the courage to
SERVE
FOURTEEN TAFT STUDENTS AND FACULTY TRAVELED TO JINOTEGA, NICARAGUA, during spring break for an annual service learning trip to offer tutoring and other educational services to underserved children. Led by faculty members Jeremy Clifford and Laura Monti ’89, the group worked with host organization Outreach 360. Academic Dean Clifford and Taft students are pictured here during a lesson.  

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By Neil Vigdor ’95

Photography by Gary Fong/Genesis Photos
On Main Hall

A WORD FROM HEADMASTER WILLY MACMULLEN ’78

Taft has a long history of visitors coming to school to give talks and meet with students, and it’s really special when the visitor is a Taft graduate. This is a great tradition—one many great schools and colleges have—and I have a briefcase filled with memories of graduates speaking in Bingham, taking part in class discussions, meeting with groups of students, or performing in front of an audience. We shouldn’t think of those visits as ancillary or additional or supplemental. They are not. In fact, they are an essential part of a student’s educational experience, a vital if often surprising broadening and deepening of the curriculum, and sometimes they become touchstone moments, an experience a student never forgets and even returns to often in his or her days here, and perhaps even long after.

And this was the case in a recent visit to Taft by federal judge Karen Stevenson, Class of 1975. I might start with the way I introduced her to the students in Bingham. Judge Stevenson, a former member of the board of trustees, is all we could hope a Taft graduate might become. A cursory review of her bio is inspiring and humbling in equal measure: Stevenson was a cum laude graduate of the University of North Carolina as a Morehead Scholar; she was selected as the first African-American woman Rhodes Scholar and received her master in history at Oxford; she then received her J.D. with distinction from Stanford Law School and practiced commercial litigation for many years in Los Angeles; and in 2015 she was appointed federal magistrate judge for the Central District of California. Her resume alone is breathtaking.

And then there’s the simple amazing fact that someone this busy and with the heaviest responsibilities was willing to fly cross-country to spend two days on campus—simply because she cared deeply about Taft. Stevenson’s schedule was packed, and at every turn she challenged and inspired. She met over dinner and breakfast with students of color, supporting and mentoring in a singular way. She gave an address in Bingham, sharing her journey to Taft, her work as a judge, and asking students to recognize that each of them no doubt found Taft and adolescence painful and lonely at times—and that they each needed to show compassion and caring for each other. When she finished, there was a standing ovation. She spent an hour in the faculty room, listening and responding to questions from some 80 students and faculty. She attended several classes and led discussions in AP Government, AP U.S. History, and lower mid Approaches to History: on the federal versus state jurisdictions, the separation of powers, the role of the Supreme Court. She met with the school monitors after six dinner, discussing the moral and ethical dilemmas of leadership and challenging them to think of ways they could leave a legacy that made Taft an even stronger, more inclusive place. She pushed and inspired students, faculty, and me.

Think of what happened in Judge Stevenson’s visit. We were able to introduce an alumna of extraordinary accomplishment who reminded students of what they, too, might become. She offered a message that a great school was one where every student could live out his or her full potential and one which aspired always to improve. She mentored students, offered to provide future advice, and extended herself as part of the Taft network. She worked with students—in affinity groups, classes, and individually—to challenge them to think of what compassionate citizenship and ethical leadership looked like. She lived out our school motto by serving the school.

The Taft education of the whole student has a lot to do with the classroom. It always has and always will. But that education also occurs in so many other ways, and visiting speakers—alumni and other—can deepen and intensify learning. These moments are not extras, add-ons. They are carefully crafted and intentionally integrated into the broader educational goals of the school. For a lot of students, the first days after March break they will remember because a graduate who cared deeply about the school returned to campus and challenged and inspired and inspired them. I like thinking that one day years from now, a graduate might be back on campus, and standing on the stage in Bingham about to give an address, say: “I’m here because in March of 2018, we had an amazing graduate visit the school. I’ve not forgotten that day.”

Willy MacMullen ’78

RETURNING AND SERVING

There’s the simple amazing fact that someone this busy and with the heaviest responsibilities was willing to fly cross-country to spend two days on campus—simply because she cared deeply about Taft.”
**Alumni SPOTLIGHT**

**“AMERICA NEEDS TO RADICALLY simplify its operating system and give people—officials and citizens alike—the freedom to be practical,” writes author, lawyer, and philanthropist Philip Howard ’66. “Rules can’t accomplish our goals. Only humans can get things done.”**

Getting things done is something Howard knows a lot about. He is the founder of Common Good, a nonpartisan reform coalition that describes itself as working to simply government to put humans back in charge, cut mindless red tape, and limit the bureaucracy that prevents progress in America. Howard is senior counsel at the New York City law firm Covington & Burling. He has appeared on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and written four books as well as the introduction to former Vice President Al Gore’s Common Sense Government.

Howard also advises politicians, works with the White House, and regularly testifies for Congress, which lies at the heart of his mission to create a more efficient and effective government. In May, Howard will be recognized for this impressive body of work with the Horace Dutton Taft Alumni Medal, Taft’s highest alumni honor.

After graduating from Taft, Howard attended Yale University and the University of Virginia School of Law before getting a job at a Wall Street law firm. It was during this time that he began to contemplate the complexities of the government. “I began to wonder why it was that my friends in government couldn’t do what they thought made sense,” he says. “Why was government so clunky? I ended up having this epiphany that law can’t be precise. If you make law precise, people spend their whole day in rule books and they can’t get the job done. They’re just complying with all these rules that may or may not make sense.”

This idea hadn’t received much attention or been explored on a national level at the time, so when Howard drafted a book proposal, Random House was eager to publish it. The book, The Death of Common Sense (1995), became one of the bestsellers of the year.

“Phil is a terrific recipient of the HDT Alumni Medal. His initial book was one of the best non-fiction works I have ever read. His ideas have gained in popularity of late on all sides of the political spectrum. I hope that in some small way our award recognizes and furthers his efforts to what I believe would be the great benefit of all Americans,” notes Holcombe T. Green III ’87, trustee and chair of the Horace Dutton Taft Alumni Medal Committee.

After the success of his first book, Howard continued to work toward simplifying government. In addition to releasing a second book, he founded Common Good, an organization focused on building support for government overhaul by educating the public.

“The challenge is persuading the public that you can’t fix this system. It’s not a management problem, it’s a philosophy problem. You have to put humans in charge again,” explains Howard. Today, Common Good’s advisory board is comprised of some of the country’s well-known leaders, including John Danforth, former U.S. senator and ambassador to the United Nations; Bill Bradley and Alan Simpson, former U.S. senators; Tom Kean, former governor of New Jersey; and Richard Thornburgh, former U.S. attorney general and governor of Pennsylvania.

Howard and Common Good are working on several reforms. Currently, they are the leading group advocating for more streamlined infrastructure practices that still honor important environmental goals. Their three-page statute would not only introduce a more productive process, but it could also create a million new jobs.

Through books, speeches, and extensive advising and advocacy work, Howard is fighting to reestablish the American people’s freedom. He explains why this is so important in his 2010 TED Talk, “Four Ways to Fix a Broken Legal System,” which has more than 625,000 views.

“If teachers don’t have authority to run the classroom and maintain order, everybody’s learning suffers,” says Howard in his talk. “If the judge doesn’t have the authority to toss out unreasonable claims, then all of us go through the day looking over our shoulders. If the environmental agency can’t decide that the power lines are good for the environment, then there’s no way to bring power from the wind farms to the city…. What the world needs now is to restore the authority to make common choices. It’s the only way to get our freedom back, and it’s the only way to release the energy and passion needed so that we can meet the challenges of our time.”

