

A close-up photograph of the front of a bright red car. The car's hood and fenders are visible, featuring large, round, cartoonish eyes with white sclera and brown pupils. Below the eyes is a single, large, round headlight with a silver, concentric-circle lens. The car's paint is highly reflective, showing highlights and shadows. The background is dark.

# *Taft*

B U L L E T I N

## Minding the **Business**

4 ALUMNI-RUN COMPANIES

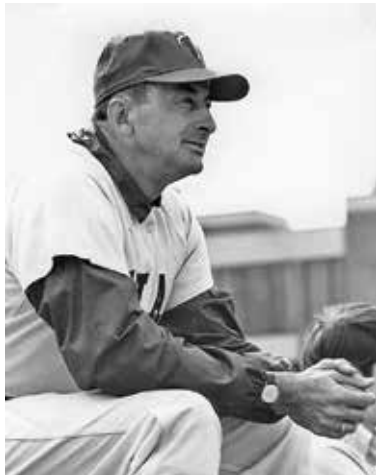
WINTER 2018



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▲ Taft varsity football celebrates their 41-23 victory over Hotchkiss School on November 11. ROBERT FALCETTI



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**Minding the Business**

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Volume 88, Number 2

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## ON THE COVER

A model of a Chuggington® train—inspired by the children's animated show of the same name—greets readers on this issue's cover! Read the feature on pages 40–57 about four alumni who create and make different products, including toy/games designer Charlie Albert '69, whose company, Creativity Inc., developed a Chuggington® interactive product line in 12 languages for Japanese company Tomy.

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# On Main Hall

A WORD FROM HEADMASTER WILLY MACMULLEN '78

## THE RIGORS AND REWARDS OF ACCREDITATION



There are lots of ways schools improve. Boards plan strategically, heads and administrative teams examine and change practices, and faculty experiment and innovate. But for schools like Taft, there's another critical way: *the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Accreditation Process*. It's a really rigorous methodology that ensures accredited schools regularly reflect, plan, and innovate; and it's this process Taft just finished. It's this process that reminds us that Taft has never been a school that believes it is finished getting better: we have always believed that we must strive to improve.

The NEASC is the accrediting body for hundreds of independent schools, and the accreditation process has two primary objectives: quality assurance and school improvement. The process is really a decade-long one, and it works like this. Every 10 years, in order to be reaccredited by the NEASC, a school must undertake a Self-Study. The study has 15 standards: Mission, Governance, Enrollment, Program, Experience of Students, Resources to Support Program, Faculty, Residential Program, Administration, Evaluation and Assessment, Health and Safety, Communication, Infrastructure, and the Accreditation Process. 2016 was our year for this institutional self-reflection. We were guided by the belief that we were a thriving and successful school, but also an imperfect one that could improve if we were honest, rigorous, and

“We have hard work to do, but it's the glorious work on challenges that mark all great schools. And we are honest in facing our weaknesses. We like the opportunity to get better.”







faculty and staff, meeting trustees, watching practices, rehearsals, and study hall. To a person, they were dedicated, curious, rigorous, and tough.

A week after the committee left, they submitted their report. Here's what the report basically said: that Taft is a really thriving, healthy, and successful school, with a global reputation for excellence and community, and one with areas it was committed to improving. Perhaps the best place to start is the Committee's introduction:

*Taft is clearly a high-functioning school with a dedicated teaching faculty, a loyal and hardworking professional administration and staff, and outstanding students from around the world. The Visiting Team members saw many compelling classes and meetings where the interplay among the students and the faculty as well as among administrators and faculty was inspirational. Faculty, staff, and students, almost to a person, spoke highly of the school. They were proud of their school and the values for which it stands. The faculty in particular lauded the commitment to students and students could find little to criticize. Taft is clearly a school where students come first. There was much to admire in our visit; Taft has well earned its prestigious reputation.*

“We did what any good organization does: affirm its strengths, acknowledge our weaknesses, and strive to get better.”

“We were guided by the belief that we were a thriving and successful school, but also an imperfect one that could improve if we were honest, rigorous, and thorough in looking into the institutional mirror.”

thorough in looking into the institutional mirror. Our 15 committees met for hundreds of hours; we conducted surveys of faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni; and we did interviews of scores of stakeholders. By late fall, the committees were drafting reports on their findings, and during the winter, writing and editing continued. By early spring, the 108-page report was complete. It was the end product of an inclusive, accurate, and robust Self-Study.

I am tremendously proud of the Taft community. You saw hard work, insight, intelligence, honesty, and courage. We saw much that we did well: adhere to our historic mission; enroll nice, smart, and talented students; create a diverse, caring, and warm community; offer a deep and broad program of academics and extracurricular opportunities; hire and support committed and compassionate faculty; steward and improve a beautiful campus; use prudence and discipline in budget and operations; and so on. But we also identified ways we wanted to improve: communication around priority setting and decision making; a deeper focus on diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism; a review of our academic program; continued evaluation and support of experienced faculty and staff; improvements in arts and athletic facilities; the need for an information and technology plan; and an examination of student health and wellness. I like to think that we did what any good organization does: affirm its strengths, acknowledge our weaknesses, and strive to get better.

As important as it is, the Self-Study is just the first of two steps toward accreditation. The next step is a three-day visit from a Visiting Committee comprised of leading educators from peer schools. The committee's job is first to read the Self-Study and, during their visit, hold the study up to essentially ask, Is the school doing what it says it is doing? At the end of their visit, the committee makes a recommendation on accreditation in a lengthy, detailed report that speaks to all 15 standards.

The Committee was on campus in early October, and they did great work. That they recommended Taft be reaccredited is not surprising, anymore than it was in 2007, 1997, 1987, and so on. But the report Taft received is a *really* telling one. First, it's important to recognize that the committee is *entirely* objective: it's made of all outsiders. Second, it was comprised of educators and leaders from New England's top schools. Third, they spent three days on campus, immersing themselves in school life—visiting classes, sitting in on meetings, reading documents, interviewing







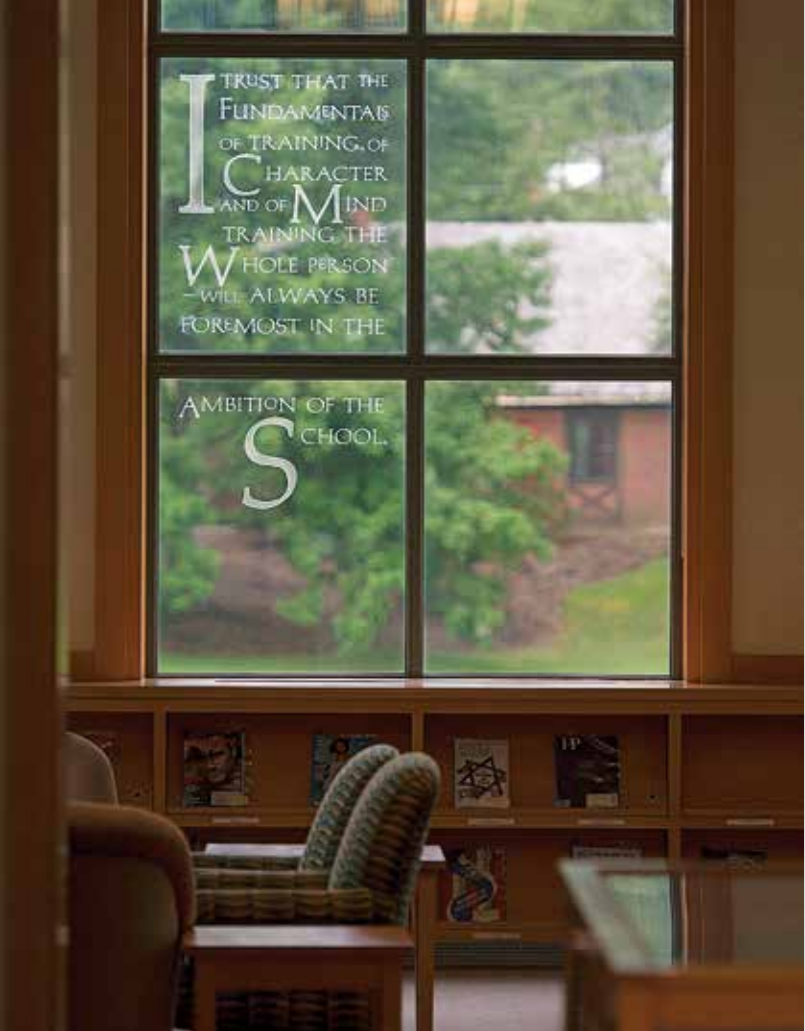
“I am tremendously proud of the Taft community. You saw hard work, insight, intelligence, honesty, and courage.”

For anyone who knows Taft, there’s a lot to be proud of when you read those lines. It’s probably the school you know. Certainly I speak of these things, as Lance Odden did before me, and you no doubt hear similar things from the website and our publications. But what makes these observations so powerful is that they come *not* from Taft but from tough, smart, experienced educators. They don’t do grade inflation.

Of course, the committee had recommendations on areas where we could get better. For each of the 15 standards, there were several minor recommendations—over 60 in total. And at the end of the report, the committee made five Major Recommendations, as they are tasked to. There was nothing surprising; essentially they affirmed the very things we had identified in our Self-Study which we were committed to addressing. In other words, there was perfect alignment between what *we* said we wanted to improve and what *they* felt we could improve.


1. *The need for a more comprehensive planning and decision-making process;*
2. *The desire for continued work on diversity and inclusion;*
3. *The need for a more longitudinal and sustainable assessment process for faculty, administrators, and staff;*
4. *A concern about student and faculty stress; and*
5. *The need for an overarching information technology plan.*

There’s work ahead of us, as there always is when you are a school that never is complacent and is filled with educators who are always trying to get better. We want to seize the moment and momentum. We are required to file progress reports to the NEASC at two and five years—this is how the NEASC keeps “your feet to the fire”—and I’m confident we will have accomplished a lot by then, just as we did in the last cycle. We will carefully prioritize the recommendations, some of which we have already addressed and others which are longer-term challenges. But we are excited, motivated, and confident. How can you not be, with the kind of



students on this campus, with the inspiring dedication of faculty and staff, with the wisdom of the board of trustees, and with the support of alumni and parents? We have hard work to do, but it’s the glorious work on challenges that mark all great schools. And we are honest in facing our weaknesses. We like the opportunity to get better. It’s something that marked the founding of this place, when Horace Taft sat at that table in September of 1890 and looked at his school.

The NEASC process? Horace Taft would no doubt approve of it, and I think he would recognize that staying true to our mission of the education of the whole student, reflecting continually on what we do well, and committing to getting even better has always been our work.

  
Willy MacMullen '78



“The report basically said that Taft is a really thriving, healthy, and successful school, with a global reputation for excellence and community, and one with areas it was committed to improving.”





# Alumni SPOTLIGHT

## Go Think...About Retail



EVERY WONDER HOW RETAILERS seem to know what you want to buy before you do? There are billions of bits of data out there about your likes and dislikes, thanks to your internet use, your shopper loyalty cards, and even your choice in music. Mining that data to help perfect the relationship with consumers is what Go Think!, the company of Katie Maxey Sorrentino '85, is doing to help guide retailers across the nation.

After spending more than two decades in the advertising world, working at high-powered firms like Ogilvy & Mather shaping branding campaigns for everything from Verizon to Coke to Shell Oil, Sorrentino went out on her own as a consultant when the ad

business "cratered" in the early 2000s.

"My dad was one of the original 'Mad Men' [advertising executives], so it was really in my blood," she says.

A mutual friend introduced her to Galen Walters, who was looking for a chief marketing officer for his retail printing business who could help him develop digital marketing, at the time in its infancy.

"He had the vision of how do we get to one-to-one marketing, because he saw that's where the world was going," she says. That approach, at that time, was the most expensive way to reach potential customers. Mass media and direct mail were then the most economical ways to get your messages out, she explains. That paradigm completely

flipped in 10 years, she says, now that email marketing has taken off and at an incredibly affordable rate.

In 2007, Walters sold his print company and cofounded Go Think! with Sorrentino.

"Through the decimation of the ad agency world [because of the economic recession]... 'thinking' was really starting to be stripped out of companies because they couldn't afford 'thinkers,'" Sorrentino says. "What we heard all the time from clients was nobody had time to think anymore. How could we help create a space and time and place for customers to think and facilitate that process?"

Sorrentino and Walters created the "Four Go" processes they use to help

retailers design their marketing: go discover, go plan, go brand, and go execute.

"We found that any problem a client brought to us, we could extrapolate that across it and help them figure out how to get results," she says.

They had planned to be consultants who worked out of their homes, but within a week and a half they had five new clients, and today they have 47 employees in Magnolia, Texas, helping with dozens of clients.

It's all data-driven, Sorrentino says. "The analytics side is really interesting. Ten years ago, every company had a website, and the website's running and doing things and they started gathering all this data, but many times they don't know what to do with the data. They're paying a lot of money for the data, and they have so much data, but what do they do with it? How do they pick and choose that data to drive sales?"

For example, the grocery business. "It's

constant churn, she explains. "There are three things that are driving them: driving sales, getting customers to come back, and expanding their base. Those are the three levers that any grocery is trying to pull: acquisition, expansion, and retention."

