

The Campaign for Democracy p. 5 ... Who Mentored You? p. 6 ...

A Day Without Devices p. 12 ... No More Helmet Hair p. 15 ...

SuperAgers Defy the Odds p. 26 ... Social Media Songbird p. 40

“Anything can be done as long as you have a glue gun, a roll of duct tape and a Makita drill.” p. 7

Northwestern

FALL 2024



Greta Shines

Film and screen star Greta Lee '05 claims the spotlight.

p. 20

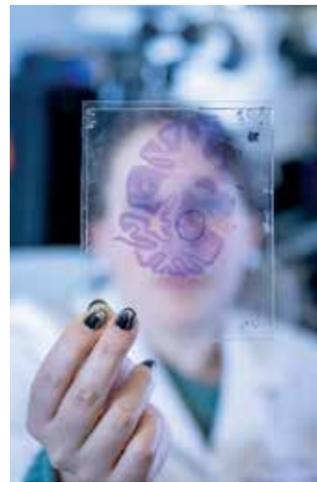
MOMENT

Pow Wow on Campus

This spring Northwestern hosted its third annual Pow Wow at Welsh-Ryan Arena. Organized by the Native American and Indigenous Student Alliance, the student-run event celebrated Indigenous people and cultures with traditional dances, including this grass dance by Ronnie Preston (foreground), who is a citizen of the San Carlos Apache Nation, and Negwes White (back left), who is Ojibwe and Navajo. The dancers were accompanied by the Oka Homma Singers, a Chicago-based "Drum" group. "The D in Drum is capitalized because it is not a musical instrument — it is our grandfather," says Jasmine Gurneau '10 MA, who is a citizen of the Oneida Nation, a descendent of the Menominee Nation and director of Native American and Indigenous affairs at Northwestern. "The singers use the Drum to create a heartbeat."



Contents



26

Forever Young
By studying older individuals with exceptional memories, the SuperAging Program advances our understanding of the aging brain — and why some stay younger than their peers. *By Martin Wilson '10 MS*

34

2024 Alumni Medalists
Get to know business leader Will Evans '77, '81 MBA, ad exec Renetta McCann '78, '12 MS and former Board chair Bill Osborn '69, '73 MBA, '18 H. *By Daniel P. Smith*

41

Puppy Love
A documentary by Gail Bartholomew Gilbert '81, '18 MFA follows four paralyzed puppies as they regain the ability to walk.



20

Greta Lee '05 Owns the Spotlight
After her award-winning performance in *Past Lives*, she's ready for another lead role.

40

← “Hundreds of people have come up to me after my shows and said that they were brought to tears by my music or that watching my videos has been a comfort during a difficult period.”

— Stella Cole '21, pop and jazz “throwback” singer



BRAIN SLIDE: SHANE COLLINS; GILBERT: JESSICA FITZGERALD; COLE: TIMOTHY ABEL; PAST LIVES: COURTESY A24 FILMS



8

Evil Eyes Sea
Özge Samanci's murder mystery turns an eye toward political corruption in Turkey.

EVIL EYES SEA: ÖZGE SAMANCI; DANCE MARATHON: JUSTIN BARBIN '11



6

Dance Marathon Celebrates 50 Years
Students lit up the dance floor for 15 hours at the annual fundraising event, raising \$340,000. In the past five decades, students have raised over \$23 million for nearly 40 charities.

On the cover: Greta Lee: Cruz Valdez/Trunk Archive. Back cover: Max Romey.

FALL 2024
Vol. 27 Issue 1

FRONT

- 1 Moment
- 4 Talk Back

VOICES

- 5 **Saving Democracy**
Beau Tremitiere calls for election integrity
- 6 **Sound Off** Who was your mentor?
- 7 **My Northwestern Direction** Julie Plec's tech week lessons

NEWS

- 9 **Field Trip to Alaska**
Students clean up plastic pollution
- 11 **Global Dispatches**
Alums share amazing international stories
- 12 **Offline Experiment**
Can you go a day without your phone?

INNOVATION

- 15 **Invention** Expandable bike helmet

IMPACT

- 18 **Northwestern Insider**
NPEP students launch a literary magazine

CREATION

- 41 **Sugar Skulls** A Día de los Muertos tradition
- 42 **Wave of the Future**
Alum duo launches all-electric boat
- 43 **Inclusive Playground**
Where kids of all abilities can play

ALUMNI

- 44 **Class Notes**
- 49 **On the Ground in Haiti** Monique Clesca reports on the crisis
- 52 **Wildcat Connections**
Sorority sisters turned bookmakers
- 60 **In Memoriam**

THE OTHER COVER

- 64 **Take the Not-So-SuperAger Quiz**

Northwestern Magazine

VICE PRESIDENT, OFFICE OF GLOBAL MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Jon Yates

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER

Andy Madorsky '86 MS

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Sean Hargadon

ART DIRECTOR

Christina Senese

SENIOR WRITER & PRODUCER

Clare Milliken

SENIOR EDITOR & WRITER

Diana Babineau

CLASS NOTES EDITOR

Paulina Freedman

DIRECTOR OF CREATIVE PRODUCTION

Martin Wilson '10 MS

PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR

Anne Egger

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Lindsay Beller, Tristan Bove

'24 MS, Deborah Cassell

'00 MS, Megan Fellman, Eric

Rynston-Lobel '22

DESIGN CONTRIBUTORS

Sarina Benoit, Henry McGill,

Mark Meyer, Leslie-Anne

Mock

MULTIMEDIA CONTRIBUTORS

Jude Appleby, Shane Collins

EDITORIAL INTERNS

Kunjai Bastola '26, Ella

Kuffour '25, Madaleine

Rubin '24

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Adrienne Samuels Gibbs

'99, chair; Krishnan

Anantharaman '91; David

Beard '81; Emily Chow '12;

Alex Freund '17, '20 JD; Alex

Garcia '89; Ryan Haggerty '07,

'16 MS; Jerry Lai '04; Robert

Leighton '82; Mike McGee '10;

Milan Polk '20; Gita Pullapilly

'00 MS; Christina Rosales '11;

Joshua Rosenblat '17; William

Weinbaum '82, '83 MS

© 2024 Northwestern University. *Northwestern Magazine* is published in fall, winter and spring. All rights reserved. Produced by the Office of Global Marketing and Communications, 1603 Orrington Ave., Suite 200, Evanston, IL 60201. Telephone: 847-491-5000 Website: alummag.nu

Views expressed in *Northwestern Magazine* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the University.

ADDRESS CHANGES

Mail to: Class Notes Editor

Northwestern Magazine

1603 Orrington Ave., Suite 200

Evanston, IL 60201

Email: address-change

@northwestern.edu

Talk Back

THE ART OF BEING HUMAN

Thank you for “The Art of Activism” in the spring 2024 issue. You have managed to convey Art Johnston ’75 MFA as, simply, an extraordinarily down-to-earth, courageous, warm human being, and to make his sexual orientation seem of far, far slighter import than his character. You’ve also gotten a considerable amount of significant history into the profile. Because I long ago left Chicago, to my frequent regret, I’m grateful to have that history of some times I’ve missed.

I’ve had occasion to write about the struggles of gay people for equal and humane treatment, and I have never read a piece of writing more likely to promote such treatment as yours. An admirable piece of work. *Malcolm McCollum '64 Colorado Springs, Colo.*

Excellent article on “The Art of Activism.” Especially timely is the insight that “the idea of marching outside, in the daylight, in downtown Chicago — it was exhilarating in a way I had never felt in my life.” That’s very similar to the way I felt in 1968! Thank you again for writing about the importance of activism.

Jim Sanders '73 MA, '80 PhD Elizabethtown, Pa.

KUDOS FOR BOO

“Flex Time” [News, spring 2024] is a great story on a great basketball player. I remember Boo Buie ’23, ’24 CERT as a frosh. He was a great shooter but only an average player. As he

developed his passing and decision-making, he became one of the best college point guards I’ve ever seen. He grew as a basketball player but more importantly as a leader and role model.

Tom Feiman '63 MBA Studio City, Calif.

AN ARCHIVE TO BRAG ABOUT

I am so unbelievably proud to see the Northwestern University Archives being highlighted in this way (“Tales From the Vault,” spring 2024). I worked at the Archives under Kevin Leonard ’77, ’82 MA during my time at Northwestern, and his and the rest of the staff’s enthusiasm for archives inspired me to become an archivist myself. I am now three years into my career as an archivist at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, all thanks to the Northwestern Archives! *Mary Pedraza '19 San Francisco*

I was thrilled by the spring 2024 edition. The story on Kevin Leonard was the icing on the cake. Kevin is a great archivist and helped me immeasurably with my last Big Ten basketball book, published in March. He not only provided great data but did it in an almost immediate fashion. He deserves any and all accolades. *Murry Nelson '72 MS State College, Pa.*

REMEMBERING GARRY MARSHALL

When I worked at Northwestern, Mr. Garry

Marshall ’56 [“Northwestern Archives Acquires Garry Marshall Papers,” Impact, winter 2024] visited and wanted to tour his fraternity house, Alpha Tau Omega. I was able to walk him through it.

