The log cabin is 199 square feet (at 200 square feet, it would have required a building inspection), and is bare bones, Brereton says.

"It's got no foundation, no plumbing, no electricity," he says. "We've got a wood stove we can cook on, a cherry table I made from a tree that fell naturally, and a bed platform. It's got only what we need."

As part of his anthropological work, Brereton also studied campsteads, often primitive wooden dwellings in forests and by lakes that people continue to live in for the experience of nature. His three



Brereton in the dugout canoe that he hand carved and named the *Bog Bumper*, a nickname for the American bittern, a wading bird.



CAROLAE: MUSIC FOR CHRISTMAS Westminster Williamson Voices Naxos Records Featuring Brian Sengdala '10

The newly released CD *Carolae* is comprised of music from two of the great Christmas traditions in the world: the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge, England, and its American progeny, An Evening of Lessons and Carols from Westminster Choir College, at the Princeton University Chapel. Celebrated in two of

the world's largest collegiate chapels, the magnificence of space, history, and tradition is matched with the music of noted composers James Whitbourn (University of Oxford) and Steve Pilkington (Westminster Choir College). Sung by the incomparable Williamson Voices of Westminster Choir College, James Jordan, conductor, the aural colors range from the vastly majestic to the supremely intimate.

years of work and book, *Campsteading: Person, Place, and Experience at Squam Lake, New Hampshire*, led to the entire Squam watershed being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This fall, he's finishing work on another "heart" passion, one that harkens back to his teenage experience in Spain. His third book is called *Seven Keys to Spanish Culture*. He's putting the finishing touches on the Spanish translation in time for the Madrid Book Fair next June, where, with its Spanish publisher, Sintesis, he and his wife will help promote it. The book fills a gap in the travel publishing world, Brereton says. It is not a quick

overview of tourist must-sees, as most travel books are, and it's not a 400-page dissertation on Spanish culture. Rather, it examines in depth seven facets of Spanish culture that people should understand if they want to truly appreciate what they'll see in Spain: Moorish architecture, romanticism, flamenco, the Quixote, religious brotherhoods, noble brotherhoods, and the bullfight. "The essays are not introductions; neither are they



▲ Brereton and his wife, Pam, set the first wall log on the sill log to build their log cabin in southeast Michigan.

general surveys," he notes on his website, www.derekbrereton.com. "Instead, they uncover the key to understanding the significance of the institution in question, and use it to carry the reader straight to the heart of the matter."

Much as Brereton has done in his own life. ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84

Rocket Woman

WHEN JANE KINNEY '06 was five she knew she wanted to be involved in aerospace. “I loved the chance to stay up late and watch TV with my parents when I was little, and it was often an episode of *Star Trek*. I always loved looking at stars, and knew I wanted to go into space,” she says.

Kinney spent nearly three years at NASA, where she worked as a flight controller for the International Space Station (ISS) at Johnson Space Center in Houston. She trained astronauts on the ground how to live and work in space, and actually sat in Mission Control to monitor audio, video, and data transferred to and from the space station. “Anytime there are satellite images of storm systems on the news,” says Kinney, “those come from the console where I worked. My colleagues and I captured those images from the external cameras on the ISS.”

She enjoyed living in Houston—and seeing astronauts all the time. The biggest misconception people have about NASA, she says, is that it does not still



exist. “When the shuttle program was cancelled a lot of people thought NASA was too, but there have been Americans in space consistently for almost two decades. There are always six to nine people at the International Space Station, usually two Americans, but always at least one.” With the potential of space tourism being brought to a wider economic audience, this number is likely to skyrocket.

It was a dream to work at NASA, she says, but there definitely was a fair amount of bureaucracy. She wanted to break into

the commercial sector, where she felt she could be at the forefront of the latest technology and shape the industry overall.

Last year, Kinney, who earned a B.S. in aeronautical and astronautical engineering at Purdue University, joined the Commercial Spaceflight Federation (CSF) as its new assistant director, where she supports CSF’s engagement with government entities, industry experts, and entrepreneurs.

CSF is a trade association that represents more than 70 businesses and

organizations, including Elon Musk’s SpaceX, Jeff Bezos’s Blue Origin, and Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic—as well as an array of other companies such as spaceports, satellite developers, or software producers that map space debris (to determine when things could potentially collide in space). Most of these companies are in the investment stage, Kinney says, “so we’re trying to get in on the front end



of a new industry. We’re trying to help set standards for the industry to make it as safe as possible, but also to ensure things aren’t stifled before the industry takes off.”

Kinney focuses on things like export control—how to launch crafts outside the U.S. without transferring certain technical information for security reasons. She also works with universities to make sure research is applicable to what is happening now in the industry. CSF also organizes different events to provide a discussion forum for the industry. “We facilitate a dialogue between industry experts and U.S. government agencies, such as NASA, the Department of Defense, Congress, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Office of the President, and more, to discuss opportunities in the commercial space industry,” she says.

“We are a very small firm, so we all do a little of everything. Some days I run flight profile simulations of rockets, while on other days I am hosting guests at an

◀ Jane Kinney '06, far right, assistant director of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation, at its 10th anniversary reception, with two colleagues.

event at the Embassy of France,” says Kinney. A recent highlight was former astronaut and second man on the moon Buzz Aldrin personally calling her cell phone a few weeks ago. “We were hosting an event he wanted information on, a monthly breakfast forum with industry experts. He loves to stay involved.”

Moving forward, Kinney still wants to go into space, not as a NASA corps astronaut, but as a space tourist with one of the many exciting companies striving to provide the service. “Pretty soon, access for people who are not millionaires will be much easier. Up until now, you had to pay the Russians tens of millions to go to space. With these new companies we are talking tens of thousands and even less in the future,” she says.

“Later this year, for instance, tourists will be able to go up into space in a craft propelled by a high-altitude helium balloon. The company, World View, will take passengers on a two-hour ride up in an enclosed capsule where they will stay for two more hours, high enough to see the curvature of the earth. There is even a bar inside the capsule!” ■



WHILE MANY MAY CONSIDER parenting their second full-time job, Christopher Persley '91 has taken this idea to the next level. In 2012, Persley put his budding career in education on hold to become a stay-at-home dad to his one-year-old daughter, Camilla, and now chronicles this experience on his blog, *The Brown Gothamite*.

When Camilla was born, Persley was working as an educator in New York City, and he was already planning to change

The Perfect Job: Being Dad

jobs at the end of the school year. That’s when he decided, if he didn’t find the right fit by that summer, he’d focus on raising Camilla. Or, as he puts it, “If I couldn’t find the perfect job, then I would go to the perfect job.”

At the same time, he began blogging about his day-to-day adventures with Camilla “so that she, years from now, could check it out and see what the experience of raising her was like,” he says.

Over time, however, Persley “started to write a few posts about fatherhood that resonated with people. I wrote a piece about my dad,” he remembers, “and how he unwittingly influenced the father I have become. He walked out on us when I was about five, and I didn’t hear back from him until months after Camilla

was born. That was pretty impactful, so I decided to write about it.” That was when he realized that the blog was “the perfect vehicle” to share his thoughts on the vital importance of being an involved father.

Since then, his site has expanded and now, in his self-proclaimed role as “fatherhood advocate,” Persley aims to “talk about fatherhood in a real positive way and encourage people to break the cycle of absent fathers that [he] grew up in.”

He admits that at times it can feel as if no one is reading his work, but then he’ll receive an enthusiastic response to a new post, and he and his readers can “have a real dialogue about fatherhood through this virtual connection.”

In addition to his writing, Persley helps organize the NYC Dads Group,

which, according to his website, “is a diverse community of more than 1,300 fathers in and around the New York City area that gives dads an opportunity to socialize and support each other.” He also works as the father focus lead for the Center for Parental Leave Leadership.

He fondly credits Taft’s motto, Not to be served but to serve, as an inspiration in his outreach to other dads. “I have always felt that that is who I need to be,” he says. “There is always a way for me for to be helpful, and I can do that through this work and get more fathers to join this dads group and find a home and be able to ask questions.

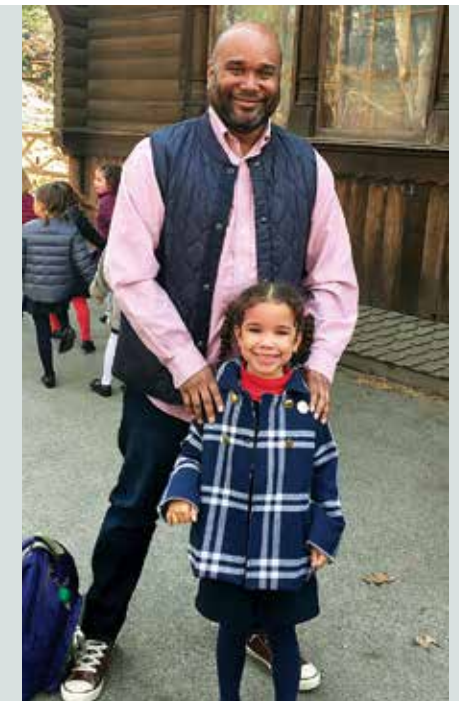
“Taft also afforded me the opportunity to discover who I was as a student and who I was as a person,” Persley says. “It presented

me the first opportunity to have conversations about race and ethnicity. These dialogues gave me a skill set and a level of confidence that I took into my career as an educator and certainly as a father.”

In fact, Persley sees no difference between his training as a teacher and the kind of impact he hopes to have on Camilla. “For me, it’s still the same kind of work. I never stopped being an educator, but now,” he laughs, “I just don’t get paid.”

And while Camilla only started kindergarten this fall, there’s a definite possibility that she’ll follow in her father’s footsteps: “My wife and I are certainly not opposed,” Persley smiles, “to her going to Taft.” ■

—Christopher Browner '12



▲ Christopher Persley '91 with his daughter, Camilla, enjoys a class trip to Central Park in NYC that he was chaperoning.



John Frechette '98, co-owner of stores that feature handmade products of American artisans, in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. KRAFTY PHOTOS

Fusing a Passion into Work

JOHN FRECHETTE '98 never intended to run a flourishing group of stores in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. After majoring in economics and art history at Amherst College, the Massachusetts native started an analyst program at Bank of America in New York City. "Thankfully," he says, "I have two older brothers who worked on Wall Street, and they explained that there are ways to make a living other than working on Wall Street."

That nudge from his siblings gave Frechette the confidence to leave his finance job and sign up with a real estate development firm that was working on a project in Jackson, Wyoming. He ended up working on the project in Wyoming for five years, but in 2008 the company filed for bankruptcy—leaving Frechette in the ski town without a job.

"I didn't want to move back to the city and didn't want to leave Jackson," he says. The circumstances prompted him to revisit a passion for studio art. "I had painted a little bit in high school

and college, and always fooled around with different things like sculpture and drawing," Frechette says. He began exploring glass art through classes at the Art Association of Jackson Hole.

Frechette found his niche in crafting belt buckles out of fused glass. He had already had his work shown in the New York Gift Show and in public art displays when an opportunity arose to open a pop-up retail store in a Jackson coffee shop for a summer.

"That's when I realized, I'm onto something. Retail in Jackson is really fun—I should try to open a store where I could sell my work and other crafted items like mine," he says. "I knew what my aesthetic was, and I wanted to create a cool boutique where everything was handmade in America. I didn't want it to be like 'your grandmother's craft store.'"

MADE opened six years ago with an emphasis on design and products that Frechette describes as "cool and functional, but not your typical craft, flea

market stuff." The shop sells a range of paper goods, decorative items for the home, and jewelry made by designers from across the United States.

As a gateway to Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park, Jackson has a steady stream of tourists passing through—three million every summer, to be exact. It's also home to a passionate group of year-round locals and affluent second-home owners. For a long time, Frechette says, the town shops were focused on novelty T-shirts and rubber tomahawks, so his idea was to open a place that tourists would love but also one that the locals would shop at and appreciate, too.

Now he's up to four locations—MADE, right off the town square, a gift shop in a Teton Village hotel, the masculine-focused Mountain Dandy, and his newest, a 3,000-square-foot home interior showroom that opened in June. There, he's especially excited about some "gorgeous," he says, salad bowls carved by an 83-year-old woodworker based in Deerfield, Massachusetts, Spencer Peterman. "Every time he comes out with a new design, you can't walk by it without falling in love," says Frechette, whose life partner Christian Burch took a sabbatical from the school where he was teaching 10th-grade literature to help launch Mountain Dandy two years ago. Now the two of them run all four shops together.

"I didn't think I had it in me to be a rugged mountain man," Frechette says, and while he still gets teased for being "too preppy," Jackson is "definitely home now."

"For a little town in Wyoming, we have a pretty awesome environment, and because of all the visitors we have a great restaurant and music scene," he says. The New York Ballet recently did a two-week residency there, inspiring Frechette to add, "Not every town has a symphony *and* a ballet!" Not every town has an independently owned retail business featuring products from 160 artisans across the country, either. ■

—Sam Dangremond '05

IN Print

THE FRENCH CHEF IN AMERICA:
JULIA CHILD'S SECOND ACT
Knopf
Alex Prud'homme '80

Julia Child is synonymous with French cooking, but her legacy runs much deeper. Now, her great-nephew and *My Life in France* coauthor Alex Prud'homme vividly recounts the myriad ways in which she profoundly shaped how we eat today.