Go Think! helps those grocers analyze the data from each shopper's purchases as recorded by their loyalty cards, and then shapes email marketing campaigns directed at individual shoppers based on those prior purchases. Consider a



▲ Go Think!'s offices in Magnolia, Texas.

person who shops a particular grocery store only once or twice a month for specialty items such as organic milk, but never buys toilet paper. Go Think! would recommend throwing out an "affinity" offer such as a discount on that organic milk coupled with a low price on toilet paper in an effort to convert that shopper into more regular visits to that store.

"We give them offers, and we also acknowledge what's important to them," based on their shopping habits, she says. "We're going to serve offers up to you based on what you spend with us. It's an exciting time." ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84





Harrison Clay '92  
at a biomethane  
vehicle fuel pump.  
CLEAN ENERGY

## Pumped Up By Renewables

HARRISON CLAY '92 has always been fascinated by the natural environment. In college, he went to Africa and studied baboons. He wanted to write for *National Geographic*. He flew to South America on an open-ended ticket and camped through Peru, hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, and spent time in the Amazon. Those experiences gave him the passion to protect the environment even after he came back to the U.S. and enrolled in the University of Virginia's law school with the goal of practicing environmental law. However, he "sold out," as he puts it, and dove instead into the world of venture capital. He

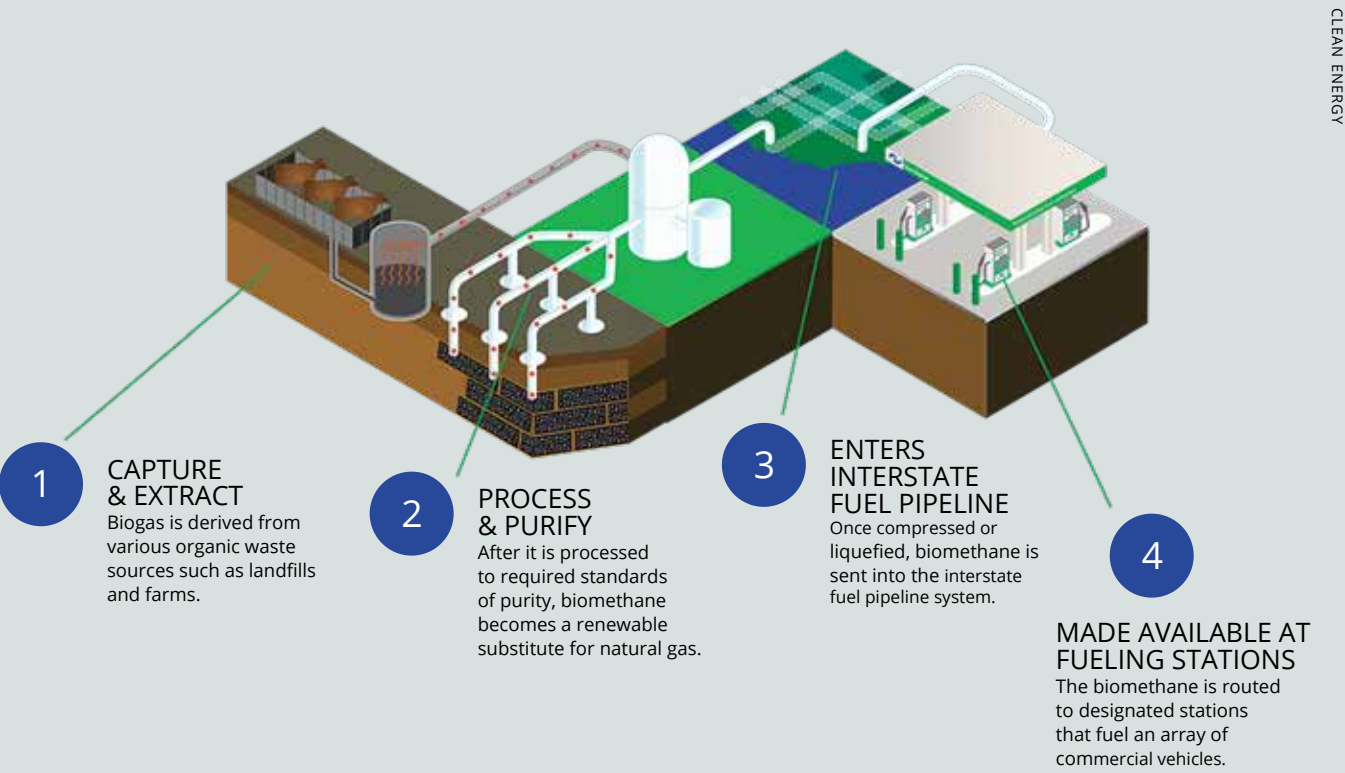
worked for a law firm with an office in Buenos Aires and had an offer to move there, but when the economy went under in 2000 the office there closed, and Clay was happy to do any work he could find. He'd had a client that was an investment bank that specialized in IPOs, and one of their clients was a small firm called Clean Energy Fuels, which was about to go public. "Honestly, I didn't know you could use natural gas as a vehicle fuel," he says. "It never really registered that it was as big of a thing as it is." Clean Energy sells renewable natural gas, a by-product of decomposing

organic material, and turns it into clean-burning fuel for automobiles, buses, and tractor trailers. Clay's passion for IPOs and the environment was about to be combined in a perfect way. He worked on the IPO of Clean Energy and "learned the industry inside and out," he says. The company hired him and made him president of their renewable natural gas subsidiary in February 2008. He led the efforts to develop biomethane as the choice of natural gas production for fleet vehicles and other uses, as well as promoting public policies to support the development of biogas products. "It's a very clean-burning fuel,"

Clay says. "It's abundant, and as I was researching the business to fully understand it...this lightbulb went off." That lightbulb was triggered by the realization that the supply of methane, the particular natural gas that comes from municipal garbage dumps and large animal feeding operations, could be a "permanent" solution to the nation's dependence on foreign oil, and a way to reduce the greenhouse gases contributing to climate change.

payments based on the eventual selling price of the biogas, similarly to the landowners who get a royalty check from traditional oil production. "We sold the very first biomethane vehicle fuel," he says. "In 2012, we sold 13 million gallons of biogas. Last year, we sold 60 million gallons." Clean Energy's biogas production business was purchased in March 2017 by global fuels giant BP, and Clay became BP's vice president of strategic development,

garbage dumps, all producing methane, there are abundant opportunities to harvest biogas here in the United States. "Anywhere there's lots of people, there's lots of organic waste and a lot of potential," he says. What's needed now is for the regulatory environment to see the potential for biogas production in all 50 states. "You want to use renewable fuels in your house," he says. "When you go out to the pig farms and capture that



Clean burning and abundant, natural gas can be used in ways traditional gasolines can't. "Would you want to be scrambling your eggs over a diesel stove?" he asks. "We're not importing it from the Middle East or contributing to geopolitical conflicts. We can rely on our own resources." Producers of biogas, whether that's a dairy with 10,000 cows or a municipal garbage dump, get royalty

global environmental products. These days, he's involved in biogas and biomethane project development, procurement, and supply. And he's working on sustainability and low-carbon fuels, which he sees as the future of energy development. Indeed, Clay sees opportunity for biogas production all around. With thousands of concentrated animal feeding operations throughout farming country, plus the tens of thousands of municipal

methane and process it and use it as vehicle fuel...you're actually reducing carbon and greenhouse gases. It's carbon negative. When you capture methane and combust it, you're displacing fossil fuels, which is an incredible benefit. It's an enormous opportunity, and until we're capturing all the methane [that's being wasted], we're losing out." ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84



## On Modern Slavery

ON A HUMID, RAINY DAY in north-central Vietnam, Klara Skrivankova '96 stood in a school courtyard with nearly 400 children between the ages of 11 and 15, who sat in rows on small plastic stools under a canopy. They wore identical uniforms and the signature red scarfs of Communist Young Pioneers.

Skrivankova was there with Anti-Slavery International (ASI) at the launch of an independent film called *The Secret Gardeners*. It's about the risks of trafficking for cannabis cultivation, which is the most common form of trafficking from Vietnam to the United Kingdom.

"It was a sobering moment to see all 370 kids at a school in Nghệ An Province raise their hands when asked who had relatives working abroad," says Skrivankova, who left her home

in Prague close to 14 years ago and eventually moved to London to work for Anti-Slavery International, the world's oldest international human rights organization (founded in 1839).

For a number of years, Vietnamese have been the top nationality among trafficked persons in the U.K., she explains. Many of them spend weeks, even months being smuggled through Eastern European countries, some traveling long distances on foot.

After many years working on this issue, ASI partnered with the Pacific Links Foundation in Vietnam. The information they gather from people in the U.K. and research along the transit routes feeds into the awareness and outreach program in Vietnam.

Skrivankova started her career 17 years

ago working with La Strada in her native Czech Republic, helping mostly women who were trafficked for sexual exploitation. Over the past five years, her focus has shifted more to working with businesses on tackling forced labor in supply chains.

According to the International Labour Organization, she says, there are at least 16 million people in forced labor in the private economy, so any business that operates in today's globalized world is likely to have slavery somewhere in their supply chains or operations.

"I regularly train businesses across sectors on due diligence, and assist them to build better systems and operations that are able to address the risk of modern slavery and respond to any incidence with a due regard to the rights and best interest of workers,"

she says. "At Anti-Slavery we call this type of work 'critical friendship.'"

Initially, there was a lot of denial about the issue of trafficking for forced labor being linked to business operations, she says. "But I'm pleased that the discourse has changed, and that many more businesses are now coming out and making strong statements and commitments on modern slavery."

The increase in transparency in supply chain legislation—like the 2010 California Transparency in Supply Chains Act and the 2015 U.K. Modern Slavery Act, on which she worked intensively—has helped.

"It is encouraging to see corporations like Wal-Mart defining forced labor as one of their priority areas of strategic focus," she says.

"What is amazing about working in Anti-Slavery," she adds, "is that we still continue the unique work of connecting emancipation of individuals and communities affected by slavery with policy and advocacy work with governments and international organizations to ensure that our laws, policies, and systems become more effective and can move us closer to final eradication of slavery."

She admits that the work can be emotionally draining, like any work where one "witnesses the atrocities that human beings are capable of committing against others." But she also finds it extremely rewarding, whether that is seeing a victim receive compensation in court, or seeing a law that ASI pushed for being applied for the first time to bring a slave master to justice.

"Think about what you can do at the company you work for to address the risk of slavery, or donate to an anti-slavery charity," she suggests. "But most important, use your rights as citizens to ask your elected representative what they are doing to stop this heinous crime from happening and protecting those affected."



Skrivankova moderating a session with the U.K. Anti-Slavery commissioner.

Whether it's the cotton we're wearing that may have been picked by slave labor in Turkmenistan, she points out, or a garment stitched and embellished by child labor in India, or the mobile phone and computer we use, which contain coltan that is often mined by child or forced labor in the Congo, modern slavery reaches, often

invisibly, into many aspects of our lives.

"Slavery is very much part of our lives in the 21st century," Skrivankova reminds us. "No matter where in the world you live, be it a city or a tranquil countryside, you are likely to encounter slavery in your everyday life." ■

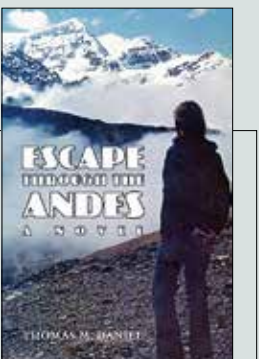
—Julie Reiff



Klara Skrivankova '96 with the U.K. ambassador to Argentina, another participant, and the chief public defender of Argentina, where she gave a session for judges and prosecutors on compensation for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

## IN Print

ESCAPE THROUGH THE ANDES  
Fithian Press  
**Thomas M. Daniel '47**



Daniel's first novel is a high-stakes journey for armchair travelers. Pursued by Bolivian security agents, Gonzalo Mamani, a Bolivian physician and spy for the CIA, and Paul Morgan, his North American mentor, colleague, and friend, must elude pursuers to reach safety in the Peruvian coastal town of Salaverry within 10 days.

Leaving La Paz, Bolivia, they race around Lake Titicaca and across the intermountain Andean plateau to

Huatahata, Copacabana, Tiawanacu, Puno, Cuzco, Machu Picchu, and points in between as they narrowly and repeatedly escape capture.

An emeritus professor of medicine at Case Western Reserve University, Daniel has turned to writing. His previous works include seven nonfiction books focused on medical history. Daniel has lived in Bolivia and traveled extensively in the regions in which this novel is set.



## Algorithms in Action

AS A MATHEMATICAL SOFTWARE engineer, John McGowan '81 spends his days happily immersed in numbers. When pressed to identify the genesis of his interests, however, he admits he's not sure. "I can't recall a time when math and science weren't a passion for me," he confesses. "I can say that I distinctly remember reading popular science books on physics when I was 6 or 7."

McGowan pursued his love of physics through secondary school, attending Taft, he says, because of its excellent reputation in math and science. "I remember taking AP physics with Eric Drake—he was a terrific teacher—and AP calculus with Dan Comiskey, who really helped me get my arms around the material."

McGowan maintained his commitment to science into college and graduate school, earning his bachelor's in physics from the California Institute of Technology and his doctorate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

While working on a Ph.D. in experimental high-energy physics, McGowan did a great deal of advanced statistical analysis and programming, and though he found the work engaging, he grew worried about the long-term practicality of his pursuits. "I realized that employment opportunities in particle physics were going down, not up, so I began to seek more practical applications for my knowledge," he says.