Several years later I had moved to Los Angeles and went to see a black box theater’s performance of *Big: The Musical*. There were two empty seats on the aisle near me, and after the lights went down, he sat next to me. He didn’t want to be a distraction for the cast in such a small (three rows if I remember) theater.

During intermission I introduced myself again, and he remembered details of the tour I gave him years before at Northwestern. He had loaned the small black box theater some props from the original movie to use in the play. They are on display at his theater in Burbank, Calif.

And after the show he stayed forever, talking with the cast and greeting each of them and their families and friends. He was a truly remarkable man and an alumnus that Northwestern should be proud of. I’m so happy his legacy lives on at his alma mater! *Steve Dealph Burbank, Calif.*

A PIONEERING SAILOR

It’s great to see the news about Lisa Franchetti ’85, chief of naval operations, in *Class Notes* [spring 2024]. It states that combat vessels were opened to women 30 years ago. The noncombat vessels were opened to [women] 46 years ago, and at least one woman from Northwestern was there. I served onboard the *USS Ajax* when I was an ensign. *Meg Macdonald '73 Lake Bluff, Ill.*

Voices

THE CAMPAIGN FOR DEMOCRACY

Ensuring Free and Fair Elections

By Beau Tremitiere

In 1992 political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously celebrated the dissolution of the Soviet Union and our victory in the Cold War as “the end of history,” a turning point marking “the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

We have fallen far short of this utopian vision. Democracies worldwide have experienced worrisome backsliding — the United States chief among them. The effort to disrupt the lawful and

peaceful transfer of power after the last presidential election is a poignant example of this phenomenon.

The think tank Freedom House reports that the U.S. now trails 57 other countries in political rights and civil liberties. If we continue our trajectory, we could join India, Hungary and other nations that, per Freedom House, no longer qualify as free and functioning democracies. This global rise in authoritarianism and the retreat of democracy are alarming. But we need not resign ourselves to such a future.

The most urgent task for my organization, Protect Democracy, is to ensure that the upcoming elections are free and fair. In 2022 we won a lawsuit to protect voters from intimidation at ballot drop boxes in Arizona, and we need to be ready for similar threats again. Election administrators likewise must be free to oversee polling places, count ballots and carry out their duties without fear of coercion or violence. Federal and state officials must review and certify results



Beau Tremitiere

STEPHEN CARDINALE

as required by law, regardless of personal preference or partisan allegiance. The bipartisan Electoral Count Reform Act was a critical step to preventing a repeat of the efforts on Jan. 6, 2021, to subvert the presidential election.

But ensuring a lawful election *in reality* is not enough — we also need the public to *believe* the election is free and fair. As Jan. 6 made clear, the mistaken perception of an illegitimate election can inspire extralegal efforts to alter the outcome. While we cannot entirely prevent the spread of disinformation, our organization’s high-profile defamation suits against Rudy Giuliani, Kari Lake and others can deter future illicit conduct.

Beyond the election, we must also strengthen guardrails to prevent government officials from abusing and aggrandizing state power for personal or partisan gain. A top priority is reaffirming the independence of criminal prosecutions from political influence. Clear limits on the use of executive emergency powers are long overdue. So are stronger protections to prevent “autocratic capture,” that is, the use of the state’s regulatory powers to force private actors to toe a political line. While in office, former President Donald Trump sought to use antitrust enforcement and changes to postal rates to coerce more favorable coverage from CNN and *The Washington Post*, respectively. While formal, legal restraints are a first line of defense against these abuses, cultural guardrails, such as an independent media and a vibrant civil society, are also vitally important.

Finally, our ambition should be greater than preserving the status quo. We need a political system that gives more voters a reason to believe their voices really matter; that allocates political power in closer proportion to popular support; and that encourages principled collaboration across partisan lines. This isn’t utopian thinking. With modest changes to the laws governing how we elect our public officials, a more representative and responsive government is a real possibility.

With all due respect to Fukuyama, there’s no end of history in sight. Rather, we’re opening yet another chapter in our effort to build a “more perfect Union.”

Beau Tremitiere '17 JD is a counsel at the nonpartisan nonprofit Protect Democracy.

SOUND OFF

Who Was Your Mentor?

Alumni share stories of the people who shaped them.

Hannah Nielsen '10,
women's lacrosse head
coach at the University
of Michigan



I feel fortunate to have been coached by, and to have learned from, Kelly Amonte Hiller, first as a student-athlete at

Northwestern, then as her assistant coach and now as a peer. Kelly not only taught her players about on-field strategy and technique but also helped us become fearless leaders. The work ethic, passion, innovation and attention to detail she taught us are all things that I lean on today. I often ask myself, "What would Kelly do?" I am fortunate to have her in my corner, and I am thankful for the lacrosse lessons — and life lessons — that she instilled in me.

Lynn Ellen Queen '81, executive coach

At the end of my linguistics class one day, Professor Rae Moses called me into her office. She asked if I was worried about my grades. I confessed that I was — to the point that I had developed an ulcer. Nodding, she slid two documents across her desk. They were transcripts of seniors (names redacted) for whom she was writing letters of recommendation. One student had straight A's. The other had mostly A's, some B's and a couple C's. She said, "Which of these people would you rather have dinner with?" With her help, I realized that we decide for ourselves what



success looks like. And I was successful. My transcript had mostly A's, some B's, a couple C's and one pass/fail, just for good measure.

Barbara Weber-Boustani '85, director,
actor, singer and voice actor

As a theater major, the clouds parted for me the day I sat in Frank Galati's class on the dramatic interpretation of literature. He told a story about how W.H. Auden wrote his poetry while walking to work every day, and how he would walk back and forth over the same four squares of sidewalk until he had worked out the "knot" in his poem. That image has stayed with me through my own creative struggles, helping me "walk out" the kinks in my writing. I still read literature [the way Galati taught us to] — by staging it in my head! Recently I've drawn on that knowledge while directing theatrical adaptations of literature. Galati ['65, '67 MA/MS, '71 PhD] was a hidden treasure.



Madeline Baxter '22, graduate student
at the University of Oxford

Professor Noelle Sullivan not only taught me about the systems that underpin our modern health inequities — she showed me what it looks like to move through life thoughtfully. She embodies intentionality — from making her own laundry detergent to volunteering on her city's school board. She structured her courses to give us flexibility in how we each learned best. She has shown up for me even beyond my college career, championing my grad school applications and offering advice. She showed me who I'm capable of becoming — someone who is fearless in their beliefs and understands the impact they can have on society.



Share your mentorship story at letters@northwestern.edu.

SOCIAL FEEDS

Students raised more than \$340,000 for charity at the 50th Northwestern Dance Marathon.



I danced in the 10th one in 1984 — an experience I never forgot! To this day, the song "All Night Long" by Lionel Richie transports me back.

Janet Riley '86 [in](#)

I joined for a mid-'70s NU Dance Marathon when I was a student. Can't believe it's 50 years now. Keep up the good work!

Vivian Rattay Carter '78 [in](#)

Happy Anniversary. So glad to see this tradition continued to live on. #gocats [♥](#)

Deborah Solmor '87 [in](#)

Way to go, Wildcats! NUDM is one of my favorite Northwestern memories. [♥](#)

Laura Hansen '01 [in](#)

WEBER-BOUSTANI: CHRISTIAN BOUSTANI; BAXTER: JASON MEEK; DANCE MARATHON: JUSTIN BARBIN '11



MY NORTHWESTERN DIRECTION

'Tech Week' Was My Crash Course in Entertainment

In September 1990 I showed up at Northwestern with big dreams of a future in Hollywood, inspired by everything I'd ever read in *Entertainment Weekly* and *Premiere* magazine.

I like to joke that my first year as a radio/television/film major was like being a computer science major before Apple was invented. The program at the time needed a major makeover. (That makeover came by way of a donation from Garry Marshall '56 the year after I switched majors, so my timing could have been better.)

I felt adrift and spent some time trying to find my way — and find myself.

The breakthrough came when I got involved in student theater. From *The Waa-Mu Show* to *The Dolphin Show*, Arts

Alliance, WAVE Productions and SummerFest, I threw my whole self into the musical theater scene at Northwestern.

Even though I wasn't a performer, I audited Professor Dominic Missimi's musical theater classes.