He shows us Child in the aftermath of the publication of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, suddenly finding herself America's first lady of French food and under pressure to embrace her new mantle. We see her dealing with difficult colleagues and the challenges of fame, ultimately using her newfound celebrity to create what would become a totally new type of food television.

As entertaining and inspiring as *My Life in France*, this latest book reveals Child's second act to have been as groundbreaking as her first.

LAWLESS AND THE FLOWERS OF SIN
Titan Books
William Sutton '89

In William Sutton's second Lawless novel, it is 1863, and, as a reluctant inspector of vice, Campbell Lawless undertakes a reckoning of London's houses of ill repute, a shadowy netherworld of frayed glamour and double standards.

From the erotic booksellers of Holywell Street to the alleys of Haymarket, he discovers backstreet castoffs and casualties of the society bordellos. But the inspector's inquiries draw the attention of powerful

men, who can be merciless in defending their reputations. Lawless must unlock the heart of a clandestine network.

Sutton is from Dunblane, Scotland, and has written for *The Times* and the *Fortean Times* and international magazines, acted in and written plays, and played cricket for Brazil.

SIMPLY BRILLIANT: HOW GREAT ORGANIZATIONS DO ORDINARY THINGS IN EXTRAORDINARY WAYS
Portfolio
William C. Taylor '77

A new era of business and leadership calls for new strategies. Author William C. Taylor argues that today, the way to win big is to relentlessly rethink the everyday. He goes inside 19 organizations that have become unlikely change agents in their fields.

Taylor reveals that these businesses share a set of core principles that help them pioneer unlikely innovation: They strive to be the only ones doing what they're doing instead of competing in crowded fields; they don't let past experience limit what they can imagine; and they share the value they create with those who helped create it.

By embracing these strategies, Taylor argues, business leaders can find opportunities where competitors didn't look. Taylor is a cofounder of *Fast Company*, author of *Practically Radical*, and coauthor of *Mavericks at Work*. He has published essays and interviews with CEOs in the *Harvard Business Review* and blogs regularly for HBR. He has written management columns for *The New York Times* and for *The Guardian*.

PURE HEART: THE FAITH OF A FATHER AND SON IN THE WAR FOR A MORE PERFECT UNION
Kent State University Press
William F. Quigley, Jr. '74

This is the story of a father and son overlooked in history, but praised in their day as American heroes. Their patriotism and principled tact amid partisanship, racial bigotry, and civil war are lessons for our own time.

In 1862, William White Dorr, 24, enlisted as a lieutenant in a new Union regiment, the 121st Pennsylvania Volunteers, in Philadelphia. His father, the Reverend Benjamin Dorr, rector of "The Nation's Church" in Philadelphia, was striving to shepherd his warring congregation of leading Republicans and a faction of anti-emancipation Democrats to prevent political divisions from sundering an Episcopal church tied to the nation's founding.

Gleaned from wartime letters written by William Dorr to his father more than 150 years ago, *Pure Heart* tells the true story of a brave young soldier and of his father, whose spirit of forgiveness kept his fractured parish intact.

Author William Quigley lives in Cape Porpoise, Maine, and teaches history at The Governor's Academy in Massachusetts. More than 20 years ago, while helping colleagues haul boxes from a flooding basement then serving to store the school's archives, he stumbled upon a forgotten collection of Dorr's wartime letters and sketches of soldiers and encampments. ■

If you would like your work added to the Hulbert Taft Library's Alumni Authors Collection and considered for this column, please send a copy to:
Taft Bulletin | The Taft School | 110 Woodbury Road | Watertown, CT 06795-2100

For more information, visit
www.taftschool.org/news

Around the **POND**

BY DEBRA MEYERS

▼ One faculty apartment was included in the renovation project this summer. It was completely reconfigured to maximize the windows in the space. The remaining nine faculty apartments will be updated during Phase III of the HDT project, scheduled for the summer of 2017.



A Historical Renovation

THE HEART OF THE TAFT SCHOOL campus was a hub of activity throughout the summer, as the Horace Dutton Taft (HDT) Residence Hall underwent major renovations. In Phase II of the three-phase project, 69 dorm rooms with a capacity of 140 students were completely rebuilt, seven bath and shower facilities were reconstructed, and three new common rooms and two study dens were added to the space.

“The 100-year-old exterior walls remain the same,” notes Taft Facilities Project Manager Mark Gorian, “but everything in between is brand new.” The HDT renovation started with infrastructure improvements made during the summer of 2015, when the heating system was converted from steam to hot water and heating zones bumped from one to 25 in the four-floor residential space. The fire

◀ A by-product of the HDT renovation was the relocation of the mailroom. The building’s original elevator was replaced with a larger model, which required a reconfiguration of the surrounding spaces. The mailroom and package pickup area are now one mail center housed below Laube Dining Hall. The reconfiguration also allowed for the addition of two new offices on Main Hall.

protection system was also upgraded, insulation was added to the exterior walls, and electrical systems, including light and power, were automated. “The result is that our students and resident faculty are more comfortable,” says Director of Facilities Jim Shepard, “and our overall energy efficiency has increased substantially.” The Phase II work follows similar projects in Mac House and Congdon, and is the culmination of some 15 years of ongoing effort to upgrade and modernize

◀ The three new HDT common rooms all include full kitchens with stoves, refrigerators, and dishwashers, as well as 65-inch flat-screen televisions. Two of the three are located in the center of their respective living areas. Says architect David Thompson, “We worked closely with the Taft administration and faculty to rethink the approach to common rooms, ensuring they be strategically located and fit out to best serve the student population on each floor. The fourth-floor common room is especially unique, taking advantage of a previously concealed attic space to make possible a generous gable ceiling illuminated with a pair of north-facing skylights.”





The old bathroom partitions and fixtures were replaced with highly durable and rust-resistant Corian partitions fit out with aluminum hardware, stone countertops, and modern porcelain and stainless steel fixtures. Accessible toilets and showers are now available on every floor.



▲ “We are quite pleased to have been able to donate all of the HDT furniture to local charities,” noted Facilities Project Manager Mark Gorian. “The new furniture was all locally sourced in New England. Each student gets a hand-crafted solid oak bed, desk with task light, bookcase, and two, two-drawer bureaus that can either be stacked, put under the bed, or used creatively to create other furnishings, allowing greater flexibility with space and utility.”

► Study nooks have been added to each floor for quiet independent or group study or meetings. The nooks will also be home for the mons on duty at night, eliminating the need for desks in the hallway.



► Facilities Project Manager Mark Gorian and Director of Facilities Jim Shepard in HDT.



▼ In addition to the work in HDT, projects were completed this summer in our athletics facilities. The gymnasium floor in Cruikshank was stripped and refinished, with new graphics added to make the space brighter and more modern for our volleyball and basketball teams. New backboards, shot clocks, and scoreboards were also installed on the varsity court. Outside, Weaver Track has been resurfaced. Said Co-Athletic Director Robert Madden, “It will look great when we host the Founders League Championship this spring.”

the campus while both preserving and enhancing the historical integrity of its buildings. Members of Taft’s board, administration, and Facilities Department worked closely with David Thompson Architects and Bushka Builders on both the overall design and final execution of every stage of the renovation process.

“HDT was in especially ‘needy’ condition, not having been significantly renovated in many years,” explains architect David Thompson. “Our charge was to ensure that all newly renovated spaces were equipped to meet applicable life safety and accessibility codes, and were made both comfortable and aesthetically

pleasing in a manner consistent with the original 1920s vintage construction.” “Everything about these renovations reflects a very thoughtful process,” adds Shepard. “This due diligence has led us to a place where we have a good sense of scope for each project. It is value engineering at its finest.” ■



Summer Snapshots

TAFT STUDENTS ARE ADEPT AT FINDING BALANCE, AND THE SUMMER MONTHS ARE NO EXCEPTION. MANY MIX SUMMER JOBS WITH SERVICE OR TRAVEL, AND BEACH TIME WITH ACADEMIC ENDEAVORS. HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SUMMER OF 2016.



Senior Lauren Fadiman (upper left, in black) films some of the work being done in Iguigig, Alaska, to revitalize the region's indigenous language.

Americans, the project not only teaches Yup'ik to community members, but also trains them to teach the language. During her time in Alaska, which was made possible in part by a Hatfield Grant, Lauren produced a video documenting Salmon's work to share with donors, helped prepare classroom materials, and worked in the village greenhouse.

Eco-science in the Bahamas ▼

Senior Mary Collette was awarded a Poole Grant to study tropical mangrove and flats habitats with the Cape Eleuthera Institute (CEI) Flats Research Team in southern Eleuthera, Bahamas, this past summer. The group looked at the plant and animal growth in the Cape Eleuthera ecosystems, and at saltwater fish in the reef systems

▲ Cultural Preservation in Alaska

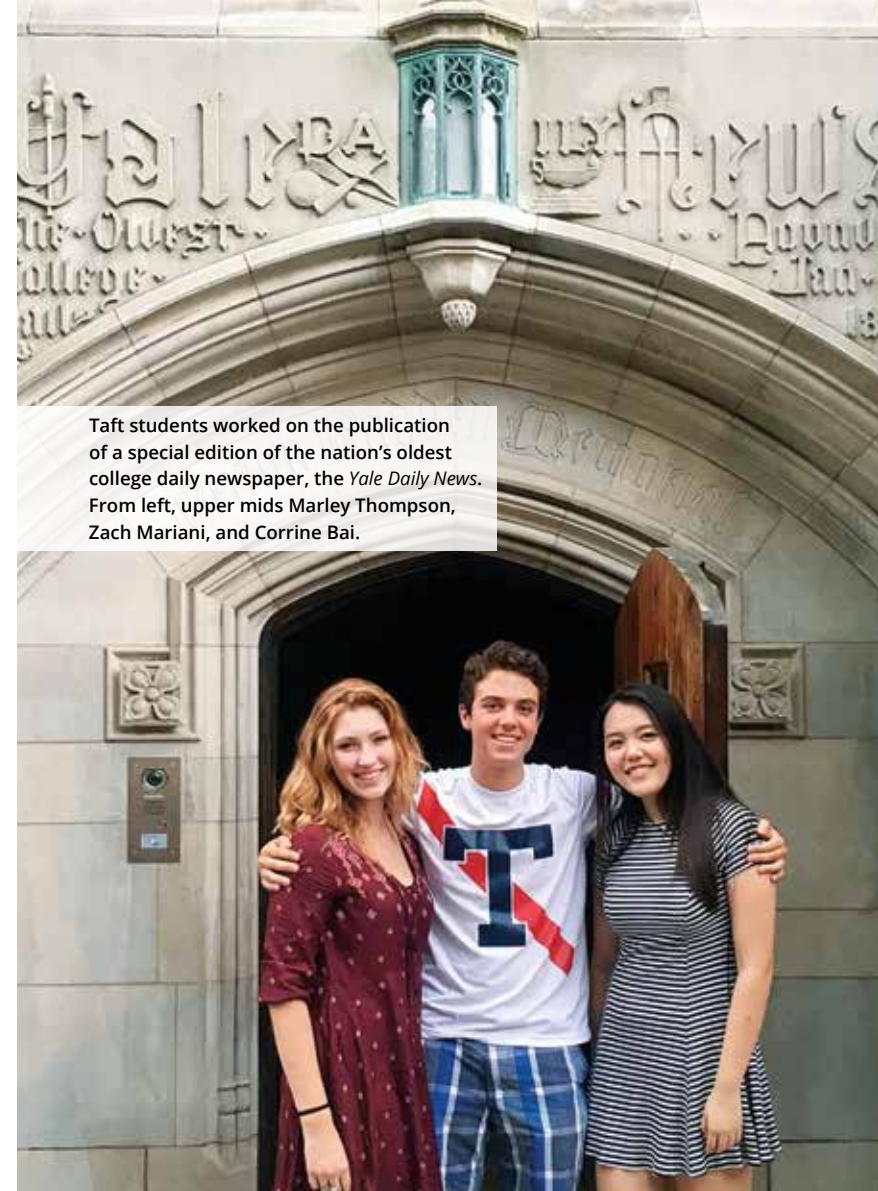
There is a movement afoot in the small Alaskan village of Iguigig to revitalize and preserve the local dialect of their native language, Yup'ik. With only 20 fluent speakers of this distinct dialect remaining, Iguigig Village Council President and Dartmouth graduate AlexAnna Salmon is working to bring the language back into everyday use in Iguigig.

"Her goal is to see babies born whose first words will be in Yup'ik," says Taft senior Lauren Fadiman, who worked with Salmon this summer in the southwestern Alaskan village, whose year-round population is 70. "It is a community endeavor that is important to everyone, not just the families indigenous to the village. It was very powerful to see."