His search was wide-ranging. His

analytical skills—together with interests in gesture recognition, speech recognition, and video compression technologies—led McGowan through several start-ups, then on to stints at NASA and Hewlett Packard Labs and finally to Apple, where he spent two years as a human interface device algorithm engineer, researching and developing the algorithms that enable the company's famous touch interface of single and double finger taps and swipes.

During this time, McGowan also worked with his father's company, the GFT Group, using his expertise in speech recognition to create Petrana, an artificial personal assistant that communicated to users in spoken English, allowing them to execute a series of computer operations hands-free. Petrana and GFT are now dormant, having been halted after the death of McGowan's father in 2008.

In February 2017, McGowan launched Mathematical Software, a start-up dedicated to researching and developing tools and algorithms that can be used to automate complex data analysis. He anticipates that the company's first software will be released this spring, and is currently seeking customers.

McGowan says his ideal clients are companies doing research and development in data-intensive areas such as medicine or pharmaceuticals, finance, and engineering. These firms gather complex data, he says, which they often have difficulty

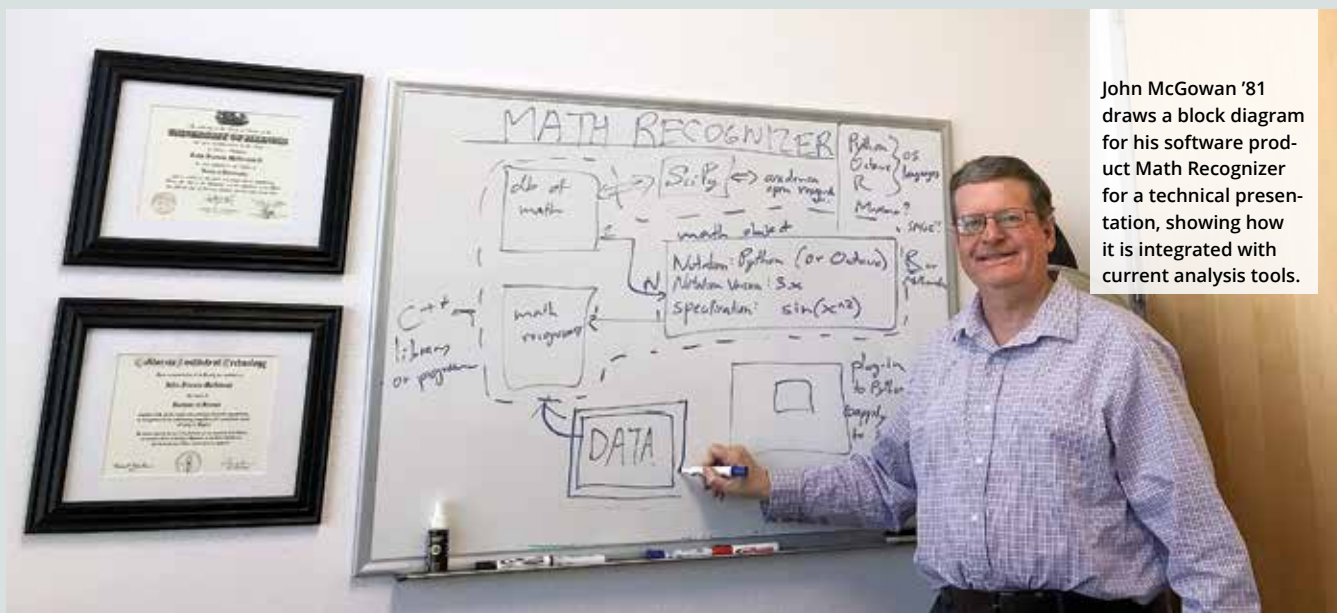
analyzing. "They must invest massive amounts of time and expertise to find a mathematical model that can interpret their data," he explains, "which is where we come in. Our software can take the data, do pattern recognition, and then return an appropriate mathematical model to perform the analysis they require."

For example, McGowan says, blood coagulation systems are complicated and not well understood. And if blood clots at the wrong time inside the body, heart attacks and strokes can result. "Our software could analyze the data and provide a good mathematical model of coagulation, thereby enabling researchers to suggest diet modifications or drugs that might affect the clotting mechanisms," he says.

Mathematical Software's programs will operate on the client's system so that they may analyze data without compromising proprietary information, McGowan continues, and will be sold on a satisfaction basis. "If our program analyzes your data and says, 'I know what's going on here,' then you pay," he says. "But if it doesn't work, you owe nothing."

McGowan is eager to get the software into circulation. "We anticipate helping many companies with complicated data analysis that will allow them to solve problems that have previously proved intractable." ■

—Lori Ferguson



John McGowan '81 draws a block diagram for his software product Math Recognizer for a technical presentation, showing how it is integrated with current analysis tools.



Financial reporter Simone Foxman '07 (far right) during a Bloomberg TV broadcast with Julie Hyman and David Westin.

## Following the Money

"IT REALLY LIT A SPARK. It taught me a lot about the written word and the power that it has to influence people."

This is how Simone Foxman '07 remembers her first experience in journalism—as co-editor-in-chief of Taft's student newspaper, *The Papyrus*. Little did she know that working on the *Pap* would be the first step in a journey that would ultimately lead her to the headquarters of one of the world's most prominent media companies, Bloomberg.

"Now I'm an investing reporter, and my beat is pretty specific to the finance industry. Basically, my job is to follow the money," explains Foxman. "These are the people calling the shots, who have millions or billions of dollars to invest. I follow what they're investing in and why, to shed light on a part of the world that's very secretive."

Foxman also discovered her interest in business and finance while at Taft. "I actually took my first economics class at Taft," she remembers. "I loved understanding why people and businesses and governments act the way they do. It taught me that money is really the driving force behind a lot of the most important geopolitical developments in the world."

This initial fascination stayed with

Foxman as she studied at Columbia University, double majoring in economics and Middle Eastern studies. While she learned about the markets in the classroom, she also honed her journalistic skills through a variety of media internships in New York. "I worked at a lot of news outlets, both national and local, and in those experiences, I really recognized that business reporting was something very important to me," she says.

From there, she followed her passion to the then-fledgling Business Insider, ultimately joining the Bloomberg team a little over three years ago. "More and more, I wanted to do investigative journalism," she says. "Oftentimes, the people that I talk to are publicity shy, and it can be hard work finding out what they're doing and why."

But it is precisely this challenge that excites Foxman about the news business. "I really like uncovering stories that the public deserves to hear," she says. "There's a thrill to breaking news. As a journalist, I learn new things every day, and as I grow in my career, I'm looking forward to the opportunity to tell bigger, better, and more impactful stories."

And she is committed to keeping her

reporting accurate. "I see that the way that everyday people view the media has changed substantially in the last few years," she acknowledges. "It's important that as a news organization there are strict standards of accuracy, and these last few years have shined a bright light on how important those practices are. We are very careful to make sure we have our facts straight."

This changing media landscape has also meant that Foxman must stay versatile in how she communicates to her audience. Not only does she write regularly for Bloomberg's terminal and website, she frequently appears on radio, podcasts, and Bloomberg's finance-focused television programs.

"Any journalist in this day and age has to be willing to embrace multiple media. I like being part of the conversation," she says, "and this role of being a journalist, especially in the finance world, really allows you to be part of conversations that are happening at the highest level. Whether they're about the future of companies or whether they're talking about how wealth is influencing policy, those are very interesting discussions to have." ■

—Christopher Browner '12



For more information, visit  
[www.taftschool.org/news](http://www.taftschool.org/news)

# Around the POND

BY DEBRA MEYERS

have come across in India through a variety of volunteer experiences and through my family,” explains Mihir. “I hope to show how differences in socioeconomic status in India correlate with access to food and education.”

Abena Kuffour, Mihir’s GLI partner, will be writing and sharing similar stories from Ghana. Their stories will be at the heart of the hunger simulation. Event guests will be seated in groups

NGO dedicated to “uplifting the underprivileged through love,” Mihir spent five weeks in Ahmedabad, India, last summer working with young children.

“I became especially close with one little girl,” says Mihir. “She was the only child in her preschool class who couldn’t run around or play, and who did not want to participate in the classroom. She seemed lethargic all the time. I learned later that she suffers from malnutrition.

last-minute coaching along the way. “Everyone was listening to the pitch in the car and giving really great constructive feedback,” says GLI Co-Director Baba Frew. “I was so impressed by the way Mihir took those suggestions and incorporated them into his pitch. He was very calm, very well-spoken, and did a great job thinking on his feet as he answered the judges’ questions. It was a really wonderful experience.” ■

## student SPOTLIGHT

### Be the Change

MIHIR NAYAR '19

MIHIR NAYAR '19 wants to change the world. He’s well on his way, with a 2017 Seed Grant from the Be the Change Venture Pitch Competition. Mihir took home the cash prize for his win in the high school division of the event, held recently at Wesleyan University.

“It was a great opportunity to get out and market my idea,” says Mihir, “to network with college students and share ideas about social entrepreneurship.”

Mihir’s idea is to shine a bright light on the issue of world hunger. He will do so in the spring, with a “hunger simulation” at Taft; the event will be Mihir’s culminating Global Leadership Institute (GLI) project, funded in part by his Pitch Competition prize.

The GLI program invites students to think about meaningful solutions to global issues, while developing the leadership skills they need to effectively impact social change. It is a joint venture between Taft and the city of Waterbury. Eleven high school sophomores from each community were invited to join the Institute’s current cohort after a rigorous application process, Mihir among them. The 18-month program concludes with a culminating project.

“I am going to be writing and sharing the stories of different people I



Working with young children in a preschool in India gave Mihir his first insight into the connection between nutrition and educational performance.



Mihir (second from right) traveled to Wesleyan University for the pitch competition with members of his GLI cohort including, from left, Randy Martinez, Destinee Riley, Megan Sng, Be the Change Venture Founder and Executive Director Anthony Prince, Rachel Lau, and GLI Co-Director Baba Frew.

of five to seven. Each will read and discuss one of the stories from India or Ghana. The food they will be served will reflect both the quality and quantity of food that might be available to the subject of their story at a given meal.

“I think it will be an eye-opening experience,” Mihir says. “Mr. Mac always talks about getting conversations going, and I feel like this event will do that.”

Mihir believes that starting a conversation is the first step to solving world issues, including hunger.

As a volunteer with Manav Sadhna, an

It made me fully realize the link between proper nutrition and education—being able to fulfill your capabilities. I believe that hunger is one of the central aspects of the poverty cycle—it is a spiral-down effect, a chain reaction that encompasses hunger, illiteracy, and poverty.”

Mihir’s passion and determination, as well as his understanding of a complex issue and detailed plan for addressing it, were rewarded by the Be the Change Venture Pitch Competition judges. Members of his GLI cohort accompanied him to the event and offered



▲ Top: Mihir spent five weeks working with an NGO in India last summer.



▲ Mihir with event competitor and Wesleyan University senior Nate Taylor (left) and Be the Change Venture Founder and Executive Director Anthony Prince.

The Be the Change Pitch Venture Competition was hosted by students from Wesleyan University’s Patricelli Center for Social Entrepreneurship, which welcomes GLI Scholars to campus for an informational workshop each year. Be the Change Venture is a nonprofit organization working to connect and empower young people to be leaders in their community and providing opportunities for networking.



# Winter Workshops: Intellectual Exchange Among a Community of Scholars



Iris Williamson shared a pedagogical framework taught at the Bard Institute for Writing and Thinking with her fellow Taft teachers.



Iris Williamson led her colleagues through a series of reading and exercises.



▲ Dean of Multicultural Education Andrew Prince led a Winter Workshop on Stereotype Threat. Math teacher and attendee Al Reiff '80 chose this session, he says, because he felt he should be "more informed." "I learned that stereotype threat—the idea that people can be adversely affected when reminded of negative stereotypes about themselves—is actually very pervasive and all around us. It can come in all sorts of forms and be very subtle."