In addition to his philanthropic work with Common Good, Howard is an active leader in New York City. He chaired the committee that installed the “Tribute in Light” memorial for victims of 9/11, and he serves as chair emeritus of the Municipal Art Society, which led the battle to save Grand Central Terminal. Throughout his life, Howard says that Taft’s motto has never been far from his mind. It taught him to value service, and he hopes that his work inspires others. “I want people to feel like they have much more ownership over their own choices and that they can make a difference on many different levels in our society,” says Howard.

“Philip Howard has been guided by Taft’s motto his entire life, and his labor, intellect, and vision are needed today. His belief—that we all can make a difference—is something every Taft graduate might aspire to,” comments Headmaster Willy MacMullen ’78.

—Hillary Donley
Teaching with a Worldview

ADAM YONKERS ’89 says that making a huge career change in his early 30s freed him from a deadening job to one that instead feeds his soul. He went from corporate communications—marketing and public relations at a big corporate law firm—to teaching U.S. history and foreign policy to high schoolers at Palo Alto Unified in California.

“I ended up working at a law firm, which was soul-sucking,” he says. “Although marketing and public relations for brands like Odwalla and Clif Bar was often great, I was constantly being told I should be a teacher, which I thought would ultimately be more rewarding in the long term.”

“I realized in marketing it was all dependent on the product,” he says. “If I didn’t believe in the product… it was really hard for me to get behind something I really didn’t believe in. So I went into this career exploration.”

Yonkers, who was coaching local basketball teams, began applying to graduate schools to earn a master’s degree in education, landing at Stanford’s Teacher Education Program. After graduation, he was hired by Palo Alto Unified.

“I spent one year teaching in middle school, and then I was hired at the high school, which was the goal,” he says. “Education, it’s relationships between people, between ideas and history. All these things are fundamentally interesting to me.”

The dual Irish-American citizen says teaching history and foreign policy courses really connects to his interests in foreign policy and U.S. history. He also lived for four years in Benin in West Africa, where his father, Charles ’58, served as the Peace Corps director. These two experiences fed his understanding of how America relates to the rest of the world.

He teaches U.S. foreign policy and history to 10th graders and an elective course for seniors. Yonkers says he prefers not to be the “sage on a stage,” where he lectures and students learn by rote, instead leading seminars where the students discuss themes based on events affecting the country today, such as immigration and the war in Afghanistan.

“A bonus of teaching at Palo Alto is that parents of his students often have connections with the very people enacting policies, such as Michael McFaul, President Obama’s ambassador to Russia, who came and spoke with his students. “I love having guest speakers,” Yonkers says. “It’s just amazing.”

Pedagogy fascinates him. His lesson plans are often minimal to allow for student discussions, with only two or so topics covered in a 90-minute period. With a lot of student classroom presentations and healthy discussions, Yonkers believes his method helps students understand the nuances of how the United States relates to the world. Yonkers and his wife, Suzanne, have three children: Connor, 7, Sue, 5, and Jack, 2. He is looking to teach in Europe in 2019–20, so that his children have the opportunity to experience life internationally outside the United States as he once did.

“I would like to give my kids an experience that would perhaps change their worldview,” he says.

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow ’84

History/government teacher Adam Yonkers ’89 (in rolled-up shirt sleeves) with his Palo Alto High School foreign affairs class when renowned historian Francis Fukuyama of Stanford University visited the class.
Fashion into the Future

VANESSA LEBFEBRE ROBINSON ’95 grew up working in her mother’s clothing store in Litchfield, Connecticut, but when she started college at UPenn, she planned to follow a pre-med track. Fast-forward nearly two decades, and Robinson is leading the women’s merchandising team at Stitch Fix, one of the most successful and exciting fashion/technology companies in the world.

Robinson’s choice to embark on a retail career wasn’t planned. After working three jobs at once during her college years, she decided to take some time off from the grind—a respite that would not have been possible if she’d applied to medical schools. A year off, she told herself, would give her some time to decide her next steps.

Robinson ended up in retail—something she thought she’d enjoy for a year and would allow her to earn money. She never expected she would stay in the industry, let alone end up in a major role at such a high-profile fashion innovator.

After UPenn, Robinson worked as an assistant buyer at Lord & Taylor, which she chose because “it was one of the few companies that still had buying and planning together, so it would allow me to work with the math and numbers behind retail and not just the pretty products,” she says.

“Trends are always changing, customer behavior is always changing, the economy is always changing, and retail is really the intersection between all of those different factors, and that’s the part that I really enjoy,” Robinson says. “I love the idea that no matter how good your business is, it could change at a moment’s notice, and you really need to always have your eyes and ears open to what that change is.”

Robinson’s openness to change prompted her to take a job at TJX, which owns TJ Maxx and Marshalls, after 11 years at Lord & Taylor. After two years there, she moved to Daffy’s and then Macy’s before joining Stitch Fix last May. Like TJX, Stitch Fix is “a disruptor in the retail industry,” says Robinson, who adds that “it’s really important as a retailer to make sure you’re always abreast of changing consumer behavior and evolving in your way of thinking about the customer.”

Stitch Fix uses stylists and algorithms to find the best five items to send clients; pictured is one such fix.

Stitch Fix uses stylists and algorithms to find the best five items to send clients; pictured is one such fix.

Clients receive their clothing selections in a beautiful box.

Stitch Fix uses stylists and algorithms to find the best five items to send clients; pictured is one such fix.

Clients receive their clothing selections in a beautiful box.

That broadened her experience and skills, helping her after a decade at Lord & Taylor. After two years there, she moved to Daffy’s and then Macy’s before joining Stitch Fix last May.

Like TJX, Stitch Fix is “a disruptor in the retail industry,” says Robinson, who adds that “it’s really important to make sure you’re always ahead of changing consumer behavior and evolving in your way of thinking about the customer.”

Stitch Fix does that by using artificial intelligence and data science to recommend clothes to its clientele of men, women, and children. When new customers sign up online for the service, they’re prompted to fill out a “Style Quiz” with fit and price preferences. After that, an AI-powered computer suggests five pieces to a stylist, who then confirms the choices and processes the shipment. Items start at $28 and go up to around $600, with designer brands like Rag & Bone at the top. A typical men’s box might contain two button-down shirts and a pair each of pants, shoes, and socks. Whatever the client doesn’t want, they simply return in a postage-paid bag.

The San Francisco-based, publicly traded company has revenues of more than $1 billion and employs about 5,800 people. Robinson believes it’s the future, and judging by its inclusion on LinkedIn’s list of the top start-ups, others seem to agree. “People are expecting personalization,” she says. “You take for granted that when you open Instagram or Facebook or even Google, it’s customized for you. Stitch Fix is taking that to the next step and personalizing the shopping experience for you.”

And while Robinson didn’t end up with a medical degree, she says her background in science has been immensely helpful in relating to the way Stitch Fix’s data scientists approach their role. “I guess all things happen for a reason,” she says.
But “work” is the wrong word to describe how Losee spends his days. While spearheading RUN/SUP is indeed his career, the business is a by-product of his passion, created through his entrepreneurial spirit. Losee, who claims he “caught the entrepreneurial bug at a young age,” got his start in the paddleboard industry when he cofounded YOLO (You Only Live Once), a line of paddleboards, in 2007 with his friend Jeff Archer.

Over the past few years, Losee has stepped away from the day-to-day operations of YOLO to focus on RUN/SUP. “I started RUN/SUP because I would consistently find myself torn between choosing to run or stand-up paddle for my workout,” Losee explains. “With this program, I’ve married my two loves.”

