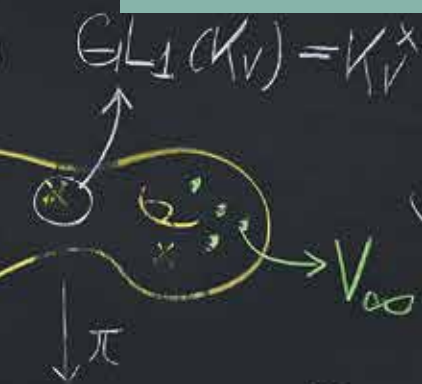


$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} dx \sum_{\alpha \in K^X} f(\alpha x) \omega \omega_S = Z(\mathcal{S}, \omega; \gamma)$$

$$\sum_{\alpha \in K^X} f(\alpha x) \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} f(\alpha x) \omega \omega_S \quad \dim H^0(\mathbb{P}^n, \mathcal{L}_{\mathbb{P}^n}^{\otimes k})$$



$$g = \log \frac{\omega_k \sqrt{|\Delta_k|}}{2^{1/2} k \pi J_k}$$

$$h_k = R_k^{-1} \left( \frac{\omega_k \sqrt{|\Delta_k|}}{2^{1/2} (2\pi)^{1/2}} \right) \prod_{\alpha \in G} L(\alpha, 1)$$



$$\text{Spd}(\mathbb{Z}) \quad g_a = 0$$

$$\int_{A/\mathbb{R}} [D\alpha] e^{\int_{A/\mathbb{R}} \text{CSA}} \prod_{i=1}^r \text{Rep}(\hat{G})_{R_i}(c_i)$$



$$\sum_{i=0}^k \sum_{\alpha \in K^X} \left( \int_{A/\mathbb{R}} [D\alpha] e^{\int_{A/\mathbb{R}} \text{CSA}} \right) \prod_{i=1}^r \text{Rep}(\hat{G})_{R_i}(c_i)$$



$$\dim H^0(\text{Jac}^g(C), L^k) = k^2$$

$$A_{g, L^k} = Z_k^{\text{Sur}}(g) = \left( \frac{k+2}{2} \right)^{g-1} \sum_{\tilde{z}=1}^{k+1} \left( \sin^2 \left( \frac{\tilde{z}\pi}{k+2} \right) \right)^{1-g}$$



$$Z_k(g) = \left( \frac{r}{k+r} \right)^g \sum_{S \subseteq \{1, \dots, k+r\}} \prod_{\substack{1 \leq t \leq k+r \\ s \in S, t \notin S}} \left| 2 \sin \pi \frac{s-t}{r+k} \right|^{g-1}$$



$$h^0(L) = 2^g$$



$$h^0(L^2) = 2^{2g}$$





While some things look different, some stay the same: A student in new art teacher John O'Reilly's Drawing I class practices methods to learn perspective in drawing during class in the Art Room.  
ROBERT FALCETTI

FALL 2020

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**Around the Pond**

Things looked different this fall, but students were able to learn, engage, and have fun both on campus and remotely.



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Read about the ongoing work of eight alums, from doctors to teachers to entrepreneurs.



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## FALL 2020

Volume 90, Number 4

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### DEADLINES FOR CLASS NOTES

Summer–May 15  
Fall–August 30  
Winter–November 15  
Spring–February 15

### COMMENTS? TELL US!

We'd love to hear what you think about the stories in this *Bulletin*. We may edit your letters for length, clarity, and content, but please write.

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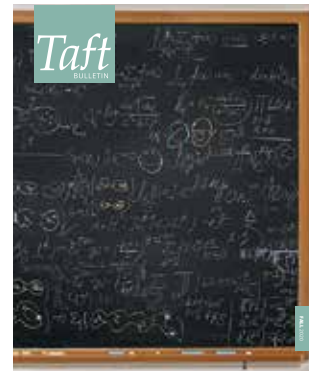
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## ON THE COVER

Mathematicians' chalkboards are the focus of photographer Jessica Wynne '90 in the book *Do Not Erase*, to be published by Princeton University Press in 2021. This is a chalkboard of mathematician Shuai Wang, Columbia University. Read more about Wynne's work in our Alumni Spotlight "Beguiling Equations" on page 18.

PHOTOGRAPHS © JESSICA WYNNE 2020, COURTESY OF EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY.

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## On MAIN HALL

A WORD FROM HEAD  
OF SCHOOL WILLY  
MACMULLEN '78



THE HEAD OF SCHOOL TRADITIONALLY ADDRESSES THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY AT THE START OF EACH ACADEMIC YEAR. THIS YEAR HE SPOKE VIRTUALLY FROM BINGHAM AUDITORIUM. HERE IS AN EXCERPT.

## Depending on Each Other

This past spring serves as a reminder that we perhaps took for granted the simple fact of this school: It is an institution that has endured all kinds of challenges and never closed its doors. *We cannot any longer have that view.* We are living in a pandemic with a deadly virus that has presented the globe's greatest health crisis in a century. Being here is not a given. Remaining here will take work and sacrifice and commitment

and unselfishness. Without those things—and this we have seen on college campuses, which opened only to be forced to close—we will not exist. It could not be more clear, and I am asking for your best.

I will be honest: This will be very hard for all of us. We are living in a new world, we will be making constant adjustments, and we must do things differently. We will feel, or are feeling, stress and fatigue. We have challenging days ahead of us, but I believe fervently we can succeed. And when we do, this might be a year that affirmed the very best of who we are as a community.

Let me back up.

Before I decided to be a boarding school teacher, I was a wilderness educator, taking troubled delinquent boys into the woods to help them. I climbed, canoed, hiked, and camped every month of the year, from the Everglades to the White Mountains to the Rockies. I loved that work in part because the very thing I was most interested in—that is, how a group's success depended on the commitment of its individual members—was so perfectly explicit and clear.

The idea that you had to sacrifice and give to something larger in order to meet a challenge was not some vague abstraction or romantic ideal. It was *real*. When you linked arms with six others in a chain across a chest-deep raging river to help someone cross without drowning, no one said, "I just don't feel like helping right now." When a blizzard was coming as night fell and you asked your buddy if he had staked the tent, he didn't explain, "It just didn't seem that important to me." And when you were roped up, climbing a 400-foot rock face, your life literally in your partner's hands, they didn't shout up, "*I think* I've got you."

For the group to succeed—indeed, for lives not to be lost—*every* member knew that they were connected. Everyone said, "I'll sacrifice for the group because I know you have as well, and that's the only way this thing works." When that commitment happens and you see it in each other's eyes, it's amazing what you can do.

And that mindset is exactly what we need now. The COVID pandemic has revealed much, but what it has really shown is the *inherent interconnectedness of all peoples*. Throughout human history, this is what viruses have always told us. A virus reminds us that, like it or not, our fates are intertwined.

So here, our lives are profoundly connected and interdependent. That's always been the case, but we maybe forget it. Not anymore. If Taft is going to work this year, each of us is going to have to say, "Our community only exists if we commit to something greater than ourselves." And that, by the way, might be a really good definition of our school motto: Not to be served but to serve. It is how we can draw strength and belonging.

"If Taft is going to work this year, each of us is going to have to say,  
'Our community only exists if we commit to something greater than ourselves.'"

“We have challenging days ahead of us, but I believe fervently we can succeed. And when we do, this might be a year that affirmed the very best of who we are as a community.”

Last night I was on dorm duty on CPT3. It was really enjoyable. I walked the halls, standing in the doorways of rooms, chatting with returning students, some of whom I know well, others less so, greeting new boys—hearing of their summers, their families, their courses, their goals. This was why I came into this work, I thought: to be part of the trials and triumphs of teenagers, to help in some way that they might become adults who were happy and healthy, who loved learning, who served others. How lucky am I, I thought, luckier than most, to be here—on a safe campus and in a beautiful building, at such a great school with a clear mission, among such nice students and inspiring colleagues.

At one point, three or four of us were in the common room watching an NBA game. OK, we were watching my Celtics lose in overtime. We were all properly spaced, one per couch, with others occasionally walking by or standing in the T. At one point, a boy walked up and was standing near one of the chairs where his friend was sitting. I asked him if he would step back just a bit, and he did immediately, politely, apologetically. I don’t know if he was five feet away, or six feet, or six and a half. I just did not feel comfortable, and it was an easy fix—the kind, by the way, I am asking each of you to make.

So why did I ask him to step back? After all, we were all wearing masks, we have all tested negative, our hands were washed—we were safe, you might say.

I asked him to step back because community safety and health is not some vague concept: It is about *lives*.

I asked him to step back because these measures are essential and effective.

I asked him to step back because even though I am healthy, I am at an age where I know that my risk with COVID is relatively high.

I asked him to step back because the thought of my wife, whom I love more than life itself, with a deadly virus is all but unbearable.

I asked him to step back because I want to visit my mother and father and mother-in-law, each in their nineties and each with health challenges.

I asked him to step back because of every boy on that floor, and every student he will be with today—in class, over meals, in the halls.

I asked him to step back because of the faculty on that floor, for whom CPT is not where they work, but where they live, where a little daughter plays and sleeps.

I asked him to step back because of the staff members, men and women of all ages and conditions, who have families and who care for elderly parents and grandparents, and who are here every hour of the day and on every corner of campus, who make Taft work, and without whom we would be nothing.

I asked him to step back because of the teachers who have chosen to serve you, who range in age from their twenties to seventies, who have children and families, who labor long hours, who are physically and emotionally close to students every day, who are carrying the heaviest of loads *for you*—and some of whom have risk factors that are real and which you do not and will not know about.

I asked him to step back because at that very moment, he and I were roped together, safely and securely, but about to begin climbing.

I hope those of you here and those coming are motivated to meet our community COVID standards. Perhaps you are motivated by the fact that calling your parents to explain you are coming home is a really bad thought. Perhaps by the hope that if we remain healthy, we might be able to relax our practices some. Perhaps by the fervent desire that the school not shut down. Perhaps by the realization that our lives really depend on each other.