**PENN FELLOW IRIS WILLIAMSON** spent a week at the Bard Institute for Writing and Thinking last summer, and was eager to share that experience with her colleagues at Taft. She did so in November through a workshop titled "Writing as a Residue of Thought," part of Taft's PEG Winter Workshop program. "The Winter Workshop program is something we have done every other

year for the past six years," says Dean of Faculty Edie Traina. "It is the brainchild of the Professional Education and Growth (PEG) Committee, a group of faculty members who look for ways to encourage professional development, both in-house and through other opportunities like travel, conferences, or grad school." The committee invited faculty members to develop and lead a series of

one-hour workshops. Topics ranged from stereotype threat and enhancing student feedback, to using technology in the classroom and deep dives into Taft's culture. "The big piece is that it is self-driven professional development," said Traina says, "developed for the community, by the community." It is the "for the community" piece that resonated with Williamson, who invited those attending her workshop to "sink into the role of student, access your love of learning, and radically care for yourself, spending time here, reading and writing in a community of scholars." Williamson led her peers through a series of exercises and experiences, built on the pedagogical framework employed at Bard. In the culminating exercise, workshop participants explored the themes and context of a written passage through shared "dialectical response" notebooks. It is an approach, she says, that has informed her teaching at Taft, and that embraces writing as critical thinking and as an essential mode of thoughtful communication in the classroom. "The way that you write is the way that you think—writing is, truly, the residue of

thought," says Williamson. "What students share in writing is often less guarded—more thoughtful—than what they would have shared in a class discussion." Emily Li, a Penn Fellow in English and workshop attendee, looks forward to using Williamson's approach in her own classroom. "I'm particularly excited about this idea of writing as the residue of thought, and some of the instructional strategies

Iris demonstrated," says Li. "I personally found writing to be so valuable throughout my own high school experience—it helped me understand what I thought, why I thought what I thought, and how that informed the way I navigated the world around me. I'd really like my students to engage in that same kind of growth. I'm looking forward to being more deliberate about how I can give my students more opportunities to refine their thinking through writing." Though participation in the PEG Winter Workshop program was voluntary, Traina notes that more than 100 faculty members took advantage of the opportunity to think about their own professional growth. "I feel a responsibility as a teacher to be constantly learning and developing," adds Li. "I really relish the opportunity to continue to improve by learning from educators I look up to at Taft." ■

*The Professional Education and Growth Committee is one of Taft's 17 standing committees, comprised of both faculty and staff, which meet regularly to enhance and expand all aspects of our school community. Other committees include Academic Technology, Global Leadership and Service, Gender, Spiritual Life, and Summer Reading. The charge of the PEG Committee is "to assist in the development of the faculty through programing for professional growth and providing oversight for the Professional Education Grant (PEG) program." The PEG charge is realized through programming such as the Winter Workshops, sponsoring outside speakers like Dr. Michael Thompson and the Stanley King Institute, as well as reviewing the 80+ summer grant applications that are submitted each spring.*

## Celebration Achievement: Fall Cum Laude Inductions

"THERE IS A CULTURE of celebration here that I am very proud of," said Headmaster William R. MacMullen '78 during the 2017 Cum Laude induction ceremony, "a belief that high achievement is something that we all can take pride in and that raises all of us. A sense and a belief that passion and talent and excellence are intensely contagious, that is, when one person is successful others become successful, as well...the sense that all of us are made better by high achievement." The Cum Laude Society is a national organization honoring scholarship and scholastic achievement at the secondary school level, comparable to Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi in colleges and scientific schools. Induction into the Cum Laude Society, MacMullen notes, honors "the highest levels of scholarship on campus." Founded in 1908, the Society now has 382 chapters, most of which are in private or independent schools located in the United States. A maximum of

20 percent of the senior class may be elected into membership in the Cum Laude Society. Fifteen Taft seniors were inducted in October, representing the top 9 percent of the class, with weighted averages that, over two years, ranged from 97 to 100. Taft's new Cum Laude

Society members are seniors Corrine Bai, Matthew Caruso, Stephen Cho, Louise Gagnon, Minna Holleck, Yejin Kim, Magda Kisielinska, Benjamin Laufer, Benjamin Roberts, Leigh Sharpless, Emma Stone, Macy Toppan, Portia Wang, Julian Yamin, and Daniel Yi. ■







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Scott Serafine's video production students put together this recap of Community Service Day 2017. Watch it here using the Layar app.

## What's Your Impact?

COMMUNITY SERVICE DAY 2017

WHEN MEMBERS OF THE TAFT community fanned out in service across Litchfield and New Haven counties on November 2, French teacher and Community Service Day Chair Sarah Gray asked each of them to think about the impact their work had on the project and on the people it serves.

"Last year we built our service work around a theme for the first time, which brought new focus and understanding to Community Service Day," says Gray. "We decided to continue that,

building this year's work around the theme 'What is your impact?' All of our conversations and activities leading up to Community Service Day incorporated that concept, encouraging students to really think about what impact the work we do has on the people and organizations and neighborhoods we serve."

Working with Community Service Day Fellows Magda Kisielinska '18, Maggie O'Leary '19, Hayley Jubitz '19, and Yejin Kim '18, Gray filled the week preceding Community Service Day with

conversations, opportunities, and activities that shaped thinking and actions around the impact of service. The fellows developed conversation prompts, for example, and taped them to the tables in the Dining Hall throughout the week to help spark conversation. Students were also invited to record their thoughts on the impact of service on a large banner outside the servery. The week of activities—the "scaffolding," Gray says—made for a more meaningful experience overall. ■





## Sustainability Week Redux



Tafties were asked to take a sustainability pledge, committing to green life at Taft.



▲ Debate teams weighed the goals of capitalist markets against principles of environmentalism in a well-attended evening event.

**TWO YEARS AGO**, the Connecticut Alliance for Campus Sustainability started a movement. The collaborative effort brought a week of environmentally focused events and activities to college and university campuses across the state. Last year, Director of Environmental Stewardship Carly Borken led Taft in joining that movement.

“Our program was both modeled after and coincided with a statewide higher education collaboration,” Borken says. “Campus Sustainability Week events not only stimulated conversation, but also built connections and inspired action.”

Taft’s 15 EcoMons, the school’s environmental student leaders, educators, and liaisons, brought Campus Sustainability Week back to Taft this fall.

“Last year was a very good start,” says EcoMon Phoebe Autio ’18, “but it was new, so people didn’t really know a lot about it. We did a better job this year creating more buildup through social media and signage. I’m sure the initiative will grow in the future as we start forecasting even further in advance.”

This year, the EcoMons worked to add breadth and depth to the foundation established in 2016.

“Our goal was really education this year,” explains EcoMon Charles Verheggen ’18. “Rather than introduce a lot of new events, we really amped up a lot of the things we

did last year. For example, this year we did ‘scrape your plate’ every day instead of just once. I think students now have a better understanding of what they can and can’t compost, and will use the composting bins more effectively and consistently. I believe this week was a good week at Taft for learning and for the environment.”

Carolyn Yow ’19 is a member of the EcoMon data research group. Their work helped shine a light on the on the need for education initiatives, including things like “scrape your plate.”

“One of the things the data research group does is look at the school’s waste and figure out the ratio between waste and recycling in tons,” Carolyn explains. “The ratio was horrible—it was 83 to 17. We presented that data to the school first before announcing Campus Sustainability Week to capture their attention and help them understand the importance of environmental

education and taking action.”

The EcoMons also brought back the “Trashion Show,” a runway show featuring clothing made from trash and other recycled materials; the design-a-mug competition; travel to a chicken processing center; and an evening debate, where teams weighed the goals of capitalist markets against principles of environmentalism. Morning Meeting speaker Majora Carter led discussions on creating more environmentally just communities by stimulating local economies, and the yoga program, coached by science teacher Amanda Benedict, lived the Taft motto by donating their time on Wednesday to clean up litter along Guernseytown Road.

“Our EcoMons have all demonstrated immense attention and passion in this role,” says Borken. “I am really excited to see where their work continues to lead our campus.” ■



Scan this page to listen in on the Service of Lessons and Carols.

Students, faculty, neighbors, and friends gathered in celebration December 12 for Taft’s 82nd annual Service of Lessons and Carols. The service included Nativity readings and seasonal music by Collegium Musicum, the Taft Chamber Ensemble, and the Taft Chorus. Listen in...



EcoMons manned the compost bins all week to help educate the community about food waste.





## Morning Meetings

Twice each week, Tafties gather in Bingham Auditorium for Morning Meeting, where speakers from across the aisle and across the globe offer exposure to new or unique perspectives, and deeper, broader insights into the world. It is one of the school's most important and respected traditions. In addition to a full roster of in-house speakers this fall, including Assistant Headmaster Jeremy LaCasse, Dean of Multicultural Education Andrew Prince, and Head Mons Leigh Sharpless '18 and Peter Horne '18, an impressive group of outside speakers brought new insights to current events, global issues, and artistic endeavors.



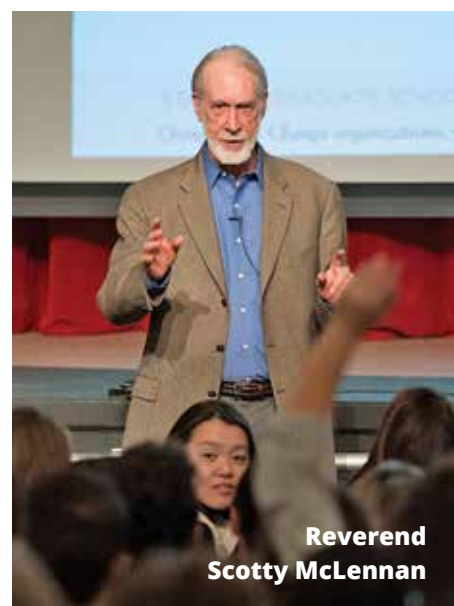
Alexis Jones

### Alexis Jones

Alexis Jones is the founder of a non-profit called I Am That Girl, which works to combat media-perpetuated notions of perfectionism. Jones's professional background includes posts at Fox Sports, ESPN, and MTV. More than one million girls from more than 20 countries are currently involved with I Am That Girl programs. Jones is also the founder of ProtectHer, and travels the country speaking to college athletes on the importance of respecting the girls and women in their lives.

### Reverend Scotty McLennan

The Reverend Scotty McLennan visited Taft for a highly engaging and interactive Morning Meeting on the impact of personal choice. A professor of ethics

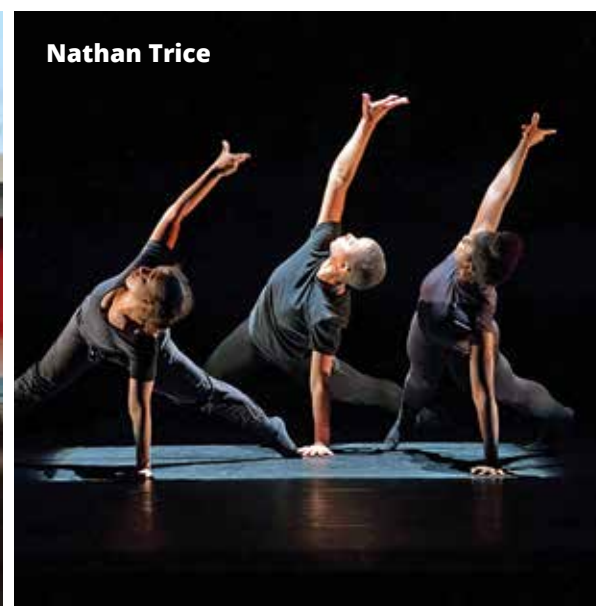


Reverend Scotty McLennan

at the Stanford University School of Business, McLennan set the stage for moral and ethical soul searching by sharing the true story of a hiker in the Himalayas faced with a life and death decision, and inviting Taft students to share their thoughts on what they would have done in that situation.

### Nathan Trice

Nathan Trice and his professional dance company visited Taft two days each month during the fall term to work with students in the dance studio. They also performed during Morning Meeting. The extended residency included work on the company's Recognizing Women Project and concludes in February with an evening performance featuring company dancers and Taft students.



Nathan Trice



Army Captain Logan Phillips

### Army Captain Logan Phillips

As part of our Veterans' Day commemoration, Army Captain Logan Phillips visited Taft for Morning Meeting and classroom talks. Captain Phillips is a graduate of the

United States Military Academy, where he will become a professor of physics next fall. He has written extensively about his battalion's initiative to "build the fundamentals of competence, character, and commitment in every soldier, from day one."

### Christine Osinski

Rockwell Visiting Artist Christine Osinski shared images and information from her Staten Island photo project, which includes both a book and a number of gallery collections and installations. Her haunting and familiar black and white photographs were taken on Staten Island during the early 1980s and document summer life in New York City's "forgotten borough."

### Mark Milewski

College professor Mark Milewski is working to summit the tallest peaks on each of the seven continents. He



Christine Osinski



Stanley H. King Counseling

visited Taft to share the story of his journey to the top of Mount Everest, the fifth summit in his quest.

### Stanley H. King Counseling

Taft faculty have been working with the Stanley H. King Counseling Institute throughout the year to further develop "deep listening" skills. The full Taft community joined the conversation when the Stanley King team shared their expertise during Morning Meeting.



Mark Milewski

Nima Tsering Sherpa



Dr. Arthur Benjamin

### Dr. Arthur Benjamin

"Mathmagician" Dr. Arthur Benjamin, a mathematics professor at Harvey Mudd College, brought his impressive mental math and combinatorics skills to the Bingham stage. Benjamin has been featured in TED Talks and across the media, and has worked for the National Bureau of Standards, the National Security Agency, and the Institute for Defense Analyses. ■

Select Morning Meeting videos can be viewed on the Taft website at [www.taftschoool.org/living-our-motto/morning-meetings](http://www.taftschoool.org/living-our-motto/morning-meetings)





TAFTIES TRAVELED TO LAKEVILLE THIS YEAR FOR TAFT-HOTCHKISS DAY, the culmination of a week filled with school spirit and camaraderie, good fun, and great competition. A big win on the football field brought the week to a close on a high note. ■



Watch the traditional Red Rally Captains' Video, produced by Dylan Kim '19. The first song on the soundtrack was created by Alex Bamford '19.