Funded by a \$850,000 Language Preservation and Maintenance Grant from the U.S. Administration for Native



Senior Mary Collette traveled to the Bahamas last summer to study the impact of development on the archipelago's ecosystems.



Taft students worked on the publication of a special edition of the nation's oldest college daily newspaper, the *Yale Daily News*. From left, upper mids Marley Thompson, Zach Mariani, and Corrine Bai.

offshore. Says Mary, "Bonefish act as 'stirrers' to the surrounding nutrient-rich sediment, and are an important economic asset to the Bahamian Islands. I studied several bonefish aggregation and spawning sites, and contributed to the highly successful CEI bonefish-tagging program. I look back and appreciate the beauty of Eleuthera's wildlife, from the bright coral reefs to the flats teeming with lemon sharks. It made me consider the very real effect of Bahamian coastal development on these habitats. The threat of harm to so many species inspired me to learn about more ways we can preserve the Bahamas, especially through education and sharing experiences."

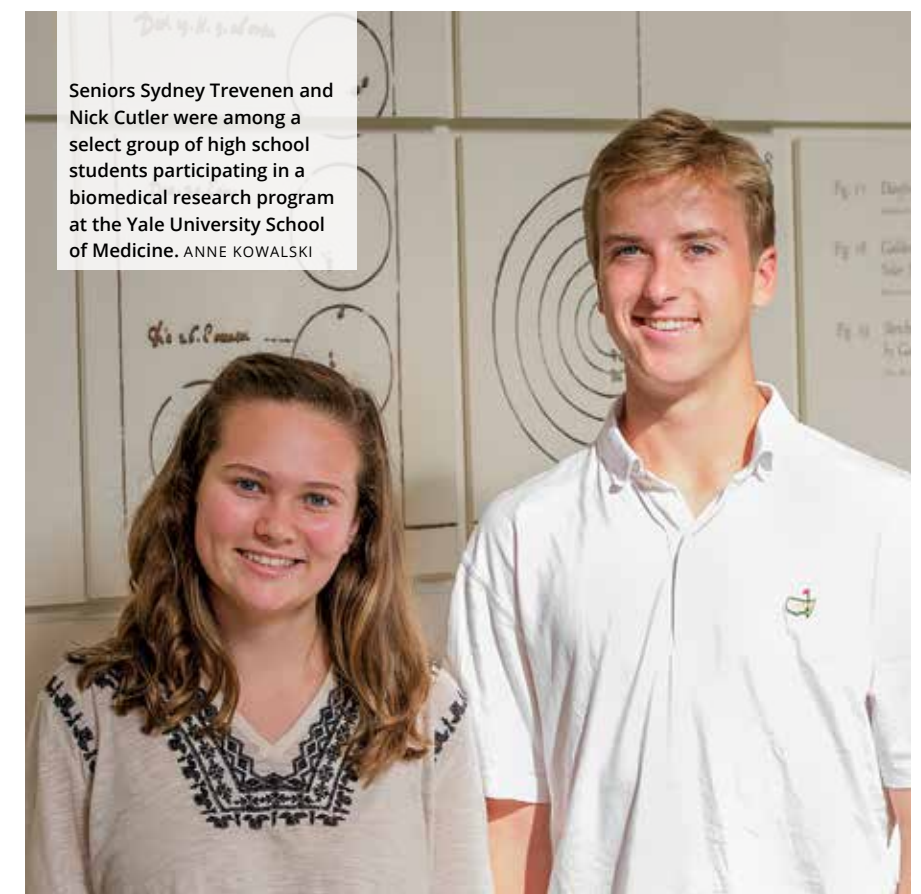
▲ Journalism at Yale

The *Yale Daily News* is the nation's oldest college daily newspaper; upper mids

Marley Thompson, Zach Mariani, and Corrine Bai are among its youngest contributors. All three participated in the Yale Daily News Summer Journalism Program, an intensive course for high school students that included writing and editing workshops, hands-on reporting, and lectures by guest speakers from major news outlets, including Vivian Yee of *The New York Times* and Molly Hensley-Clancy of BuzzFeed. The program culminated in the publication of a special issue of the *News*, which included articles written by Marley, Zach, and Corrine. Says, Zach, whose *Yale Daily News* feature profiled three *News* alumni now working as professional journalists, "I got to experience journalism from another perspective, which was extremely valuable."

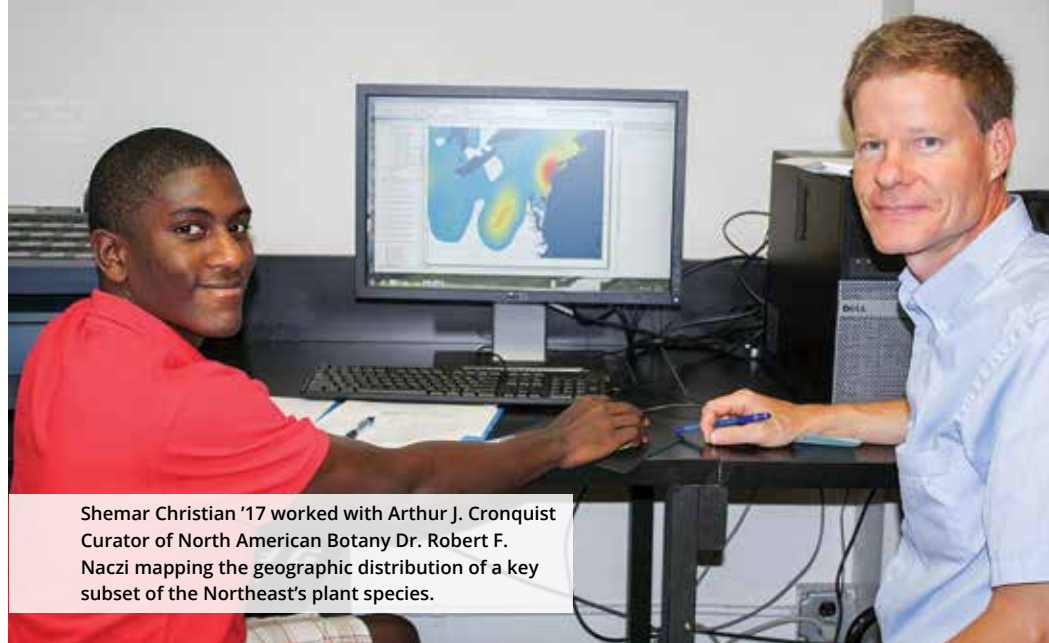
Biomedical Research at Yale ▼

Seniors Sydney Trevenen and Nick Cutler were awarded internships through the Discovery to Cure program at Yale University. Each spent six weeks conducting hands-on research in Yale's biomedical laboratories under the mentorship of a principal investigator. Working with



Seniors Sydney Trevenen and Nick Cutler were among a select group of high school students participating in a biomedical research program at the Yale University School of Medicine. ANNE KOWALSKI

endocrinologist John Wysolmerski, Sydney looked at the relationship between a specific protein (PTHrP) and breast cancer susceptibility. She also did mouse mammary gland stainings for certain proteins using a mouse model that over-expressed PTHrP. The presence or absence of those proteins indicated the effect of the overexpression of PTHrP. Says Sydney, “The program taught me that the scientific process is not just coming up with a question, running a procedure, and getting a perfect answer, but that



Shemar Christian '17 worked with Arthur J. Cronquist Curator of North American Botany Dr. Robert F. Naczi mapping the geographic distribution of a key subset of the Northeast's plant species.

every specimen from a specific locality without repeating any locations of a population. Using the exact coordinates of these specimens, I created a detailed map of the recorded populations of each species, and analyzed the spacing of these populations to find evidence that supports the idea that there are possible centers of endemism, meaning that plant species are more likely to grow in certain locations.” Shemar’s work will play a critical role in the development and

prioritization of conservation initiatives. Senior Eliza Price worked with Dr. Barbara Ambrose and Tynisha Smalls on a fruit evolution and development project, comparing three different species of genetically similar plants that had widely differing fruit structures. The team worked to determine the point in the fruit’s development at which specific genes were “turned on.” Eliza explains, “Although the overall research was ongoing, no part of this

specific project had been done before. I did everything in the lab, from growing the wild strawberries that I would be observing, to extracting DNA and RNA from plant tissue and running PCR and electrophoresis.” The NYBG internships were sponsored by Leslie and Angus Littlejohn P’03, 05, who are also devotees of The New York Botanical Garden, with additional support from the Yerkes Botanical Art and Science Fund, Dwight Stocker ’74, and anonymous donors. ■



Taft students built four homes for local families during their summer service trip to Guatemala.

failures are also important to discovery. It allowed me to be immersed in a true research environment, take part in important research, and put to test everything I had learned in the Taft classroom.”

Nick worked with Discovery to Cure High School Internship Program founder Dr. Gil Mor, under the direct supervision of researcher Yuan You, to create a 3D in vitro model of the human endometrium. “Our problem is that there currently is no accurate representation of the human uterus. Scientists cannot perform tests on other animals because their reproductive systems are slightly different from the human reproductive system,” explains Nick. “Creating a 3D model allows researchers to construct tests to help find a way to

limit infertility and miscarriages.” Nick created one of the most accurate models of the human uterus to date. Says Nick, “I spent a lot of time doing the same things over and over, and realized how important it was to get the little things right. One mistake and the whole experiment could have been ruined, so I definitely learned how to manage processes effectively and keep record of everything that I did.”

▲ Building Homes in Guatemala

Sixteen students and four faculty members traveled to Antigua, Guatemala, for Taft’s ninth annual service trip to the region. Antigua is located in the central highlands of Guatemala, famous

for its well-preserved Spanish Baroque-influenced architecture and for its colonial church ruins. It served as the capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala, and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The group worked on four homes, bringing the total number of homes built by Taft students and faculty in the region to 27. The group also volunteered their time at a homeless shelter and assisted with clothing distribution. The trip included a weekend excursion to Lake Atitlan, with stops at the Mayan ruins at Iximche and the indigenous market at Chichicastenango.

▲ In the Laboratories of The New York Botanical Garden

For the fourth consecutive summer, Taft students worked side-by-side with world-renowned scientists, graduate students, and college interns in the laboratories of The New York Botanical Garden. The internship program is part of Taft’s ongoing and highly successful partnership with The Garden. Senior Shemar Christian worked with mentor Dr. Robert Naczi in conducting a biogeographic analysis of a subset of the Northeast’s plant species. “Using *Flora of North America* I identified plants that only have been found in the northeastern United States and adjacent Canada, then located samples of those species in The Garden’s herbarium,” explains Shemar. “My task was to georeference

Precious and Potent Moments: Convocation 2016

Headmaster Willy MacMullen ’78 officially opened the new school year with both reflections on the space in which the community will gather throughout the year and his hopes for the connections that will be made there and around campus.

The tradition of gathering in Bingham auditorium, MacMullen noted, dates back to the construction of the building in 1929.

“Horace Taft believed deeply, as do I and as do all the faculty, that gathering as a community is critical,” said MacMullen.

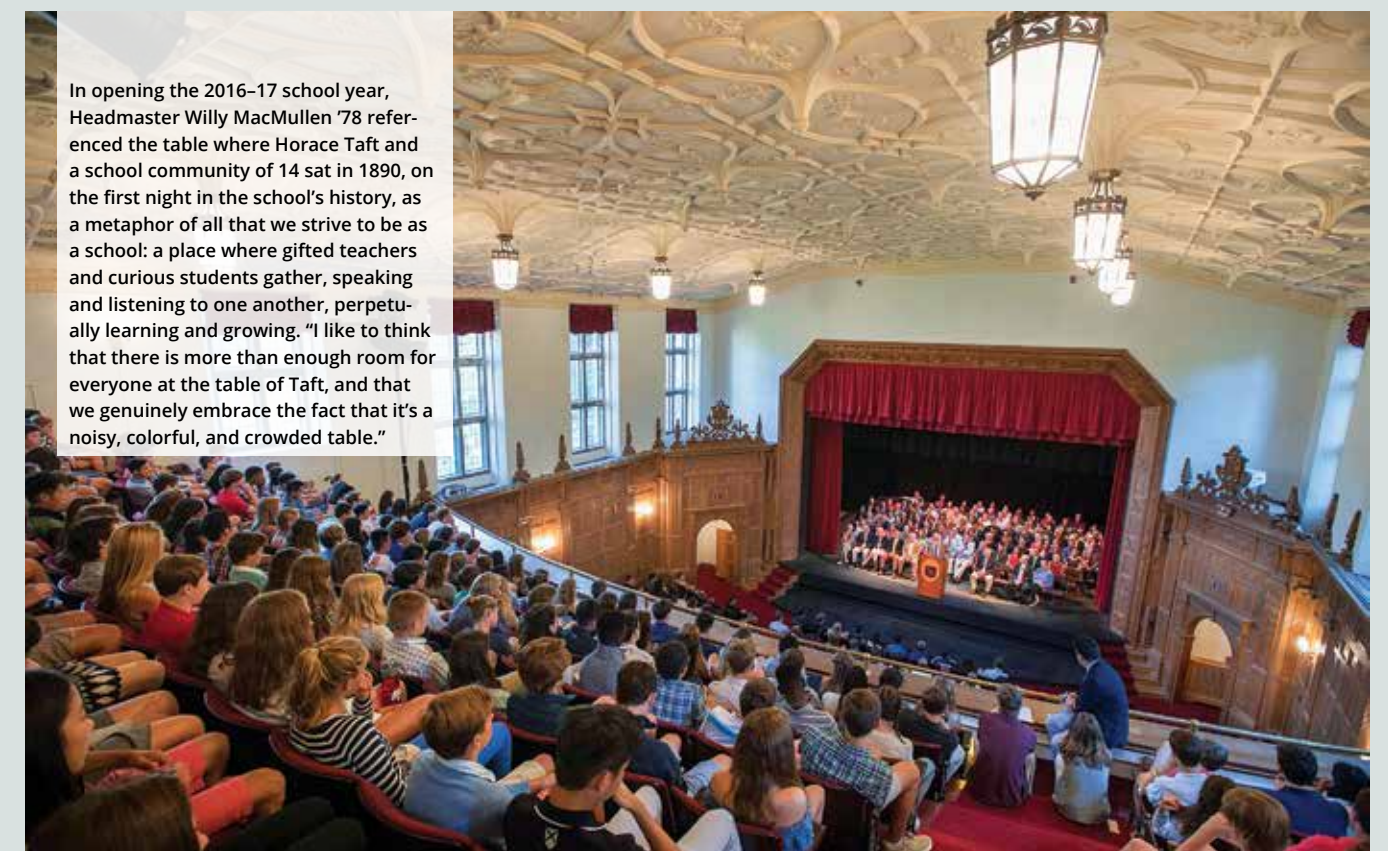
Until about 25 years ago, the gathering in Bingham was for Vespers, referencing the liturgical traditions across Christian denominations of an evening gathering around song, prayer, and reflection. The Taft community gathered at 6:10 pm for Vespers four days each week to hear speakers covering a broad range of topics.