Whatever motivates you, realize that today we each begin a year that will be unlike any in our history, and if we can seize this moment, with courage and generosity and love, well, then, we might all one day look back and realize we have been part of something powerful, something that might just change each of us as well as this school.

  
William R. MacMullen '78

SOCIAL SCENE

Follow @thetaftschool on Facebook, @taftschool on Instagram and Twitter for daily glimpses of Taft life.



Students in Sarah Surber’s dance classes are participating in a three-week repertory project with Carolyn Dorfman Dance, a contemporary dance company based in New Jersey. The immersive project includes lessons in company repertory, Zoom sessions with choreographer Carolyn Dorfman, and virtual coaching sessions with rehearsal directors from the company. Here, Dance II students work virtually with Katlyn Waldo, a rehearsal director for the company. #lifeattaft #taftacademics #inthistgether @cdorfmandance



Arriving now: Fall. 🍁🍂 #lifeattaft #campusbeauty #itt #fall 🐾🍷



On the last day of September, we’re throwing back to the first day of September, when Ms. Leal captured this spectacular sunrise and reminded us that there was so much to look forward to. And indeed, September has been a month to remember. After many, too many months apart, a large portion of our community was reunited on our beautiful campus. Those who could not join us in person connected in class, clubs, activities, and dorm rooms through the magical power of Zoom. September was a month to reconnect, reflect, remember, and relearn what it means to be a community. In the end, we’re still Taft. And there is still so much to look forward to. h/t Ms. Leal #lifeattaft #inthistgether #itt #community @dispatchesfromthedeans 🍁🍂🍷🐾





# The Road to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Affinity groups are an important part of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity work that we do at Taft. We typically think of affinity groups as being for people of traditionally marginalized groups because they provide places of comfort and support in communities that can be difficult to navigate. However, groups for people of privilege that facilitate better understanding of privilege in order to dismantle it are necessary to creating a more just community. The newly created Taft White Anti-Racist Caucus is one such group in our community. WARC functions in support of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) members of the community, though it works independently toward this end. The article that follows was written by members of WARC.

## The genesis of the White Anti-Racist Caucus

One thing was certain: Something had to change.

In the aftermath of the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, white members of the Taft faculty found themselves looking inward. While Louisville and Minneapolis were miles away from Watertown, Connecticut, the reverberations of this social justice movement and moment were felt across campus and throughout our remote community. Days later, a group of Taft alumni sent a letter demanding change. Days after that, the Instagram account Black@Taft was formed, detailing the trauma and discrimination BIPOC students have faced on campus for decades. (Similar Instagram accounts emerged at other schools, colleges, and universities representing a national “Black@”

movement adjacent to and informed by the Black Lives Matter movement.) For white faculty at a primarily white institution, it was a sobering moment of self-reflection: We had failed. We had failed our BIPOC students. We had failed to create and maintain an equitable institution. We had failed to create a country in the ways that educators contribute to the ethos of a country that valued Black bodies and Black lives. Our intent had not matched our impact, the institution needed to change, and in that, white faculty needed to change.

In the early weeks of June, individual and disparate white faculty members connected in order to help catalyze Taft’s evolution and growth as an actively anti-racist institution—especially in light of the most recent feedback from students and alumni on Instagram (Black@Taft). These brave, shared personal experiences from students’ time at Taft revealed trauma and illustrated the

ways white faculty in particular were falling short in our goals with regard to BIPOC students. White faculty realized that they needed a space to learn, process, and grow that would not burden BIPOC faculty and students. We needed to educate ourselves, hold each other accountable, and learn from each other. We needed to provide models for our white students in the ways we spoke about our own whiteness and role in white supremacy and systemic racism. Finally, the formal group would serve as an important signal to the Taft community that Taft is serious about anti-racism; a formal group also allows information to be shared more easily and gives folks a sense of where to go for support and guidance.

After a few meetings, we decided to formalize our group and mission. What originally started as a white affinity group evolved to a white educators group, which eventually evolved into WARC.

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANZI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

## Why WARC?

The White Anti-Racist Caucus.

White: We wanted to acknowledge our whiteness because that identity is essential to our place and purpose in anti-racist work.

Anti-Racist: While we are interested in being activists in support of all marginalized members of our communities, at the time of our group’s formation, race was front and center in our minds and needed the most attention from the school. Plus, as Ibram X. Kendi and others have argued, you can’t be anti-racist unless you are also anti-sexist, etc.

Caucus: We chose not to use “educators” because we wanted to include staff who did not necessarily identify as educators, and we wanted to use “caucus” because it implied activism.

## Carrying out our work

This summer, the mission of the steering committee was two-pronged: to educate white faculty and staff through interactive and engaging lesson plans, and to offer space to white community members to begin to understand their whiteness, unpack their privilege, and educate themselves on more socially just forms of community to implement at Taft in the fall. In addition to building a website to share resources and sending educational emails listing activities each week, WARC began hosting three summer sessions, one per month. The topics were:

- June: Exploring Whiteness: identifying whiteness/white behaviors that uphold supremacy
- July: Relearning History: Filling in the holes in our understanding of history
- August: Listening to BIPOC Voices: Diversifying media consumption

In total, 90 white faculty and staff have joined the group. The group intends to move forward, slightly shifting the model for the school year as students and teachers implement practices stemming from

the various school-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) trainings conducted this summer. Our future sessions will work to help white faculty and staff reflect on interactions they’ve had on campus, pass a critical eye over curriculum, question institutional structures, and strive to involve more white students in anti-racism work.

## The socio-ethical focus of WARC

We need action. We need change.

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of the 1997 book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, in which she addresses the problem of passive inaction, writes, “*I sometimes visualize the ongoing cycle of racism as a moving walkway at the airport. Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt. The person engaged in active racist behavior has identified with the ideology of White supremacy and is moving with it. Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor*

**Our future sessions will work to help white faculty and staff reflect on interactions they’ve had on campus, pass a critical eye over curriculum, question institutional structures, and strive to involve more white students in anti-racism work.**

*belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking. Some of the bystanders may feel the motion of the conveyor belt, see the active racists ahead of them, and choose to turn around, unwilling to go to the same destination as the White supremacists. But unless they are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt—unless they are actively antiracist—they will find themselves carried along with the others.”*

The members of WARC are working to draw sustained attention to this troubling moving walkway of racism as described

by Dr. Tatum. Knowing the nature of this system, how it was created, and how it affects both BIPOC and white people were strategic goals that inspired the formation of the three topics presented by WARC in Zoom meetings this summer. We hope that dissemination of knowledge in support of anti-racism will encourage and inspire attendees to plan for their personal growth and to take action in implementing change within the larger Taft community, even if it is a small action conducted within one’s sphere of influence, which could consist of one’s office or department.

Taft’s community is diverse and multifaceted. Some Tafties may think these efforts are too bold, controversial, or political. Some may even think this is all unnecessary. Of course, race and racism have become central political issues in this election year. Political disagreements about local and national policies are commonplace and learning to listen to, understand, and respond to each other in a civil manner is a time-honored process in learning institutions and the hallmark of a democracy. When political discourse becomes deeply

polarized and national politicians express beliefs and ideas that are contrary to the mission of The Taft School and inconsistent with Taft’s Portrait of a Graduate, it requires bold and decisive action to counter and correct discourse occurring with our community that is offensive to our students and to basic human rights. ■

—Jonas Katkavich, Jill Danaher, Sarah Tamsen, Alison Almasian, Emily Clark, and Caitlin Hincker, WARC Steering Committee members

To learn more about Taft’s ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work, visit [www.taftschool.org/dei](http://www.taftschool.org/dei)



# There Is Work to Do

We begin the year in a complex and potent social, political, cultural moment. And there's no question that our work on campus is going to be affected by that which is taking place outside of it. Our national reckoning over race—systemic racism, police brutality—it has been profound, it has been needed, and it has been painful. It has reminded us clearly that as a nation, we have not met the promise that we have had as a nation: that we are created equal, that we are endowed with certain inalienable rights. This conversation is happening everywhere in the country. And it must happen. It has to happen. The country needs it. As a school, we have had to face the reality that we, too, have not always met the promise to be the community that we aspire to be. This cannot stand. There is work to do; there is work we've already begun. We commit to it, and we commit to the change that follows.

—WILLIAM MACMULLEN '78, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
OPENING OF SCHOOL ADDRESS, PART II

Watch Part II in full here: <http://bit.ly/WMHOS921>

Read about Part I in On Main Hall on page 3  
or watch it here: <https://bit.ly/WMHOS916>

## Faculty Engage in

# Summer Professional Development

ALL TAFT FACULTY MEMBERS TOOK part in two substantial summer training programs this summer—one focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); the other focused on integrating social-emotional learning, trauma-informed education, and culturally responsive teaching to address the complex issues impacting students and educators today.

Dean of Multicultural Education Andrew Prince and Associate Dean of Faculty Stephen Palmer developed the three-module DEI training for all faculty. Through video, Powerpoint, scholarly articles, reflection, and conversation with colleagues, faculty tackled a range of topics.

The first module focused on defining

and providing Taft-specific examples of microaggressions and microassaults, and spoke to concerns raised by students and alumni regarding the school's response to these occurrences.

In Module Two, faculty members learned about reflective cultural competence and protocols for responding to microaggressions.

In Module Three, faculty grouped up by dorm teams, academic departments, and other professional roles to collectively anticipate and explore other types of marginalization or blind spots within those areas. Additionally, Prince and Palmer led a two-hour training session during opening faculty meetings in which faculty

members reviewed many of the concepts presented over the course of the summer and had a chance to do group work in virtual breakout rooms, role-playing, and working through responses to examples of microaggressions and microassaults.