Running and stand-up paddleboarding are extremely popular in the scenic Panhandle area. In addition to providing great exercise, both activities offer breathtaking views of the region’s pristine coastal dune lakes, lush green acres, and, of course, majestic blue ocean. RUN/SUP is ideal for fitness enthusiasts of all levels, including beginners. Losee offers RUN/SUP programs at the Boathouse Paddle Club at the WaterColor Inn on Western Lake, including classes in SUP Yoga and TRX.

“It’s a great way to cross-train,” Losee explains of the workout, which typically involves a one-mile group run followed by an interval-style workout on the stand-up paddleboards, including bodyweight squats, push-ups, and core exercises. The entire program is finished in less than an hour.

Born and bred in Long Island, New York, Losee grew up loving the water and was a natural athlete from a young age. “It was actually at Taft that I first started running,” he recalls. “There was a legendary Latin teacher named Donald Oscarson ’47 (known as ‘Oscie’), who was dean of students for two decades. He had a training program called Jumpers, kind of like Crossfit, that athletes did to stay in shape between seasons, and we had to run a lot. I like to pay homage to that when I think about the role running has played in my life and in my work.”

RUN/SUP’s tagline is simple but impactful: Let your workout take you somewhere. Part of the beauty of the program is the idea that it can truly be done anywhere there’s a body of water, and participants are never in the exact same spot twice. RUN/SUP uses and sells its own line of inflatable paddleboards, which are just as durable as non-inflatable boards. “The beauty of inflatables is that they come in their own travel bag,” Losee says. “We went to Patagonia recently. All you need are your sneakers and your board, and you can take the RUN/SUP experience with you. I like the natural simplicity of it.”

As the program gains popularity, RUN/SUP is becoming more than just a workout; it’s evolving into a true fitness and lifestyle brand. The company has a small retail store that carries gear and activewear, and RUN/SUP now offers retreats, training certification programs, kid’s classes, and a variety of race events. “The races aren’t anything too crazy, but they’re very popular,” Losee says. “Typically it’s a mile run followed by a mile paddle. They’re a lot of fun.”

What’s next for stand-up paddleboarding? Losee, whose daughter, Ella ’20, is a Taft middler, would love to see SUP become an intermural at his alma mater someday. “I just want people to get out and try SUP and enjoy it,” he says. “At the end of the day, that’s my goal.”

—Carola Lovering ’07
The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s
Simon & Schuster
William I. Hitchcock ’82

In a 2017 survey, presidential historians ranked Dwight D. Eisenhower fifth on the list of great presidents, behind the top four: Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Theodore Roosevelt. Historian William Hitchcock shows that this high ranking is justified. Eisenhower's accomplishments were enormous. A former general, he kept the peace: he ended the Korean War, avoided a war in Vietnam, adroitly managed a potential confrontation with China, and soothed relations with the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. He guided the Republican Party to embrace central aspects of the New Deal like Social Security. He thwarted the demagoguery of McCarthy and advanced the agenda of civil rights for African-Americans.

The Performance Cortex: How Neuroscience is Redefining Athletic Genius
Zach Schonbrun ’05

Why do good quarterbacks always seem to know where their receivers are? Why can't modern robotics come close to replicating the dexterity of a 5-year-old? In this deeply researched book, sports and business reporter Zach Schonbrun explores what drives human movement and its spectacular potential. The groundbreaking work of two neuroscientists in Major League Baseball is only the beginning. Schonbrun traces the fascinating history of motor research and details how new investigations into the brain are helping explain the extraordinary skills of talented performers like Stephen Curry, Tom Brady, Serena Williams, and Lionel Messi, as well as musical virtuosos, dancers, rock climbers, race-car drivers, and more. Whether it is timing a 95-mph fastball or reaching for a coffee mug, movement requires extraordinary computation that many take for granted — until now. The Performance Cortex ushers in a new way of thinking about the athletic gifts we strain to see in our cavernous arenas. It's not about the million-dollar arm any more. It's about the million-dollar brain.

A Question of Attachment: Toward a Lossless Society
Frederick H. Leonard ’74

Pulling from his background in geology, counseling psychology, and philanthropy, Frederick Leonard organizes the information he presents and the stories he tells around the singular question he sees posed by patterns of insecure attachment within U.S. society: How do I bring to myself a sense of connection, even intimacy, while at the same time distancing myself from the pain and heartbreak that connection and intimacy inevitably bring? He looks at number of social and cultural trends that he considers as answers to the question asked by insecure attachment: the march of postmodernism, which he considers as answers to the question asked by insecure attachment.

Tell Me Lies
Simon & Schuster
Carola Lovering ’07

Lucy Albright is far from her Long Island upbringing when she arrives on the campus of her small California college, happy to be hundreds of miles from her mother, whom she's never forgiven for an act of betrayal in her early teen years. Quickly grasping at her fresh start, she embraces college life and all its offers—new friends, wild parties, stimulating classes. And then she meets Stephen DeMarco. Charming, confident and cocksure, Stephen sees something in Lucy that no one else has, and she's quickly seduced by this vision of herself. Meanwhile, Stephen is determined to forget an incident buried in his past that, if exposed, could ruin him. And their addicting entanglement will have consequences they never could have imagined.

BAYT FARHI AND THE SEPHARDIC PALACES OF OTTOMAN DAMASCUS IN THE LATE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES
American Schools of Oriental Research/Manar al-ATHAR

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis ’98

One of the largest and most important palatial houses of late 18th- and early 19th-century Damascus belonged to the Farhi family, who served as financial administrators to successive Ottoman governors in Damascus and Acre. The conversion of Bayt Farhi to a hotel provided a unique opportunity to make a detailed examination of its architecture, which is comparable to that of affluent Christians and Muslims and decorated with high-quality materials in the latest styles. Bayt Farhi's outstanding architecture and decoration is documented and presented in this first comprehensive analysis of it and Damascus's other prominent Sephardic mansions Matkab Anbar, Bayt Dabah, Bayt Stamboyl, and Bayt Libiona. The Hebrew poetic inscriptions in these residences reveal how the Farhis and other leading Sephardic families perceived themselves and how they presented themselves to their own community and other Damascenes. A history of the Farhis and the Jews of Damascus provides the context for these houses, along with the architectural development of the monumental Damascene courtyard house.

Tell Me Lies
Simon & Schuster
Carola Lovering ’07

A thrilling, sexy, coming-of-age story exploring toxic love, ruthless ambition, and shocking betrayal, Carola Lovering's first novel is about that one person who still haunts you—the wrong one, the one you couldn't let go of, the one you'll never forget.

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When dancer and choreographer Nathan Trice established his theatrical dance company in 1998, his vision included the creation of a “unique visual, audio, sensory, theatrical movement language.” For nearly six months, Trice spoke that language at Taft, guiding students through a process of self-exploration that culminated with extraordinarily personal performances on the Bingham stage.

The depth and breadth of Taft’s dance program has grown markedly during dance teacher Sarah Surber’s six-year tenure. Surber is a former professional dancer with deep roots and connections in the national arts community. She has used those connections to bring an eclectic and impressive roster of dance companies to Taft for limited residencies, including Trice, a highly regarded dancer, choreographer, and artistic director.

“Trice is a highly regarded dancer, choreographer, and artistic director. He is the artistic director and founder of nathantrice/RITUALS, a project-by-project theatrical dance company based in Brooklyn, New York. He brought his talent and experience to a unique residency program at Taft.