“These mattered greatly to Horace Taft,” said MacMullen. “I meet alumni all the time, particularly older ones, who speak of how important the tradition was. Some of them remember

vividly particular Vespers services.”

One of the most meaningful Vespers gatherings alumni speak of took place on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack. It is also where the Taft community gathered on September 11, 2001.

“Some of the most important moments in our life as a school happen in here...these minutes are precious and potent,” MacMullen told the community. “This meeting and this space can be sacred.... You are now the holders of this tradition.” ■



In opening the 2016–17 school year, Headmaster Willy MacMullen '78 referenced the table where Horace Taft and a school community of 14 sat in 1890, on the first night in the school's history, as a metaphor of all that we strive to be as a school: a place where gifted teachers and curious students gather, speaking and listening to one another, perpetually learning and growing. “I like to think that there is more than enough room for everyone at the table of Taft, and that we genuinely embrace the fact that it's a noisy, colorful, and crowded table.”

Going Home

"GOING TO THE MOUNTAINS IS GOING HOME..."

—John Muir, *Our National Parks*

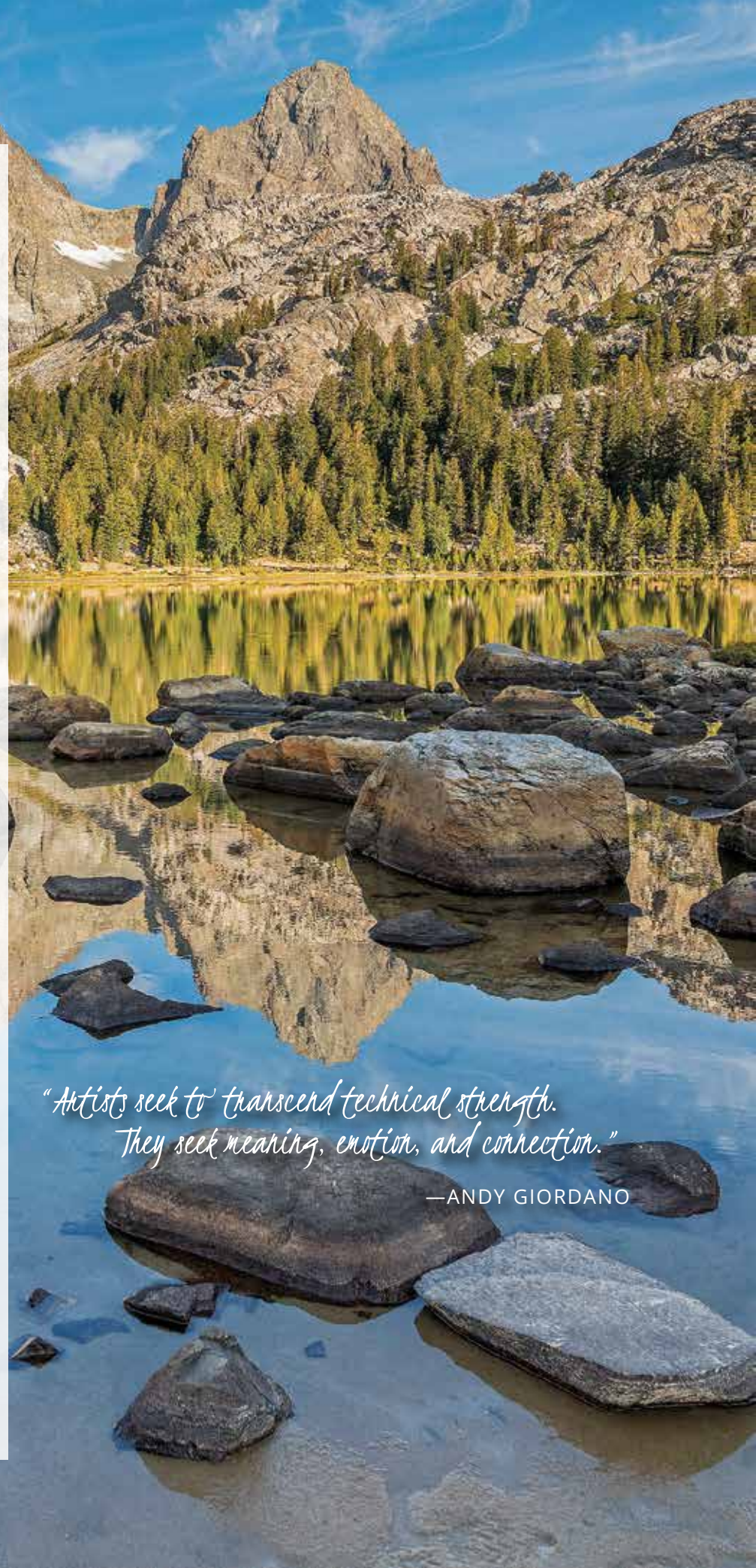
The Mark W. Potter '48 Gallery opened the school year with *Going Home*, the work of California-based artist Andy Giordano. A landscape and wildlife photographer, Giordano draws inspiration from his home: the American West, deep in the Sierra Nevada. Says Giordano, "One of the first lessons we learn as photographers is to be passionate about our subject matter. Shooting what we know gives us a leg up, perceptively. Evoking a sense of place and time—or timelessness, as the case may be—is a goal of my landscape work."

Originally from Buffalo, New York, Giordano earned degrees in evolutionary biology and zoology before moving to California to work in education.

"As an educator, photographer, and outdoorsman, connecting people to the wonder of the natural world is a driving force of mine," says Giordano. "I first delved into photography while pursuing a graduate degree in zoology at Washington State University. The Cabinet Mountain Wilderness in northwestern Montana was my base of field operations and provided early photographic inspiration, being rugged and solitary. Audiences know many of the dramatic American landscapes because of the great and creative photographers whose images are icons of our open spaces. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to develop my compositional style in a region essentially devoid of photographers in the public eye."

Giordano notes that his work reflects "unique perspectives and authentic moments." His pieces, he says, "not only look like the moments I am experiencing, but also allow the viewer to feel what I was feeling." The show continues through December 1. ■

PHOTO: Photographer Andy Giordano's *Ritter and Banner Reflected*.



*"Artists seek to transcend technical strength.
They seek meaning, emotion, and connection."*

—ANDY GIORDANO



Taft WELCOMED three new teaching fellows to campus this fall. All are earning advanced degrees through the Penn Residency Master's in Teaching program while fulfilling teaching and coaching duties at Taft. From left, Emily Adler, chemistry; Iris Williamson, English; and Laura Stoughton, psychology.

WOODWARD CHAPEL is now home to a 1997 New York Steinway B concert grand piano, donated by John H. Kilbourne '58. Kilbourne accelerated his planned gift to Taft in June by gifting the school with the piano, which is in near-perfect condition.



Taft WAS RECENTLY HONORED with the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Safe Sports School award. The award reinforces the importance of providing the best level of care, injury prevention, and treatment by recognizing secondary schools that provide safe environments for student-athletes. "We are honored to receive this First Team recognition from NATA," says Taft's Head Athletic Trainer Sergio Guerrero. "Our goal is to lead our athletics program to the highest safety standards for our players, allowing them to successfully meet their personal goals of great competition, winning records, fair sportsmanship, and good health." Taft's athletic trainers, from left, Maggie Wilson, Rachel Cohen, and Sergio Guerrero.

MR. AND MRS. SHELBY M.C. DAVIS, son Lansing A. Davis '97, and their family created the Davis International Scholars Program to bring international students to campus in support of greater global diversity at American boarding schools. The program identifies and recruits highly motivated future leaders from around the world who will make the most of their educational experiences as well as throughout their professional lives, including "giving back" to help shape a better world. Taft's 2016-17 Davis Scholars are Zygimantas Jievaltas '17, from Vilnius, Lithuania; Nick Morgoshia '17, Tbilisi, Georgia; Raya Petrova '17, Plovdiv, Bulgaria; Juste Simanauskaite '17, Kaunas, Lithuania; Sinan Kaya '18, Istanbul, Turkey; Magda Kisielinska '18, Mazowie, Poland; Anabel Likoskendaj '18, Tirana, Albania; Milan Moudry '18, Kyjov, Czech Republic; Ivana Salisova '18, Dolny Kubin, Slovakia; Mthabisi Tshuma '18, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; Anna Volentics '18, Budapest, Hungary; Osi Bialunska '19, Jablonna, Poland; Cho Dechen '19, Nepal; and Nico Gusac '19, Chisinau, Moldova.

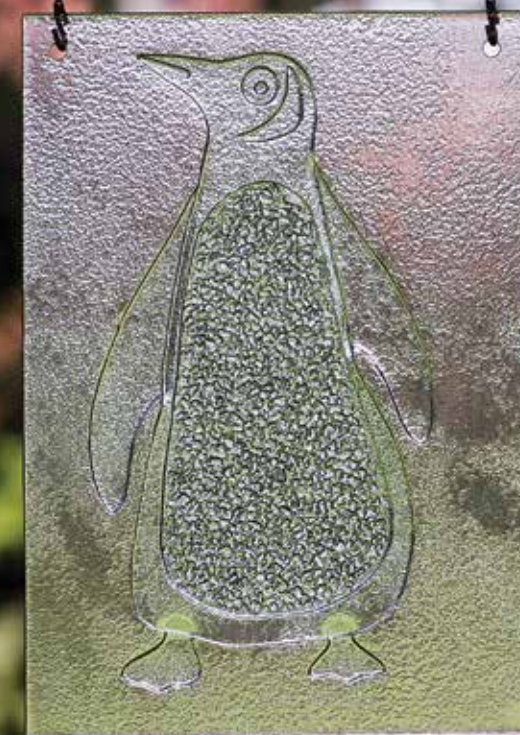
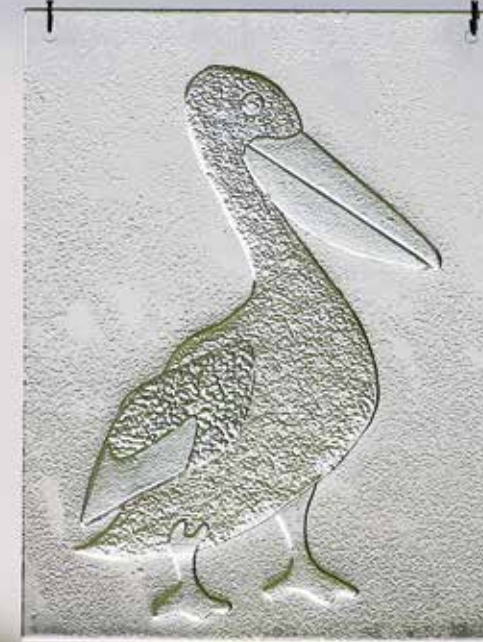


TAFTIES SHOWED THEIR TRUE COLORS during their first full weekend on campus as part of our annual Super Sunday games and festivities.