I ran crew, stage managed and eventually produced and directed shows. Before I graduated, I even created my own class — a student-organized seminar for lyricists, composers, writers and producers. We wrote and staged an original musical showcase and called ourselves Circle 13 Productions.

The peer community was incredible, like living an endless summer camp experience.

But I've said that nothing prepares you for life more than a student theater production's "tech

By Julie Plec '94

Julie Plec is a creator, showrunner, executive producer and director. Her latest TV series, *We Were Liars*, will air on Amazon Prime in 2025. She is co-chairing Northwestern's Reunion 2024 with classmate and friend Greg Berlanti '94.

week." Tech week is the frantic week prior to a production's opening night, when all the technical elements — costumes, lights, sound, set and makeup — are brought together during rehearsal for the first time. It is an exercise in making do with what you have, creating everything out of nothing and relentlessly driving toward a finish line. It puts your work ethic to the test and humbles you. After all, you're napping on a four-by-four under a prop blanket in between building a set by hand.

My motto became, "Anything can be done as long as you have a glue gun, a roll of duct tape and a Makita drill."

When I first moved to Los Angeles, I started as an assistant, as pretty much everyone does. Because of my Northwestern experience, I felt like I could survive anything the industry threw at me. I was inexhaustible.

With a combination of luck, hard work and saying yes to every opportunity, I started working with Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson on the *Scream* franchise. By the time I was 28, I had been on multiple movie sets and was producing my first television show.

I eventually became a television writer, showrunner and director, most notably for the *Vampire Diaries* franchise.

The road wasn't always smooth — in Hollywood it never is — and there were definitely times when I lost my way. No amount of education can prepare you to navigate the politics of a competitive industry. You learn as you go, and sometimes you learn it the hard way.

But every bump in the road led me to become the person I am today — someone who can balance confidence and humility and be both driven and compassionate. And the resilience I learned in student theater — with my glue gun, duct tape and Makita — has been the key to my success.

“Tech week ... is an exercise in making do with what you have, creating everything out of nothing and relentlessly driving toward a finish line.”

BEHIND THE BOOK

Evil Eyes Sea

A murder mystery set in 1995 Istanbul

Özge Samanci shares the inspiration for her new graphic novel.

What parts of your life inspired this book? I attended Bosphorus University in Istanbul from 1992 to 1998. The university admitted top students, but the dorms were underfunded. I lived in a 200-square-foot room with seven other women. We rarely had running water. There were no laundry facilities or refrigerators.

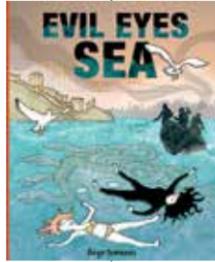
It was such an absurd place that I wanted to make a book about it. My two main characters, Ece and Meltem, are poor university students who join the scuba diving club. Many anecdotes in the dormitory came from my life. The misery of the dorm parallels that of the country.

Was the murder plotline inspired by real events too?

No, that is completely fictional. But the murder mystery is another way of looking at what was happening in the country at the time: political scandals, cover-ups, male violence against women. Those problems persist today.

What themes do you explore in the book?

It is a story of women searching for power within a climate of political hopelessness. Characters try, and sometimes fail, to keep their personal values intact while facing pressure to be complicit in Turkey's authoritarian regime, corrupt politics and patriarchal culture. It is a challenging world for Ece and Meltem to navigate.



Ece and Meltem try to reclaim some control over their lives by pretending to wield the mythical power of Medusa's gaze. Where did that idea come from?

That came from lived experience. A close friend and I used to stand in the cold for an

hour, waiting for a public bus. It felt like the bus would never come. So we would play a game. We would say, "OK, if we can focus hard enough on that spot on the horizon, that bus is going to appear." We were trying to find power in our desperation.

Despite the heavy themes, there's humor in your drawings and dialogue — moments of levity in otherwise dismal circumstances. What do you hope readers will take away?

I want readers to feel present in the magical world I'm creating and experience a journey between time and cultures. While the U.S. is a democracy, there are astonishing parallels between the populist politics of Turkey and those of the U.S. today. I would love for readers to catch those similarities.

There's loss, trauma, guilt and difficult questions in this book. But the funniness and resilience of the characters carries people through.

Özge Samanci is an associate professor of radio/television/film. Read more at alummag.nu/EvilEyesSea.

Every morning we woke up like figures in a Caravaggio painting. Bodies lurched, reached, searched, crawled, begged. We inevitably stepped on each other and everything in our path.



ÖZGE SAMANCI

News

Dispatches from India, Colombia, Ukraine and more p. 11

Kathryn Hahn lauds 2024 grads p. 12

Marching band alumni, assemble! p. 13



FIELD TRIP

Plastics at the Edge of the World

Northwestern students tackle pollution in Alaska.

It's easy to leave the world behind in Alaska. The bellowing gush of a spouting humpback or the rustle of reeds as a sea otter pokes its head from the water are some of the few sounds that break the silence.

But step onto any beach in the Gulf of Alaska, and that serenity is shattered. Layers of trash, ropes and nets interlace through boulders and fallen trees. Countless fragments of tiny, coin-sized debris are intermixed with the gravel. Much of that debris is plastic.

The problem of plastic pollution extends far beyond this coastline — it is a global crisis. But in May, Northwestern students joined a research project to help find a local solution.

On the recommendation of Dayne Swearer, assistant



MAX ROMEY



The crew of M/V Lady Sea helps OPR handle marine debris.

chemical and biological engineering at Northwestern, gladly joined the expedition. "In this field, you don't really do much fieldwork," he says. "Out here, I can see this is an urgent problem. This trip has reminded me why I got into this field in the first place."

His research focuses on upcycling — turning end-of-life plastics into a class of materials called covalent adaptable networks (CANs), which are physically stronger than plastics but can still be recycled. Using chemical additives, he creates this class of materials in a lab by heating and molding a feedstock, usually polyethylene — the most common type of plastic, present in milk containers and shopping bags.

Fenimore plans to test his approach against recovered polyethylene plastics from Alaska to determine if the same processes used to create new CANs "could also be used for samples that have sat on beaches for forever," he says. Once OPR finishes collecting the marine debris, samples of the salvaged plastic will be shipped to Fenimore.

"In the end, we hope that what we do in the lab ... can be applied," Fenimore says. "This week was a big reminder of our situation and will help propel me through the late stages of my PhD and onward."

OPR participant Tristan Bove '24 MS reported this story. Learn more at alummag.nu/Alaska.

professor of chemistry, and with support from Northwestern's Paula M. Trienens Institute for Sustainability and Energy, the six undergraduate and graduate students joined the Ocean Plastics Recovery Project (OPR). They spent a week exploring remote islets around Prince of Wales Island and clearing beaches of marine debris — solid, human-made material that ended up in the ocean.

In 2019, 6.1 million metric tons of plastics ended up in oceans, rivers and lakes,

"This trip has reminded me why I got into this field in the first place."

— Logan Fenimore

according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data. If waste management systems don't improve and consumption patterns keep growing, nearly 500 million metric tons of plastic will have accumulated in the world's bodies of water by 2060, more than the weight of the entire human population alive today.

Spearheaded by plastics recycling expert Scott Farling and former Coast Guardsman Andy Schroeder, OPR has been removing marine debris from Alaska's coastline since 2018. "We want to collect big plastics before they degrade into microplastics that get into the food system," says Farling. "And we want to research how ocean plastics affect species and ecosystems — and determine if we can extend the life cycle of tricky materials."

Logan Fenimore, a fifth-year doctoral candidate in

A PROFESSOR ON TRIAL
Paris

Award-winning Los Angeles-based filmmaker and audio journalist Dana Ballout '13 MS (below right) attempts to unravel a decades-old whodunit in *The Copernic Affair*. Coming soon, the podcast series follows the case against Hassan Diab (below left), a Lebanese-Canadian sociology professor who was accused of involvement in the 1980 bombing of Paris' Rue Copernic synagogue. In 2023 a French court tried him in absentia and found him guilty, sentencing him to life in prison. Diab maintains his innocence but faces possible extradition from Canada to France. "My co-host, Alex Atack, and I both grew up in the Middle East," says Ballout, who is from Lebanon, "and we share a deep-rooted connection to the region."



Learn more about these projects at alummag.nu/GlobalMedia.

ALASKA: MAX ROMEY; ANTETOKOUNMPO: GETTY IMAGES; LA BONGA: SEBASTIAN PINZON SILVA; TICKER ILLUSTRATIONS: LESLIE-ANNE MOCK

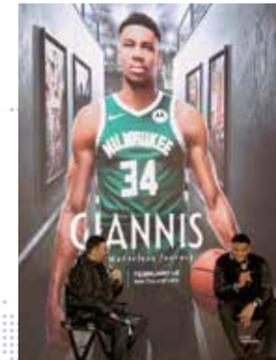
GLOBAL LENS

Reports From Abroad

Alumni shine a light on international stories.