When Nathan began talking about the work he was doing with college students, it really sparked my interest,” says Surber. “I thought, Wait a minute, our students can do this kind of work and really enjoy it.”

The work done at Taft is a very small part of a much larger initiative developed by Trice in 2001. The Recognizing Women Project bridges the gap between art and academia through collaborative interdisciplinary research initiatives between the company, high school students, professional female dancers, and students enrolled in university social sciences and humanities departments.

The mission of the project is to “create artistic/educational work that addresses various social, political, cultural contributions, as well as emotional, psychological, and spiritual experiences of women.” It is designed to shed light and provoke thought, and to drive self-discovery.

Overall, the Recognizing Women Project focuses on creating work that speaks to the unique contributions and experiences of women,” Trice explains. “We do that by having the dancers research their own lives to develop deeper personal understanding and pen very personal narratives. Each year there are new dancers involved with the project, each with their own story. I have a broad choreographic framework that I adapt to bring those stories to the stage.”

The “research” process begins with Trice challenging students to think about themselves within the context of societal expectations, norms, and perceptions. Whiteboards, flip charts, and open conversation in the dance studio plant seeds for ongoing self-reflection through new understandings and perspectives.

“I ask students, ‘What is self-objectification? What does it feel like to be objectified? Do you think you have ever been objectified? What is that like?’” explains Trice. “Students were not only asked to reflect on these topics outside of class, but to interview their friends and classmates to learn about their experiences, then unpack that for themselves.”
Around the POND

Ideas about self-objectification. We had a thoughtful discussion about identity, agency, self, and community. The students started to understand the possibilities, not just the academic achievement, that open up when they integrate the skills they learn in class to who they are as a people. Nathan’s energy and expertise to speak with young people and pull out those often personal and challenging parts of themselves was inspiring.”

Addie Trice, "There is a way to sort of listen to the students’ stories and peel them back a bit more. In doing so, I can begin to see how they intersect—how maybe your story and my story can intersect and tell maybe a societal story. I wanted students to take a step back, look at their own lives and say, Who am I? How did I become this person, and where do I want to go from there? It is about taking some control, understanding that you have some agency, some autonomy in this, and some responsibility in this.”

The content developed by and with Valdez’s students informed the work being done by Surber’s Advanced Dance students in the studio, and punctuated points in the overall narrative shaped during Trice’s residency at Taft. That narrative was the heart and soul of a 10-minute theatrical movement piece performed at both the Taft Dance Ensemble Winter Concert and a special Music for a While concert series performance by Trice’s dance company, I, The Object In My Eye, featured six students from the Advanced Dance class. The piece was the culmination of months of emotional and physical self-exploration and discovery.

“Early in the school year Nathan showed us some basic phrases just to get a feel for his movements and his move- ment language,” explains dancer Haylee Snow ’19. “In the months that followed, we had a lot of really important discussions about how we view our own bodies and how other people view us, about how our identities may change in different contexts. Over time, we learned how to connect our movements and our feelings around that research, and the things we discovered about ourselves.”

Snow and her peers literally wrote their stories—pen to paper verbal records of thoughts, feelings, and discoveries. Bits of those stories were verbally articu- lated during the dance performances.

“I have never spoken in a dance before,” says Snow. “Dance, to me, has always been a form of communica- tion. But it was not until I worked with Nathan that I actually came to understand how to connect words, feel- ing, and movement for the first time.”

And in making that connection, Snow’s dancing was elevated, and forever changed.

“My movements have become more fluid,” says Snow. “There is more inten- sion behind each movement and more meaning behind each phrase.”

To learn more about Nathan Trice, the Recognizing Women Project, and his company, nathanieltrice/RTUALS, A Project-by-Project Dance Theater Company, visit www.nathanieltrice/rtuals.com.

---continued from previous page---
Non ut Sibi: Serving Those Who Serve

TAFT’S RED RHINO FUND AWARDED four nonprofit organizations grants totaling $7,135 earlier this year, the culmination of a months-long process designed to support groups working to impact the lives of children in the Greater Waterbury community. Percussionists from Bravo Waterbury!, an organization that received grant dollars from the Red Rhino Fund last year, performed in Bingham Auditorium during the awards ceremony.

Founded in 2007, the Red Rhino Fund is an endowed charitable fund run this year by an eight-member student board with two faculty advisors. At its core, the fund’s mission is an extension of the school motto, Not to be served, but to serve. The board works to create positive change in the Greater Waterbury community for children, especially those who are underprivileged, by awarding monetary grants and promoting local organizations in support of education, literacy, and the arts. Along the way, they gain solid perspectives on both the mechanics and importance of philanthropic work.

“Our group is successful due to the culmination of many students working hard and in unison,” Red Rhino Fund Board President Hanna Murphy ’18 explains. “Serving on the board has not only given each of us the opportunity to experience philanthropic work, it has also allowed us to see how our hard work helps other students.”

In September, the board set a budget for the academic year, which included grants and marketing costs on one side, and income generated through events like Denim Day, an annual badminton tournament, and the Spring Fling on the other. Grants Committee Chair Raveeno Douglas ’18 led the initiative to identify and evaluate grant recipients, largely through site visits.

In making their awards, the Red Rhino Fund board considers things like the breadth of an organization’s reach and how it plans to spend the grant dollars. They extend their own reach by adhering to a policy that prevents any organization from receiving a fund grant in two consecutive years. The 2018 grant winners are the United Way of Greater Waterbury, offering a broad range of philanthropic services across the region; the St. Vincent DePaul Mission, working to make a positive difference in the lives of the homeless, hungry, and mentally ill; Save Girls on F.Y.R.E., Inc., enhancing the lives of girls and young women who live in underserved communities; and Reach Out And Read, Inc., working to close achievement gaps through early literacy interventions.

DAN CALORE WORKS WITH PERFORMANCE ENGINEERING students in Taft’s new Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Laboratory. The lab consists of a technologically and ergonomically progressive classroom; a project-based, mechanical-build workspace with advanced safety features; and a technology laboratory with, Calore says, high-tech additive and reductive engineering tools.

Website Continues to Wow!

THE COUNCIL FOR ADVANCEMENT and Support of Education (CASE) recognized the Taft School website with a gold Circle of Excellence Award. The site earned top honors in the Marketing Communications/Website category in the 2018 District I Circle of Excellence Awards competition. Awards were presented at the CASE Conference in Boston in March. Boston University’s Shipley Prostate Cancer Research Center took silver in the same category, with the MIT Chemical Engineering Department rounding out the field with bronze.

CASE is a professional association serving educational institutions and the advancement professionals who work on their behalf in alumni relations, communications, development, marketing, and allied areas. Its membership includes more than 3,670 colleges and universities, primary and secondary independent and international schools, and nonprofit organizations in more than 82 countries across the globe.

In addition to the website award, the Arts microsite, housed within the Taft School website, also took home top design honors, earning gold in the InspireED School Marketers 2017 Brilliance Awards competition. InspireED is an online professional development resource and community for PK-12 private school marketing and communications administrators in the U.S. and abroad.

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BEST-ON-BEST BARNBURNER?
Maybe...but most definitely a great time when alumni took to the ice in Odden Arena for the annual Alumni Hockey Game.

EVERY SUMMER, TAFT STUDENTS chase their dreams through a broad range of artistic endeavors, some with assistance from the Kilbourne Summer Enrichment Fund. Established by John Kilbourne ’58, in memory of his parents, Samuel W. and Evelyn S. Kilbourne, these summer grants help students attend enriching programs in the arts. The 2017 Kilbourne Scholars shared their adventures with the Taft community during a Morning Meeting in February. They are, from left, Brady Grustas ’19, Cami Long ’19, Lily Turner ’18, John Kilbourne ’58, Gerry Callers ’18, Haylee Snow ’19, and theater teacher Helena Fifer.