Dean of Faculty Edie Traina and Dean of Academic Affairs Jennifer Kenerson organized the second professional development program for Taft faculty, which involved five virtual sessions led by faculty facilitators from Mount Holyoke College. The 10-hour Mount Holyoke training offered teachers and student-support faculty practical strategies to foster students' academic and social-emotional development across in-person, hybrid, and remote settings. ■

## Goals of This Module

- To provide a model for how we will become more culturally competent as school employees
- To provide language and a protocol to respond to microaggressions and microassaults
- To provide an opportunity to practice using this language and these protocols so we will be better prepared to employ them in the school year
  - This will feel loaded and uncomfortable at first and the more we can do it, the easier and more natural it will be





# By the Numbers:

## A Return to Campus Life

Summer is typically a time when the Taft campus becomes a construction zone: Dormitories and faculty homes are renovated, classrooms are updated and upgraded, and a host of facelifts happen everywhere, indoors and out. This year, our summer work took on a new and critical focus: preparing for the safe return of our students, while also advancing our technologies to best meet the needs of students who are continuing their studies remotely. From signs and sanitizer to plexiglass, power strips, and portable whiteboards, this was a summer like no other.



► From the moment students, faculty, staff, and families arrived on campus, there were signs. Signs with reminders about how to wear a mask, why to wear a mask, how to wash hands properly, and why social distancing is critical to school safety. There were directional signs outdoors, floor stickers 6 feet apart indoors, and arrows and blue tape guiding people through one-way corridors, through the server, and around the athletic center. In all, there are

**900** instructional and informational new signs on campus  
**216** floor stickers  
**40** signs near the campus gates and on school grounds



The incomparable teams from the Dean of Faculty, Dean of Academic Affairs, and Information Technology offices asked, “What will our faculty need to safely and effectively deliver the high-caliber academics—in person *and online*—that lie at the heart of a Taft education?” The answers:

**50** portable whiteboards  
**130** phone tripods  
**200** iPad stands  
**200** portable MoFi batteries  
**200** bottles of hand sanitizer  
**70** classroom microphones, each with three different adaptor cables and extension cords  
**600** dry-erase markers  
**200** erasers  
**150** squid power strips—Miles (and miles) of adapter cords for Apple and Android products



► Construction or not, Taft’s facilities team remained busy, working with outside engineering and HVAC vendors in developing and responding to equipment and service evaluations, and installing whatever it takes to keep campus safe, including

**812** upgraded air filters  
**4** COVID testing booths  
**15** air handler UV lights  
**90** new hand sanitizer dispensers for a total of 125 across campus  
**960** square feet of plexiglass  
**512** quarts of disinfectant  
**1,500** face masks  
**11,000** pairs of gloves  
**125** touchless paper towel dispensers  
**360** yards of blue tape

► **1** large heated tent (40 feet by 100 feet) with pool tables, ping-pong tables, and basketball.



► If all that sounds like a lot, chew on this: This fall semester, the professional food service team from Aramark will serve

**1,800** grab-and-go meals each day



► And to help Taft students remain social and conduct outdoor classes at a safe distance, Taft purchased

**64** Adirondack chairs  
**4** tents  
**80** outdoor dining chairs  
**20** outdoor dining tables  
**20** umbrellas and bases





# Building Connections

**During COVID-19**



**TAFT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A COMMUNITY** built on connections, many of which are forged early in the academic year through traditions like Super Sunday and Convocation. This year, community activities look a bit different, as we strive to keep Tafties safe by staying physically distant—at least 6 feet apart. Student Activities Director Courtney Smyth brought a series of new, safe, and creative activities to the opening of school, while faculty explored the use of unique spaces and methods for school gatherings.

While the sledding hill adjacent to the baseball field has traditionally been home to the “Crisco slide” on Super Sunday, this year it has been a hub for socially distanced school gatherings. Head of School Willy MacMullen ’78 and other school leaders kicked off the academic year with a welcome message on the hill. Its amphitheater qualities also made it an ideal spot for big-screen viewing parties, including a Giants-Steelers matchup and a showing of the 2018 documentary *RBG*, a tribute to the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.



**THE CLOSE CONTACT INVOLVED IN THE TUG-OF-WAR GAMES AND HUMAN** pyramids of Super Sunday simply couldn’t be this year, but that didn’t mean students couldn’t have fun. Community Day featured kickball competitions, lawn games, and tie-dying. Students also connected through bonfires on the Jig patio, craft sessions, and digitally guided scavenger hunts.



**DESPITE A DECISION BY THE FOUNDERS LEAGUE TO SUSPEND ATHLETIC** competition during the fall semester, student-athletes continued their training guided by team coaches and strict safety guidelines. And that applied to all athletes in all sports, regardless of the season—fall soccer and field hockey players saw development time, but so did spring golfers and lacrosse players, to name a few.





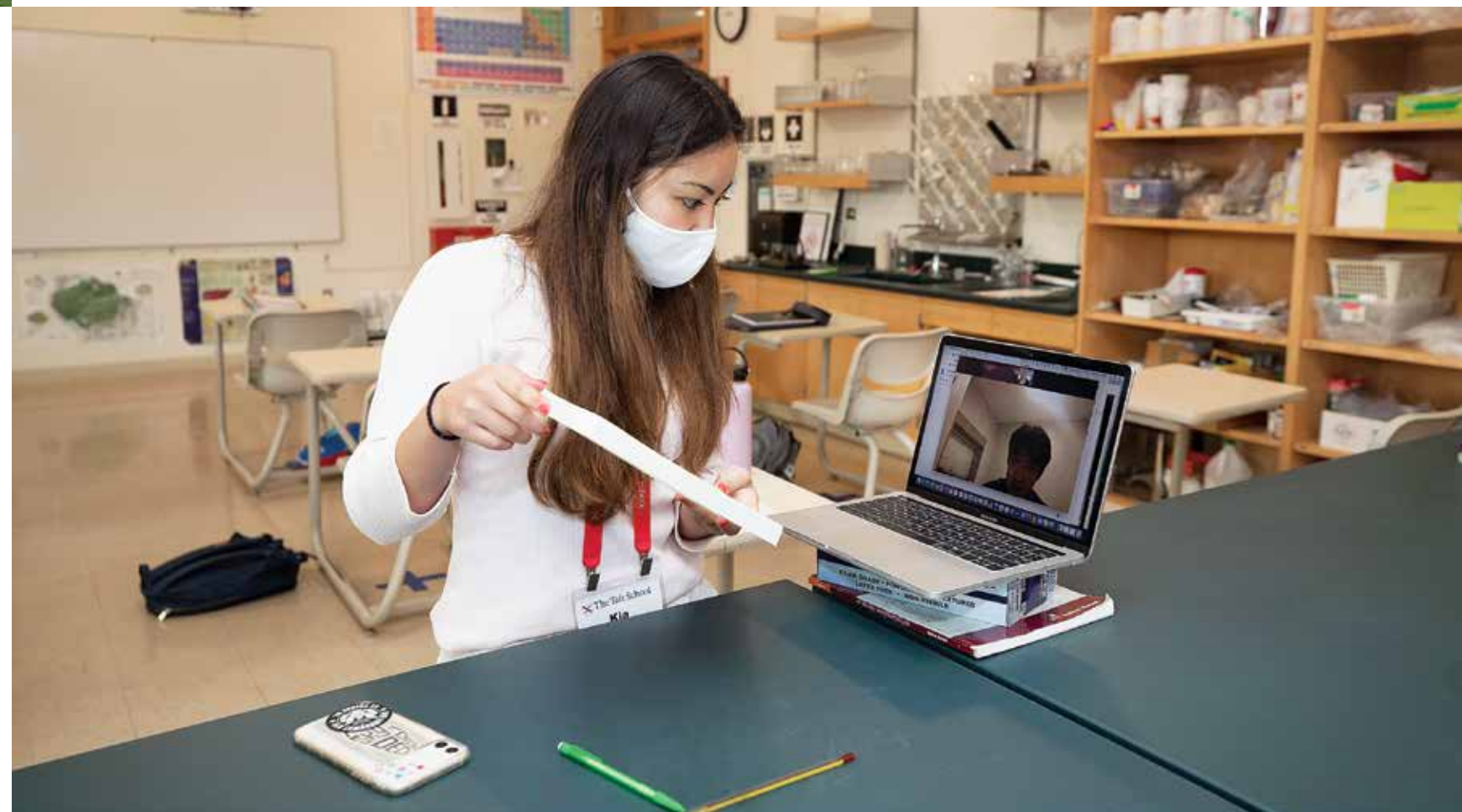


# Academics

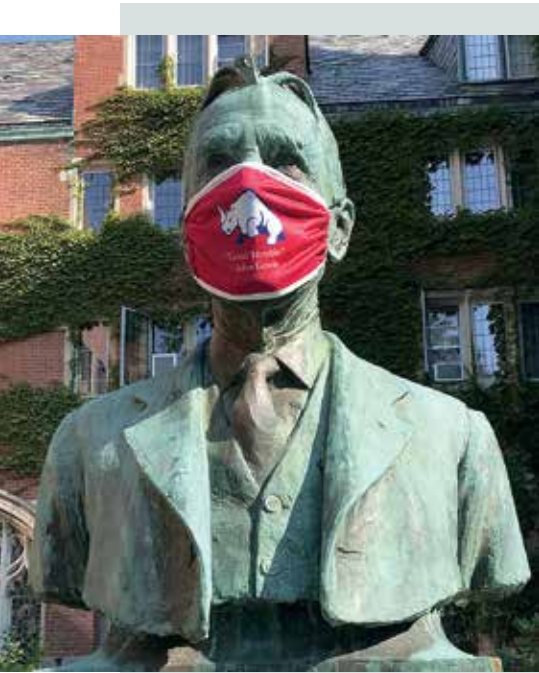
## The Core of a Taft Education



**ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IS PARAMOUNT** at Taft: Structuring safe classrooms to support exceptional learning experiences for both in-person and remote students was one of the most important initiatives of the summer. The school consulted with experts and did considerable work to ensure that all learning spaces are safe and equipped with appropriate technology. Our classrooms were measured and furniture adjusted to allow for 6 feet of physical distance between students; classes were assigned to classrooms based on enrollment in that class and the capacity of the room; spaces are cleaned regularly using COVID-specific practices and specialized products; faculty members received equipment and training to “broadcast” their classroom sessions to remote learners; and teachers work to connect students in the classroom with remote learners whenever possible for group projects, discussion, and peer reviews. ■







**Good Trouble**

**FACULTY MEMBERS** Ginger O’Shea and Andrew Prince designed and ordered “Good Trouble” masks over the summer to honor civil rights icon John Lewis—often called the conscience of the United States Congress—who passed away in July after dedicating his life to making “good trouble” in his battle against racial injustice. Lewis referred to “good trouble” often in his speeches and on social media as a call to peaceful action as a path to positive change. “Do not get lost in a sea of despair,” Lewis tweeted in 2018. “Be hopeful, be optimistic....Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” Masks are available to students at no cost, though donations are requested to support several local youth charities.