TAFT'S FALL PRODUCTION OF *FOOTLOOSE* wasn't just great, it was also green. In addition to toe-tapping numbers and smooth dance moves, the show featured the debut of environmentally-friendly upgrades to the historic Bingham stage. Twenty-seven LED stage lighting fixtures were installed in September incorporating both the backdrop system and the "down light" over the stage, reducing power demand from 18,000 watts to 840 to light the backdrop, and from 9,000 watts to 900 for the down-lighting. *Footloose* also marked the first use of rechargeable batteries in the wireless microphone packs worn by the actors, eliminating the need for roughly 300 disposable batteries over the life of the show. ■





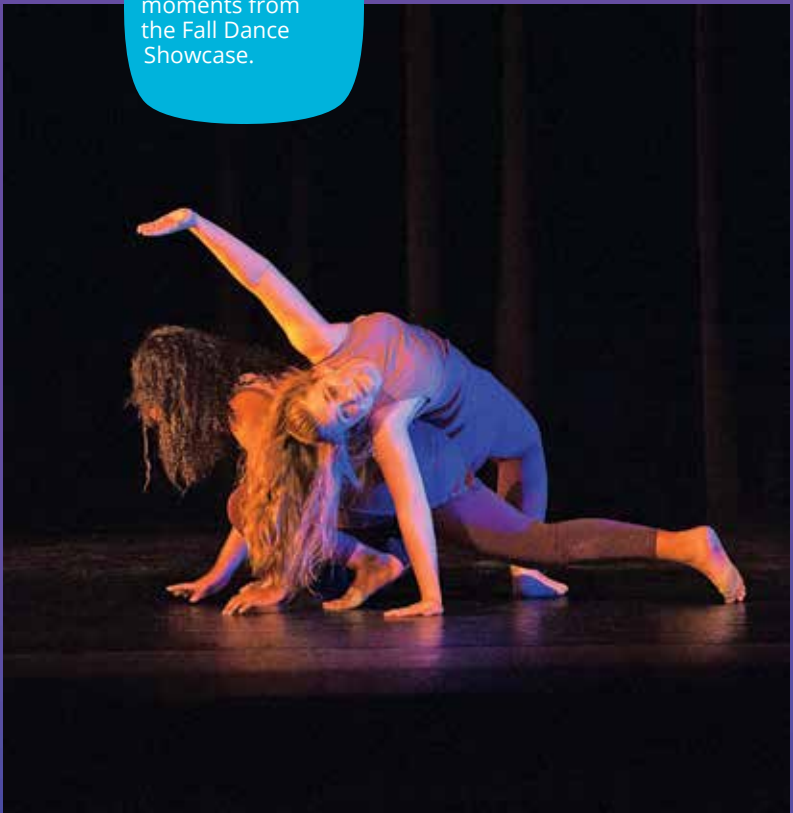


Watch Pearl Young's piece reflecting the historical struggle for racial and ethnic equality.

**THE FALL DANCE SHOWCASE** was a powerful and spirited celebration of the work done in all of Sarah Surber's dance classes and by Taft's Dance Ensemble. A highlight of the show was a piece choreographed by Pearl Young '18 as part of an honors independent tutorial in dance. Set to Sam Cooke's *A Change Is Gonna Come*, the piece and the tutorial explore peaceful activism and human rights issues, and are inspired by the work of Dr. Pearl Primus, a pioneering dancer, choreographer, and anthropologist who used dance to resist civil injustice and advocate for change in the 1960s. ■



Scan this page to watch moments from the Fall Dance Showcase.











Taft forward Mthabisi Tshuma '18 works his way through St. Mark's defenders.

For more on the fall season, please visit [www.taftsports.com](http://www.taftsports.com)

# Fall Sports **WRAP-UP**

BY STEVE PALMER  
Photography by Robert Falcetti

## Boys' Soccer 16-3

### ► NEW ENGLAND CLASS A SEMIFINALIST

It was another spectacular season for Taft boys' soccer, as the team posted an impressive record of 16-3 (7-1 in the Founders League). For the third consecutive year, Taft earned a spot in New England Class A Tournament, and for the second time in as many seasons, the team reached the semifinals, falling to the eventual champion by a goal in each of those contests. The program reached national notoriety, being ranked as one of the top five prep school soccer teams in the country. The Rhinos began the 2017 season with a seven-game win streak, highlighted by convincing victories over top programs like Avon Old Farms (6-2), Deerfield (9-2), and Andover (5-1). After dropping a thrilling game to Berkshire, Taft produced another seven-game win streak, rolling to victories over Kent (6-1) and Choate (4-1). The team then closed out the regular season with a dramatic comeback win over Hotchkiss. In the New England quarterfinal, Taft defeated Belmont Hill (3-2) before falling to eventual New England champion Loomis in the semifinals. The offense on this team was prolific, scoring 92 goals in 19 matches, led by the trio of Mthabisi Tshuma '18 (23 goals, 11 assists), Sammed Bawa '20 (23 goals, 12 assists), and Marvin Sibanda '19 (15 goals, 23 assists). Carter Veley '18 (3 goals, 10 assists) and Aaron

Skeene '19 (10 goals, 3 assists) added to this dynamic attack. Kevin Wharfe '18 and Jackson Lardner '18 were also key members of the midfield, and a young group of defenders—Micah Umeh '19, Jordan Miller '20, Cole Torino '20, Ethan Hindle '20, and Jayce Fraser '21—did an excellent job for Taft and give the program much to be excited about in the future. In net, Shayan Karimi '19 played nearly every minute of the season, earning 16 wins and 8 shutouts.

## Girls' Soccer 11-5-1

### ► NEW ENGLAND QUARTERFINALISTS

In a year of real growth, the Rhinos started 4-4-1 but pulled together as a gritty team for a great second half of the season, fighting for seven straight wins, including key victories over Deerfield (4-0), Northfield Mount Hermon (3-1), and Westminster (2-0). That run earned Taft a third consecutive invitation to the New England



Amanda Graziano '21 moves the ball upfield against Sacred Heart.





Kayla Robinson '19 makes a block against Andover September 16.

Class A Tournament. The team fell 2–3 in the first round to #1-ranked Nobles in a terrific yet heartbreaking game when Taft tied the game 3–3 in the final seconds, only to have the goal called back. This team learned a lot about competing and pushing limits, especially through the leadership of the seniors on the team who won just five games as lower mids. The next three seasons saw an average of 11.6 wins and shifted the team’s goals from making the tournament to winning the postseason tournament. This year’s leading offensive players included leading scorers Patience Kum ’21 (13 goals) and Jamie Howie ’18 (10 goals) and assists leader Emilee Adami ’19 (7 assists). Goalie Katie Piechnik ’18 had a 75 percent save average, five shut-outs, and a 1.31 GAA. The future of this team is solid, as lower mids scored 25 of the team’s 52 goals through the season.

**Volleyball 14-5**  
▶ **RANKED #4 IN NEW ENGLAND**  
▶ **NEW ENGLAND QUARTERFINALISTS**

The varsity volleyball season started with a fantastic team-bonding trip to Cape Cod in late August. Players went there to train and to bond in every sense of the word. The preseason laid the foundation that promoted the team’s “Umbrella” theme to support each other. Throughout the season in games and in many off-court activities, the Taft players lived up to this ideal of teamwork, and in the end won much more than games. Though the Rhinos would defeat many strong squads, including Andover (3–1), Nobles (3–0), and Loomis (3–0), they won also when they volunteered at the Connecticut Food Bank, when they raised money for

breast cancer research at their night game against Choate, and when they practiced and bonded with the JV and thirds volleyball teams. A stirring 3–2 win over rival Hotchkiss in the regular season finale earned Taft the #4 ranking for the New England tournament (their 14th trip to the Class A Tournament in the past 17 years), and coach Ginger O’Shea her 484th career victory. In their quarterfinal matchup, Taft lost to Loomis at home in three very close games. Finally, many of the team’s players were recognized for their fine academic work by receiving an award from the American Volleyball Coaches Association. Senior co-captains Elizabeth Baratta ’18 and Emily Hardy ’18, and Kaia Whiteley ’18, were recipients of the Volleyball Award. Kayla Robinson ’19 and Osi Bialunska ’19 both received Founders League Recognition.

**Football 4-4**

The 126th Taft football season had some great moments, starting with a preseason trip to Hawaii that built unmatched camaraderie and unity to start the season. Taft opened with a win over perennial power Salisbury (42–20), and followed that great effort with a win against Williston Northampton 26–12 under the lights in front of the entire Taft community. After this 2–0 start, Taft had opportunities but could not knock off the three strong teams that finished at the top of the league, Trinity-Pawling, Brunswick School, and Avon Old Farms. The team rebounded to defeat Kent 43–19 on Parents’ Weekend, but followed against a gritty Berkshire

team with overconfidence and suffered a disappointing loss. The squad bounced back to finish the year with a resounding win on Taft-Hotchkiss Day by a score of 41–23. The potent Taft offense (32 points per game) was led by quarterback Nolan Grooms ’19, who threw for 1,569 yards, 21 TDs, and only 6 interceptions. Grooms added 535 yards and 7 touchdowns on the ground. Postgraduate Alex Jones ’18 had one of the finest seasons at running back in recent memory, carrying the ball for 920 yards and 9 TDs and adding 4 receiving TDs. Postgraduate Eric Rooks ’18 was one of the best wide receivers in New England, accounting for 49 receptions and 8 TDs. Matt Staalsoe ’18 anchored the front as one of the best two-way linemen in the league.



The Taft defense was led by leading tacklers and captains Zane Segalas ’18 (74 tackles) and Joe Hardison ’18 (51 tackles and 2 interceptions). Postgraduate Jordy Agudosi ’18 was an impressive pass rusher—he added 9.5 sacks in only eight games. The 2018 squad returns many of their impact players next season and the future of Taft football is bright!



Taft quarterback Nolan Grooms ’19 rushes for yardage against Kent School on October 28, while wide receiver Joe Hardison ’18 provides protection.



Field Hockey 8-9

The season began with a challenging new match-up against Milton, but Taft rebounded quickly with wins against Canterbury (2-0) and The Gunnery (5-0). The Rhinos spent the early part of the season on the road, but the first home match-up came against league rival Loomis Chaffee, set under the lights on a frigid late September Saturday night. The atmosphere was electric as many fans showed up to cheer the team on. Loomis scored right away, but McKinley Karpa '18 (season leading scorer) answered to tie the game. At the end of the first half Loomis was awarded a penalty stroke, but goalie Phoebe Autio '18 (1.4 GAA and 85 percent save season average) made a huge save. In the second half McKinley unselfishly passed the ball over to second-leading scorer Liv Santini '19, who put away the game winner. For the second year in a row, Taft defeated Ethel Walker (2-1), the #1 team in Class C. The Rhinos were down the entire game until the last two

Ryan Steps Down as Head Coach



After 15 seasons as head coach of Taft's varsity field hockey team, Rachael Ryan is stepping away from the game that has been a fixture in her life for more than 30 years. Ryan's legacy

includes 10 winning seasons and nine tournament appearances, with a memorable trip to the New England finals in 2005. Ryan led her teams through 239 games as Taft's head coach, and mentored countless young women. "The success Rachael has had on the field proves itself from the record books," says Abby Hine '07. "But beyond the game, Rachael finds a way to build the inner tiger in young players who have no recognition of their current capabilities. She built a confidence in me that I didn't even know I had, one that allowed me to become a collegiate All-American athlete, all-time leading scorer, captain, and leader. Her lessons have served as a foundation for hundreds of young women, inspiring them on the field and far beyond." ■

For a more in depth look at Ryan's career and retirement from coaching, visit the News section of the Taft School website.



Liv Santini '19 moves the ball upfield against Ethel Walker School on October 25.

minutes when captain Eva Baurmeister '19 scored a beautiful penalty stroke to send it to overtime. Ethel Walker dominated early on, but Corinna Dorr '19 and Autio turned away a couple of their corners. The momentum shifted and Taft came away with the win when Baurmeister tipped in a shot at the top by Olivia King '20. Western New England All Stars were captain Phoebe Autio and McKinley Karpa, while NEPSAC Honorable Mention went to Baurmeister. Taft's Founders All-League winners were Amelia Allen '18 and Corinna Dorr, and captains-elect are Eva Baurmeister and Corinna Dorr.

Boys' Cross Country 3-4

Led by senior tri-captains Calvin Palmer '18, Ben Roberts '18, and Barrett Wong '18, the team had a great start to the year, beating Trinity-Pawling—a team that had beaten Taft last year by a single point—in the first race 18-45. After taking three tough losses in a single day from the powerhouses Loomis, Hotchkiss, and Northfield Mount Hermon, Taft bounced back, winning the final two dual meets of the year in a hard-fought battle against Williston away (22-35), and an impressive home win against Kent (20-36) on the home course on Parents' Weekend. The season was capped by a strong 5th-place finish at the Founders League championship race and a 10th place at NEPSA Division I Championships at Choate, improving upon last year's placement in both races. Beyond the improvements as a team, the 2017 season was marked by individual accomplishment, as six harriers broke into the top 30 performances by Taft runners on the home course, including Philip Huang '18, Ian Wohlhieter '18, Joey Nihil '21, Isaac Lennon '18, and Calvin Palmer (16:37, 3rd all-time), and Ben Roberts (16:28), who bettered his own record on the course. Roberts was recognized as a Founders League and New England All-Star, and finished



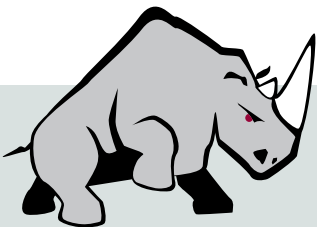
Ben Roberts '18 during a meet against Kent School in October.

the season with a great 12th-place finish at the New England meet. Fellow Founders League All-Star Palmer was the recipient of the John B. Small Award. Next year's team will be captained by Marcus Valenta '19 and Stefan Kim '20.