HEADMASTER WILLY MACMULLEN ’78 REFERS TO THE ANNUAL LOWER MID MACBETH RECITATION CONTEST as “the best night of the year,” and for Ivy Zhuang ’21, it may have been just that. Ivy placed first in the 2018 competition for her delivery of Lady Macbeth’s Act I Scene v plea to the spirits.

THE BOLD, VIBRANT PAINTINGS OF ALUMNI ARTIST WILLIAM HUDDELS ’82 (above) set the table for the multimedia sensory feast of student art (at left) that brought Potter Gallery to life during the Winter Term.

Around the POND
Of Trembling Winter, the Fairest Flowers o’ the Season

Shakespeare returned to Taft for his annual winter visit, this time not only for the traditional recitation competitions, but also for a uniquely imagined staging of The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, in which six students shared the title role.

"Many years ago, I saw a production of this play in which the role of Hamlet was played by four actors," notes Performing Arts Technical Director David Kievit. "They were always on stage together sharing lines, thoughts, and emotions." The dynamic, he says, was a "formidable force," and one that added clarity to the storytelling and to the theatrical experience.

"When I watched other productions with one actor in the role, I sometimes thought that if I could just take him out to the lobby for a minute or two I could straighten this whole thing out. But with four I never had that thought," Kievit says. "Hamlet does a great deal of introspection, and having another Hamlet to talk to—or talk with—at times can be comforting for the other characters in the play."

Gerry Calles ’18 inhabited the characters of Hamlet, Laertes, and Guildenstern.

Milan Moudry ’18 was as comfortable in the role of Horatio as in that of Hamlet.

Mihir Nayar ’19 took to the stage as both Polonius and Hamlet.

Tania Tsunik ’20 played both Hamlet and Ophelia.

Louise Gagnon ’18 and Will de Melo ’19, here as Queen Gertrude and King Claudius, also shared the role of Hamlet.

The Dance Ensemble

Winter concert was a vibrant celebration of movement, culture, power, and expression.
Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable…. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Empowering Youth to Wage Peace

“How MANY OF YOU READ THE paper and have a sense that there is more conflict today than you remem-ber?” asked Nancy Lindborg, president of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) during her Morning Meeting visit to Taft in January. “It seems that we are really engulfed in conflict right now… This is a time that all of us need to be very mindful of what is happening, and what our role is both as individu-als and as part of our greater country.”

USIP was founded 34 years ago, Lindborg explained, by Congress in an effort to provide a nonparti-san, independent federal institute that was devoted to better prevent-ing and resolving violent conflict. “There was a group of leaders in Congress who had served in World War II and the Korean War who were seized by the fact that we needed, as a country, more capacity and greater focus on how to wage peace as well as how we wage war,” said Lindborg. “They noted that there were many military academies, and that there needed to be an academy for peace, as well.”

Conceived as a national peace academy in the 1960s and married in principle with grassroots efforts in the ’70s, the legislation that established the institute was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1984. Its efforts today span the globe and include identifying, train-ing, and empowering youth leaders living in conflict zones around the world.

Nancy Lindborg’s visit to Taft was made possible by the Rear Admiral Raymond F. DuBois Fellowship in International Affairs, which offers Taft students the opportunity to learn more about international affairs through annual presentations by guest lecturers. Her talk and most Morning Meeting presentations are available on Taft’s website at www.taftschool.org/multimedia.
Girls’ Hockey 17–6–0
- FOUNDERS LEAGUE CHAMPIONS
- NEPSAC QUARTERFINALISTS

The Taft girls’ hockey team made a significant leap this season, achieving several firsts in many years, including making it to the PKO Tournament Championship game (eventual runners-up), earning the Founders League Championship (a 3-way tie), and qualifying for the NEPSAC tournament for the first time since 2004, as the #6 seed. Highlights of the season included a post-holiday eight-game winning streak, with five shutouts. Taft had tremendous leadership from its eight seniors, led by captain Natalie Witkowski ’18, who was selected to receive the Patzy K. Odden Hockey Award this year. Selected as Founders All-League players were defender Claudia Vira ’18, forward Lexi Cafiero ’18, and goalie Sidney Molnar ’18. Selected to All-NEPSAC First Team were Sidney Molnar and, for the Honorable Mention Team, Claudia Vira. Next year, a solid core of returning players will be led by captain-elect Shannon Bucci ’19.

Boys’ Hockey 9–13–1

This year’s team will be recognized for their growth throughout the season both on and off the ice. Led by 10 seniors...
Girls' Basketball 18–6

With an 18–6 regular season finish, wins in the quarterfinals and semifinals of the New England 8 Tournament, a 6–1 Founders League record, and another appearance in the Class A New England Tournament, the girls’ varsity basketball team enjoyed one of its most successful seasons in years. Four-year varsity players and co-captains Lauren Pelosi ’18 and Juliana Yamin ’18, three-year letter-winner and co-captains Jordan Tonelli ’18 and Billy Dobensky ’19, the focus of the season was to play a high-paced style of hockey by committing to a team-first mentality. The Rhinos started the season well with a 2–1 record at the St. Paul’s jamboree and a 2–2 record at the Lawrenceville tournament, and finished with eight 1-goal games against some of the top teams in New England. Key wins came against strong teams from Avon (3–2), Kent (4–2), and Loomis (5–2). The second half of the season was fueled by Taft’s skill and stability on the power play and penalty killing units. All-Founders League selections were Jack Feinstein ’18 and Johnny Hartfield ’18. For his overall play and contributions to the team and the spirit of hockey at Taft, Jordan Tonelli earned the Coach’s Hockey Award. Goalie Caleb Hannon ’18 earned the Angier Hockey Trophy as the player who did the most to promote good sportsmanship in the interest of the team. Taft’s leading scorers for the season were Ryan Colwell ’19 (26 points), followed by Jordan Tonelli (23 points) and Christian Jimenez ’20 (15 points). Next year’s team will be led by captain-elect Billy Dobensky.

Wrestling 10–3

With a balanced lineup, the Rhinos powered to a 10–3 record in dual meets but missed three critical contests due to the weather. Key victories included a 58–21 win over what appeared to be a resurgent Hotchkiss team and a 54–30 win over the always tough Avon squad. While injuries and some bad luck hampered the team’s showing at the league tournament, Taft did crown two league champions for the first time since 2011. Frank Robertshaw ’18 at 170 and Alex Jones ’18 at 195 both pinned their way through the finals. The tri-captains went to New England the following weekend, where Drew Dye ’18 at 160 and Robertshaw both won matches and Jones took 3rd place, Taft’s highest finish since 2009.
Boys’ Varsity Basketball 11–13

For only the third time in the past 11 years the boys’ basketball team finished with a losing record, but the Rhinos did not play a single game this season with their whole roster and were challenged by injuries. Taft was anchored by Shamir Johnson ’18, who was the team’s leading scorer and rebounder, and was second in assists. On the defensive end, Johnson led the team in steals and deflections and was called on to defend the opposing team’s best player. Johnson scored over 1,000 points and was selected to the NEPSAC All-League team. Point guard Adam Drummond ’18 was pivotal in creating offense and dictating the pace of play for teammates, and led the team in assists. A bulk of the scoring came from Connor Printz ’19 and Kai Kostmayer ’20, who were threats to score from behind the 3-point arch as well as in transition. The team’s 6-foot 9-inch center, Frank Lumaj ’18, held down the middle with his ability to block, making it tough for teams to score inside. Season highlights include sweeping both Hotchkiss and Kent for the second straight year. The 2018-19 team will be captained by Connor Printz, who has proven himself as a leader on and off the court.