**SO MANY INTEGRAL SCHOOL ACTIVITIES INVOLVE ONE-ON-ONE AND SMALL** group sessions. The fall term brought many creative approaches to making that work safely, including holding college counseling sessions in the great outdoors.

**Welcome to New Faculty!**

 <p><b>Alexandra Budd</b> <i>English</i></p>	 <p><b>Justin Hudak</b> <i>Classics</i></p>	 <p><b>James Magagna</b> <i>English</i></p>	 <p><b>Elspeth Michaels '05</b> <i>Art</i></p>
 <p><b>John O'Reilly</b> <i>Art</i></p>	 <p><b>Charissa Padgett</b> <i>Science</i></p>	 <p><b>Sheryas Rane</b> <i>Mathematics, Computer Science</i></p>	 <p><b>Andrew Taylor '72</b> <i>History, Global Studies and Service</i></p>



AT THE END OF EACH SCHOOL YEAR, used textbooks are collected to build a “lending library” for the next academic year. This year, students browsed an online catalog of available books, placed orders, and collected their books at a safe social distance.

**Taft Welcomes New Parents’ Fund Chairs**

**THE SCHOOL IS PLEASED TO** announce Neile and Chad Messer as the new chairs of the 2020–21 Parents’ Fund. Chad, Class of 1990, recently celebrated his 30th Taft Reunion. Neile and Chad are active members of school life, having attended many events both on and off campus over the years. Their older daughter, Hartley ’20, graduated last spring, and Caroline ’22, is in her third year at Taft. They also have a younger daughter, Lindsay. “We were honored to be asked to chair the Parents’ Fund as we are passionate about Taft and so happy to be able to give back to a school that means so much to our family,” the Messers told the school. For the past 28 years, parents have shown their generous support of the Parents’ Fund with a participation rate of at least 90 percent. Before accepting their new roles, Neile and Chad served as members of the Parents’ Committee for two years and spent countless hours volunteering. Chad takes pride in his Taft education and the opportunities it has provided him, and he wants to make sure that stays true for every Taft graduate. “One of our favorite ways to spend time

on campus has been to watch athletic events. We are fortunate to live an hour away from Taft and many of the other Founders League schools. Being on the sidelines is a great place to connect with faculty, classmates, and other parents,” the Messers stated. “One of our goals as chairs of the Parents’ Fund is to work with Taft to keep parents as engaged as possible.” We thank the Messers for leading the Parents’ Fund in a year of extraordinary challenges and opportunities. ■



New Parents’ Fund Chairs Neile and Chad Messer ’90, and their family.

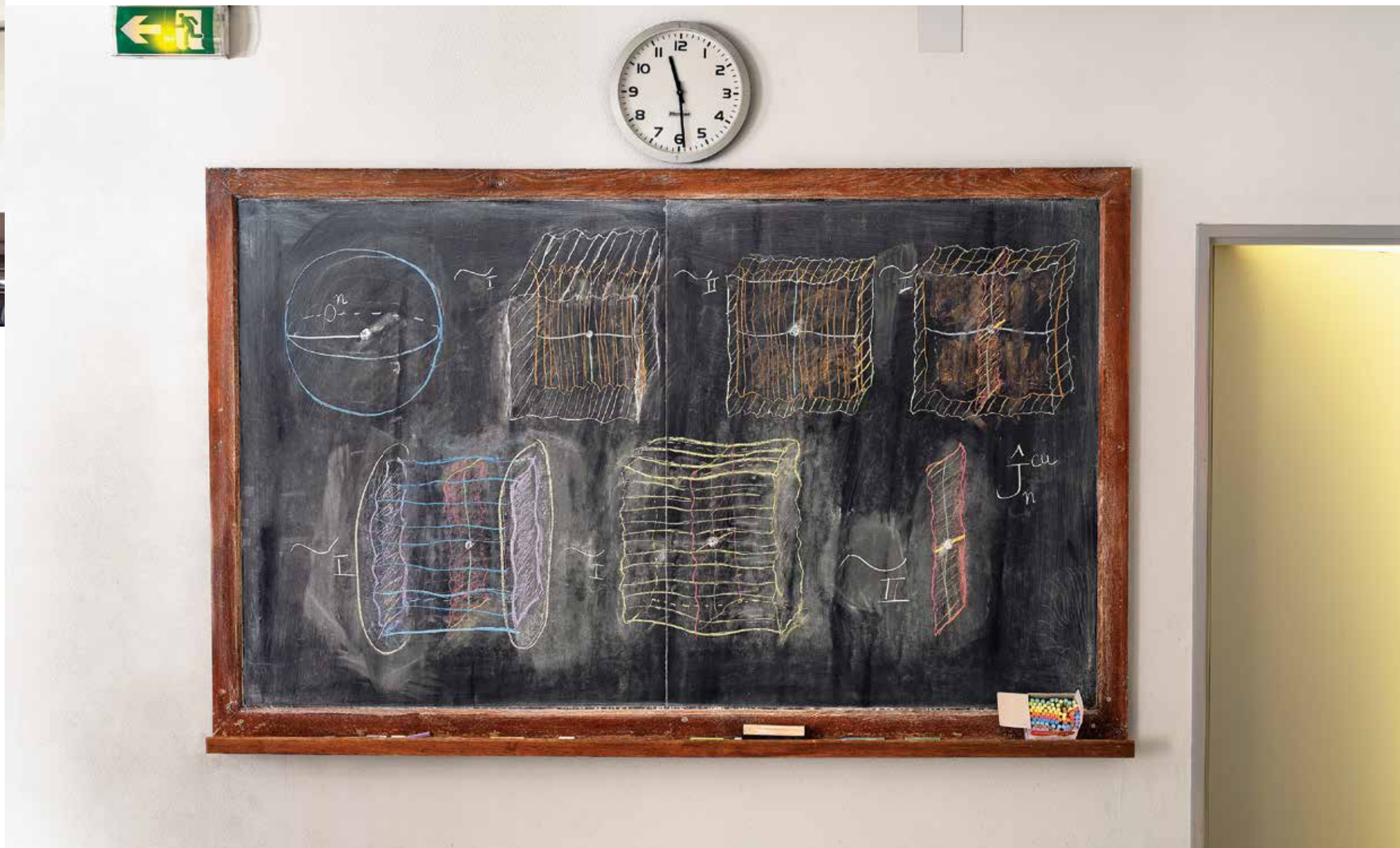




Left: Jessica Wynne '90 photographing a mathematician's chalkboard, one of many, for her new book, *Do Not Erase*, to be published by Princeton University Press in 2021.

"Photographing their boards was a way for me to show some sort of psychological interiority of the mathematicians—like seeing a window into their minds, an interior portrait."

Below: Amie Wilkinson, University of Chicago, at the Institut Henri Poincaré, 2020



# Beguiling Equations

THEY SAY THAT MATHEMATICS is a science, not an art. But when photographer Jessica Wynne '90 is involved, that science becomes beautiful art.

Wynne has documented the intricate lines of mathematical equations written on dusty chalkboards in universities across the globe for her new book, *Do Not Erase*, coming out this spring from Princeton University Press.

What is often overlooked or erased after a mathematics class is finished becomes beguiling in Wynne's photographs. There are swirls and circles, lines and dashes, and words written in different colored chalks that provide contrast to the deep gray and green chalkboards.

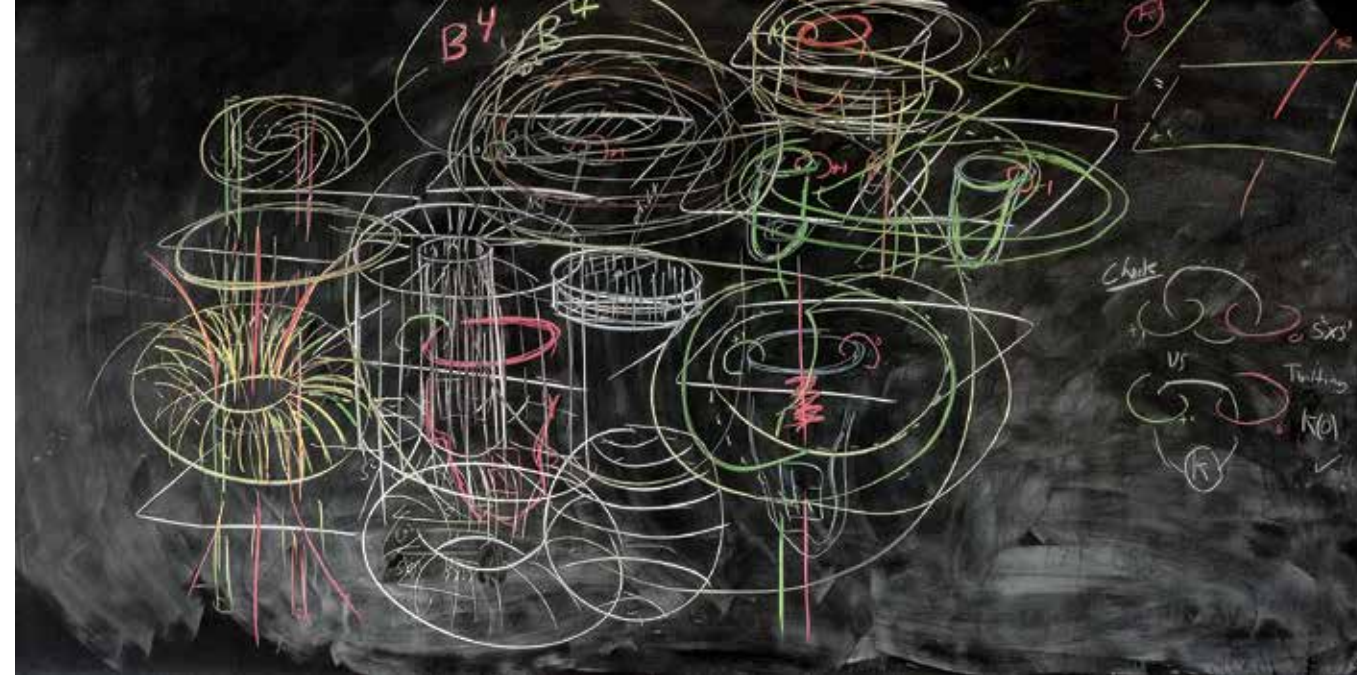
Wynne's love of photography began early. The daughter of retired Taft teachers Gail and John Wynne—Gail taught art, John taught history and coached wrestling—she spent time in India during her time as a Taft student.