Girls' Cross Country 1-7

The season record of 1-7 does not reflect the achievements and personal improvements of the 2017 girls' cross country team. Racing a tough dual-meet schedule against several non-Founders League teams, the girls faced multiple losses within two or three points but ended up earning a 5th-place finish (4th place for JV) at the Founders League Championships. The successes of the team were owed to the leadership of captain Hanna Murphy '18 and classmates Lexi Cafiero '18 and Claudia Vira '18, a trio that traded places for the top three finishes on the team throughout the majority of our meets. Strong friendship and hard work led Michelle Lian '20 and Katie Bootsma '20 to regularly place within the top five Taft scorers, each finishing as high as 2nd and 3rd for

the team. Haley Barr '18, Yuka Ishimoto '19, Eleanor Streit '19, Logan Clew-Bachrach '20, and Kate Zhang '20 also earned varsity letters for placing within Taft's top seven at least once. Cafiero earned All-Founders honors for finishing within the top 15 at the Founders League Championship; her time of 21:55 placed her 13th. Vira and Lian were named Founders All-League in recognition of their sportsmanship, hard work, and character, while Murphy received the Girls' Cross Country Award for demonstrating the most dedication and enthusiasm for the team. Next year's team will be captained by Bootsma, Lian, and Streit. ■



FALL ATHLETIC AWARD WINNERS

**John B. Small Award**  
(Boys' Varsity Cross Country)  
Calvin Palmer '18

**Girls' Cross Country Award**  
Hanna Murphy '18

**Volleyball Award**  
Elizabeth Baratta '18  
Emily Hardy '18  
Kaia Whiteley '18

**Field Hockey Award**  
Eva Bauermeister '19  
Phoebe Autio '18

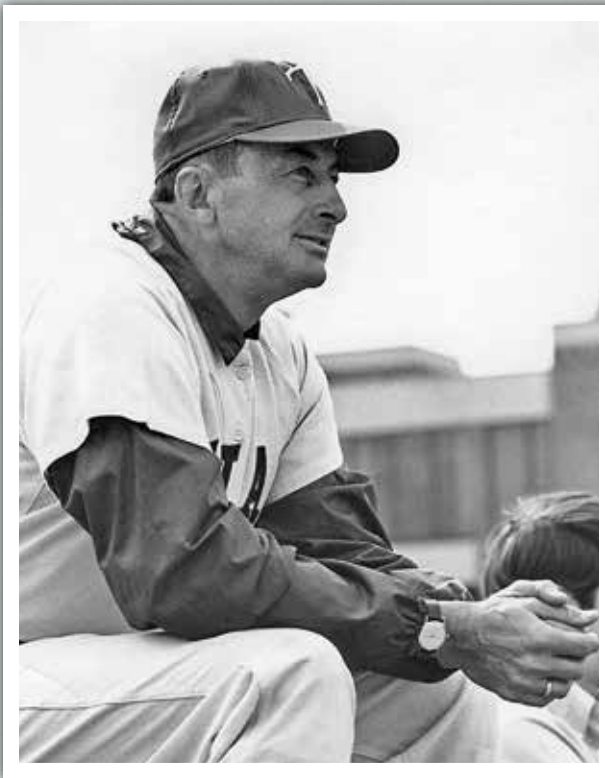
**Black Football Award**  
Joe Hardison '18

**Cross Football Award**  
Zane Segalas '18

**Livingston Carroll Soccer Award**  
Mthabisi Tshuma '18  
Carter Veley '18

**1976 Girls' Soccer Award**  
Kristin Manfreda '18  
Juliana Yamin '18  
Mary Alice Ewing '18





# Remembering a Legend LAWRENCE HUNTER STONE

AUGUST 30, 1926–SEPTEMBER 20, 2017

LARRY STONE, the legendary football and baseball coach who also served as director of athletics during his 34-year tenure at Taft, died on September 20, 2017.

As Headmaster Willy MacMullen '78 wrote shortly after Stone's death in the fall, "Many graduates knew him forever as Coach Stone, and scores point to him as a transformational figure, someone they have never forgotten, someone who shaped them into the adults they became. In his years, Larry became a legendary coach. He was tough, old-school, demanding—but in a way that made athletes want to get better and strive to meet what seemed like impossibly high standards. He embodied sportsmanship

and class, in 'doing it right.' And his teams were very good: disciplined, tough, competitive...His ability to draw greatness out of every player was special."

Born on August 30, 1926, Stone grew up on a family farm in Dover, New Hampshire, and graduated from Dover High School before proudly serving as a Navy quartermaster, third class, on the USS *Caliente* during World War II. After the war, Stone continued his education at Brewster Academy and the University of New Hampshire, and earned a bachelor's degree from Arnold College. A fierce competitor and multisport athlete in high school and college, Stone signed a professional baseball contract with the Boston Braves in 1948.

Stone coached football for 39 years, first in New Hampshire at Exeter and Portsmouth High Schools, followed by 30 years at Taft, where his wife, Lu, worked in the Admissions Office, greeting visitors in the Harley Roberts Room when they arrived on campus. In addition to coaching baseball at Taft for 33 years, Stone coached the local Watertown Babe Ruth and Oakville American Legion baseball teams for many summers.

"When Larry Stone arrived, Taft's was the weakest athletic program in New England. He left it at the top," said Headmaster Emeritus Lance Odden. "As a coach he was the best, writing records never to be equaled in

football and baseball. Incredibly, Larry was never a recruiter. He accepted whomever Cunningham and Wandelt brought in and turned them into competitors. The key to his success was that he was an inspirational teacher who brought out the very best in all. Yes, he was demanding, but his players loved him for all he stood for."

As an athletic director, Stone was deeply respected in the landscape outside of Taft. He was a leader, and he embodied all that is best about sports in schools. He always advanced Taft's interests, but with a fairness and camaraderie that still marks the league. Among athletic directors, Taft became known as a school with the finest in play, coaching, and facilities in New England.

"Larry Stone was an inspirational teacher for both faculty and students," said Faculty Emerita Patsy Odden, who established Taft's girls' ice hockey program and coached for many years during Stone's tenure as athletic director. "A man of deep integrity, both on and off the playing fields. The only thing he loved more than coaching were his wife and family. Personally, I cannot imagine having a finer mentor."

Many former players who have written the school with remembrances of Coach Stone have mentioned their strong memories of his accent, his unique turns of phrase, and the lasting impact his coaching had in their lives.

"Gents, we are going to have to be better.' I can hear his motivational guidance clearly even today," wrote Jim Neil '72, who played baseball under Stone. "And the great sayings, 'He's got Moxie, Dying Quail, Frozen Rope, Can of Corn,' and especially, 'Hustle!'"

"Taft produces instructors with extraordinary talent in their field who are also dedicated to providing a sound moral compass and promoting a commitment to helping others," Neil continued. "No one was better at this at Taft than Coach Stone. Period. Coach Stone's tutelage for me as a baseball player was focused on backhand stops, cutting the corner

running the bases, double-play footwork, and hitting the curve ball to right. 'Doing it the right way!' But his lessons were ultimately about preparation, integrity, teamwork, and building confidence."

"Our dad believed in education through athletics and that proper preparation and spirited competition built strong character," his children wrote in Stone's obituary. "His teams reflected his ideals as they battled with true sportsmanship and moxie."

"I am very blessed that I played baseball and football for Coach Stone and that he was my mentor, and he and his family my friends," wrote Taft alumnus and former faculty member Thomas Daily '78. "I do think of him often, whether it's throwing an eyebrow-to-toenail curveball to my son, trying to solve a problem, lead a group, or prepare for a trial. *Give it your best. The hay's in the barn.*"

Stone is survived by his children, Michael B. Stone '74, Kelly Stone '76,

James H. Stone '83, and Kathleen B. Stone '84; daughters-in-law Cynthia P. Stone '74, Rachel E. Stone, and Elizabeth S. Wilson; grandchildren Kylie S. Mean and her husband, Max; Jamie S. Feingold and her husband, Paul; Lawrence Hunter Stone II; Cullen J. Stone; and Kip M. Stone; great-grandson Jack M. Feingold; the Holbrook and Carl A. Stone families; and many special friends including Elaine and Joe Bizzozero and Ame Gonzalez.

▼ Larry Stone with player Shaun Roberts '89.



A remembrance ceremony will be held during Taft's 2018 Alumni Weekend, May 18–19. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Lawrence Hunter Stone Scholarship c/o Headmaster Willy MacMullen, The Taft School, 110 Woodbury Road, Watertown, CT, 06795. ■

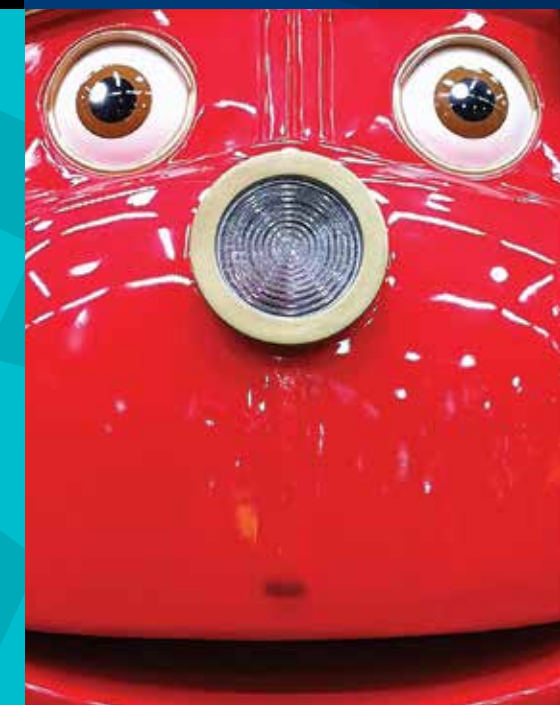
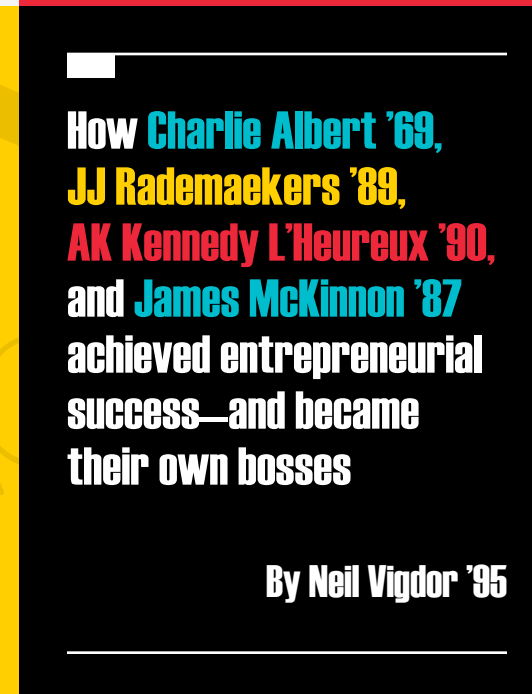


# Minding the **Business**



How **Charlie Albert '69**,  
**JJ Rademaekers '89**,  
**AK Kennedy L'Heureux '90**,  
and **James McKinnon '87**  
achieved entrepreneurial  
success—and became  
their own bosses

By Neil Vigdor '95







CHUGGINGTON® IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF LUDORUM PLC.

# Toy Story

They've been keeping children (and our inner child) company for a generation, with unique personalities and voices all their own.

We stand in line on Black Friday for them, sing along with them, and travel back to prehistoric times with them.

And if it weren't for Charlie Albert '69, they would just be inanimate objects.

For more than 20 years, he's been bringing many of the most iconic toys to life, from Tickle Me Elmo to Zoomer Dino.

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Well, it is and it isn't when your focus groups are children.

"Somebody says, 'I want you to create a really cute robot personality

in audio,'" Albert says. "They always refer R2-D2. But they don't want it to be R2-D2. 'We love Mickey Mouse and Elmo, but it has to be something new.' We're the guys they come to."

It's been two decades since Albert and his wife and business partner, Sally, launched their aptly-named toy development company, Creativity Inc. The San Carlos, California-based business employs 35 people who specialize in animatronics, puppeteering, play-testing, software engineering, sound effects, and musical composition.

They have worked on more than 7,000 products, including five that were awarded the Toy of the Year Award,

For more than 20 years, Albert has been bringing many of the most iconic toys to life, from Tickle Me Elmo to Zoomer Dino.







▲ Albert in front of the “wall of toys” that his company has worked on.



known in the industry as the TOTYs. It’s the Oscars of toys. You might have heard of several of them such as Sing-a-ma-jigs and Hatchimals.

“We’re pretty sure we’re working on next year’s hit toys,” says Albert, whose clients include Hasbro, Mattel, and Disney. But there are no sneak previews in this business.

“It’s like working with spies,” Albert says. “We are under all kinds of [nondisclosure agreements], which are super strict. We’re not allowed to talk about what we’re working on at all. We’re trusted.”

It wasn’t always top secret for Albert, who received a music degree from Stanford University after graduating from Taft. For the first 10 years of his career,

he was a professional musician and later ran a recording studio and founded an amplifier manufacturing business. At the time, Albert’s brother worked for SEGA, a pioneer in the video game industry.

“My brother said, ‘The big opportunity is in games. They will take over the world,’” Albert says. “What I quickly learned was audio in the game world was pretty primitive. I saw an opportunity to be inventive.”

Albert, who majored in the flute and plays the guitar and piano, started doing sound design for SEGA and Sony PlayStation. Their development platforms weren’t exactly encrypted. “You got information on that through a bulletin board that they had which was pre-Web,” Albert says. “My password was music.”

**“Trying to be a great boss in many ways is the most rewarding aspect of having our business.”**

Albert worked on the video game Sonic the Hedgehog, but it was Elmo that rocketed his career.

“Every single syllable is sliced into a separate file,” he says. “The toy contained six seconds of audio, but it played for 30 or 40 seconds, all told.”