Skiing

The boys’ and girls’ ski teams both had solid seasons, getting faster with each race, and by the Carl Williams Championship Slalom, the boys placed 3rd and the girls tied for 5th out of 13 schools. The girls were 10–7 in the regular season and 7–1 against all girls’ teams. They placed 4th of 13 teams in the New Englands, narrowly missing the podium, and were 8–1–4 in the Brigham Ski League Championships. The boys posted a record of 12–5 during the regular season and placed 6th of 14 teams in the New Englands and 3rd of 13 in the Brigham Ski League Championships. Natalie Waldram ’18, co-captain Maddie Savage ’18, and Jake Wasserstein ’18 provided senior leadership for the 16 skiers on the varsity team, and each contributed significantly to the team’s success. All three skied in the New Englands, and Waldram earned All New England honors in both the giant slalom and slalom and, with co-captain-elect Abby Ford ’19, will lead the team next year.

Girls’ Squash 5–6

Led this year by co-captains and returners Aariya Patel ’19 and Zoe Eberstadt-Beattie ’18 (unable to play due to injury), the team was comprised of two more returners, Eliza King Freedman ’19 and Yasmeen Bae ’18, and five new players, Carolina Salvatore ’21, Sadie Pollack ’21, Tiffany Tam ’20, Nina Brockelman ’19, and Minna Holleck ’18. Key wins for the season came against Groton, Exeter, Hopkins, and Westminster. The Rhinos competed against top teams in the country in the Division II High School Nationals, dropping close early-round matches before finishing with a close final win against Harriton-Lower Merion, and finished tied for 11th at the Division A of the New England Championships. #1 Patel and #2 Salvatore fought hard for two big wins each, and Brockelman earned three wins and a 7th-place finish. Taft looks forward to many players returning next season, and the team will be captained by Aariya Patel and Eliza King Freedman.

Boys’ Squash 8–6

Taft finished with an 8–6 record and competed at the Division II High School National Tournament and the Class A New England Tournament. The Rhinos were led by co-captains #3 Peter Keigher ’19 and #2 Raunak Advani ’19, and also by three seniors in the top 9, #1 Sanjeev Jeyabalan ’19, #4 Hunter Lord ’19, and #7 Teddy Schoenholtz ’21. Highlights of the season included team wins against Choate, Exeter, Loomis, and Westminster. Next year the team will be led by co-captains-elect Peter Keigher and Raunak Advani, as well as returners #1 Sanjeev Jeyabalan ’19, #4 Hunter Lord ’19, #5 Peter Denious ’20, and #7 Teddy Schoenholtz ’21.
TO SERVE.

How three young alums are living out Non ut sibi in their daily lives in the military.

Three recent graduates credit Taft with instilling in them a sense of service to others that has inspired them to serve their country. A Naval meteorology and oceanography officer, a communications and cyber warfare officer, and a Marine Corps test pilot have taken the school’s motto to heart.

By Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow ’84
After completing his deployment as a surface warfare officer aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, Keefe Rafferty joined the Navy Meteorology and Oceanography Command this year—METOC is a branch command of U.S. Navy Information Warfare. He’s stationed at the Stennis Space Center with its fleet survey team. Rafferty says the team travels the world’s oceans to bottom map nearshore regions for publishing charts and safe navigation of military platforms and vessels. Rafferty was awarded a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal from his commanding officer on the Theodore Roosevelt when he transferred from the aircraft carrier. It’s a difficult medal to earn during a first tour as an officer (two years after his graduation and commissioning). “I was humbled and honored to receive it,” he says. “I can absolutely attribute the award to the crew I worked with onboard, but I also can attribute this to Taft, where my call to service all began.” As Rafferty was growing up as a faculty child at Taft—his mom is Jennifer Zaccara, former associate dean of faculty and English teacher, who served from 2001 to 2013—the school’s motto, Non ut sibi ministretur sed ut ministret, Not to be served but to serve, instilled his calling to serve in such tremendous ways.

“During my spare moments in my office while on deployment, my chief and I broke out his ukulele and jammed out some tunes.” Rafferty says. “A good way to relieve a busy schedule.”
FOR FIVE HOURS EACH DAY OR NIGHT, 5,000 SOULS WERE IN MY HANDS. A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOMEONE RIGHT OUT OF COLLEGE, BUT ALSO VERY FULFILLING.

to serve, made a huge impression on him. He credits that motto with helping spark his desire to join the military.

“When I entered middle school, I quickly began to notice how I was different than a lot of my peers. Not in a bad way or a better way, but more of a disciplined way,” he says. “I focused on life from a strategic and innovative mindset, focusing on mental and strength development and teamwork. I thought at the time that the military team, or family, would be the best fit for me for my initial career.”

His love of history and the ocean led to his decision to enter the U.S. Naval Academy, as well as for its education.

“Annapolis gave me that opportunity,” he says. “I’ve always been a scholar at heart. I chose the Navy because I love the ocean,” he says. “I pretty much was always in the water whenever I could be. I also did not know what particular branch of the Navy I wanted to serve in, whether it be surface, submarines, aviation, special warfare, or the Marine Corps, so, I thought entering the Navy through the U.S. Naval Academy gave me that best option to prepare and have time in to see what I wanted to pursue.”

Taft’s motto—and the school’s help when his brother, Bryce ’07, had a near-fatal diving accident just days before Rafferty’s senior year at Taft—reinforced his desire to serve others.

“It’s a call to humility,” he says. “A desire to place others before myself in everything that I do. Hard to do when I am a pretty competitive person, notably on the athletic pitch, but I approach life as a servant leader and follower as opposed to a strict manager or egocentric leader concerned with one’s own career and personal gain. Money is not one of my life pursuits. In my faith, life is about serving—serving God, serving my country, serving in any avenue where I can put my talents that God gave me to good use for the greater good. Taft instilled my calling to serve in such tremendous ways. When I look at schools, I always ask or see what their motto is, and I have yet to find one as powerful as Taft’s.”

Rafferty’s previous posting had him leading more than 60 sailors. “I was a surface warfare officer (SWO) on the aircraft carrier in the engineering department, where I led over 60 sailors in the management of all electrical systems on the ship outside of the nuclear reactor plant. I’m not an electrician by trade, but SWOs are placed into many different departments on the ship to lead and manage respectively, to include engineering, combat systems, operations, deck, navigation, and weapons,” he says.

“When out to sea, I also stood officer of the deck, where I was the leading officer and direct representative of the ship’s captain on the bridge. I ensured safety of navigation, ship and crew, mission accomplishment, and seamanship innovation and training, maintaining situational awareness at all times of all radars. For five hours each day or night, 5,000 souls were in my hands. A lot of responsibility for someone right out of college, but also very fulfilling. It never gets old placing the ship into the necessary headwind and crosswind wind limits to launch and land our fixed and rotary wing aircraft.”

Sailing at night, Rafferty says, was the most difficult. “I was definitely thinking about the past sailors, back when it was all sails. They didn’t have GPS or all the instruments,” he says.

“We have technology today, so it’s really hard for present-day officers to think about that. We did learn how to navigate by the stars if the GPS goes down. It’s definitely a little more labor intensive!” And even though he’s only 26, Rafferty feels personal satisfaction in watching those under his leadership rise to the occasion.