"When I was 16 years old, I left Taft and spent a year at a boarding school in the Palani Hills of southern India—the same school that my mother had attended as a child. During that time away I discovered my love for photography," Wynne says.

"I've always been fascinated by people and places that are unfamiliar to me, and having a camera gives me a kind of license to be curious," she adds.

Photographs © Jessica Wynne 2020, courtesy of Edwynn Houk Gallery.

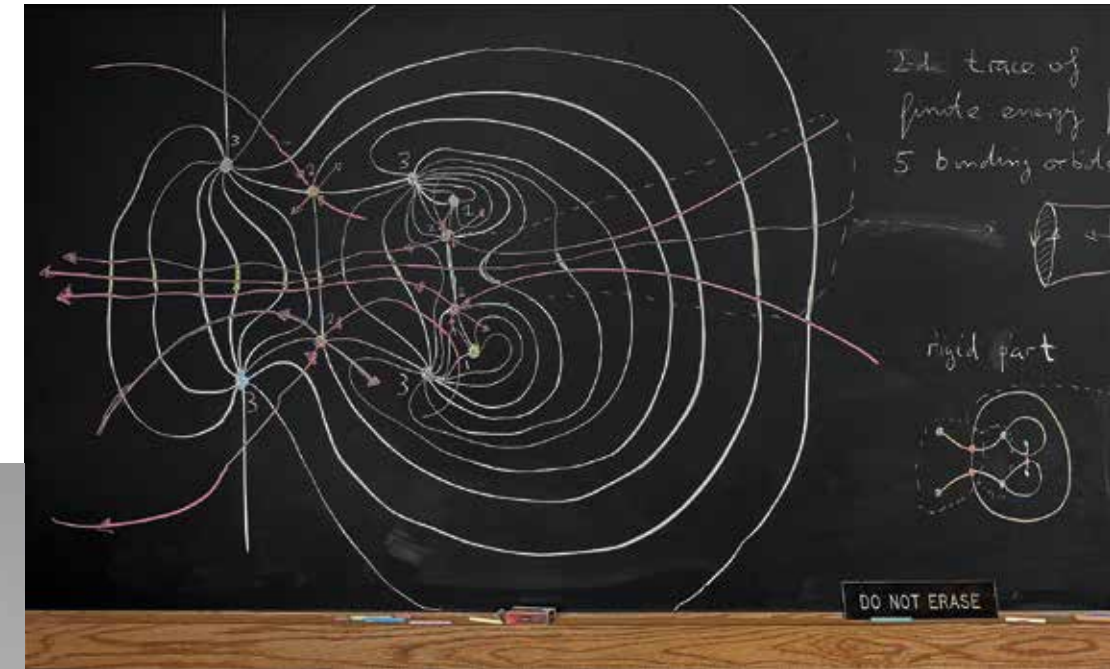




Left: David Gabai,  
Princeton University, 2019

Below: Patrice de Calvez,  
Sorbonne Université Paris

Right: Helmut Hofer,  
Institute for Advanced Study, 2019



She received an MFA from Yale University in 1999 and a BFA from San Francisco Art Institute in 1994. Exhibitions of her work have been held at the The Armory Show, Art Basel, Whitney Museum at Champion, Cleveland's Museum of Contemporary Art, Carriage Trade Gallery, and Nars Art Foundation. Other publications and collections that include her work are *Turn Shake Flip: Celebrate Contemporary Art*; *25 and Under: Photographers*; the Morgan Library, Permanent Collection; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Permanent Collection.

Wynne currently lives and works in New York City. She is a professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology and is represented by Edwynn Houk Gallery. The mathematics project came about after she befriended neighbors on Cape Cod who are mathematicians.

"Every summer, I leave my home in New York City to live in a small beach town on the outer tip of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. For the past 10 years, I've become very close to my neighbors. The husband and wife are theoretical mathematicians—both teach at the University of Chicago—and over the years our conversations have

opened me up to their mysterious world of higher mathematics," Wynne says.

"[Mathematicians'] imaginations guide them, and similar to an artist, they have the higher aspiration to create, discover, and find truth," she told *Colossal* magazine. Finding mathematicians who would allow her to photograph their equations and chalkboards became an adventure, she says.

"Initially my neighbors made a few introductions to their mathematician friends in New York City, and I began photographing their work at Columbia and the Courant Institute at New York University," she says. "Then I started to research and reach out to people on my own around the U.S., Brazil, and France. The mathematicians were very receptive and open to the project."

"Photographing their boards was a way for me to show some sort of psychological interiority of the mathematicians—like seeing a window into their minds, an interior portrait," she notes.

When Wynne began the project, she set some parameters to guide the process.

"I only wanted to photograph chalkboards—no glass or whiteboards—mainly



Right: Noga Alon,  
Princeton University, 2019

Below: Yang Li,  
Institute for Advanced Study, 2020

Bottom: Boya Song,  
MIT, 2020



for their inherent beauty and timeless analog nature. I asked the mathematicians to write or draw whatever they wanted on their boards,” she explains. “Usually it ended up being something they were currently working on. I wanted to photograph in a literal, objective, straightforward way—showing the chalkboards as real objects—capturing their texture, erasure marks, and all forms of light reflecting off their surfaces.”

Wynne doesn’t try to explain the formulas that she’s photographed. She leaves that to the mathematicians themselves, whose explanations are included in Wynne’s book.

“The formulas and mathematical symbols are mysterious and inaccessible to me. And I don’t mind not understanding,” she says. “I actually like the tension of being seduced by the formal abstract beauty—the patterns, symmetry, and structure—while simultaneously feeling disconnected, not being able to fully access the meaning of their work. There is a friction of being drawn in and pushed away which is exciting to me. I may not know the specific meaning of the theorems, but I do know that beyond the surface they are ultimately revealing, or attempting to reveal, a universal truth.”

Some may see mathematical equations as very dry work, but “for this series I felt a lot of emotion while shooting the chalkboards,” Wynne says. “I felt the energy and intensity through looking at the mathematicians’ theorems on the boards. There’s a lot of drama and passion in the world of higher mathematics, and I felt that when shooting their work.” ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow ’84

Learn more at [jessicawynne.com](http://jessicawynne.com).

Wynne’s book, *Do Not Erase*, can be preordered at [press.princeton.edu/our-authors/wynne-jessica](http://press.princeton.edu/our-authors/wynne-jessica).



# Fighting Coronavirus on the Front Line



IN EARLY MARCH, ERIC COSTANZO '92 was walking through the Intensive Care Unit at Jersey Shore Medical Center in Neptune City, New Jersey, when its first COVID-19 patient was confirmed. Within two hours, there were 14 cases.

"I'm a big fan of military history and leadership, and I really took to the book *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*," says Costanzo, who serves as director of the pulmonary medicine fellowship, director of the critical care fellowship, director of the medical intensive care unit, and director of interventional bronchoscopy at Jersey Shore Medical Center, where he has worked for 13 years. He went to medical school at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey after working as a lifeguard, firefighter, and EMT in his teens; he became a paramedic by taking a course while an undergraduate at Muhlenberg College.

"I had just watched the movie, and there was a scene in which Mel Gibson's character called in a 'Broken Arrow' over the radio to signal that his unit in the Vietnam War was being overrun and needed all the reinforcements that his superiors could provide.

"I saw fear in my staff, fear in the doctors and nurses," Costanzo says, "and I walked into a meeting of the hospital administration that was happening at the time and said, 'Broken Arrow. We are going to have an explosion of COVID patients, and this is what we need to do.'"

His plan involved converting the 600-bed hospital into a 500-bed intensive care unit, creating "Delta Squads" of health professionals, and everyone's schedule to four days on, followed by one day off. Costanzo

Left: Dr. Eric Costanzo '92 said, sadly, of this photo, "Lots of deaths this day—took the residents out for rounds and fresh air."



Costanzo collaborating with ICU colleagues.

says that while he was not sure the hospital administrators would accept his plan, which required shutting down entire hospital departments, like orthopedics, they did.

"The next day, we had the ability to handle 200 critically ill patients while keeping physician and resident well-being in mind," he says. "We created an environment where we could handle continuity of care and really handle the surge when it came."

And it did. While the hospital typically has about 25 patients on respirators,

at the height of the first surge it had just under 200 on them, with other patients on different high-flow oxygen methods.

"The greatest thing about the experience was that from the day we saw our first patient, we were prepared, and we had wonderful outcomes," Costanzo says. "I knew I had the manpower, I knew I had the beds, and I knew I had the space." Organizing the teams was the real challenge.