Music for a While

2016-17 Taft School Performance Series

- October 16: King of Instruments*
Nathan Laube, concert organist
4:00 pm in Woodward Chapel
- November 6: A Concert of Remembrance Requiem*
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Collegium Musicum, Cantus Excelsus, soloists,
and Woodward Chamber Orchestra
Bruce Fifer, conductor
5:00 pm in Woodward Chapel
- December 13: Taft School's 81st
Service of Lessons and Carols*
Collegium Musicum, Taft Chamber Ensemble,
Woodward Brass Ensemble
6:00 pm and 8:00 pm in Woodward Chapel
- January 6: Avery Ensemble*
Classical Music Performance
7:00 pm in Walker Hall
- January 20: Too Blue*
Folk Concert
7:00 pm in Walker Hall
- February 10: Art from the Heart
A Classical Valentine's Concert*
Woodward Chamber Players
7:00 pm in Walker Hall
- March 3: Jazz from the Undercroft
A Mardi Gras Celebration*
Woodward Jazz Ensemble
with special guest musicians
7:00 pm in the Woodward Chapel Undercroft
- March 31: Pianist Andrew Armstrong and Friends*
Classical Music Performance
7:00 pm in Woodward Chapel
- April 14: Music for Penitence and Passion*
Classical Music with Cantus Excelsus
and Woodward Chamber Players
7:00 pm in Woodward Chapel
- Collegium Musicum Spring Concert*
April 21 at 7:00 pm in Woodward Chapel
April 23 at 2:00 pm in NYC
(location TBA)
- May 13: King of Instruments*
Daniel Scifo, organist
4:00 pm in Woodward Chapel



Reading Kangaroos and Puffins in the Taft Library

In 1976, Connecticut artist Priscilla Manning Porter was asked by Taft's librarian at the time, Walter Frankel, to make several fused-glass panels to adorn some of the library's windows. Porter and Frankel decided that the panels should be publishers' and printers' marks, and because they felt that colored glass would be too distracting, they settled on using fused layers of clear construction glass. They vary in size but

several are roughly 16 by 26 inches.

These panels crafted in Porter's Plumb Hill Studio in Washington, Connecticut, hang today in Taft's "new" library dedicated in 1997 on the northern and western windows of two floors. The sampling shown here is of animals that symbolize publishers: Penguin Books, Puffin Books, Bantam Books, Pelican Books, and Pocket Books (whose logo is

"Gertrude," a kangaroo that is reading).

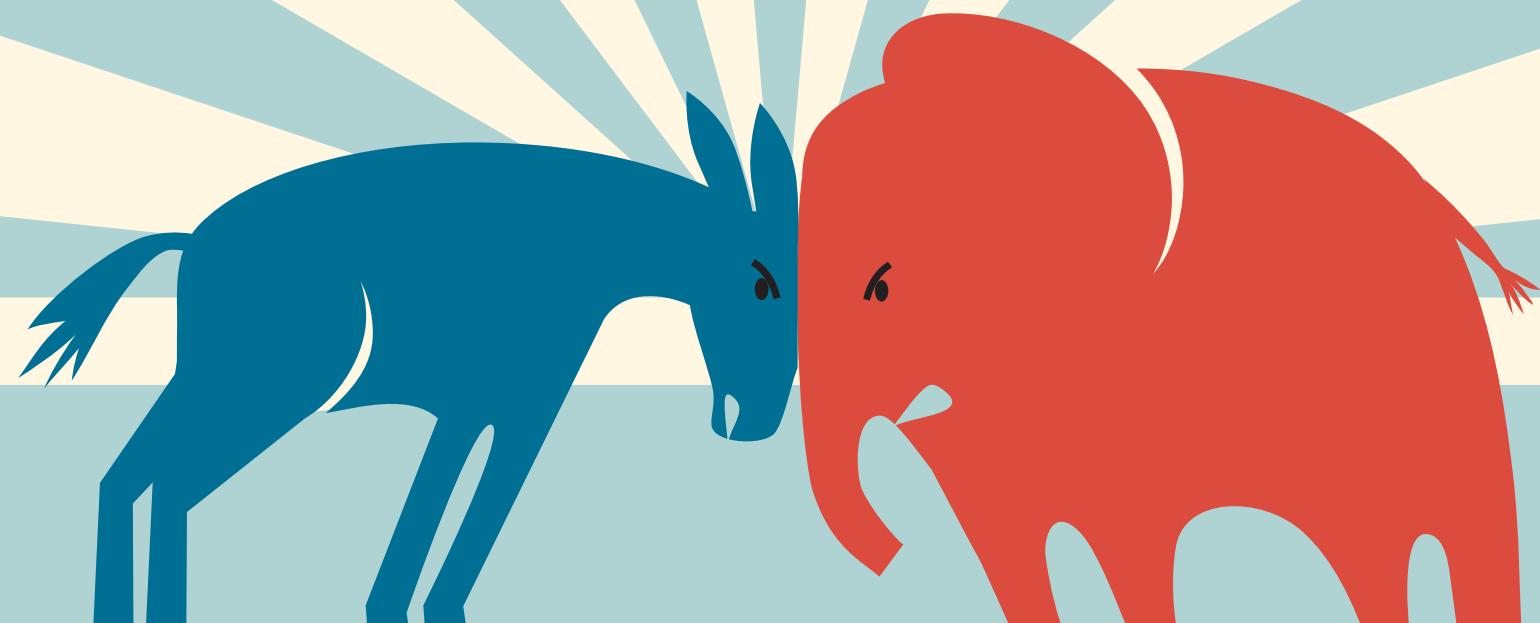
Porter taught ceramic classes at the Museum of Modern Art and began experimenting with fused glass, becoming a pioneer in this method. Her works have been exhibited by the Smithsonian and were also acquired by the New Britain Museum of American Art.

These are only one example of the many artistic surprises around Taft's campus, both indoors and outdoors. ■

IN THE TRENCHES

with Political Reporter Neil Vigdor '95

A
Q&A
with Taft Bulletin Editor
Linda Hedman Beyus



Starting out as a sportswriter for the Vanderbilt University student newspaper, Neil Vigdor '95 didn't quite foresee his interviewing a presidential candidate for a newspaper franchise, or running around national and state political conventions and rallies in his post-college professional life as a political reporter.

Now, having hit his stride, Vigdor says he "enjoys the chase" of a controversial or quirky story.

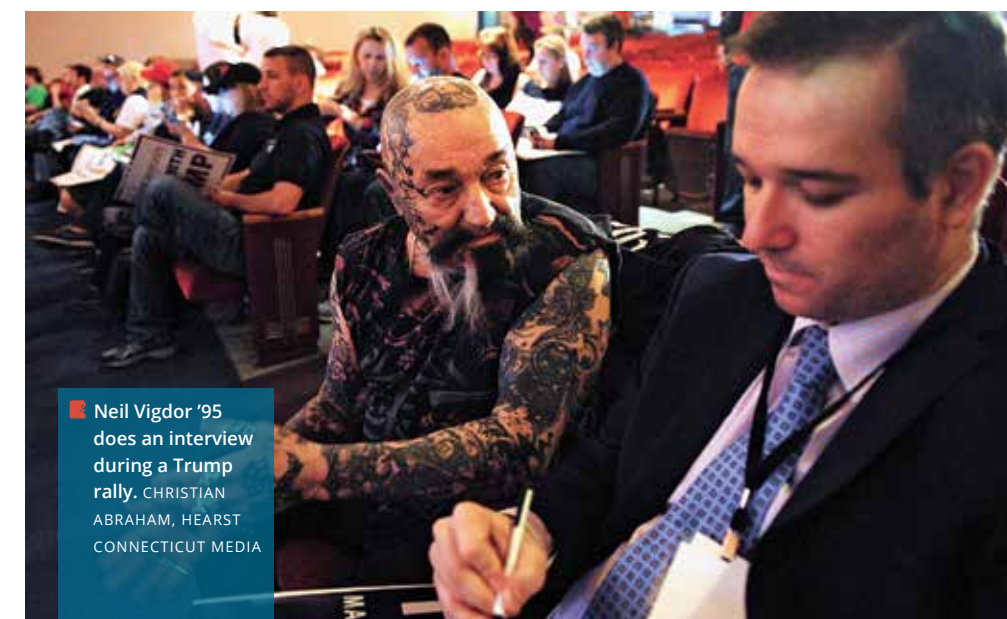
The *Bulletin* asked him in September about his daily work during a heated political year from his front-row seat as the statewide political writer at Hearst Connecticut Media Group. Hearst's publications in Connecticut include *Greenwich Time*, *The (Stamford) Advocate*, *Connecticut Post*, *Danbury News-Times*, *Norwalk Hour*, and six weekly newspapers. Vigdor's Twitter handle is @gettingviggy.

Q: What's it like being a political reporter in this contentious presidential election year?

A: I think that everything you do is amplified that much more in this climate. You're fielding more complaints, more criticisms of bias, and so you really start to think in terms of stories you decide to cover and how much coverage you give to a certain issue.

You're constantly on—it's 24-7, the cycle. You could be on a weekend and something breaks. You're dealing in this cycle with two candidates who have such high negatives and who so many people have major criticisms of, that it leads to a lot more "gotcha" stories, coverage that's not flattering, rather than the homespun "retail politics." There's some of that, but given [Donald] Trump, with his businesses and his business background and the rhetoric, and the Clintons, given the Clinton Foundation and her tenure as secretary of state, it's really a lot of material and fodder for stories that people perceive as negative.

[It's harder this year] but I think I'm going to go through withdrawal when it's all over. For any reporter worth their



salt, there should be no shortage of stories out there. There's rarely a day when I say, "What am I going to write about?"

It's been a kind of wild and mesmerizing year.

Q: Is it hard to stay unbiased as a reporter this year, and in general?

A: No, I don't think so. I tend not to harbor strong political views, so that definitely helps in my job. I call it as I see it, and I realize there are going

to be things that I write that people are going to have a problem with, but I generally try to be straightforward with people in terms of what the angle of my story is and not blindsides them. I will say, I'm sorry, I'm doing this story, you're not going to like it—I somewhat prepare them for it, and it is what it is.

When people engage on social media, my general policy is not to really engage with people and go back and forth, but to let the stories speak for themselves. Frequently we have comment threads on our Hearst Connecticut websites,

"It's hot, you're sweating, and you're under intense pressure to get your story out....You've got people yelling and screaming—you're not working in a library, let's put it that way."



and people will vent about stories on there. Even when you go to political events and people are friendly, and maybe want to take a photo with you or something like that, it sometimes puts you in an awkward position.

“For any reporter worth their salt, there should be no shortage of stories out there. There’s rarely a day when I say, ‘What am I going to write about?’”

Q: Do you get to choose your assignments?

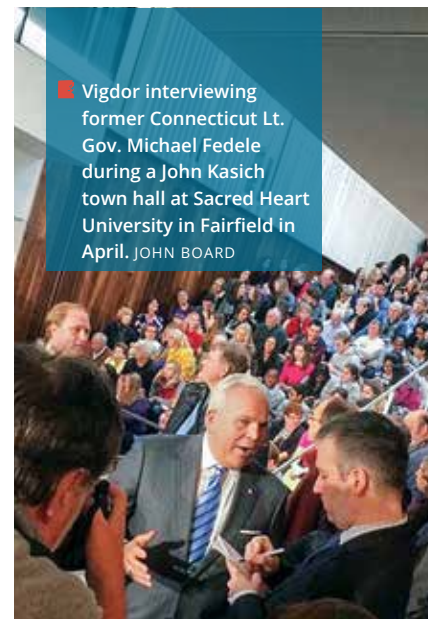
A: Ninety percent of the stories that I do are self-generated—the tips that come in to me, the things I think of. I try not to follow the pack. I try to think of things that are more quirky or offbeat. A couple of stories that come to mind: A couple of months ago at Lake “Quassy” in Middlebury, there was a magician there doing a comedy routine, and he made an offhanded kind of quip about Donald Trump in front of children and

their parents. One of Trump’s supporters actually went up to the stage and cursed the guy out when he was in the middle of the performance, and the amusement park people had to escort the guy off the property and ask him to leave. That’s something that somebody tipped me off on, and I said, that’s a great story, so I wrote about it.

Another one was before the Democratic primary [in Connecticut] in April. Someone tipped me off that John Podesta, the chairman of Hillary Clinton’s campaign, had to come here to meet with Connecticut union folks to try to placate them because they’re angry at Governor Malloy over layoffs of state employees, and union people didn’t want to go out and knock on doors for Hillary. The Hillary people were really worried that was going to hurt them and that Bernie Sanders might win Connecticut, so that’s another kind of example of something that the Associated Press or other publications might not necessarily be chasing.

Q: What was it like to cover both the Democratic and Republican national conventions this summer and the New Hampshire primary earlier on?

A: Speaking of the conventions, the anticipation was a much bigger deal than actually being there. You worry about worst-case scenarios—riots and tear gas, that sort of thing. Before going



Vigdor interviewing former Connecticut Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele during a John Kasich town hall at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield in April. JOHN BOARD

to Cleveland, I was debating whether to bring an escape-hood gas mask with me, actually. There were stories about reporters from major news outlets signing up for actual courses that cost \$1,200, \$1,500, from former Israeli commandos on what to do if you were kidnapped or involved in a terrorist attack.