The two most reliable members of Albert’s focus group, sons Eugene and Miles, are now grown up. Miles works for the family business, while Eugene worked there for a few summers.

“Trying to be a great boss in many ways is the most rewarding aspect of having our business,” Albert says.

▼ Creativity Inc.’s staff outside its offices in San Carlos, California.







# The Sweet Spot

**“I look at candy as the sum of science and creativity.”**

The title on his business cards says “Chief Candyman.” JJ Rademaekers ’89 signs all of his emails that way, too.

Who knew that what started out as a one-man enterprise selling chocolate-covered caramels and other confections at the Boulder, Colorado, farmers’ market would turn into a career reset and national candy brand for this former scientist and musician?

It was late 2009 when Rademaekers had a premonition that would ultimately become JJ’s Sweets, maker of Cocomels.

“I had a literal dream one night where I found myself in this kooky Wonka world,” he says. “I woke up the next day and had these great candy ideas. This was a transitional phase between jobs, so I was open to a new direction.”

Rademaekers puts the wonk in Willy Wonka. The *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* character never concerned himself about too much sugar. Dairy-free and vegan ingredients would have



◀ Rademaekers’ signature candy, Cocomels.

▶ “Chief Candyman” JJ Rademaekers ’89 in the kitchen at JJ’s Sweets.



“Yes, I still do have a sweet tooth. It’s my duty to be on top of the latest and greatest candies.”



been stranger than fiction. But not for Rademaekers, who uses coconut milk instead of butter and cream in his signature Cocomels, which are award-winning, organic, non-GMO and gluten free.

No wonder you can find Cocomels at 3,000 retail locations, from HomeGoods to Whole Foods and from Kroger to TJ Maxx. They’re sold on Amazon and in airports.

“I sort of look at candy as the sum of science and creativity,” he says. “I’ve been a longtime food geek and hobbyist chef.”

In his former life, Rademaekers worked as a scientist for the U.S. Geological Survey and as a musician for

13 years. “I also worked for a carbon offset start-up for a little while,” he says.

Then Rademaekers turned his home into a test kitchen, whipping up an early version of his Cocomels, hard candies, and brittle for his friends for the holidays.

“When they came over to the house, they’d give me positive feedback,” he says. “Then I’d bring them to parties.”

Soon, the married father of two turned his homemade confections into a cottage industry, asking his friends if they wanted to purchase them. “After a week or so I had to stop taking orders,” he says.

The following spring, Rademaekers applied to be a vendor at the local

farmers’ market, where he started selling Cocomels and giving out samples.

“It was sort of great face-to-face consumer insight studies,” he says. “From there it started to take off on its own.”

The demand for Cocomels became so high that JJ’s Sweets and its six employees couldn’t handle the volume in-house. So they turned to some family-owned candy factories in Chicago to crank them out without sacrificing quality. Quality control is not a problem for Rademaekers, though.

“Yes, I still do have a sweet tooth,” he says. “It’s my duty to be on top of the latest and greatest candies.”



► The JJ’s Sweets Cocomels team.







# Setting an Intention

◀ AK Kennedy  
L'Heureux '90 and  
business partner  
Brook Cosby at the  
Hyde office in Marin  
County, California.

Alignment is everything in yoga, from humble warrior to side plank.

But AK Kennedy L'Heureux '90 recognized that something was amiss in the Zen lifestyle—and it wasn't the bend in her knee or angle of her spine.

For all the “body is my temple” mantra of yogis, the vast majority of yoga apparel has been made overseas from synthetic material.

“This is a customer that does care where their product is coming from,” L'Heureux says. “I liked the feeling of natural fibers next to my body when I was doing yoga.”

This past fall, L'Heureux and her business partner, Brook Cosby, relaunched Hyde organic yoga apparel company, a dozen years after its inception as an eco-conscious alternative to mass-produced

athleisure wear. If you own a yoga mat and sweat-wicking leggings, you know who the manufacturers are.

They moved their business across the country from New York to Marin County, California, but that wasn't the only change.

“I didn't want it to be made in China,” L'Heureux says. “So over time, we continued to look for factories in the U.S. as the quality of the Chinese goods started to [deteriorate].”

L'Heureux was keenly aware of the reputation of organic yoga clothes for women, the “hippie-dippie” tie-dye look with Buddhas all over them. “It was crazy expensive,” she says. “The quality was terrible.”

After six months of searching the U.S. for a supplier, Hyde discovered a family-owned factory in Los Angeles to make its

**“This is a customer that does care where their product is coming from.”**



organic • made in the usa



# “I liked the feeling of natural fibers next to my body when I was doing yoga.”

pants, crop tops, and other clothes.

“It’s almost like starting over,” L’Heureux says. “We moved our warehouse. We moved our office location.”

Not only was it critical for their clothes to be made from natural fibers and in a socially responsible way, they had to be functional.

“There’s no tie digging into your back when you lie on the floor to do a backbend,” L’Heureux says.

While she’s been practicing yoga for 20 years and completed a teacher certification course, L’Heureux took time to find her career niche. She went to art school in California, then she worked for a company that sold rugs made in Nepal.

“I sort of got the small business bug,” says L’Heureux, who is married with three children, including a 10-month-old.

As a small business owner, L’Heureux has an appreciation for the value of a dollar. All of Hyde’s yoga pants sell for less than \$100, unlike some of the big-name manufacturers. And their customers never have to worry about their pants being too revealing, like some other brands.

Thirty-five stores in 16 states carry Hyde apparel, which can also be purchased on the company’s website and through wholesale. “So we’re getting there,” L’Heureux says.



organic • made in the usa

► L’Heureux wearing her company’s organic yoga clothing during an impressive posture.  
MARK LOADER







**“We are on an adventure to bring quality made-in-the-U.S.A. products back and to do so in a way that’s affordable, has a positive impact on the environment, and is done in a sustainable way.”**

# Wearing It Well

► James McKinnon '87, CEO of third-generation family textile company Cotswold Industries, and his father, Wink McKinnon '60, in their Manhattan office.



They are cut from the same cloth—three generations in the family business.

James McKinnon '87 is carrying on that legacy in the ever-changing world of textile production as CEO of Cotswold Industries. His grandfather founded the company in 1954. Then his dad, Wink '60, followed suit. In 2009, it was James's turn.

“My dad said, ‘A family business needs family,’” says the younger McKinnon, who had previously worked in management consulting and for an executive search firm.

While the principles and hard work remain the same, the business model has evolved over the generations.

“As trade deals changed the nature of how American manufacturing fit into global commerce, it remains an incredible challenge to figure out how to keep an old-line American company relevant and profitable,” McKinnon says.

The answer was for the New York City-based company to eschew the default supply chain of the clothing industry.

“I cut my teeth in China, Mexico, and Vietnam, and most of the expansion over the last decade seeing how apparel is produced,” he says. “I just got to a point where I thought I should do something about it. We believed we could do it better. We believed we could do it at an

affordable price. We’re having a whole lot of fun reinventing the business model.”

Key to the company’s blueprint for success are its two new clothing lines, J Wingfield, a dressier label launched in 2015 that skews toward young professionals, and Frank’s, a casual wear line launched in 2017 that is geared toward older customers. About 100 stores carry the company’s two brands, which can also be ordered online and through third-party e-commerce sites such as Amazon.

Cotswold Industries gets the cotton for its flagship labels from Mississippi and Alabama. It’s then spun and woven at factories in Georgia and South





# “We believed we could do it better. We believed we could do it at an affordable price. We’re having a whole lot of fun reinventing the business model.”

▼ Frank's product guide conveys The American Edge concept for its U.S.-made menswear line.



Carolina. Finally, it's cut and sewn into clothing in Virginia and Texas.

“We call it dirt to shirt,” McKinnon says. “‘Made in the U.S.A.’ has become more of a buzzword as China has become expensive and exceedingly dirty and as the world becomes more aware of carbon footprints.”

In addition to its own labels, Cotswold Industries counts Levi's, Wrangler, and Abercrombie & Fitch as major accounts for its fabrics. They make pockets,

waistbands, corduroy, everything except for underwear and socks. Everything. Not just clothes, either. The company produces textiles for wallpapers, circuit boards, and fabrics for the car industry, the military, and for health care.

“We are on an adventure to bring quality made-in-the-U.S.A. products back and to do so in a way that's affordable, has a positive impact on the environment, and is done in a sustainable way,” he says.

It hasn't been easy for McKinnon, who is married with two children and lives in Rye, New York. “Our bank went bankrupt. That was a big problem,” he says. “We had to refinance in the middle of Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers going out of business. It was certainly a trying moment, not just for us but the entire country. You look back on it and say, ‘If it didn't kill you, it made you stronger.’”

Another example of the company keeping up with the times was the launch of its made-to-measure service just in time for Cyber Monday.

“Choose your fabric. Tell us what you would like, and we'll make it for you personally,” McKinnon says. “A lot of the market is not exactly mediums or large.”

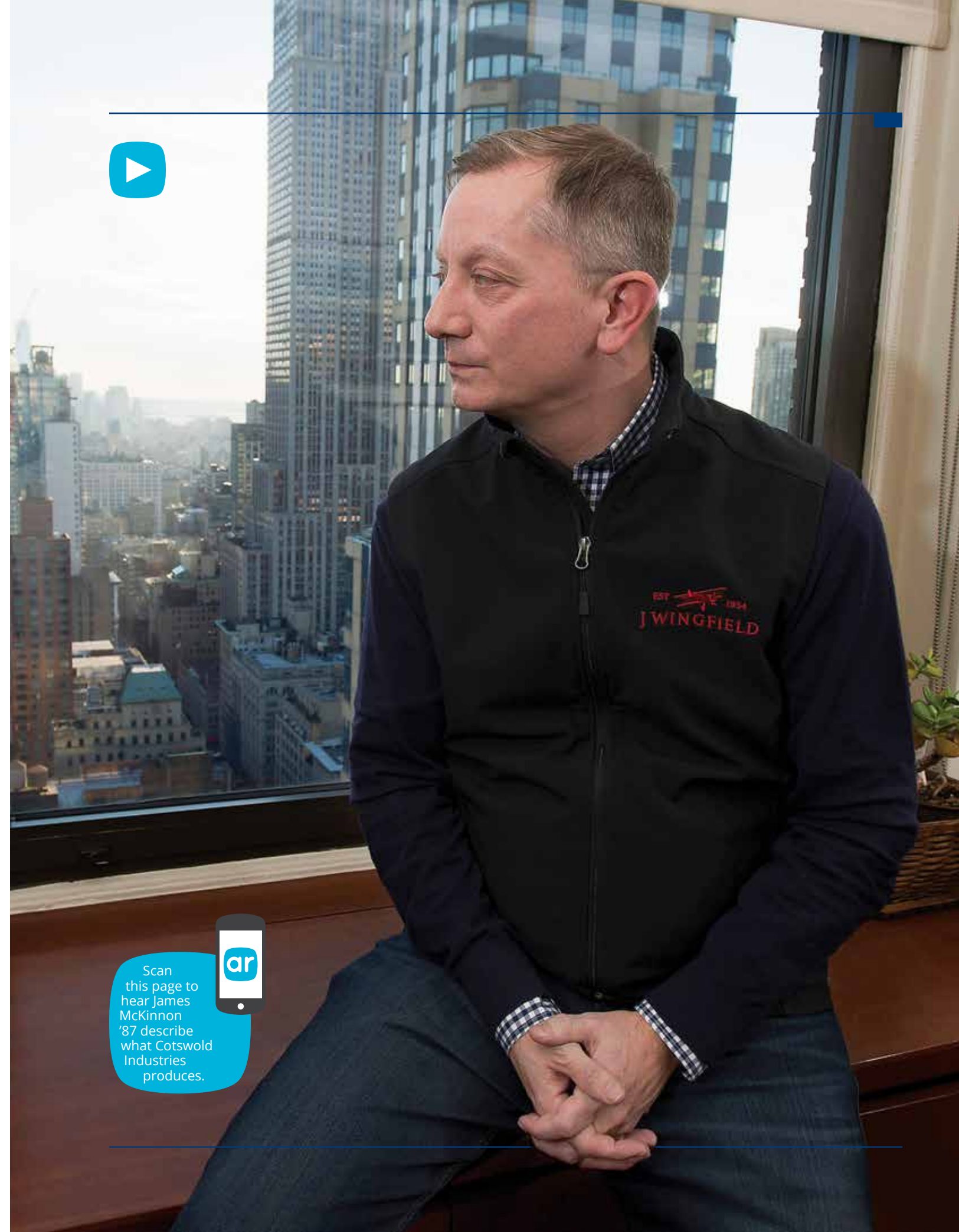
And in business, one size doesn't fit all. ■

► James McKinnon '87, CEO of third-generation family textile company Cotswold Industries, in their Manhattan office.



Neil Vigdor '95 is the statewide political writer for Hearst Connecticut Media, which publishes eight daily newspapers and 13 weeklies in the state and *Connecticut Magazine*.


Photos of James and Wink McKinnon: Robert Falcetti.



Scan this page to hear James McKinnon '87 describe what Cotswold Industries produces.







# how to work smarter, not harder

Jon Willson '82,  
director of Taft's  
Moorhead Academic  
Center and history  
teacher.

## THE MOORHEAD ACADEMIC CENTER AND JON WILLSON '82 IN ACTION

By Julie Reiff  
Photography by Robert Falcetti



For longtime history teacher Jon Willson '82, teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. And he's betting on both. In his role as director of the Moorhead Academic Center, or the MAC, Willson wants to help both students and teachers make the most of their academic experience at Taft.