Thanks to some foresight, though, Costanzo was prepared. "In early January,

we had an obese, older gentleman come into the hospital," he says. "He died for no [apparent] reason, and we couldn't quite figure it out, but in retrospect, I think he was our first COVID case."

"Medicine has become bundled today—like the steps that you take to treat pneumonia, for instance, but since this was a novel virus, you had to almost experiment," he says. "To be in the trenches during that time was very demanding, but also exhilarating because you got to practice medicine like they did when the AIDS epidemic came out and no one knew what it was. They were trying this and trying that."

A few weeks after that patient died, Costanzo reached out to some critical care doctors in Italy to determine where their system broke down (the country had a shortage of ICU beds). He also assigned some of his residents to study how medical teams had been organized in China and New York City, which was about two weeks ahead of the Jersey Shore in its outbreak timeline. That knowledge informed the staffing plan that he implemented, with pods of critical care units following algorithms of how they would work.

When we spoke with him in early fall, the hospital had liberated 117 critical care cases—including a pediatric ER physician—from respirators and prevented another 80 from ending up on ventilators. At Costanzo's suggestion, the hospital began playing a song over its loudspeaker every time a COVID patient was discharged from the hospital to keep up morale. One Friday in early September, there were zero inpatient cases. To celebrate that milestone, the hospital filled its halls with an uplifting tune: "Here Comes the Sun."

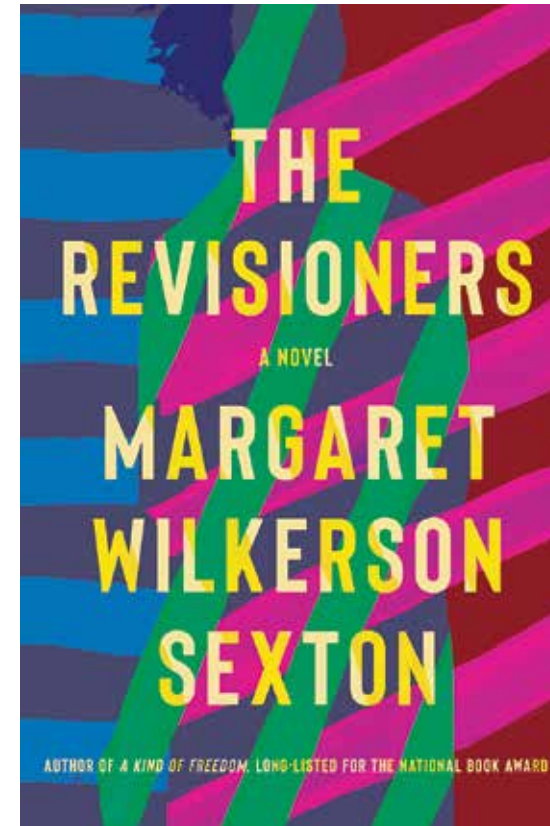
—Sam Dangremond '05





Born and raised in New Orleans, Margaret Wilkerson Sexton '00 studied creative writing at Dartmouth College and law at UC Berkeley. Her debut novel, *A Kind of Freedom*, was a 2017 National Book Award Nominee, a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2017, and a *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice. Her work has been published in *The New York Times Book Review*, *Oprah.com*, and other publications. She lives in the Bay Area, California, with her family.

BEN KRANTZ



# A Q&A with Author Margaret Wilkerson Sexton '00

**about her recent book,  
*The Revisioners***

*The Revisioners* explores the depths of women's relationships—powerful women and marginalized women, healers and survivors—and is set in the American South. It is a novel about the bonds between mothers and their children and the dangers that upend those bonds, and ponders generational legacies, the endurance of hope, and the promise of freedom.

As the book begins in 1924, Josephine is the proud owner of a thriving farm. As a child, she channeled otherworldly power to free herself from slavery. Nearly 100 years later, Josephine's descendant, Ava, a single mother who has just lost her job, moves in with her white grandmother, Martha, a wealthy woman who pays Ava to be her companion. Martha's behavior soon becomes erratic and threatening, and Ava must escape before her story and Josephine's converge.

## What is a Revisioner?

The Revisioners are the group of enslaved people who, through a lottery system, select one among them whom they will all help escape slavery. The path to freedom they envision will not be attained through logistical practices; rather it will be through the collaborative power of

their mind and spirit. Whether this particular group of enslaved people escapes is beside the point. The true manifestation of their power is demonstrated in its liberating impact on their descendants, generations later—descendants who are searching for their own relative freedom. All of the force that went into those visions will not be in vain.

## What inspired you to write this book?

I was motivated in part by the 2016 presidential election. I saw the significant discrepancy in voting patterns between white women and Black women, and I wanted to explore the history of separation between the two groups. There's more uniting the demographics than dividing them, and I wanted this book to offer opportunities to facilitate communication and reconciliation.

## Where did the idea come from?

I wanted to explore the idea of the legacy of racism. We understand how it travels down through generations through systemic and cultural and familial tracks, but I wanted to look at other more nuanced means by which the dynamics between the races might be transferred.





Above: Author Margaret Wilkerson Sexton '00 during an interview with National Public Radio's Scott Simon.

Left: Sexton at a reading of *The Revisioners* in Los Angeles with Well-Read Black Girl founder Glory Edim.

Below: Sexton with her husband, Thomas.



his family. In that way, the white family represents the world and the Eurocentric standard by which people are viewed and judged. We notice as the book goes on, Ava distances from Martha and moves closer to her mother, and through her mother, to Josephine. In moving closer

## Religion and cultural practices merge in the lives of the slaves on Wildwood Plantation. How does Christianity fit into their lives? How about Ava's life?

The enslaved people on Wildwood's plantation practice a combination of West African spiritual beliefs and the Christianity they encountered in America. Both serve as anchors for the enslaved, especially for Josephine as she leaves Wildwood and her mother. She's buttressed not only by the divine power she believes in, but also by the connection that the religion provides between her and her family.

## What is the role of music in building strength for both Ava and Josephine?

There's an invisible thread that connects Ava and Josephine. There are veins

throughout the book that facilitate and demonstrate that connection, and music is one of them. Tools like music remind the reader of the ongoing bond between the two women, and they also serve as actual ties between the characters. It's almost as if anytime one of the characters experiences music, they are communing with one of their ancestors or descendants in a way that transports them from the actual time and space they inhabit.

## The lives of the women—both white and Black—as portrayed in this novel are hard. Would Josephine approve of Ava's choice to live with Martha?

I was interested in exploring assimilation in Ava's section. Ava is so eager to be closer with her paternal grandmother, and much of that urge comes from her need to be accepted by her white father and

to her maternal ancestors, she finds her strength she's been inadvertently running from—she finds her power.

## What's the role of magic in *The Revisioners*?

In the book, ostensibly disenfranchised people use magic as a way to connect to their source and as a way to control circumstances around them. There were so many restrictions on Black life, of course, during slavery and Jim Crow, but also during Gladys's and Ava's more present-day lives. The characters' use of magic gives them agency.

## Josephine's efforts to claim an independent life turn tragic, yet she continues to carry on. What message does that send down the years to her great-great-grandchild?

Ava's at her strongest when she's most aware of the connection between her and her great-great-grandmother. The message that is passed down is that Josephine's strength literally lives inside her descendant. Whatever trials Josephine endured, Ava is also inherently capable of enduring.

## Where do you see magic today?

When the book came out, there was a lot of talk in interviews about it being magical realism, which makes sense. Having said that, every element of "magical realism" in the book is based on an actual belief that I hold. I see magic in every aspect of my life. ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84

Below: Sexton with her family: from left, daughter Nina, husband Thomas Sexton, son Miles, Margaret, and son Carter.







Peter Walke '99 doing an interview with local Vermont news station WDEV (before the COVID lockdown), discussing an ongoing effort to modernize Vermont's 50-year-old land use law, Act 250. JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR

# Climate Change Agent

IN A YEAR OF SHUTDOWNS AND cancellations, climate change and pollution have no pause button.

Existential threats to the environment abound—even in places like Vermont, a state known for its conservation-minded populace and reverence for the outdoors.

The need to clean up Lake Champlain from phosphorus and other pollutants—a 20-year project with an estimated \$1 billion price tag—isn't going away. The reclamation of former industrial sites, known as brownfields projects, cannot wait. And, pandemic or not, the state had to move forward with an organics landfill ban on July 1.

There is no such thing as stasis when it

comes to the work of Peter Walke '99, who was named as commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Conservation in February by Governor Phil Scott.

"There's a never-ending list of challenges that we face environmentally in Vermont," Walke says.

The department is part of the Agency of Natural Resources, for which Walke previously served as a deputy secretary since returning to his native Vermont in 2017. Before that, he was an assistant secretary for the environment in New York state.

"It's nice to be home and doing the work that I love for the state I consider home," he says. "Vermont benefits

from its size in some ways because its population is incredibly engaged."

At the same time, being a small state with limited resources presents its share of challenges. "It creates a push and pull about what our priorities are," Walke says.

Walke presides over 300 employees at the department, most of whom have been working from home since March because of the coronavirus pandemic. Most of them were not expected to return to the office until January.

"For many families, it's really hard, quite frankly," Walke says.

Sending children back to school in September created even more uncertainty

for many of his colleagues. Walke ought to know. His sister, Bibba Walke Kahn '97, is Vermont Teacher of the Year for 2020, and his two children are in her class (read about Bibba on page 32).

"We aren't competitive in sort of a professional sense, but we are competitive in a teasing sibling sense for sure," Walke says. Both siblings have learned to adapt in unique and unimaginable ways this year.

At the start of the pandemic, Walke made one- to two-minute videos with messages for his colleagues to try to humanize the experience of working remotely and promote a sense of togetherness. "We're a pretty small, tight-knit group," he says.