GIANNIS' JOURNEY
Athens, Greece

Producer Hannah Beir '22 MS traveled to Greece for *Giannis: The Marvelous Journey*, a 2024 documentary on Milwaukee Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo. Beir documents his trajectory, beginning as the son of Nigerian immigrants in Greece to becoming an NBA champion. "His family has never publicly spoken about their story," she says. "It felt important to allow them to speak their truth." Beir also recently worked with WNBA star Caitlin Clark on *Full Court Press*. "Sports are relatable and unifying, so it's a great avenue to talk about larger issues," Beir says.



ENTERING A WAR ZONE
Tel Aviv, Israel

NBC News correspondent Josh Lederman '11 MS interviewed survivors of the Oct. 7 Hamas attack and has been documenting the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. In east Jerusalem, he reported from a hospital where Gazan children being treated for cancer were stranded when war broke out. In central Israel, Lederman interviewed Arab-Israelis who say they have experienced a crackdown on free speech.



RETURNING HOME
San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia

Former classmates Nevo Shinaar '17 MFA and Sebastián Pinzón Silva '17 MFA worked together on *La Bonga*, a 2023 documentary about a community of Afro-Colombians who were forcibly removed from their original settlement 20 years prior, due to a civil war. Co-directed by Silva and co-produced by Shinaar, the film follows the group into the jungle of San Basilio de Palenque, where they rediscover their abandoned village and celebrate one of their important holiday festivals. Silva began working on *La Bonga* after exploring the topic in his MFA thesis film, *Palenque*.

KINDERGARTEN, INTERRUPTED
Kharkiv, Ukraine

NPR correspondent Elissa Nadworny '14 MS spent eight months investigating what happened to Ukrainian kindergartners whose school was heavily damaged by Russian shelling in August 2022. Nadworny and her team traveled across Ukraine, Europe and the U.S. to spend time with the 27 children, their families and their teacher. In a feature story on NPR's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, Nadworny showcased the ways the children are processing trauma and loss and how their families are helping them rebuild their lives.

UNDERGROUND RADIO
Goa, India

A senior video producer for the BBC, Nikita Mandhani '16 MS directed, produced and edited a short documentary on Goa, a state on India's western coast. Now a popular tourist spot, Goa spent more than four centuries under Portugal's rule before India ousted Portuguese forces on Dec. 19, 1961. "The fight for Goa's freedom picked up momentum after India won its independence in 1947," says Mandhani, who is based in New Delhi, India. For this film, she interviewed Libia Lobo Sardesai (below), who "saw Goa's freedom struggle up close." Sardesai started an underground radio station with her late husband, Vaman Sardesai, in a dense forest on Goa's northern border in 1955, a time when media censorship and propaganda were rampant in the Portuguese colony. The station's broadcasts boosted morale and exposed the Portuguese troops' oppressive actions.



The Ticker

Evanston campus construction kicks off.

● A renovation of the Donald P. Jacobs Center will transform the building into a **hub for social sciences and global studies**, with classrooms, labs, offices, dining areas and an outdoor terrace overlooking Deering Meadow. Read more on page 16.



● With the goal of **restoring and preserving its historic features**, Deering Library will be renovated to improve accessibility and upgrade its technology. Construction will last through September 2025.



● Northwestern is replacing Ryan Field, its 97-year-old football stadium, with a world-class facility for a **best-in-the-nation football experience**. Construction is expected to be completed before the 2026 season. Temporary enhancements have been made to the Lanny and Sharon Martin Stadium on the Evanston campus to host games in 2024 and 2025.



● The Cohen Lawn — formerly the Norris University Center East Lawn — will be **transformed into a welcoming outdoor destination**. A pub with a small stage will be the centerpiece, in addition to a rooftop patio, a pavilion and fire pits. Construction is scheduled to conclude in fall 2025.



DO NOT DISTURB

Digital Detox

Brandon Kondritz spent a day without his electronic devices — and it paid off.

Where's your phone right now?

Brandon Kondritz, a junior journalism major, asks listeners that question in his podcast episode "The Day I Ditched My Devices," a finalist in NPR's annual College Podcast Challenge. In just under eight minutes, Kondritz's episode chronicles his day as a Northwestern student — completely unplugged.

One of 10 finalists, Kondritz's episode was chosen from more than 500 submissions, a record high. The challenge invites college students nationwide to submit original episodes for a chance to have their work air on NPR.

For his entry, Kondritz ditched his electronics for a day and went about his usual routine, using his phone only to record background sounds and short voice memos about his experience. Between audio clips of him running on a treadmill without music or taking notes by hand in class,

he intersperses interviews with digital behavior researchers who comment on smartphone addiction and feeling "phantom vibrations" when we leave our phones or smartwatches at home.

The day proved more difficult than expected, Kondritz says. He fought the urge to scroll through Instagram or check his emails. Going without music was the hardest part. But he felt some benefits too, including feeling more focused all day.

"It showed me that I really can go a day without my devices," Kondritz says. "And I've taken some of the lessons that I learned that day and integrated them into my daily life."

Kondritz now takes notes by hand more often, and he charges his phone across the room instead of by his bedside to reduce screentime at night.

Though his entry did not win NPR's challenge, the experience was definitely rewarding, he says.



Hahn: Shane Collins; Illustration by Sol Cotti

'A GORGEOUS LAKE OF PURPLE AND WHITE'



Actor Kathryn Hahn '95, '24 H addressed the class of 2024 at Commencement in June. "You have been through so much already, personally and historically," said Hahn, referring to the fact that most of the graduates missed their high school graduations due to the pandemic. "You deserve to live your life. ... It is the time to stop being who you think other people want you to be and be yourself."

'CAT TALES

Happy Birthday, NUMBALUMS

The NUMBALUMS have a reputation for being among the most engaged and school-spirited Northwestern alumni. Though the group — now 3,000 strong — was created by legendary band director John Paynter '50, '51 MMus in 1972, this year marks the 25th formal anniversary of the alumni organization for former members of the Northwestern University "Wildcat" Marching Band (NUMB) and Bienen School of Music ensembles.

In addition to its annual Homecoming pregame and halftime shows, the group hosts events throughout the year to foster fellowship and give back to the band community. The group's Push On Fund also provides scholarships, stipends, band instruments and more to current NUMB students.

"Being in band creates a shared bond between every member," says NUMBALUMS president Blake Kolesa '18, who played the trumpet and sousaphone in NUMB. "It's important to us as alumni to support current members."

NUMBALUMS: ANTHONY SETTIPANI '16; PRICE: SHANE COLLINS



Lawrence Price in the Aida and Mike Feldman Broadcast and Digital Media Suite



GRADS TO CELEBRATE

A 'Cat Ready to Go Courtside

Class of 2024 grad Lawrence Price is pursuing sports journalism.

In the span of just a few hours, Lawrence Price III met NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal, got career advice from basketball analyst Charles Barkley, chatted with sportscaster Ernie Johnson Jr. and interviewed Denver Nuggets forward Aaron Gordon.

"I was thinking, 'Wow, I'm a 21-year-old student who has class on Monday, but I'm here with these professionals who are at the top of their game,'" says Price '24, who attended the NBA's opening night in October 2023 in Denver as part of his Oscar Pope Lift Every Voice Fellowship. An initiative by

TNT Sports, the fellowship provides undergraduate student journalists of color the chance to work with the network during its coverage of select major sporting events.

Growing up in Southfield, Mich., Price loved sports. At Northwestern he majored in journalism and minored in legal studies while working for *The Daily Northwestern*, Northwestern News Network Sports and WNUR Sports. His favorite project was "Unsung Heroes," a series for *The Daily Northwestern's Cats Corner* podcast. The series is "a deep dive into the people in Northwestern Athletics

who don't get the credit they deserve ... like the people cutting the grass at 6 a.m. for a 9 a.m. game," he says.

Price also served as president of the University's National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) chapter, his "home away from home."

"I've met so many students who look like me, who help me out or just give me tips," Price says of NABJ. "It's so heartwarming but also pushes you forward professionally."

Price plans to pursue a career in sports journalism.

Meet more 2024 grads at alummag.nu/grads24.

Innovation

OH, BUOY!

Great Lakes Ventures

New course encourages climate-conscious entrepreneurship.

Thanks to the new Innovate for Climate course, Sydney Williams now knows a few things about buoys.