“I have the opportunity to affect other people’s lives every day,” he says. “Carpe diem! I can help and get to see my sailors accomplish their goals and dreams, whether that be promoting to the next rank, getting college-level degrees, obtaining qualifications, or raising a family. I get to have the opportunity to lead fine men and women each day.”

My job encompasses being a directive officer holding sailors accountable one second, and the next second I may be giving them recognition for their accomplishments and training them how to be a team of teams. The Navy is about teamwork. In our field of work, when we do not operate as a team, sailors’ lives may unfortunately be in jeopardy. Succeeding as a team at the end is an amazing feeling. We grind it out and complete the missions. It’s a great feeling.”
Coming from a military background, Rhydian Glass always felt patriotic. Her grandfather and several other family members served in the military.

Glass is currently an ensign and communications and cyber warfare officer stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, aboard the USS Leyte Gulf.

“From a very patriotic town, and ever since I was young, I’ve always highly regarded the military,” she says. A star softball player at Taft, Glass went to Yale after graduation. The thought of joining the military was pushed back as she concentrated on her studies.

“I never knew becoming an officer was an option for me until my junior year of college—before then, I thought ROTC or the military academies were the only routes,” she says. “When I learned that Officer Candidate School was an option for college graduates, I became very interested in the opportunity. It’s always been a goal of mine to apply all that I learned from my studies at Yale toward my career, and I saw the Navy as a challenging yet solid place to start.”

Glass earned a bachelor’s degree from Yale in environmental studies concentrating on national security and policy. She focused primarily on nonproliferation, electromagnetic pulses, and nuclear warfare issues. “A lot of what I studied actually pertained to the Navy and global naval issues,” she says.

“I just turned 24 years old, and I am in charge of a division of nearly 20 sailors. Every day I lead them, from making sure work is properly and efficiently executed to providing support and guidance on a personal and career level,” she says. “The travel is also every exciting. I’ve gotten a chance to see some incredible places around the world, from the Middle East to the Arctic Circle.”

Glass says she joined her current ship as it was halfway through its deployment last summer.

“My love and pride for our country motivate me, particularly contributing to and serving something greater than myself.”
“I flew out of Bahrain, spent some time in the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea, we encountered plenty of sandstorms out there...and we sailed through a monsoon.”

“I flew out of Bahrain, spent some time in the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea,” she says. “We encountered plenty of sandstorms out there. Within my first week on board, we sailed through a monsoon. The Suez Canal is quite an interesting experience, traveling on a warship with land 50 meters to each side. I’ve been through the Mediterranean and saw Spain, went up north to Scotland—saw lots of sharks up there—and can loudly say I ‘Bluenosed,’ having crossed and spent time over the Arctic Circle. The water up there is cold. The fjords of Norway are absolutely surreal, and the views from the top of a warship’s mast are incomparable.”

Being in the military has changed Glass, she says. “I’m more confident and direct. I’m becoming a much stronger and efficient leader, and am learning how not to put up with silly nonsense. I can quickly adjust and adapt to any situation and circumstance, and I’m definitely more courageous.”

Those considering a career in the military should think hard about their choice, Glass says. “I’m more confident and direct. I’m becoming a much stronger and efficient leader, and am learning how not to put up with silly nonsense. I can quickly adjust and adapt to any situation and circumstance, and I’m definitely more courageous.”

“Those considering a career in the military should think hard about their choice,” Glass says. “You should know what you’re getting into. Do the research, talk to people, consider the long-term pros and cons. And understand you can’t just take vacation time or slack off. Every day is mission critical, and no matter who you are, you play an important role. Commitment is serious.”

Glass says that civilians might not understand certain things about those who serve. “How much we sacrifice on a daily basis and the overall commitment. Planning vacations or even weekend trips is very difficult,” she says. “When I’m out at sea, I’m limited on how often I can talk to family and friends. The hours are early and late. As convenient as uniforms are, I find that I miss that individualism that I can express through my own personal style.”

Maintaining long-distance relationships is also tough, she says, and so is keeping a sense of one’s nonmilitary self. “I think it’s important to separate your civilian self from your military self. I don’t want to bring work home, especially the frustrations,” she says. “I leave work on the ship. Home and off-ship are my escape and fresh air. Little things like dressing up nice when I can, exercising, and making sure I stay connected to my friends and family are critical for mental, emotional, and overall physical health and stability.”

Looking to the future, Glass says she’s excited for the possibilities. “I’m very fortunate with the position I currently hold, as it could potentially lead to some great opportunities in the long run, as long as I continue to work hard, do my job right, and put forth every effort to be the best leader and division officer I can be. Every day I strive to improve myself and my sailors, set standards, and strive to meet both short- and long-term goals.”

It’s a difficult job, but Glass is proud of her service. “My love and pride for our country motivate me, particularly contributing to and serving something greater than myself,” she says. “It’s a challenge, but I know in the long run it’s worth it and every day I’m making a difference in the overall safety of Americans.”
Major John Alspach is a U.S. Marine F-35A operational test pilot on exchange with the U.S. Air Force, flying over the deserts of Nevada, testing out fighter planes. "I recently transitioned to my new job following a three-year tour as an FA-18 Hornet instructor pilot at Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One, the Marine Corps’ advanced weapons school," he says. "I have deployed three times, to Afghanistan, Syria, and the Pacific theater of operations. One of those deployments was off the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier. I have been stationed everywhere from Pensacola, Florida, to Las Vegas, Nevada. However, I have spent the majority of my time living in Coronado, California, and flying out of Miramar, California, with aircraft carrier-based FA-18 squadrons."

"There is no more fulfilling experience than executing safe, productive, and effective flight operations over dangerous territories."
"Being in the military has shown me a side of life that I never would have experienced if I had gone a more traditional route."

Alspach also served as an aggressor pilot in the F-5. "As an instructor pilot, I was in charge of the development, standardization, and instruction of various systems and tactics in the FA-18," he says. "As an aggressor pilot, I flew against American forces in an adversary role, training them how to fight and win against threat nations."

As a boy, Alspach says he watched movies about military planes and knew he wanted nothing more than to fly fighter jets off aircraft carriers. "I wanted to have a profession that was unique, exciting, and purposeful," he says. "It was alluring to think of a career that involved adventure, adrenaline, thinking, and decisive decision-making due to the responsibility entrusted to me and fellow pilots," he says. "There is no more fulfilling experience than executing safe, productive, and effective flight operations over dangerous territories. In a sense, the feeling of accomplish-ment post-deployed flight operations is the most euphoric sensation one can imagine. After my last combat flight, I was relieved, proud, worried, sad, giddy—everything. Leading men and machines into combat is an awesome and unreal experience, an experience that is forever etched into my memory." The down side? Being away from his family. "My last position mandated being in the military has shown me a side of life that I never would have experienced if I had gone a more traditional route," he says, has been the opportunity to lead servicemen and aircraft into combat. "Combat operations require an immense amount of maturity, clear

For roughly six months, (one that is operationally ready and deployable), I was gone for 29 out of the 44 months I was with the squadron. Leaving my wife and 2½-year-old little girl is something I would say, overall, I have become a very detail-oriented, skeptical, and wise person as a result. Serving has really opened my eyes to a lot of things." There’s a lot that people don’t realize or acknowledge about those who serve, Alspach says. "I flew my first combat mission at age 26, leading FA-18 Hornets into Afghanistan to support coalition forces on the ground," Alspach says. "Being responsible for men, machines, weapons, and policy at that age is a priceless experience. As clichéd as it sounds, you really can make an impact on something other than yourself as a military officer. You just have to choose what that impact is."