Willson is excited about a lot of things, but especially about helping faculty figure out ways to make student learning visible or transparent. He's taken a special interest in how the brain learns—in the science behind how humans gain and retain information. Much of his reading about brain research now informs his own teaching and his approach to helping students learn better and teachers teach better.

"I don't get involved in curriculum design," he says. "That's a departmental thing. But I want to show teachers different teaching strategies and tactics."

Faculty shouldn't see teaching as transferring knowledge to students, he explains, but as engineering better learning environments. Of course, he admits there are times when the content calls for a *short* lecture.

"When you do lecture, you need to stop and validate for student understanding"—ask them to write down two or three things they've just covered, to be sure that what you taught is what they learned, and to help them move that learning to a different part of the brain, he says.

Willson, who joined the Taft faculty

in 1996, recently spent a sabbatical year reading about teaching (the pedagogy) and the assessment of it, and how those two go together. He then interviewed master teachers at Taft and elsewhere.

"I wanted to observe and interview great teachers, to learn as much as I could about great teaching," says Willson, who talked to legendary faculty at Watertown High and at a KIPP high school in the Bronx in addition to nine other boarding schools. "I went out of my way to find many different teachers—in art, French, math—to see everything I could."

From his research, he believes strongly in three basic but powerful ideas:

# 1. S/he who works, learns.

"What I get most excited about," says Willson, "even back when I was the History Department head, is the challenge of showing teachers how to teach better by shifting the burden of learning to students—which doesn't mean you're not working."

It's up to the teacher, he says, to think very deliberately about what the typical student knows coming in to the class, what they need to do to recall prior learning, what the goal is for that day, and what activity will help them achieve it.



A group of students talking about an assignment.



Willson works with a student visiting the MAC.

# 2. Challenge, engage, empower.

Every lesson, every assessment should do all three, he says.

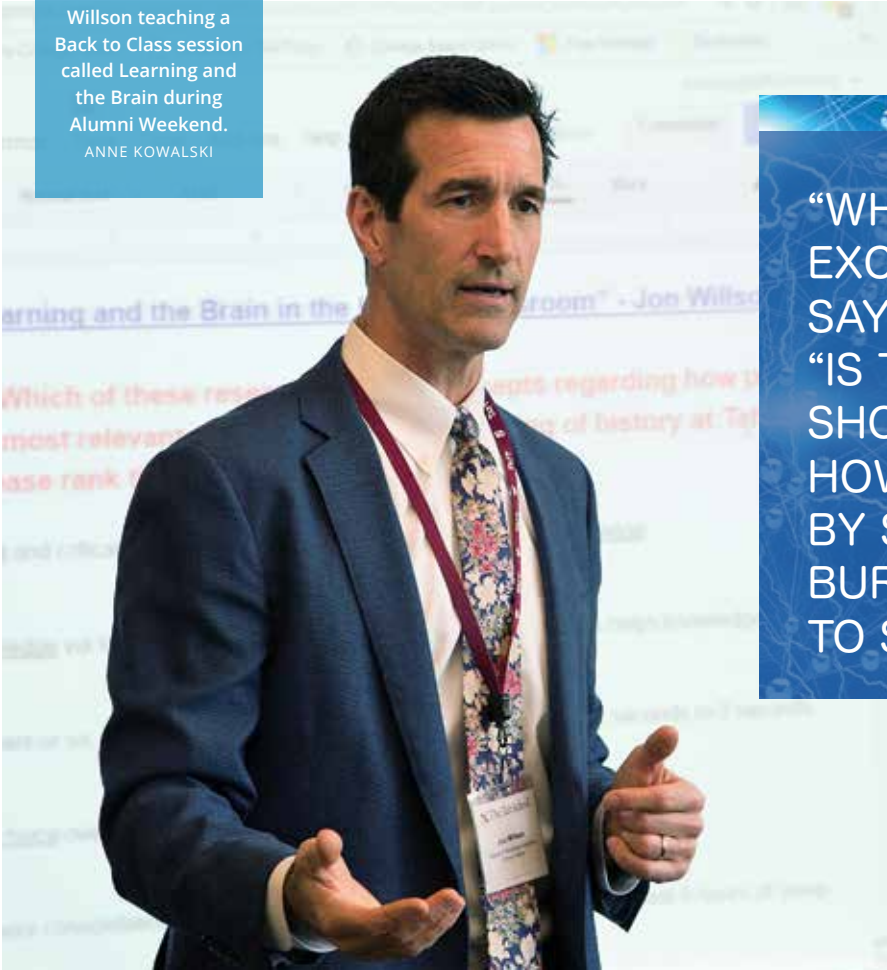
"If students are bored or feeling powerless—or that it's pointless—it's your fault. It's your job as the teacher to engage them. Your goal is to get them to do things that are harder than they think they can do," he explains.

# 3. Teach students, not a course.

As academic dean for eight years, Willson received plenty of unsolicited feedback about teachers from students. At Taft, whenever a student asks to change a course, they have to talk to the academic dean. "You take some of it with a grain of salt, but what I heard—almost across the board—was that when they didn't like a teacher it was because they had the sense that the teacher wasn't really in their corner, which is rare at Taft," he says.

Willson teaching a Back to Class session called Learning and the Brain during Alumni Weekend.  
ANNE KOWALSKI

"WHAT I GET MOST EXCITED ABOUT," SAYS WILLSON, "IS THE CHALLENGE OF SHOWING TEACHERS HOW TO TEACH BETTER BY SHIFTING THE BURDEN OF LEARNING TO STUDENTS."





AS ACADEMIC DEAN, before his sabbatical, Willson led changes in the academic schedule, the grading system, and the way we assess students' academic habits.

“He did this with a tremendous level of dedication to the role,” says Jeremy Clifford, who succeeded him as academic dean, “while building a high degree of rapport with the students and respect among the faculty.”

Willson now heads the Pedagogy and Assessment Committee, with the goal of helping faculty incorporate new and exciting teaching techniques into classrooms at Taft.

One of the things that has been most instructive, Willson says, are instructional rounds. A teacher says, “I’m doing X. Anyone want to come see me?” It’s not about giving that teacher feedback. It’s about what the observers can take away from seeing that teaching technique in action.

“I was impressed by Jon’s excitement and authenticity in wanting to push our classrooms to a place where we are all doing transformational work,” says English teacher Khalid

Tellis, who recently joined the group.

In some ways, what Willson does now echoes the experience new Taft faculty get through the Penn Fellows program—an innovative two-year fellowship program between the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education and nine top boarding schools.

“This P&A group is really a wonderful addition to the faculty,” says Karen May, a specialist in educational assessment and reading strategies who works with Willson in the MAC. “What Jon has managed to do is bring the same excitement and learning and camaraderie that I have marveled at with the Penn Fellows. They observe each other’s classes, sharing as a community of learners. He is successfully helping teachers to share their ideas, their questions, their best practices, and their excitement—all of it under our roof. I have seen teachers, experienced teachers, come alive with this work Jon is doing.”



A student receives homework help from Willson.



Willson’s winter faculty workshop called Primacy Recency helped show how teachers can better start and end classes to facilitate learning.

HALF A DOZEN TEACHERS sit in one of the newly remodeled CPT history classrooms. The Professional Education and Growth Committee has organized a morning of professional development workshops on campus by and for faculty.

Willson—tall, lean, dark-haired, and dressed in a white button-down and khakis—is there to talk about “primacy and recency”—essentially the importance of structuring class time so that the most important parts of a lesson are at the start and end of the class block, when students are most likely to remember them.

Simple in concept, but the key, of course, is the execution. He gives each teacher a survey rating how frequently they start class with various activities, from reviewing homework or outlining the plan for the coming week, to giving lectures or short quizzes. Of course, all are aware of the gentle nudging going on. Sprinkled through the list are activities designed to better engage students, such as having them work in small groups or putting answers on the board—as he is having the faculty group do.

The goal, they learn, is to maximize those critical early minutes of class to do one or more of the following:

- > Recall content from prior learning so it is accessible in working memory
- > Practice skills
- > Learn because the activity is novel or physically involving
- > Provide feedback as to what students know in a way that might guide a learning plan

He might simply have explained the concept, but by asking faculty first to review their own behavior, they’re more engaged learners.

Similarly, the last chunk of class is the second-most opportune time to engage students, he reminds the group—that is, to get students to consolidate or apply the content or skills faculty want them to practice. Again, they review their own track record of end-of-class activities and discuss (in small groups) what best aligns with this “primacy-recency” concept.

Another possible way of thinking about this, he explains, might be to ask which

of the activities is likely to help students move the material into their long-term memory, or to help teachers understand what students actually learned that day.

But his work with faculty isn’t limited to organized workshops or to working with members of the P&A Committee. Willson regularly gets emails from faculty wanting to share or discuss an article they’ve just read, whether that’s the merits of flipped classrooms or the latest research on learning and the brain. At lunch, he’ll happily delve into deep discussions of the advantages of single-point rubrics or low-stakes testing.

FACULTY SHOULDN’T SEE TEACHING AS TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE TO STUDENTS, BUT AS ENGINEERING BETTER LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.



Karen May, who works with Willson in the MAC, specializes in educational assessment and reading strategies for students.



AROUND CAMPUS, Willson is known for the catchphrase “Work smarter, not harder.” In fact, he devoted a Morning Meeting to the subject, complete with a detailed handout. He’s achieved such market saturation that the school mons parodied him in a sketch, in the nicest possible way, using that mantra.

He’s happy about that, but hopes students will also take the time to come to the MAC to work out in more detail just what that smarter approach might mean for them.

Piper Desorcie ’20 is very glad she has. “He’s very welcoming, friendly,” she says. “We tried to figure out where I needed to improve—going through his worksheet. He threw out some ideas that may help: how to study properly, to work better with flashcards. In a couple classes I’m meeting with teachers more. I feel like I’m starting to understand the material better, and that’s helping me to be more engaged in class, to know what I’m listening for. I have a more formal plan now of how to approach things.”

In addition to being the girls’ varsity basketball coach, Willson is a goalie coach for the soccer teams.

“He helps everybody,” Piper says, “and is really kind about his advice to you. He’ll say, ‘You’re doing this, maybe try doing this.’ He gives advice in a way that’s easy to follow and understand, but you feel like he’s there with you, not against you.”

Willson’s own students benefit directly from his enthusiasm and expertise.

Not only do his students genuinely like him a teacher, they look forward to his class, which is saying a lot, given that Advanced Placement U.S. History has a notoriously difficult and content-heavy exam.

“Mr. Willson is definitely one of the best teachers I’ve had at Taft,” says Stephen Cho ’18, who had him for AP U.S. History and is currently the ranking scholar for his class. “I think what sets him apart is that he focuses on

what students want to learn. We would do the reading and write responses, and if we had any questions or a special interest in any topic, he would gear his lesson plans to address them.”

“He has this ability to make us all passionate about the material,” agrees Isaiah Jones ’18, who also took Willson’s class last year. “He knows a lot about U.S. history, since he’s been teaching for so long, so he can make connections between ideas really quickly and makes you see history in a different way. Instead of just separate events, you see it as a continuum. He puts things in perspective and makes the class really enjoyable, so it’s a class that you’re looking forward to.”

One of the things they also appreciate is that he doesn’t like to lecture.

“He just simply doesn’t believe in it,” says Yejin Kim ’18. “And so we’d have a lot of discussion. Last year, with the presidential election—and a lot of things were happening based on race or gender—it was so much more comfortable talking about that stuff in class. He creates an atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to participate without trying to grade it or anything.”

“Jon eats, sleeps, and breathes teaching and learning,” says Jeremy Clifford. “I find myself thinking about a lesson plan and asking, what would JW do here? Even though he has an engaging personality and is a naturally gifted teacher, he is still very mindful and deliberate about what he does in the classroom and is still thinking of how to improve, even as a very experienced classroom teacher.”

WILLSON LIKES to think of teaching as three things concurrently: curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment—or what are you teaching, how are you teaching it, and how are you assessing it?

But whatever teaching philosophy or style one embraces, for Willson, there is one sure bet: Students learn best from teachers who care.

“When I interviewed all those legendary teachers,” says Willson, “they were all so different in personality and approach, but the one thing they all did, in ways unique to them, was

“JON EATS, SLEEPS, AND BREATHES TEACHING AND LEARNING,” SAYS JEREMY CLIFFORD. “I FIND MYSELF THINKING ABOUT A LESSON PLAN AND ASKING, WHAT WOULD JW DO HERE?”

demonstrate their caring for all students. The students felt that those teachers cared—the prickly English teacher or the Spanish teacher-mom type. That’s the basis for all great teaching. It has to start with great relationships.” ■

Julie Reiff teaches journalism at Taft and is the former editor of this magazine.



MAC faculty member David Dethlefs talks with a student who makes use of the center’s resources.



The Moorhead Academic Center offers a place to work quietly with faculty help or with other students.

# THE MOORHEAD ACADEMIC CENTER

With an overarching mission to improve student learning, the Moorhead Academic Center (MAC) offers a broad range of resources and services to Taft faculty, students, and parents. The MAC staff works with faculty to incorporate research-based pedagogy and assessment into their teaching; assist students with learning strategies and study methods, and, where appropriate, facilitate their accommodations to help them become more effective academicians; and help parents navigate assessments and evaluations of their children as learners.

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