Making sure that the department's employees were able to do their jobs from home has been a point of emphasis for Walke, who is responsible for ushering in policy initiatives to address climate change and projects to clean up hazardous materials.

Because of rainfall runoff from parking lots, farms, lawns, and streets, Lake Champlain has become overburdened by phosphorus, which causes harmful algae blooms and other environmental problems. Vermont is working with New York and the Canadian province of Quebec to reduce pollution loads and clean up the lake.

From the brownfields cleanup projects to the detection of elevated levels of lead in drinking water, much of the department's energy and resources are spent righting the legacy of industrial activity in the state and its neighbors.

And then there is the tension between states, including Vermont, and the Trump administration.

"There are a fair number of conflicts between the federal government and lots of states on environmental issues," Walke says.

For example, Vermont, which has a Republican governor, is still committed to

the greenhouse gas emission limits set by the Paris climate accord, from which President Trump withdrew the United States. "We're doing our part where we can," Walke says.

Another way Vermonters are being asked to do their part is by changing habits. As of July 1, Vermonters were barred from disposing of food waste and leaf and yard waste in the trash under an organics landfill ban that was implemented by the department.

"I think most people are pretty good in Vermont about managing their waste," Walke says.

Residents were required to switch to at-home composting or bring organic waste to drop-off composting sites under the law, which Walke says created a learning curve for some residents.

"People will have to get acclimated," he says. ■

—Neil Vigdor '95



Walke doing some backcountry skiing in Bolton, Vermont. JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR



# A Lesson Unlike Any Other



Bibba Walke Kahn's advisees celebrate with her after she was recognized as Vermont's 2020 Teacher of the Year.



TEACHING WASN'T ALWAYS SECOND nature for Bibba Walke Kahn '97.

Her foray as an educator came during a gap year when she traveled to Ghana as a volunteer and was placed at a free school run by a nongovernmental organization.

"I had no idea what I was doing," Kahn says. "After watching for a few days, the teacher said, 'You should teach an English lesson. It's your first language.'"

That was the aha moment for Kahn, who was named the 2020 Vermont Teacher of the Year. There was nothing like the feeling of being in front of a class.

"That was it. I was hooked," she recalls.

Kahn's teaching odyssey took her to an all-girls independent school in San Francisco, a boarding school in New

Hampshire, and an all-boys school in Baltimore before she returned to Vermont, the beloved state where she grew up.

It was a serendipitous homecoming for Kahn, who is a French and Spanish teacher at Main Street Middle School in Montpelier, the same school she attended as a child. Two of her former teachers were still on the staff when she joined the school. And two of her students are the children of her brother, Peter Walke '99, who in February became commissioner of Vermont's Department of Environmental Conservation (see article page 30).

At the school, Kahn organizes a yearly trip to Quebec City and Montreal for her eighth-grade French class that has become a hit with students.

"For some of my students, it's their first time out of Vermont, and for a lot of them, it's their first time out of the country," she says.

The trip gives students a chance to practically apply what they have learned in the classroom. It's also an affirmation of their ability to effectively communicate in another language.

"They say, 'I asked for a napkin in French'" Kahn says, citing an example of their progress.

As the Teacher of the Year—an award given by the Vermont Agency of Education, dating back to 1964—Kahn has used the platform to focus on equity in the classroom and to make students feel valued. Amplifying the voices of other teachers has also been a priority.

Kahn's input was also sought out by

education officials during what has been an unprecedented and stressful time for students, parents, and teachers.

No lesson plan could have prepared Kahn, a mother of two, or her students for the disruptive force of the coronavirus pandemic. Teachers and students quickly had to adapt to a remote learning model, which Kahn says was particularly tricky for foreign language instruction, which often relies on nonverbal cues.

"We've got our feet under us a little more than last year," she says.

In addition to social distancing, temperature checks, and requiring students and staff to wear masks, Kahn's school this fall utilized a widely favored cohort model, where students and teachers are clustered together in small groups to avoid transmission of the virus.

"I'm taking heart in Vermont's health data," she says. "We have really low community transmission. For the

Right: Kahn recording a lesson for her asynchronous virtual language classes.

Below: Kahn accepts her Teacher of the Year award with the state's Secretary of Education Daniel French and Pam Arnold, former principal of Kahn's school; photo taken outside Main Street Middle School in Montpelier, where Kahn teaches and once attended.



most part, we have mask mandates in my town, and people take it pretty seriously and are thoughtful about it."

In Vermont, the decision whether to return to in-person classes, stick with remote learning, or adopt a hybrid model was left up to individual school districts. About 20 percent of schools opted to go to a virtual academy model at the start of the school year. Kahn says there is no one-size-fits-all solution to educating students in the pandemic.

"Each family's experience is a really unique experience," she says. "Everyone has different risk factors for COVID. Their school-age kids have different needs."

—Neil Vigdor '95



Kahn, center, with two teaching colleagues (advisors of an Equity Alliance) in late February, after a flag-raising ceremony for Black Lives Matter, something that their middle-school students had advocated for.



# The Man Behind the “Masks to Go”

Adrian Cheng '98, CEO of New World Development, founder of K11, and owner of Rosewood Hong Kong. SWKIT



Already, “Masks to Go” has reached 40,000 beneficiaries in Hong Kong, but as Cheng is happy to say, “It will continue to evolve. We’re in this for the long term. Post-COVID, masks will be an indispensable necessity for a long time, and we’re considering making masks that are more sustainable, recyclable, or made from different materials.”

New World Development’s swift and generous response to the COVID crisis—which also included instituting a \$1.3 million pandemic relief fund in Hong Kong and donating millions of masks to mainland China, South Korea, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and UNICEF—is the latest in a long line of socially conscious moves that the company has taken in recent years.

At the core of everything that he does, Cheng says, is the concept of shared value: “Businesses should be

connecting with social programs and sharing our resources to solve problems.”

With this principle as a guide, Cheng has also worked to share his personal passion for the arts with the Hong Kong community. In 2008, he founded the art fashion brand K11, and two years later set up the K11 Art Foundation to “propagate and promote contemporary art, design, and culture in Asia and incubate local creators and artists,” he says. “We want to create a movement to democratize art and help people learn about and appreciate art.”

In the past decade, Cheng and his team have built a number of museums and cultural centers, curated exhibitions of contemporary Asian artists, and opened the K11 Art Mall, a retail experience that integrates art and design into every aspect of the customer experience. “It’s not only

a retail space, it’s a cultural hub,” Cheng says. “We are incubating local art and design, and visitors can also take classes or go to the museum inside the mall.”

This dedication to making a positive contribution to society extends to Cheng’s future projects as well. “At New World Development, our commitment to sustainability is great, and by 2030, we plan to reduce our carbon emissions and energy consumption by 50 percent,” he says. “And we’re finding ways to lower the amount of waste going into landfills, preparing for extreme climate in the future by constructing more resilient properties, and exploring circular economies where everything is recycled or upcycled. We’re always looking for innovative, creative approaches to solving problems.” ■

—Christopher Browner '12



AS HE WITNESSED THE RAPID SPREAD of the COVID-19 outbreak, Adrian Cheng '98, knew that he had to do something. And while in his role as CEO of New World Development, a Hong Kong-based real estate development firm, he principally oversees large-scale construction projects, Cheng found a way to translate some of the company’s existing skill set into a program that could help those in need. “In Asia, there was a shortage of masks, and even though we weren’t in the mask business, we’d built hospitals and surgery rooms,” he explains. “So we realized that we could quickly create a mask production line.”

The first step in establishing the new venture was ensuring that every mask would be produced to the highest possible standards. “We needed the best materials, the best filters, and they had to be very resilient,” Cheng points out. “Not to mention that, in order to get the masks certified, they have to be produced in a very clean environment, a ‘clean room’ free of bacteria or viruses.”

Working around the clock, Cheng and his team soon had the initiative up and running. “In two months’ time, we built a small factory in Hong Kong producing 7 million ASTM Level 1 surgical-grade masks per month,” he says. “But it

wasn’t just producing the masks, it was also creating an intelligent distribution method,” he adds. “We had to ensure that the masks were safely distributed to the people who were most in need.”

“So we created mask vending machines and placed them in 36 nonprofit NGO centers across 18 local districts in Hong Kong,” he continues. “We asked the NGOs to identify the people who needed the masks most. Then we gave those people, many from low-income families, a QR code. Once they received the code, they were able to scan it at the machine and collect the masks on a daily basis.”

Below: New World Development collaborates with the biomedical company Master Dynamic on research and development of the application of NanoDiamonds technology to make the next generation of antibacterial and antiviral masks; Cheng, at right, visits site. NEW WORLD DEVELOPMENT



Learning how to use a #LoveWithoutBorders “Masks to Go” dispenser, which are at designated NGO centers across Hong Kong and benefit more than 40,000 people in low-income communities, using QR code technology on smart redemption cards for preregistered families and communities. NEW WORLD DEVELOPMENT



# A Taft Bulletin Q&A

## with social entrepreneur Richard Blossom '66

AFTER A LONG CAREER IN THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY, RICHARD BLOSSOM DECIDED TO cofound two businesses that help marginalized farmers in Northern Thailand earn a much better living producing organic foods. We asked him what made him decide to do this and how it's working.



Richard Blossom '66, in white shirt, with a Hilltribe Organics farmer, along with staff members; Hilltribe Organics is his organic free-range egg company based in Northern Thailand.

### What led you to cofound two companies that work with farmers in Northern Thailand to produce organic foods after a career in the international food and beverage sector for PepsiCo, Del Monte, and others?

I remember someone showing me a picture of farmers in a small village in Thailand. It took me a moment to realize what was wrong. I asked, "Where are the young farmers?" and was told there aren't any young farmers anymore. All the children have gone

to the city. And I knew how those journeys go—the poor become the abject poor. I had no idea how to solve that problem, but I thought I might have an idea how to preserve these small farming communities.

These farmers are not poor because of their soil or the crops they grow or how they grow them. It is because there are seven layers in the food supply chain and the farmers are the last one. They take all the risks, everyone else makes money, and little is left for them.