For the experiential course, Williams spent a mid-April morning at Wilmette Harbor, just north of Evanston, learning about Lake Michigan's buoys — anchored, floating, sensor-laden devices that provide valuable data, including air and water temperature, wind speed and wave height. Then she helped Ben Szczygiel, a specialist from Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, prepare the Wilmette buoy for launch.

Williams, a junior Earth and planetary sciences major, and two of her classmates partnered with the Great Lakes Observing System “to identify communities ... who could use observational assets provided by the buoy

system to build long-term climate resiliency,” she says. The student team proposed using the buoy data to build a map of climate change effects on vulnerable Great Lakes communities, with the hope that policymakers can better address such issues.

“This is an opportunity for our students to work on real-world problems that affect our backyard,” says Hayes Ferguson, director of the Farley Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, which sponsored the new course.

Ferguson co-taught Innovate for Climate with Ryan Jeffery, managing director for the sustainability program at the accelerator gener8tor, in collaboration with the NobleReach Foundation, which works with student entrepreneurs to address critical challenges



Sydney Williams, left, preps a buoy for launch with Ben Szczygiel.

in society. NobleReach and the Farley Center identified sponsor organizations that presented student teams with unique problems associated with the Great Lakes. The teams then used startup methodology, including interviews with dozens of stakeholders, to understand the intricacies of their specific climate issue before crafting a relevant, practical solution.

“Whatever solutions you develop, you have to think of it from a business perspective,” Jeffery told the class.

Students Sam Rappin and William Kosann, for example, worked with

Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers (GSGP) to promote awareness of fish underutilization. GSGP encourages processors to use every bit of commercially caught fish and is supporting new ventures, especially in tribal communities, to turn byproducts into fish oil supplements, pet food, fertilizer, wallets and more.

At the end of the course, Rappin and Kosann were awarded \$500 from the Farley Center to continue their project, creating a platform that connects commercial fisheries and processors with byproduct users.

WILLIAMS AND SZCZYGIEL: MATTHEW GILSON; CHAN AND MOKOTOFF: JOEL WINTERMANTLE



TOP STUDENT STARTUPS

Sophomore Rudy Arora's Turbolearn AI, a program that generates study guides, won first place at VentureCat in May. Alexis Chan '24, left, and Izzy Mokotoff '24, right, took home second place for SteadyScrib, a pen designed for people with Parkinson's disease. (Read more at alummag.nu/SteadyScrib.) Third place went to MBA student Scott Tsangeos' Olympus, a digital platform that analyzes athletes' strength-based workouts.

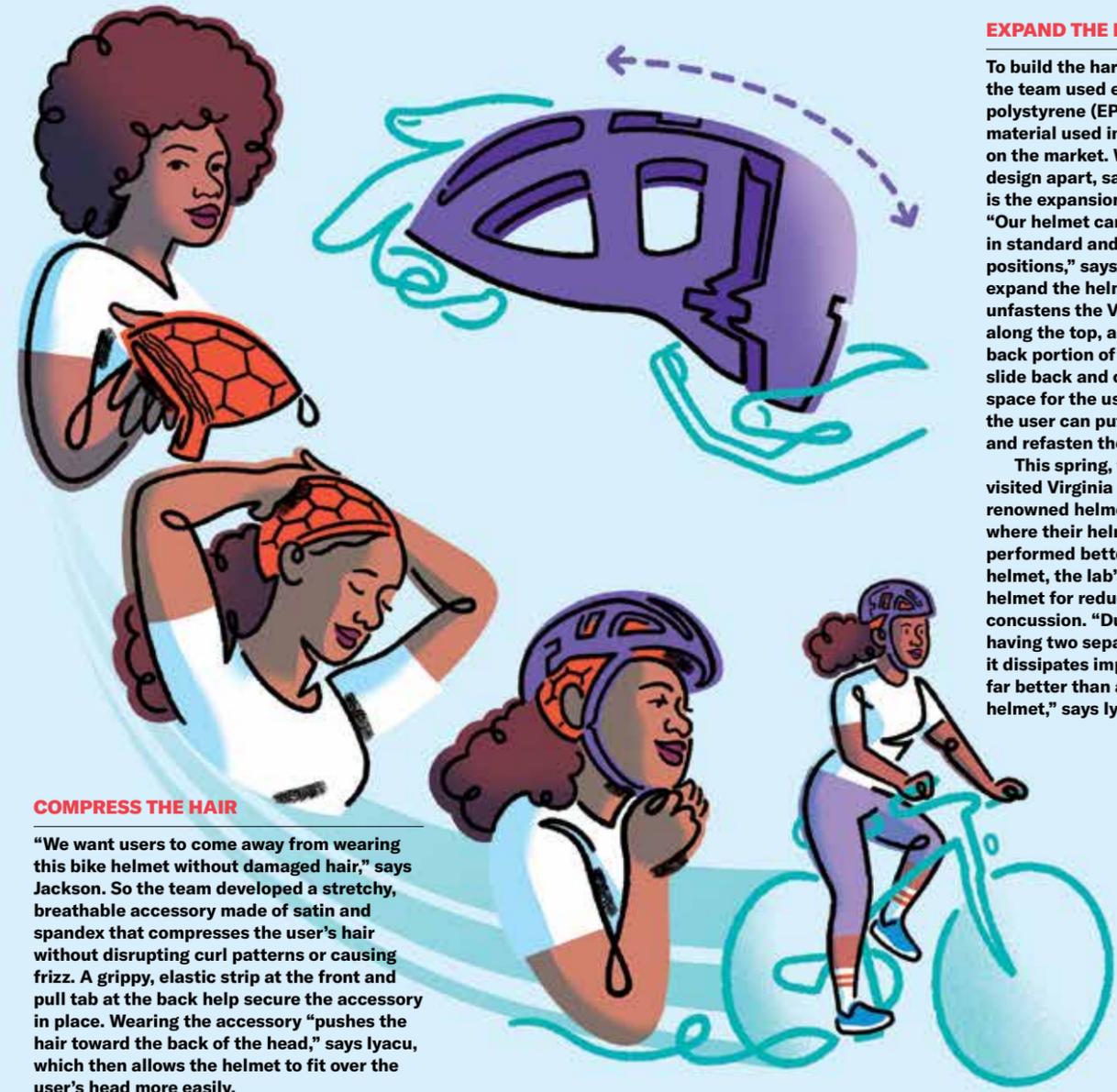
INVENTION

A More Inclusive Bike Helmet

Gass Iyacu '24 rode a scooter across Northwestern's Evanston campus to get to class every day. Emma Jackson '24 rode her bike. But neither regularly wore a helmet. Why?

“They just don't fit!” says Iyacu, who wears his hair in various styles, such as an Afro or braids. Jackson has the same problem. Helmets typically frizz her hair and disrupt her natural curls.

Determined to find a solution, the two manufacturing and design engineering majors teamed up with classmates Pratham Bansal '24, Alicia Cabrera '24 and Kevin Kaspar '24 to create an expandable helmet that accommodates thick, curly and voluminous hair while prioritizing safety and proper ventilation. “People of color change their hair a lot,” says Jackson, “and in our research, we saw people saying they have to buy a new bike helmet for all their different hairstyles — that's a lot of money! We want our model to be cost effective.”



EXPAND THE HARD SHELL

To build the hard outer shell, the team used expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam, a material used in most helmets on the market. What sets this design apart, says Jackson, is the expansion mechanism. “Our helmet can be used in standard and expanded positions,” says Iyacu. To expand the helmet, the user unfastens the Velcro straps along the top, allowing the back portion of the helmet to slide back and create more space for the user's hair. Then the user can put on the helmet and refasten the Velcro straps.

This spring, the team visited Virginia Tech's world-renowned helmet testing lab, where their helmet prototype performed better than a 5-star helmet, the lab's highest-rated helmet for reducing the risk of concussion. “Due to our design having two separate shells, it dissipates impact energy far better than a single-shell helmet,” says Iyacu.

COMPRESS THE HAIR

“We want users to come away from wearing this bike helmet without damaged hair,” says Jackson. So the team developed a stretchy, breathable accessory made of satin and spandex that compresses the user's hair without disrupting curl patterns or causing frizz. A grippy, elastic strip at the front and pull tab at the back help secure the accessory in place. Wearing the accessory “pushes the hair toward the back of the head,” says Iyacu, which then allows the helmet to fit over the user's head more easily.



CAMPUS

A New Hub for Learning and Student Engagement

The Jacobs Center will be transformed into a destination for social sciences and global studies research and collaboration.

A gift from Northwestern Trustee Steven A. Cahillane '87 and Tracy Tappan Cahillane '88 is kickstarting the renovation of the Donald P. Jacobs Center into a hub for research, learning and student activity on the Evanston campus. The new facility supports the University's strategic priorities by expanding Northwestern's capacity to innovate in the social sciences and global studies.