"The military was not the most popular professional career option coming out of Taft," he says, "but if a person looks past the stereotypes of the military, one will realize that the military is full of opportunity, incredible people, and unbelievable experiences. Coming from a place such as Taft, where students are told, ‘Not to be served, but to serve,’ a young military officer is given an immense amount of responsibility and can make significant impacts on everything from young enlisted personnel to national strategic policy."

"Yet Alspach has seen more things than he ever expected. ‘Being in the military has shown me a side of life that I never would have experienced if I had gone a more traditional route,’ he says. ‘I have seen the absolute highs and lows of society and humanity, and this experience has matured me rapidly. I would say, overall, I have become a very detail-oriented, skeptical, and wise person as a result. Serving has really opened my eyes to a lot of things.’"

"I flew with the squadron. Leaving my wife and 2½-year-old little girl is something that has only gotten more difficult."

"The best part of his job, Alspach says, has been the opportunity to lead servicemen and aircraft into combat. "Combat operations require an immense amount of maturity, clear

While we have highlighted here only three young alumni now serving in the military, we fully acknowledge and express gratitude for the service of many other Taft graduates through the decades, both those currently enlisted and those who have nobly served in the past. We thank them all for their commitment to serve, a profound manifestation of Non ut sibi. Thank you."
A Ground breaking Appproach to Cancer Treatment

Dr. Will Polkinghorn ’95 is empowering patients to gain access to the best treatments

By Neil Vigdor ’95
Photography by Gary Fong/Genesis Photos
Peer-reviewed studies have shown that up to 80 percent of cancer patients want to participate in clinical trials. Yet only 3 percent of patients participate in clinical trials, and 60 percent of trials get shut down because there’s a shortage of patients participating in them. Today, patients simply don’t know what is available to them. “The realization was, wow, the model of the existing retail space—the hospital—hasn’t fundamentally changed in over 150 years,” Polkinghorn says.

“In order to access a treatment, a patient has to enter a physical space and interact with a human clerk, the doctor. And that one doctor processes your information, in a very short period of time, in order to show you the treatment options the individual doctor is aware of. In a world of Uber and Airbnb, cancer patients just don’t have the access they deserve.” And so Driver was conceived. Now came the hard part—raising money. The startup didn’t want to be obligated to Big Pharma or the insurance industry to help it get off the ground. Driver’s first investor was the well-known former Goldman Sachs executive, George Wellde Jr. “We were literally done,” Polkinghorn says. “I was in Hong Kong fundraising and when I came back to San Francisco, we were going to be out of dough.”

“I was in Hong Kong fundraising and when I came back to San Francisco, we were going to be out of dough.”

Driver needed a breakthrough. And it’s not hyperbole. The company’s name is Driver.

Will Polkinghorn ’95 is the cofounder and CEO of the San Francisco-based treatment access platform, which has the technology world buzzing. The Driver app enables cancer patients to securely upload their medical records and tissue sample information, and most importantly, gain access to the best treatments across a network of more than 30 cancer centers.

“A consumer platform that connects cancer patients to the world’s largest inventory of treatments was the vision of Polkinghorn and Petros Giannikopoulos, who met on their first day at Harvard Medical School. “What if we built a consumer platform that enabled cancer patients to access treatments in the same way that Amazon transformed how we buy a book?” Polkinghorn says. “Give the patient access to everything. That was the idea—to empower the patient to be the driver.” It almost didn’t happen.

In 2014, Polkinghorn left his job as a radiation oncologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York to embark on the transcendent project. Something dawned on the Rhodes Scholar during his tenure at MSKCC, where he spent four days a week in its research building and one day taking care of patients in the hospital across the street. There was a glaring disconnect. “It was in crossing that street and entering the hospital where I felt as if I was going back in time,” said Polkinghorn, who specialized in prostate cancer.

After presenting his thoughts during a Driver staff meeting, Polkinghorn carefully listens to ideas and thoughts from others.
During the past 10 years, biology and medical science have undergone what Polkinghorn characterizes as an exponential explosion of knowledge and discoveries—passing a true tipping point that has been made possible by new technologies like genomics and gene editing.

“We are uncovering more and more information about what causes disease,” he says. “It’s exponential. It’s literally exponential. But there is now a huge gap between the potential of this science and that which is reaching the patient.

“When you look at the delta between what’s happening in the laboratory and what’s happening with the patient, it doesn’t take a domain expert to realize these are two different movies,” Polkinghorn says. “And there I was, a physician scientist straddling these two universes—struggling to reconcile the two. The why of Driver is pretty simple.”

Polkinghorn is a man in motion, bouncing back and forth from San Francisco and New York to Europe and China. Hopping into an Uber. Grabbing coffee with investors. Meeting researchers. Hiring a public relations firm to handle the growing number of media inquiries. His laptop is running out of juice as we speak. So is his cell phone. He hands them both to a restaurant waiter to charge.

“Our message is really driven not toward a hot shot Silicon Valley crowd but instead toward our customer, the cancer patient,” Polkinghorn says. “And to serve this customer we are building the most powerful marketplace in the world.”

Neil Vigdor ’95 covers politics for The Hartford Courant.
Composer William Mayer, Class of 1944

MUSIC THAT “SINGS OUT WITH REAL BEAUTY”

Reflecting on a career spanning more than half a century and a body of work that included symphonies, operas, oratorios, ballets, chamber music, songs, and compositions for solo instruments, William Mayer ’44 described his style as “a plaintive lyricism, motoric drive, humor, and a suggestion of great distance—whether of time or space.”

Born in 1925 in New York City, the son of John, an amateur violinist, and Dorothy Ehrich Mayer, Mayer arrived at Taft when he was 13 and did not immediately find a home within the school’s rigorous academic routine. Instead, he savored stolen moments improvising at the piano. After Taft, he enrolled at Yale, but before he could earn his degree was drafted into the Army, serving in Japan during the American occupation after the end of the Second World War.

Mayer returned to Yale in 1947 to complete a degree in history, but he felt something missing in his life. “An invisible wall seemed to prevent me from reaching my feelings,” he recalled, and seeking a remedy to his malaise, “what first burst out was music…. I knew then that, without slightest doubt, I would devote my life to music. I would become a composer.”

This renewed purpose led him to study at both Juilliard and Mannes School of Music before launching his career. He scored his first major successes penning songs for children, including the popular “Bongo and His Baboon Drum,” a tune later recorded by Burl Ives. The notoriety of these compositions ultimately led him to complete a degree in history, but he felt something missing in his life. “An invisible wall seemed to prevent me from reaching my feelings,” he recalled, and seeking a remedy to his malaise, “what first burst out was music…. I knew then that, without slightest doubt, I would devote my life to music. I would become a composer.”

Mayer used his talents to tackle more serious subjects, too, as he admitted years later, he “was unprepared for the fact that getting one’s ‘adult music’ programmed was a lot harder.” One such work, Letters Home, was a setting of letters from members of the military serving in Vietnam that had its 1968 premiere as part of a memorial for the recently assassinated Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mayer continued to garner great acclaim, more than 30 years. He also received a number of awards and honors, including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ford Foundation, and the American Music Society; a Guggenheim Fellowship; and a life-achievement award from the Center for Contemporary Opera, among many others.

But above all, the greatest achievement of Mayer’s career was the thrill he received from communicating through his music. As he once observed, “The medium of music itself has always been a natural outlet for imaginative flights.… A special joy is transmitting your emotions directly to the singer and then to the audience.”

What successful Taftie, no longer living, would you like to see profiled in this space? Send your suggestions to beyou@taftschool.org.
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