I think that both cities and the state and federal law enforcement did a phenomenal job protecting not just the media, but the delegates and moving people along.

They were very memorable conventions, and very different. In Cleveland, Trump clearly had his fingerprints on the convention, so you had a lot of unorthodox choices for convention speakers. You also had the dynamic of Republicans sitting on their hands—a lot of the A-list Republicans were not in the speaking lineup in Cleveland.

For the Democrats, clearly Hollywood and the whole glitz and star power is a big part of the narrative, and the convention in Philadelphia had no shortage of the firepower in terms of the celebrities and all. Actually, I found the convention in Philadelphia to be much more topsy-turvy, in terms of the protests by Bernie Sanders’ supporters leaving in the middle of some of the convention speeches and



An interactive touch screen in Cleveland shows Vigdor’s electoral map predictions for the presidential election.

having sit-ins outside the arena. I think some of the things they predicted for Cleveland manifested in Philadelphia.

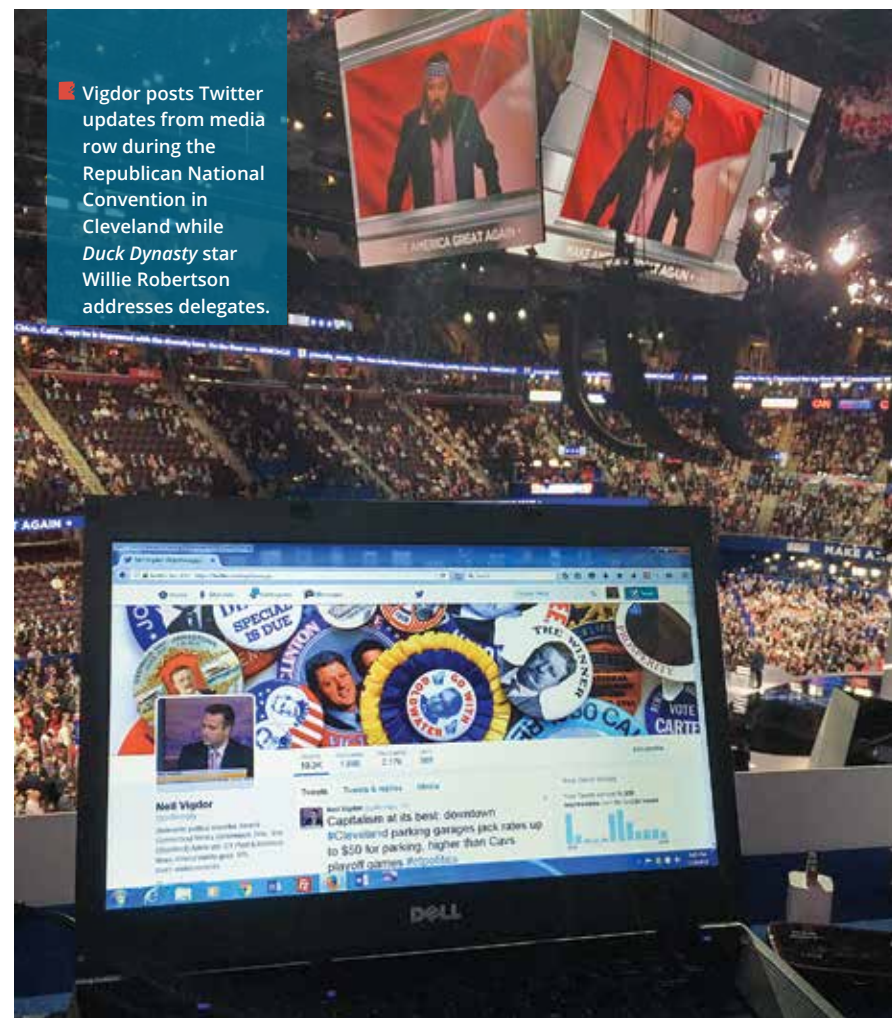
Both were huge logistical undertakings, with security and getting around and being able to stay at the hotels with the delegates from Connecticut. Same with New Hampshire—getting around in the snow and the black ice. New Hampshire is a really remarkable and unique place to get the kind of intimate interaction with the candidates and see them close up and see them do their “retail politics.” The people up there take it very seriously in terms of vetting candidates in the first primary in the nation.

When I was up in New Hampshire, the hotel that I stayed at was the same hotel where Marco Rubio was staying. The first night that we got there, when it was snowing, his campaign bus was in a dark corner of the parking lot, and those campaign buses don’t strike me as having the best traction in snow, so I figured that he would be marooned at the hotel. The next day he was camped out in the lobby with his family and security and handlers, so that was kind of neat to see him in downtime. These people are constantly on, and to be able to see them with their families and not going through the talking points was refreshing.

Q: It sounds like it was also, especially at the national level with two conventions back to back, exhausting.

A: I had 17 bylines during the two weeks of the conventions. I did probably a dozen videos and 300-plus Tweets. I had to go through nine, ten different security checkpoints, Secret Service. You get to be really efficient in terms of getting your wallet and iPhone out of your pockets and going through that and turning on your laptop.

Actually, for the undertaking and the crowds and all that, [it was] much more efficient than the airport. They moved people through quickly.



Vigdor posts Twitter updates from media row during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland while Duck Dynasty star Willie Robertson addresses delegates.



Vigdor at a Bernie Sanders rally in New Haven, sending one of hundreds of Tweets during the final months of the election campaigns. CHRISTIAN ABRAHAM, HEARST CONNECTICUT MEDIA

Q: I know that you majored in communication studies and English at Vanderbilt University, but how did you get into political reporting versus other kinds of journalism after college?

A: I worked on the student newspaper at Vanderbilt, which is one of the oldest student newspapers in the country and has a very storied history—a lot of great sportswriters went to Vanderbilt. I started out doing sports on the student newspaper, and

was really lucky the summer between my junior and senior years to get an internship at *Roll Call* in Washington, one of the Capitol Hill newspapers.

I took some summer classes at Georgetown, and my internship turned me on to politics on the Hill and the personalities. Certainly you have to understand policy to write about politics, but my interest has always been more on the personalities and profiling and the game of politics. But again, you have to know about the policies to understand that.

Q: What do you love about being a political reporter?

A: I like the ability to influence people with your stories, and to have the most influential people in the state [of Connecticut] reading your stories, following you on Twitter. There's really something to be said for that.

I enjoy the chase, and, sometimes, some of these quirky stories may cause a little bit of controversy. I like that.



Q: How has this election cycle been different locally?

A: There was always this conventional wisdom that Connecticut would be an afterthought this year, as it was in 2012, when Mitt Romney won the Republican nomination, and that by the time the end of April rolls around, nobody really cares about Connecticut.

But this year, given the dynamics of 16 to 17 Republican candidates, an extended nominating race, Clinton and Sanders going for as long as they did, Connecticut suddenly became pretty strategic for the campaigns, so you had all of the candidates—with the exception of Ted Cruz—making appearances here, some of the them multiple appearances, for the primary.

You had Bernie Sanders on the Green in New Haven that drew 15,000 people the Sunday night before the primary; you had Hillary Clinton go to Bridgeport, go to Hartford; John Kasich was here, did multiple events in the state; Donald Trump, three stops in the state—Waterbury, Bridgeport, and Hartford—so that was just an incredible opportunity for the people of Connecticut to get to experience this race in a way that they wouldn't ordinarily be able to.

It's almost like they got a taste of New Hampshire or Iowa, and all of a sudden, Connecticut matters.

Q: What are some of the toughest challenges in your work, not just this year?

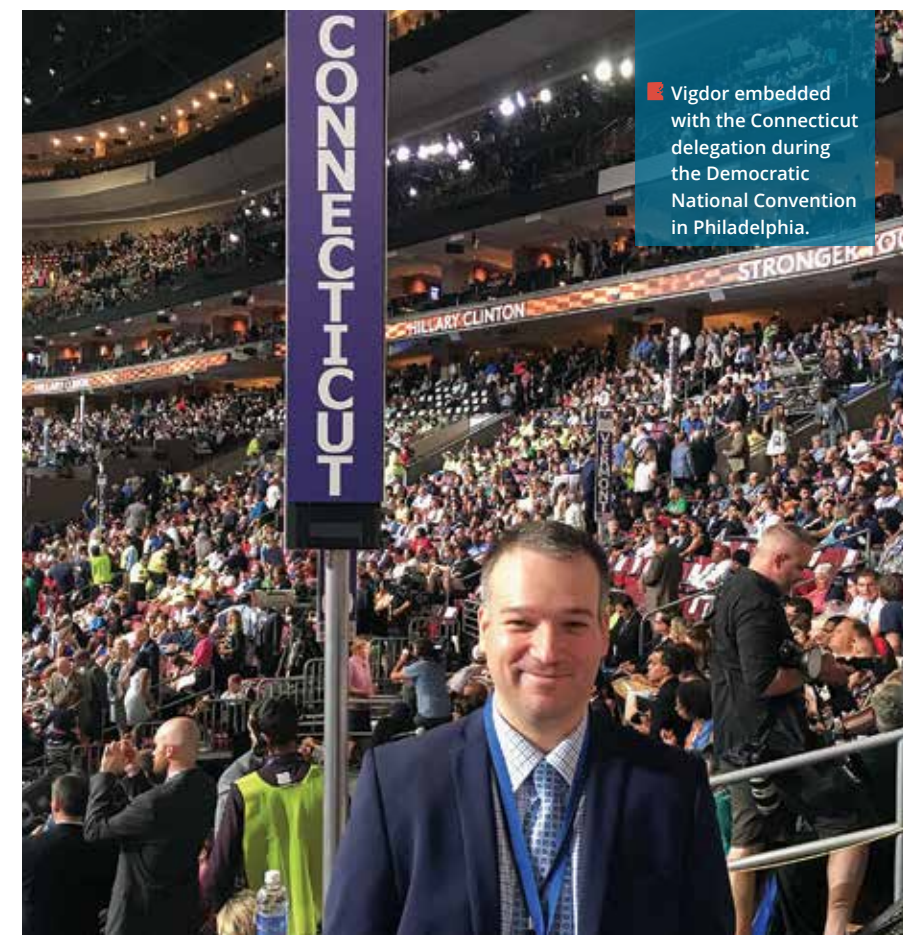
A: Challenges are sometimes about time management. You want to, of course, have consistent daily breaking-news stories, but some of the best journalism is done on some of these enterprise investigative pieces that typically run in our Sunday papers, so setting aside time to work on those things and balancing that out with the daily grind of getting breaking news, that's one of the big challenges.

Also you have to be able to focus in sometimes grueling working conditions, particularly when you go to these conventions, and you've got a band playing,

there's music, it's loud, you've got balloons dropping, you've got difficult deadlines. A big emphasis for our papers is to localize content, so for the *Connecticut Post* we want to have Bridgeport voices and stories, and Greenwich people [for *Greenwich Time*], so chasing people around at these massive conventions and rallies and spotting them in the crowd is a challenge.

I think of when Trump had his rally in August in Fairfield. It was a Saturday afternoon at Sacred Heart University, temperatures well over 100 degrees, no air conditioning inside the arena where they're having this rally. The media have a kind of dedicated corral, some people like to call it the "petting zoo," and we have our own dedicated Secret Service agent there for crowd-control purposes. It's hot, you're sweating, and you're under intense pressure to get your story out for print. I have to think both in terms of print deadlines; I can always make revisions for the online [versions], so that's a challenge.

You've got people yelling and screaming—you're not working in a library, let's put it that way.



Vigdor embedded with the Connecticut delegation during the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.