Located in the heart of campus on Sheridan Road,

the Jacobs Center was built in phases between 1972

“Having so many world-class scholars in the same space will create natural connections that never before would have been possible.”

— Kathleen Hagerty

and 2001 and previously housed the Kellogg School of Management. The renovation will transform the interior of the building and significantly enhance the surrounding grounds. Construction will begin this year and is expected to be completed in 2026.

The renovated building will be the new home of the Northwestern Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs; the School of Education and Social Policy; the Institute for Policy Research; and several departments within

the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, including anthropology, linguistics, political science and sociology. Additionally, the Weinberg College Center for International and Area Studies and Weinberg College's Program in Global Health Studies will be based there.

Bringing these exciting intellectual areas together will generate distinct hubs for research in the social sciences, policy and global affairs, bolstering opportunities for innovative partnerships and discoveries across schools and disciplines.

“Northwestern is committed to finding solutions to society's most pressing issues through interdisciplinary research, and this initiative furthers our efforts to foster greater collaboration within the social sciences, education and global studies,” Provost Kathleen Hagerty says. “Having so many

← Located in the heart of the Evanston campus on Sheridan Road, the Jacobs Center will become a welcoming entry point.

world-class scholars in the same space will create natural connections that never before would have been possible and will lead to exciting new research endeavors.”

Once complete, the building will serve more than 1,000 faculty, staff and students on a daily basis. It will feature numerous classrooms of varying sizes, along with meeting and seminar rooms, lab spaces, faculty offices and dining areas. There also will be spaces for student services and programming, scholarly talks and other learning opportunities. Each floor will offer open seating areas where students and faculty can gather.

“Tracy and I are delighted to make this gift that will help enhance interdisciplinary collaboration and the student experience,” Steve Cahillane says.

The first floor will have a multipurpose space that

can host events for up to 150 people or serve as a student lounge; the space will open onto a new terrace overlooking Deering Meadow — it is one of several outdoor gathering areas planned as part of new landscaping surrounding the building. In recognition of the Cahillane family's gift, the multipurpose space and outdoor terrace will be named for them.

“Steve and I love Northwestern,” Tracy Cahillane says. “We met on campus as undergraduates, and it changed our lives. It is such a special institution, and we are grateful to be able to help the students of today and tomorrow benefit from a Northwestern experience.”

↓ A new large gathering space will open onto Deering Meadow and serve as a student lounge, event space, and flexible lecture and seminar room.



RENDERINGS BY WILLIAM RAWN ASSOCIATES AND SHEEHAN NAGLE HARTRAY ARCHITECTS

A Global Focus



Deborah Cohen

An accomplished scholar of European and global history, Deborah Cohen has led the Northwestern Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs since January 2024. During this time, her team has launched a raft of programs that build on the institute's mission of fostering interdisciplinary teaching and research about the world beyond U.S. borders.

Northwestern Buffett's newest opportunities for undergraduate students include the Elliott Scholars Program, which pairs a two-course sequence on global topics with internships abroad, as well as an international senior thesis research competition and research fellowships that match students with faculty mentors. The institute also offers programs for graduate students, including

grants for language study and funding for international research and dissertation work.

“One of the thrilling things about Northwestern Buffett is that it connects so many different parts of the University to each other and then to a wider public,” says Cohen, the Richard W. Leopold Professor of History. The institute draws faculty and students from all 12 Northwestern schools for conversations, events and working groups on urgent global issues.

Cohen expects the institute's upcoming relocation to the renovated Jacobs Center to further stoke collaboration — and not only at Northwestern. “We're also reaching out in the policymaking space, in international governance and to globally focused nongovernmental organizations,” she says. “That's our mandate.”



← NPEP students participate in a political science course at Stateville Correctional Center.

For example, the program is purchasing laptops for students, helping participants continue their studies post-release and providing introductory college-level courses at the Cook County Jail in Chicago.

Meanwhile, the program continues to grow. After the first statewide applications for NPEP went out to facilities throughout Illinois in 2022, nearly 400 men applied for spots to join Stateville's third and fourth cohorts in 2023. The program also has expanded to include students at Logan Correctional Center in Lincoln, Ill., who will become the first incarcerated women in the U.S. to graduate from a top 10 university.

The program's success is due in large part to its director, Jennifer Lackey, who founded NPEP in 2018.

"The graduates of and students in NPEP radically expand what it means to be a member of the Northwestern community and, in so doing, play a vital role in reimaging and reshaping what is possible for all of us in spaces of higher learning," she says. Lackey, who is the Wayne and Elizabeth Jones Professor of Philosophy at Northwestern, received the Daniel I. Linzer Award for Faculty Excellence in Diversity and Equity from the University's Office of the Provost this year.

"I'm thankful for Professor Lackey," Soto says. "Through her vision and tenacity, she has fulfilled the transformation and dreams of many others through NPEP."

To learn more about or to support the Northwestern Prison Education Program, visit alum.nu/NPEP.

ALEX GARCIA '89

COMMUNICATION

Inspired by Gratitude

A health crisis motivated Victor Su and Patricia Kou to help expand Northwestern's speech and language services to a wider community.

Victor Su '95 never imagined that a life-altering health challenge would bring him back to his alma mater. After earning degrees in chemical and industrial engineering at Northwestern, he spent 20 years in consulting and finance, ultimately working around the world — from New York City to Japan to the United Kingdom — as a managing director of Credit Suisse.

Nine years ago, while putting in long hours at his job in London, the then-42-year-old Su suffered an aortic dissection followed by three strokes. The National Health Service doctors who treated him didn't expect him to survive. But after returning to New York City via an air ambulance, Su defied the odds. He gradually emerged from a coma. He underwent five months of inpatient therapy and learned to walk again. He also struggled with right-side paralysis, memory loss and aphasia — a communication disorder that often occurs suddenly following a stroke or head trauma and can affect one's ability to talk, read, write and/or understand spoken language.

After Su was discharged from a rehabilitation hospital, his wife, Patricia "Trish" Kou, knew he would need more therapy to keep improving. Searching online, she found an intensive, one-month program for aphasia patients at the

Northwestern University Center for Audiology, Speech, Language and Learning. In summer 2017 Kou and the couple's two young children accompanied Su to Evanston, where he worked five to six hours a day with speech and language clinicians.

"It was a lifesaver for Vic," Kou says. Su regained his ability to communicate at the center and continued to progress at home through online sessions with his Northwestern therapy team.

In gratitude for Su's treatment, the family this year made a generous gift to establish the Su Family Community Impact Fund,

which will help the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) at Northwestern's School of Communication (SoC) expand diagnostic and treatment services to underserved children and adults

throughout the Chicago area.

"One of our top priorities is to provide high-quality clinical services, not just to those who come to our clinic but to everybody in the community who may have trouble accessing them," says Bharath Chandrasekaran, CSD chair and the Ralph and Jean Sundin Endowed Professor. The gift from the

Su family also will support innovative, interdisciplinary research partnerships within SoC.

The Su family's gift — which also establishes a scholarship fund to support undergraduate students in the McCormick School of Engineering — has the potential to make a broad impact. The couple say they hope their philanthropy will increase access both to a Northwestern education and to treatment for aphasia and other disorders for those who lack resources to pay.

"The treatment I received at Northwestern made a huge difference in my recovery," Su says. "I am forever grateful."

↓ The School of Communication's Break the Blocks improv workshops, which are free to the community, help build confidence in young people who stutter.



JUSTIN BARBIN '11

EDUCATION

A Brighter Future

The Northwestern Prison Education Program is transforming the lives of incarcerated students in Illinois.

The voices of people incarcerated in Illinois are rarely heard outside their institutions' walls. Students in the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) are changing that.

This spring, spurred by the efforts of NPEP graduate Tony Triplett '23, students worked closely with faculty advisers and writers to create the first issue of *Northwestern Insider* magazine. The publication, which is available online, provides an outlet for NPEP

students to share their creative talents through personal essays, fiction and poems.

The magazine is the latest achievement for the program, which is committed to providing one of the nation's best educations to incarcerated students in Illinois prisons, jails and youth centers. In November 2023 the original cohort of NPEP students at Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, Ill., became the first incarcerated people in U.S. history to earn bachelor's

degrees from a top 10 university.

"NPEP is such a central part of my life," says James Soto '23, who graduated in November and was exonerated in December after serving 42 years for a wrongful conviction. "It has not only provided me with a high-quality education from a top-tier university but has also opened up many wonderful opportunities. But most of all, NPEP has offered me the transformative power of higher education, allowing me to make my dream a reality." Soto is now applying to law school.