But my experience told me that if we produce superior branded products for high-end consumers and eliminate the middlemen, we can assure small farmers a consistent and much higher income. So we did that

by creating a new market in Thailand for organic free-range eggs—in biodegradable packaging and traceable to every farmer—under the Hilltribe Organics (HTO) brand.

It worked. HTO created a new market, helped spur the growth of organic food in Thailand, and still remains the leader of a substantial and growing market segment. We doubled or tripled the income of farmers.

A year after we started HTO, we started Perfect Earth Foods, also focused on the hill tribe farming communities. Our first project was to bring chia seeds as a crop to Thailand from Peru. Then we built a plant to produce organic gluten-free pasta from the organic brown, red, and black rice our hill



Hilltribe Organics farmers in their traditional Karen clothing. Each farming family is given 700 hens, which doubles or triples their family income within three months of starting the program.

tribes were growing. And now we are starting to produce organic meal kits and organic gluten-free instant ramen noodles—to our knowledge the first in the world that are fully organic, including the sauces and seasonings.

In some ways, I suppose I am atoning for my sins in selling unhealthy products to people all over the world in the early part of my career.

### How did you decide to focus on this unique area, home to the marginalized Akha and Karen people? What made you want to help them generate sustainable farming income?

My cofounder of both companies, Arvind Narula, is the largest exporter of organic rice in Thailand. He does contract farming with thousands of small farmers in Northern Thailand, but we were both drawn to starting our project with the hill tribes, capitalizing on the experience of his team there. We took poor rice farmers and gave them something they had never had in their lives—daily income. And annual income two to three times greater.

These hill tribes are socially and politically marginalized, so we felt that if we are going to

help small farmers, let's start with the poorest, the ones nobody else wants to help. But also we had the goal to broadly spread organic farming among small farmers, not just to improve their income, but also to improve the health and wellness of them and their families and of the consumers of their products, while protecting the land on which they depend.

### Have you been able to get these food products into a wider international and regional distribution system?

For fresh eggs, the distribution scope is limited due to shelf life. We are sold in all the major retailers in Thailand and export to Hong Kong and, until COVID, were exporting to Qatar. We are working on getting Certification to Export to Singapore (which can double our sales) and in taking the HTO model to Vietnam next year.

At the same time, HTO is working on value-added products that can be sold globally—like organic whole-egg mayonnaise produced from our organic free-range eggs, and on other crops that can be grown organically by our farmers, such as organic coffee and organic honey.

Perfect Earth only produces shelf-stable products, and they are sold all over the world.

### What's the most rewarding part of having established these businesses? And what have the hurdles been?

The rewarding part is easy. For both HTO and Perfect Earth, we can easily see the impact we have made on these small farming communities. The communities have stopped shrinking. Kids have stopped leaving and some have started to come back. Parents are sending kids to better schools and sometimes to college. The air and water are cleaner since they have stopped using pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and the farmers are healthier and feel better. And we have made many consumers happy, especially those like my daughter, Carissa '08 (also a Taftie), who has celiac and has to eat gluten-free.

On the other hand, the hurdles are constant, especially for HTO. Since we are organic we cannot use antibiotics, so when the rainy season comes our hens get sick. We solve the problem every year and then the next year there is a new disease we never heard about. But we have a great team who are passionate about what we are doing, so we have improved every year and hopefully will continue to do so. Maybe one day we can bring HTO to American Indian tribes in remote areas! And meanwhile, we are working on launching the Perfect Earth brand in the U.S. for our organic chia seeds and shots, organic gluten-free pastas, organic meal kits, and organic instant ramen noodles. ■

—Linda Hedman Beyus



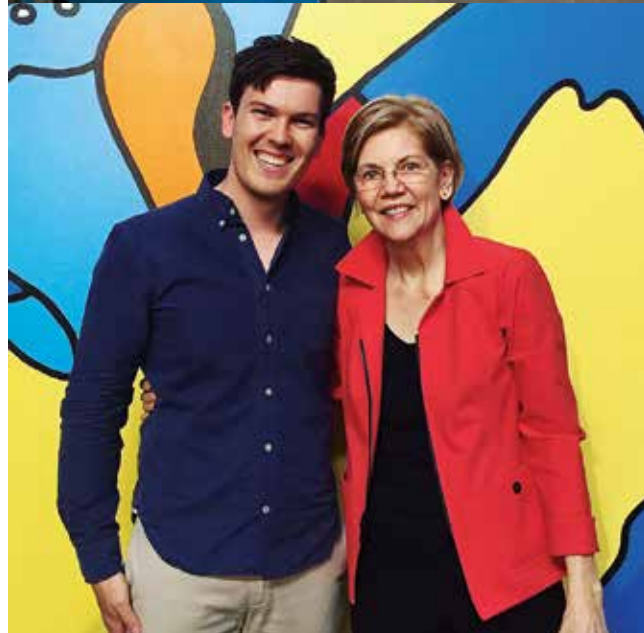
Blossom with Perfect Earth chia farmers near the Burmese border. The chia was in full bloom and almost ready for harvest.





Will Sealy '05, center, with Summer's other cofounders, Paul Joo (left) and Vincent Tran (right).

Summer offered information at an American Federation of Teachers convention in Washington, D.C., to help teachers navigate the student loan repayment process.



Sealy with Senator Elizabeth Warren, a few years after he had worked with her.

committed to finding ways to better educate people about basic financial concepts.

"This led me to Washington, D.C., as part of the White House team working on implementing the Dodd-Frank financial regulation act," he says.

know how much they owed, they were paying loans across multiple websites, and they were managing multiple types of interests rates," he continues. "I was thinking that the government had to provide better solutions."

After the campaign, Sealy returned to Washington, but yearned to increase his impact. "I loved that work, but it was slow and incremental," he says. So he enrolled in business school, and Summer was born. "My vision for Summer is to take the digital expertise of a technology company and couple it with the macro-level impact of the government and the social consciousness of a nonprofit advocacy organization."

Sealy credits several Taft friends who have helped him along the way, including Arden Klemmer '05, who helped him design the product as Summer's first software designer; Camden Flath '05, who helped establish the brand's voice and vision; and Calin Gunn '05, who helped Sealy gain some early press coverage and developed the company's PR strategy.

Nearly three years into growing the business, Sealy recently found himself returning to government work, in a sense. "When the COVID outbreak hit, I feared that the resulting financial downturn could have similar impacts as the last financial crisis, if not worse," he says.

He and his team turned their attention to state governments, partnering with Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont and Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo. "State governments manage unemployment filings when people are at their wits' end," Sealy adds. "We're partnered with them to provide Summer to people who are applying for unemployment, and to date, we've helped thousands of borrowers save several millions of dollars by enrolling them into free federal programs that they might not have known about or struggled to enroll in."

While the team at Summer has expanded these partnerships to include several more states, Sealy is the first to admit that the challenges facing borrowers are steep.

"We're experiencing the highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression, and as many as 24 million people are still being required to make student loan payments," he points out. "That being said, there's never been such a high level of awareness of the problem and a desire across all sectors to help borrowers. After years of uncovering borrowers' stories of immense hardship and reporting eye-popping debt statistics, we're finally breaking through." ■

—Christopher Browner '12



A visit to Summer's team from one of its investors, Nigel Morris, the founder and first CEO of Capital One Bank.

# Summer Savings

## Helping student loan borrowers

"I LOVE POLICY AND BIG THINKING, but at the end of the day, I realized that I'm much more of an entrepreneur than a bureaucrat," Will Sealy '05 says. "I like to take a creative idea and bring it into the world to help people." After working on two political campaigns, serving as a White House staffer, and helping launch the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Sealy founded his own company to assist America's student loan borrowers.

After earning an MBA from Yale in 2017, Sealy created Summer, a digital platform and service that has helped tens of thousands of borrowers understand, manage, and ultimately conquer their student loan debt.

"We offer borrowers the ability to plug in all of their loans and track them in real time, and we run their loans through all of the federal, state, and private-sector programs that could potentially result in savings," he says. "We sum up your loans, and when you have questions, we want to sum it up for you—hence the name 'Summer.'"

"The results speak for themselves," Sealy says. "We've been able to generate an average savings of \$300 per month, and we project savings of \$31,000 per borrower over the course of repayment." Not only are Sealy and his 30-person team helping borrowers save money, they've ensured that the service is provided free of charge. "We partner with colleges, unions, and employers, who in turn offer their students, members, and employees access to Summer. So far, we've partnered with more than 150 institutions representing 3 million borrowers."

Sealy discovered his passion for assisting those struggling with financial hardships while working on Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, and after graduating college, he was inspired to follow in the newly elected president's footsteps. "I began working as a community organizer helping California communities devastated by the Great Recession," he recalls. "Companies had taken advantage of these people's lack of knowledge about financial issues, and I became



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Looking  
**BACK**

# The Many Lives of the Harley Roberts Room

Life at Taft is a little different this fall. After a thorough study of all academic spaces, best practices for classroom safety were put in place. Classroom spaces were redesigned with health and safety in mind, and 10 new classrooms were brought online. All classrooms have been redesigned to allow for at least 6 feet of space between each student.

And this year, as in past years, several rooms were repurposed. This summer the Harley Roberts Room, which has welcomed prospective students and their families for decades, had its couches and coffee machine removed and student desks brought in.

Although it has been used as a reception room for 90 years, its first use was as a library. The room served as the library until 1930, when the library was moved to the newly built Charles Phelps Taft Hall.

—Beth Nolan Lovallo '93, *The Leslie D. Manning Archives*



Above: This photo was part of a mailing to students with the reading list for the 1923–24 school year.

Below, left: The Harley Roberts Room has been welcoming future students, families, and guests for nearly a century.

Below, right: It is quite fitting that this year the Harley Roberts Room is being used as a classroom. Horace Dutton Taft felt that influential teacher Harley Roberts was responsible for the improvement in the standard of scholarship.



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