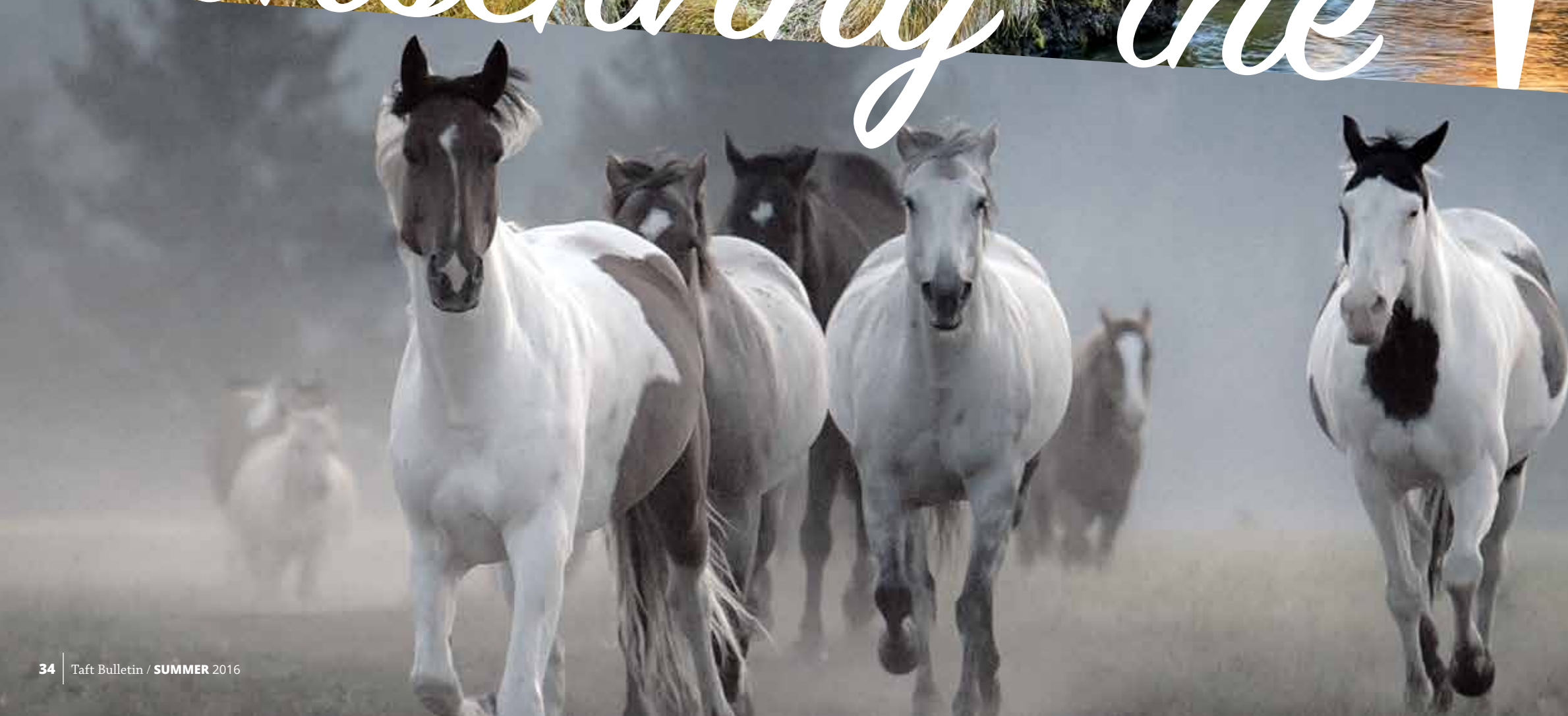
Q: When the presidential election is over, first of all you can breathe a little, but will you be doing more national coverage then, or does it just depend what hits the state?

A: Certainly if Clinton wins the election, as the polls would seem to suggest, that could mean that you'd have a lot of people from Connecticut, whether it's Governor Malloy or Congressman Himes or Senator Blumenthal, who's a Yale Law School classmate of Hillary Clinton's, that could put them in position for a job in a Clinton administration, so there could be major stories to come out of that. And then it's a whole kind of domino effect in terms of if they move on to greener pastures, although [Vigdor laughs] maybe that's not the right characterization, but if they move on, that opens up other jobs, and you've got people already waiting in the wings and eyeing things. So I don't think that everything just ends after the election. Certainly there's going to be a lot of musical chairs, I think. ■


"I enjoy the chase, and, sometimes, some of these quirky stories may cause a little bit of controversy. I like that."



Conserving the West



IN THE *NON UT SIBI* TRADITION OF SERVING, WE ARE HIGHLIGHTING TWO TAFT GRADUATES WHO ARE LIVING OUT THEIR COMMITMENT TO CONSERVING AND WISELY MANAGING THE LAND OF THE WEST WITH ITS POWERFUL LANDSCAPE AND RESOURCES. THE MONTANA E BAR L RANCH, OWNED BY JUANITA VERO '91 AND HER FAMILY, IS SITUATED ON 8,000 ACRES THAT VERO IS ENGAGED IN PROTECTING FOR THE FUTURE. AND JONATHAN OPPENHEIMER '92, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIRECTOR FOR THE IDAHO CONSERVATION LEAGUE, IS WORKING TO PRESERVE IDAHO'S UNIQUE WILD LAND AND SEE THAT ITS RESOURCES ARE RESPONSIBLY MANAGED.

A woman wearing a light-colored cowboy hat, a blue and white checkered shirt, and jeans is leading a brown horse with a white blaze on its face. They are in a dusty field at sunset, with other horses and a wooden fence in the background. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light.

"I was very lucky to be born into this, therefore I feel a great responsibility to foster, steward, and share all that we have here."

The *Montana* E Bar L Ranch *of Juanita Vero '91*

PICTURE THIS: *CITY SLICKERS* MEETS *DOWNTON ABBEY*. THROW IN A LITTLE *A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT*, AND THAT'S THE VIBE JUANITA VERO '91 SAYS HER GUESTS FEEL WHEN THEY VISIT HER FAMILY'S E BAR L RANCH, SITUATED ON 8,000 ACRES ON THE BLACKFOOT RIVER, AN HOUR EAST OF MISSOULA, MONTANA. IT'S A LOCATION THAT'S FAMED FOR ITS BEAUTY, AND IT'S LAND THAT VERO IS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN PROTECTING FOR THE FUTURE.

VERO GREW UP ON THE RANCH, WHICH WAS FOUNDED BY HER GREAT-GRANDFATHER, O.W. POTTER. POTTER WAS AN ENGINEER AND A SURVEYOR WHO'D BEEN BROUGHT UP IN CHICAGO, WHERE HIS FAMILY WAS IN THE STEEL BUSINESS. AFTER GRADUATING FROM M.I.T., HE "WANTED TO FIGURE OUT WHERE HE WANTED TO BE." SO, LIKE SO MANY YOUNG MEN AT THE TURN OF THE LAST CENTURY, HE HEADED WEST," VERO SAYS.

By Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84

Riding through the sagebrush and the ponderosa pines, the mountains and the prairie, hearing nothing but the creak of the saddle and the cries of birds, is heaven for Vero.

Potter explored Montana as an engineer on the Northern Pacific Railroad before falling in love with the land along the Blackfoot River (the “river” of the famed book and movie *A River Runs Through It*).

Potter began buying land in 1906 and, after marrying Gertrude Landsburg (who married O.W. on a bet), decided to make the land a ranch and their permanent home. “It was a business marriage,” Vero says of her great-grandparents. “She could be a difficult person.”

When World War I broke out, the ranch lost all its farmhands, who joined up to fight the Kaiser. After the war ended, Potter’s old college buddies from M.I.T. would visit, seeking an experience that would help ease their transition home. Tired of feeding and housing guests with no compensation, Gertrude and O.W. decided to open the ranch to

paying customers in the mid-1920s. These guests were usually New Englanders fascinated by the Wild West, which was becoming more accessible thanks to the construction of the railroads. The ranch’s first name—El Dor El—was derived from Vero’s great-grandfather’s three sisters, Eleanor, Dorothy, and Elizabeth, who helped fund the land purchases. The name was later changed to E Bar L.

Being kind to the land has always been a priority at E Bar L, Vero says. “For many years the logging that happened on the ranch was for building structures and getting firewood. We didn’t get electricity here until the late 1950s, and didn’t stop using ice from our ice pond and ice house until the mid-1960s.

“In the 1970s there was a pine beetle infestation, and my grandfather (O.W. ‘Bill’ Potter, Jr.) had to figure out

a way to save his timber. That forced him into forestry, and he began working closely with the University of Montana Forestry School’s Lubrecht Experimental Forest, which is just down the road from us,” Vero says.

“My grandfather was known for retrofitting his farm equipment for logging purposes, and for creating uneven aged stands of timber with the dead, dying, deformed, diseased trees removed so it looked as if a natural fire had gone through,” Vero says. “Our guests ride through this landscape, so he was also very particular about ‘clean’ logging operations. He was much lighter on the land than traditional logging operations because most of the logging activity happened in the fall and winter, when the ground was frozen. Our guest season is from May until October, so there wasn’t

time to log during those months.”

“My grandfather also had family members working for him—you don’t have to pay family members to do this more tedious, time-consuming form of logging the way you would proper employees,” Vero adds. “He was fortunate that he had the guest ranch business to supplement the logging, so he wasn’t dependent on logging income and could make choices that made better conservation and long-term economic sense, but that maybe weren’t immediately economical.”

The Lay of the Land

Scenery abounds at the E Bar L Ranch. Stunning mountains, gorgeous sunsets, and winding trails greet guests.

“We’re in western Montana, which looks like a profile of a face. The eye is the Blackfoot watershed, and that’s where we are,” she says. “It’s ponderosa pines, mountains, prairies—just a fantastic landscape. It’s great riding terrain.”

The only livestock that the ranch supports are the horses that guests spend



▲ Vero leads guests on a ride across the river. WILL LAVERACK

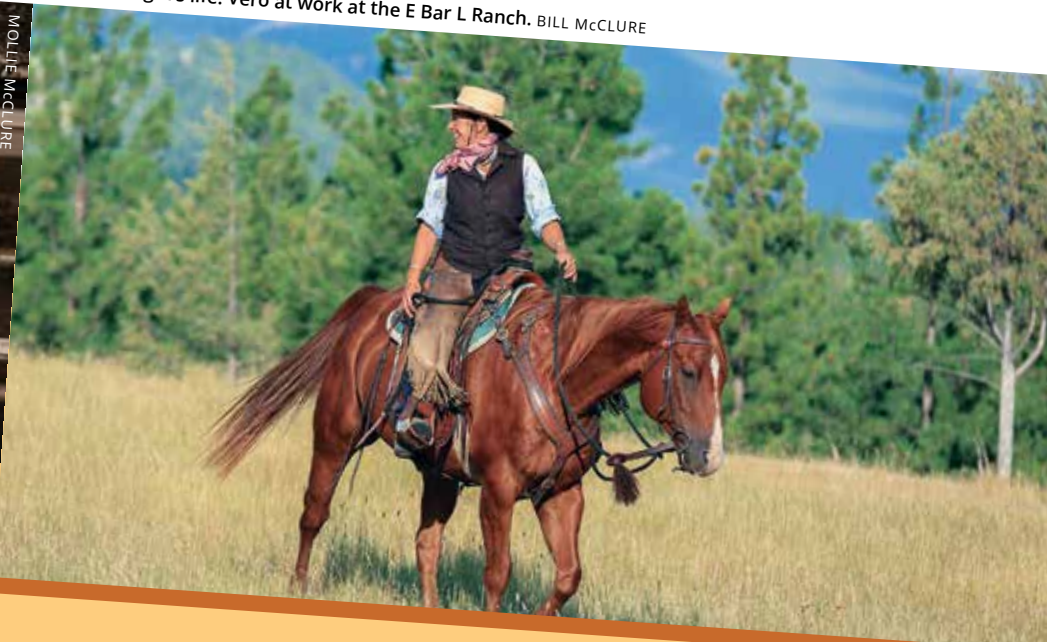


MOLLIE MCCLURE



MOLLIE MCCLURE

▼ A cowgirl’s life: Vero at work at the E Bar L Ranch. BILL MCCLURE



◀ Previous page: Vero’s morning routine in the corral, the start of a long, busy day. BILL MCCLURE



▲ Whitney McDowell '94, at right, visits the E Bar L Ranch of Juanita Vero '91.

their days riding through the gorgeous countryside—the ranch has 97 horses. The family continued to operate the guest ranch through World War II, and by the late 1960s, Juanita's mother Mary, O.W. Jr.'s daughter, had fallen in love with Louis Vero, one of the ranch hands, a Filipino wrangler from California hired as summer help.

"That caused all sorts of drama," Vero says, "but they stuck it out for five years—they against the world"—before marrying. The scandal lingered, as interracial marriages were still uncommon at that time. But along came Juanita and her brother, and now she runs the business with other members of her extended ranch family welcoming visitors for weeks or months each season.

Growing up in the remote area as she did was wonderful, Vero says, but because the ranch is so far from other communities, she "didn't get the social references" her peers learned from watching television and movies, she says. She graduated from Taft in 1991 and after graduating from Lewis and Clark College returned to the ranch.

A minimum stay at the E Bar L Ranch is a week, and they accept about

"The ranch experience, that's such an honor to be able to provide," Vero says. "It's just something that's very organic, a culture and a structure to the place that's hard to describe."

40 guests at a time. Guests stay in rustic log cabins and take meals together in the large lodge with a huge stone fireplace.

"We're open from the beginning of June to the end of September," Vero says. "For a guest, it's get up, eat breakfast at 7, be at the corral by 8, go out riding until noon, come back, and eat lunch. Then there's skeet shooting or rifle shooting or float down the river in an inner tube for a couple of hours, followed by cocktails and dinner. After that there's a ranch-wide softball game, and then we sit around the campfire. It's like summer camp for the entire family."

Apart from a Facebook page for the ranch, there's very little in the way of advertising. Vero gets her business through word of mouth and from repeat clients, many of whom have come since they were children.

"The ranch experience, that's such an

honor to be able to provide," Vero says.

"It's just something that's very organic, a culture and a structure to the place that's hard to describe. The folks that get it and like it, they return for years and years."