NPEP is funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, and support from alumni and other donors is growing, helping to expand and deepen NPEP's core work.

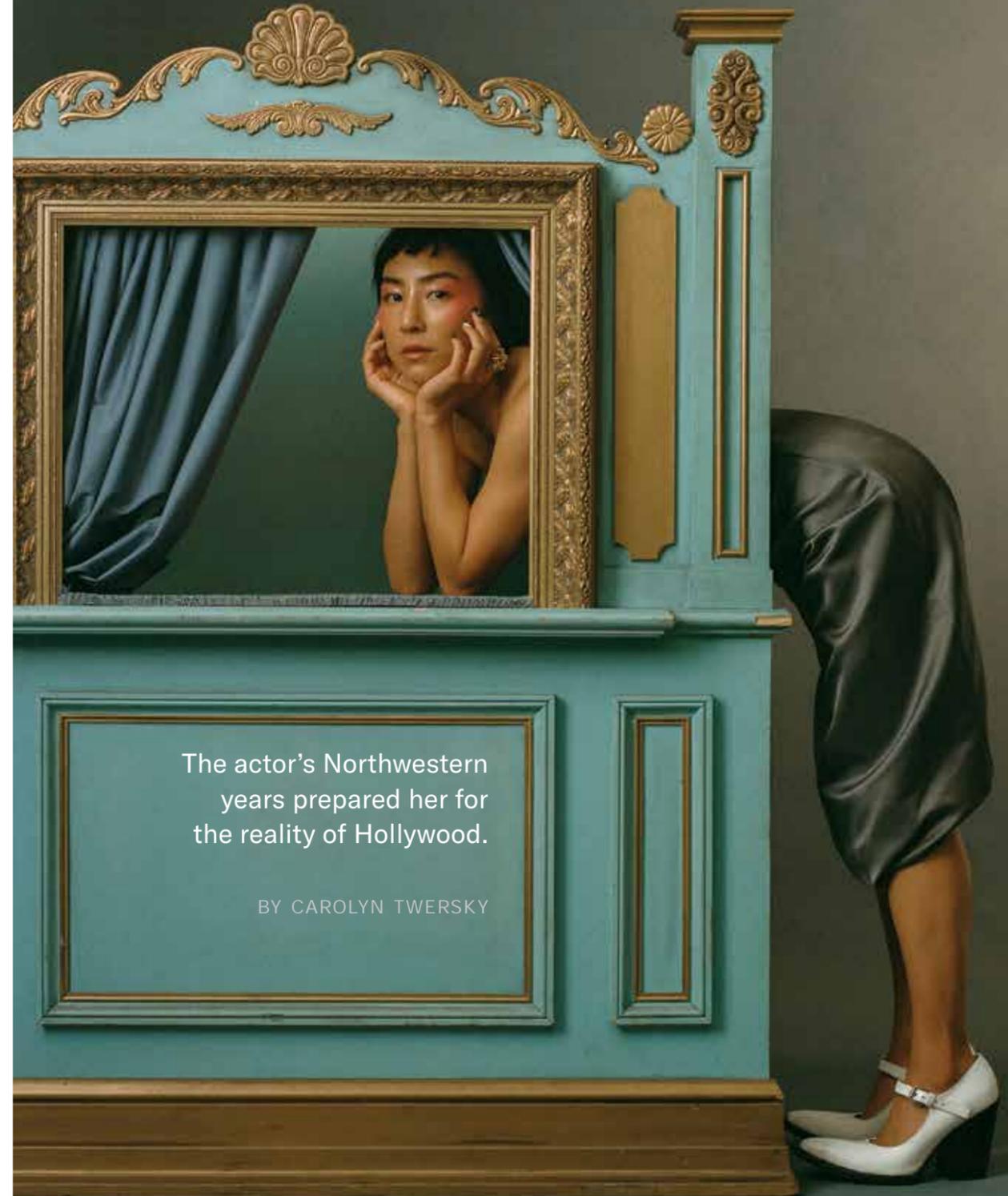
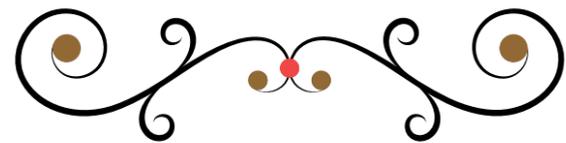
**Can you see me?
I'm right in your line of sight,
but are you looking at me
or through me?**

— From "I'm Right Here," a poem by NPEP student LeShun Smith

THE INCREDIBLE, ADAPTABLE

GRETA

LEE



The actor's Northwestern years prepared her for the reality of Hollywood.

BY CAROLYN TWERSKY

If you know Greta Lee '05, you know she's a bit of a shapeshifter, with acting roles that span from the dead serious to the drop-dead hilarious.

When we connect in late spring, she's in Vancouver, British Columbia, hard at work on her next film, *Tron: Ares*. Somehow, between motorcycle stunts and line readings with co-star Jared Leto, she finds time to chat — even though a nap is more enticing. Despite her exhausting day, Lee is decidedly chipper.

She's sunny and self-deprecating when she reflects on her Northwestern days. And then, moments later, the shapeshifter emerges, and she's resolute as the conversation turns to her experiences in Hollywood and her incessant pounding on the industry's glass ceiling.

If you don't know Greta Lee, here's a quick primer. For almost 20 years she has thrived in supporting roles on some of TV's biggest shows, such as *Russian Doll* and *The Morning Show*. It's not that she's avoided the direct spotlight. It just never shined on her.

"As time passed, there was this uncomfortable realization that, 'Oh, I'm not going to get leading roles. They don't exist for someone like me,'" Lee says frankly of the racial and gender bias she has experienced in the industry. In the years following her Northwestern graduation, she says, "I realized, I will fall behind if I don't find my way."

Her way came in the form of secondary roles — the quirky friend, the spoiled rich girl, the young tech entrepreneur. Yet even playing the sidekick, she demanded viewers' attention with her punchy one-liners and laidback deliveries. And for a while she felt content with the career she'd built.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, came *Past Lives* — the highly praised and Oscar-nominated film that placed Lee center stage.

In the 2023 release, Lee plays Nora, a South Korean immigrant who is happily married and living in New York City when she reconnects with her childhood sweetheart after decades apart. It's a soft-spoken love story, heavy in chemistry

and resulting despair. Lee earned Golden Globe and Critics' Choice Award nominations for her performance, and some say she was snubbed at the Oscars.

Nevertheless, *Past Lives* ushered in a new stage of Lee's career. Now she knows what she's been missing.

"I am in shock over how much has changed in the past year, especially in terms of the material I'm now getting my hands on," she says. "Of course, there's always that fear that *Past Lives* was it. But that's a constant fear for all actors: 'Will I ever get a shot again?'"

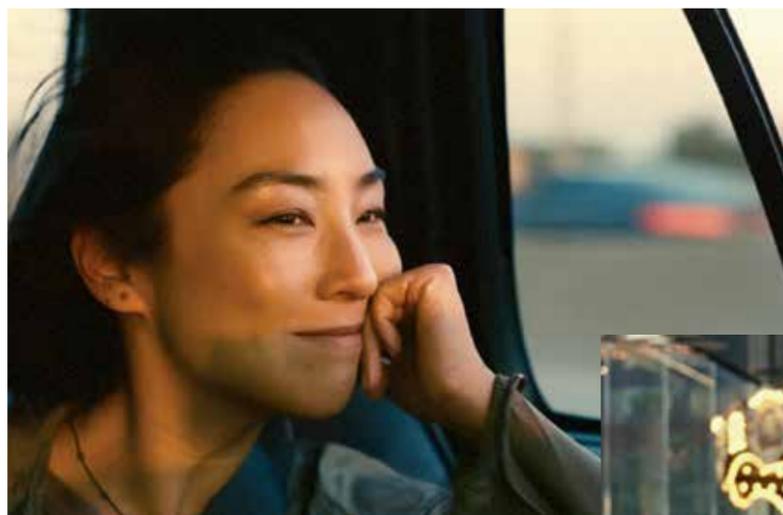
Lee grew up with her two younger siblings in the shadow of the Los Angeles Hollywood sign. From the beginning, she took herself extremely seriously as an artist — even the shows she put on in the family living room came complete with professional-style programs.

"I had a lot of moxie as a kid," says Lee, who trained in dance and singing and insisted on entering every local talent show to showcase her skills. "I was the picture of a very intense child."

The daughter of South Korean immigrants, Lee had to adapt to various environments — from her immigrant community to her predominately white school. She quickly mastered how to code switch.