The challenges facing a family-owned and operated business that's been passed through several generations can be tricky to navigate, Vero says. Her mother and father recently retired from the business, and a trust was set up to ensure that her grandfather's wishes for the ranch would be honored. The ranch brings in young college students each summer to help with the day-to-day operations.

"It's long days," she says. "It's fun, but you're on all the time."

Riding through the sagebrush and the ponderosa pines, the mountains and the prairie, hearing nothing but the creak of the saddle and the cries of birds, is heaven for Vero.

A Commitment to Conservation

"I care so much about Montana and the part of Montana where I live, it makes me really happy, but you have to share that," she says. "When you have something fantastic that gives you joy, if you can't share it with other people, it doesn't work. I love being able to share this space. Generations of guests have been coming here—people who knew my mom before she met my dad. To have clients like that, I don't consider them clients, they're family."

Caring for that land and the river that runs through it is part of the reason Vero joined the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited in 1998, soon after she returned to the ranch after college. "I



MOLLIE McCLURE



MOLLIE McCLURE



▲ Vero, at left, with one of the ranch's wranglers. RACHEL MURRAY

don't fish, don't know a tippet from my elbow, but the ranch is on the hallowed Blackfoot River," Vero says. "Clean, cold, connected, complex water is important to us regardless, and BBCTU has helped us improve our irrigation practices, conserve water, and improve trout habitat. Why should we care about fish? They are indicator species of our watershed's health. Also, people come to Montana to fish."

In 1975, the earthen Mike Horse tailings dam failed, and 100,000 tons of toxic sludge went into the Blackfoot River. By the 1980s the fishery was suffering due to years of ranching, mining, and logging along the tributaries. An open-pit cyanide heap leach gold mine was also being considered for the headwaters on the Blackfoot near Lincoln, Montana. Landowners became anxious, decided to get serious about organizing, and formed a Trout Unlimited chapter to address concerns about the proposed mine.

"A baseline study needed to be done to inventory the river but no state funding was available," Vero says. "One of E Bar L Ranch's longtime guests, an avid fly fisherman from Chicago, asked how



MARIE BUSH

"Taft should be, and no doubt is, very proud of Juanita. My family has been visiting the E Bar L Ranch for 23 consecutive years, so we have known 'Juan' for quite a while. While I have no doubt she would be successful in any setting, she is a child of the wilds of Montana. She is an amazing rider, a poised businesswoman, a passionate environmentalist, and, most important if one is fortunate enough to ride the mountains with her for three to four hours, a marvelous storyteller."

—Bill McClure

much was needed and wrote a check to get the study done. That mine and another proposed in the mid-1990s did not get built. The Blackfoot's fishery has been restored, and the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited is one of the most active restoration chapters in the country."

But the environmental challenges didn't end there, Vero says. In 2005 an "egregious" subdivision for 119 lots on 200 acres next door to the ranch was proposed. "How could something like this happen in 'our' utopian Blackfoot Valley?" Vero says. "I educated myself on land use planning, my county's process, and better understanding local and state government. This led to me being on the board of Montana Conservation Voters, which has broadened my perspective to include statewide issues. In 2006, I was appointed to the county's Open Lands Committee."

Vero says that 2005 was also the

year when any tract of land with a road, or potential for a road plus views of snow-capped mountains and within two hours of an airport, was at risk of being subdivided and developed. For over 60 years the E Bar L Ranch had leased 4,000 adjacent acres from Plum Creek Timber (and other timber companies before them), which was interested in selling its timberlands for development.

"Our ranch guests helped raise \$2.5 million for a conservation easement to be put on those adjacent 4,000 acres that we had always leased," says Vero. "We already had a conservation easement on the ranch land (about 4,000 acres), so that no matter what happened, our land and the land we lease cannot be subdivided or developed. It was probably the most important endeavor I've ever been part of."

With the help of the Blackfoot Challenge—a landowner-based group

that coordinates management of the watershed—and The Nature Conservancy, 88,000 acres in the Blackfoot Watershed were protected from development by being sold to conservation buyers.

"I sometimes have fantasies of going to law school—not to be an attorney, but to learn how to better think about these issues: conservation, growth, community development, while maintaining the state of mind that is Montana," Vero says.

"One can simply read or hear the word Montana, and it conjures up images and emotions that I feel invested in delivering: clean air, clean water, wild places, access, community, solitude, freedom—perhaps an overused word nowadays—and opportunity.

"I was very lucky to be born into this, therefore I feel a great responsibility to foster, steward, and share all that we have here." ■

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MOLLIE McCLURE



MOLLIE McCLURE



MARIE BUSH

"Environmental issues have long been a punching bag for politicians, especially in the West," Jonathan Oppenheimer '92 says, "but we believe that we can support development while also preserving our core environmental values."

FOR BOISE RESIDENT JONATHAN OPPENHEIMER '92, MOST DAYS BEGIN MUCH THE SAME: HE ENJOYS BREAKFAST WITH HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTERS, THEN STEPS OUT THE DOOR FOR A FOUR-MILE RIDE ALONG A GREENBELT PATH ON THE BANKS OF THE BOISE RIVER TO HIS OFFICE AT THE IDAHO CONSERVATION LEAGUE. "IN THE FALL AND WINTER MONTHS, I MAKE THE TRIP IN A RATHER TIRED, 25-YEAR-OLD PAIR OF BIKE PANTS, WHICH MY COWORKERS LOVE TO TEASE ME ABOUT," HE SAYS WITH A CHUCKLE, "BUT I DON'T MIND. I LOVE BEING OUTDOORS, AND THE RIDE IS A RELAXING WAY TO START MY DAY."



Preserving *Idaho's* Wild Spaces *Jonathan Oppenheimer '92*

By Lori Ferguson

"Idahoans, myself included, have a close connection to the land. I'm outdoors as much as possible. I can hit a trail or trout stream and be the only person around. It's phenomenal."



▲ A quiet moment for conservation advocate Oppenheimer at the Casino Lakes in Idaho's Sawtooth National Recreation Area. JOHN MCCARTHY

Such is the rhythm of Oppenheimer's life for nine months of each year. But this leisurely pace goes by the wayside for the three months that the Idaho legislature is in session. During this intense period, Oppenheimer is out the door ahead of the family, his days consumed by his duties as the Conservation League's government relations director, a post that affords him plentiful opportunities to contribute to the "conservation conversation."

As the state's leading voice for conservation, Oppenheimer's organization monitors mining, logging, recreation

management, and wildlife management to ensure that resources are managed responsibly, and also works to maintain clean air and water across Idaho. "There are always a handful of issues that we're working on at any given time," says Oppenheimer, "but mining, fire, and open space are three of the biggest." Mining is a major source of revenue in the state, but mine development is also a major source of pollution, he explains, so the League monitors water quality to ensure that health and safety aren't compromised in pursuit of commerce. Fire is another

focus for the group, with the threat of wildfires a special concern in the summer months. "We're monitoring everything from community development to fuels reduction on state, private, and federal lands," he says. Finally, nothing could be accomplished without successful collaboration between the League and the community's stakeholders, from the timber industry and corporate developers to Fish & Game officials and private citizens.

Oppenheimer concedes that this aspect of his job isn't always easy. "Idaho is a conservative state, so it can be



▲ Fording a stream with fishing gear loaded in his backpack, Oppenheimer sets out in the proposed Long Canyon wilderness in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. PHIL COOK

challenging to talk about conservation issues, but finding a way to disagree without being disagreeable is a hallmark of our organization." Conservation and conservative come from the same root, he points out, and working for alignment between the two perspectives is a goal to which he is deeply committed.

And for the three months of each year that the legislature is in session, Oppenheimer and his team have a bit of a bully pulpit. During this period, he dons his lobbying hat and shuttles from one meeting to the next, discussing development of new legislation, attending and testifying at committee hearings, developing action alerts that League members can use to correspond with their elected leaders, and collaborating with other parties whose interests are deeply intertwined with the League's. Efforts hardly lag outside the legislative session—Oppenheimer and his team continue to meet with state policy leaders, attend interim committee meetings, monitor land management activities, conduct public outreach, collaborate with community stakeholders, develop organizational policy, and manage litigation.

Oppenheimer has been with the League since 2002, starting as the North Idaho conservation associate and working his way up to senior conservation associate, a post he held until several months ago when he moved into the government relations director's position. But his bona fides in conservation stretch back to his first job out of college. After

◀ Previous page: Jonathan Oppenheimer '92 speaking at the Idaho Conservation League's annual Wild Idaho! conference at Redfish Lake Lodge in Idaho's Sawtooth National Recreation Area. MARY BETH WHITAKER

"There are many places here that look the same as they did in the early 1800s when Lewis and Clark were exploring the region. These regions have intact ecosystems, areas that function as they did 10,000 years ago, which is incredibly rare in this day and age when we're witnessing the disappearance of grasslands, redwood forests, and the like."

earning a bachelor's degree in forestry-resource conservation at the University of Montana, Oppenheimer joined Montana's Predator Conservation Alliance, cataloguing the conditions of unmapped forest roads in grizzly bear and elk habitat.

The job was not without its hazards. In one instance, Oppenheimer and a colleague (the late Charlie Blumenstein '92) found themselves with two flat tires some 15 miles from the nearest pavement. Fortunately, the pair stumbled upon a radio at a Forest Service helicopter firefighting encampment



▲ Oppenheimer at a forum on public lands issues in Boise hosted by NPR. AARON KUNZ.

and were able to call for a tow truck. Oppenheimer then spent a year with the Riparian Wetland Research Program in Missoula, studying the effects of cattle grazing on private, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) riverside lands. "One day I was chased by a bull moose," he recalls. "Luckily, I was able to tuck under a fence and escape harm. I never saw where the moose went, and I didn't wait around to find out!" After a few years of adventure, Oppenheimer headed east to Washington, D.C., to join the Forest Campaign of the government watchdog group Taxpayers for Common Sense. Five years later, however, the opportunity to play a role in an active conservation team drew him back west once more.

After so many years in the field, Oppenheimer concedes that it's hard to pinpoint when he first became interested in environmental issues. "I've had a strong connection to the outdoors and the natural environment since I was a kid." An Ohio native, Oppenheimer moved to northeastern Connecticut at the age of 11 and fondly recalls a childhood filled with field trips and summer camps. "Environmental studies are a longstanding interest. I've always been intrigued by public interest and environmental health issues. It's a natural fit that I've just never questioned," he says.

Idaho is the perfect venue for his interests, Oppenheimer continues. It represents a vestige of what America once was, and at the same time serves as an outstanding example of the way in which the best landscapes and watersheds can be preserved while responsible economic development is encouraged. Approximately 63 percent of the state's land is public, encompassing national forests and BLM acreage, he notes, and residents feel a deep connection to their natural heritage. "Idaho has millions of acres, which represent incredible wild land value. There are many places here that look the same as they did in the early 1800s when Lewis and Clark were exploring the region. These regions have intact ecosystems, areas that function as they did 10,000 years ago, which is incredibly rare in this day and age when we're witnessing the disappearance of grasslands, redwood forests, and the like."

Despite this abundance, Oppenheimer remains vigilant, keenly aware that there are many stakeholders in the mix, each with an agenda. Among his greatest concerns at the moment: the issue of public versus private land ownership. "At present there's a big backlash against land ownership by the federal government. Public lands are a large part of the community in Idaho—fishing the evening rise on the Boise River, hunting in the state's wildlife

management areas—outdoor activities are an integral part of life here." Yet there are some, Oppenheimer says, who wish to sell public lands into private ownership, a move that he vehemently opposes. The air we breathe and the water we drink are all interconnected and belong to everyone, Oppenheimer contends, making preservation of these wild spaces as important to those in other parts of the country as it is to the residents of Idaho. "This attempt to make public lands private is a significant assault on the rights of citizens to enjoy the amazing landscapes we have here in Idaho," he asserts. "It's very troubling to me to witness this ploy—and it is a ploy—to seize

lands and turn them over to the state for auctioning off to the highest bidder. It strikes at the heart of what it means to be an Idahoan *and* an American."

Oppenheimer speaks as one who takes this birthright very seriously. A passionate outdoorsman, he avails himself of all that his state has to offer, from hiking and backcountry fly-fishing to predawn pickup games of ice hockey. Yet he also recognizes the necessity of economic development. "Environmental issues have long been a punching bag for politicians, especially in the West," he says, "but we believe that we can support development while also preserving our core environmental values."

"Idaho is a wonderful place to live," Oppenheimer concludes. "My wife and I moved out here, and before we knew it my sister, my mother, and my in-laws were here as well!" Boise sits at an elevation of approximately 3,000 feet and enjoys a high desert climate, he notes happily, which results in over 300 days of sunshine per year, mild winters, and little precipitation. "Idahoans, myself included, have a close connection to the land. I'm outdoors as much as possible. I can hit a trail or trout stream and be the only person around. It's phenomenal." ■

Lori Ferguson is a freelance writer based in southern New Hampshire.

▼ Oppenheimer lands a beautiful rainbow trout on the South Fork of the Boise River. JUSTIN HAYES





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