"Being an immigrant," Lee says, "you almost take on the qualities of a spy. You have to see what kind of environment you're in, how to exist in a room — and that is constantly changing. Being a person of color really suits being an actor. You learn how to shift, sometimes subtly but sometimes drastically. You're thinking, 'How do I become more American or more Korean?' as the situation demands. Those experiences filled in some of the holes in my training as an actor."

Lee's grandfather Yang Ki provided a different kind of training, introducing



A GRETA TIMELINE

Lee to silver screen classics. Because Ki was diagnosed with polio, he was exempt from fighting in the Korean War. So instead, he painted movie billboards at a U.S. Army camp in Busan, South Korea, where he gained an appreciation for the golden age of Hollywood. "He taught me about the Hepburns and *Gone With the Wind* — all the classics," says Lee.

While she learned about films from her grandfather, she gleaned musical instruction from Mariah Carey. "I had a cassette tape of her song 'Hero,' and I would sing it until my throat bled," the actor recalls. "Music was a big part of my upbringing." Her mother was a concert pianist, and her medical practitioner father was also a musician.

After graduating from Los Angeles' Harvard-Westlake School in 2001, the audacious teen considered The Juilliard School for her formal education in music and acting. But Lee worried that environment might fail to provide a well-rounded education that would prepare her for the real world. Instead, she enrolled in Northwestern's School of Communication, venturing to the

Midwest for the first time. "I remember taking out a map and trying to find Illinois with my parents," Lee says with a laugh. "I wanted to become a person of the world. So I went to Northwestern and made friends with people from Sheboygan, Wis. — and it changed my life."

In Evanston, Lee found "a beautiful balance between college life and Chekhov." She joined the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority, dabbled in art history and got serious about miming for a minute. She dove into musical theater, joining Waa-Mu and Dolphin Show productions. She took acting classes with TV and stage actor David Downs and vocal lessons with opera singer Marie Michuda '92 CERT, a former senior lecturer of music performance studies.

"Greta had a strong, clear sense of who she was, and she brought it to all of her work," Downs, associate professor emeritus in service, says of the college-aged Lee. "She was just as at home with comedy as she was with drama. She could see the ridiculous just as powerfully as the tragic."

At the time, though, it was the latter that appealed to Lee. "I wanted to be a real stage actor, like James Earl Jones," Lee says. "I'm making myself sound unbearable, but I really was like, 'I'm gonna be Meryl Streep!'"

Those lofty aspirations would prove hard to reach, especially for an Asian American woman in the early 2000s. She recalls feeling "deeply uncomfortable" at times at Northwestern, "getting boxed out of opportunities and having to convince people to take me seriously," she says. "I felt limited."

For her breakthrough role in *The Waa-Mu Show*, Lee remembers being cast as an Asian woman with a thick accent. "I was doing the calculus in my head, like, 'This is acting, and I stand by it, but it's also questionable that this has to be my way in.'" Looking back, she wishes she had advocated more for diversity in the theater program. But "it can be hard to be a spokesperson," she says.

In her quest to become a serious actor, Lee eschewed joining *The Mee-Ow Show* when many of her friends were signing on to the student improv and

PAST LIVES 2023

The pinnacle of Lee's career thus far, *Past Lives* follows Lee as Nora, a South Korean immigrant who connects with her childhood crush, forcing her to reconsider her marriage and her identity.

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE: ZOE GROSSMAN/CPI SYNDICATION

PAST LIVES: COURTESY A24 FILMS



THE MORNING SHOW 2021–23

Lee earned a 2024 Emmy nomination for outstanding supporting actress in a drama series for her role as Stella Bak, a driven young television news executive, above, in the Apple TV+ show.



RUSSIAN DOLL 2019–22

Many fans began taking note of Lee for the first time following her role as Maxine, below, in the time-warping Netflix show.



SISTERS 2015

A small but memorable role in the Amy Poehler- and Tina Fey-led film found Lee as Hae Won, right, a nail salon technician who lets loose during a night of partying.



GIRLS 2013–14

In Seasons 2 and 3 of the HBO comedy, Lee starred as Soojin, left, a gallerist with a vocal fry, seemingly placed in the story for the sole purpose of making Allison Williams' Marnie feel bad about herself.



THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE 2007–08

Lee's debut role as Marcy Park in the touring production and Broadway run of the musical comedy put her singing, dancing and acting abilities to the test.

looking to engage for a lot of reasons," she says. "But we began a friendship that just became really undeniable. We totally fell in love." (Now married for 10 years, Armstrong and Lee have two sons and a handful of chickens at their Los Angeles-area home, where the couple moved in 2020 following years in New York City.)

Lee graduated in 2005 and headed to the Big Apple. (Armstrong followed a few years later.) Thanks to the theater department's Senior Showcase, which introduces select graduating student performers to industry professionals in New York City, Lee landed the role of overachiever Marcy Park in the touring production and Broadway run of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, a musical comedy. She moved into an apartment in Manhattan with Northwestern friends and waited tables to make ends meet.

But time passed, *Spelling Bee* closed in 2008, and those serious roles she coveted did not come.

No stranger to rejection, Lee says her years in Evanston prepared her for the harsh reality of the

entertainment industry. "I auditioned for the Northwestern cappella group Melodious Thunk my freshman year, and I was devastated when I didn't get cast," she says. "But those experiences were so helpful. If I had gone to college somewhere less challenging, I would have been immediately destroyed upon graduating and moving to New York."

So Lee adapted. She did commercials and took on every small role she could find. "I was taking every shot and wringing it dry, making the most of it," she says. "If the door is not going to open for someone like me, what can I do?"

The answer? Keep knocking.

A small role in the 2011 off-Broadway play *4000 Miles* caught the attention of writer, director and

actor Lena Dunham, who created the role of Soojin specifically for Lee in her HBO show *Girls*. Then, at a *Girls* table read, Lee bonded with Amy Schumer, leading to roles on the comedian's *Inside Amy Schumer*. Despite her best efforts, Lee was getting noticed for excelling in comedy, the genre she'd turned her back on for years.

"With comedy, you have the opportunity to really play with the character," Lee says. "It's an extremely heightened, athletic kind of performance." She learned to appreciate that flexibility, in both the comedic and supporting roles that seemed destined to define her career.

"Often the supporting roles are the most colorful," Lee explains. "That's where you get to add that dynamism." And she did just that, standing out as the headstrong tech entrepreneur turned executive Stella Bak in Seasons 2 and 3 of Apple TV+'s *The Morning Show*, making space among big hitters Jennifer Aniston and Jon Hamm and earning a 2024 Emmy nomination. In Netflix's *Russian Doll* she's Maxine, the fashionably fun friend with

THE MORNING SHOW: COURTESY APPLE TV+;
RUSSIAN DOLL: @NETFLIX/EVERETT COLLECTION

INSIDE AMY SCHUMER: @COMEDY CENTRAL/EVERETT COLLECTION;
GIRLS: PHOTO 12/ALAMY; SISTERS: K.C. BAILEY/@UNIVERSAL/EVERETT COLLECTION

drugs at the ready, whose iconic, first-season line "Sweet birthday baby!" will likely follow Lee for the rest of her career.

But even though Lee worked alongside everyone from Tina Fey to Tilda Swinton, she still longed for a leading role.

Then *Past Lives* came — and went. Lee read director Celine Song's screenplay and fell in love with the script, but Song thought Lee was too old to play Nora. (Lee was in her late 30s at the time.) A year later, Song reconsidered. The two chatted on Zoom, and Lee landed her first starring role.

Lee has said in past interviews that she doesn't know if she can return to the world of supporting characters after feeling the power of playing the lead. "I stand by my words, but I also hate what I said," Lee clarifies. "I meant I'm making a commitment to myself to try to step into the light.

"Now I know what has been available for other people. That's something I'll never take for granted again. Now I'm trying to continue with courage and keep raising my hand."

Beyond acting, Lee has been working on writing and producing projects. "I've written and sold pilot scripts," she says, "but the topics that really excite me come from perspectives that have not always been met with open arms." Thus far, the projects she has pitched, many of which center around Asian American stories, have not made it to production.

Past Lives' success, though, has proven to her that there is an audience for stories that center the Asian American experience, like the TV adaptation of Cathy Park Hong's book *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, which was announced in 2021 with Lee attached as writer, star and executive producer, yet never got off the ground. "People will say, 'That feels too niche,' but *Past Lives* completely validated for me that you can have specificity of character and story and place and still connect with a wide audience," she says.

Phil Yu '00, co-author of *RISE: A Pop History of Asian America From the Nineties to Now*, agrees that *Past Lives*, as well as Lee's newfound prominence, is proof of

changing tides within the entertainment industry. "You don't need a gimmick or hook to trick people into watching something about Asians," says Yu, better known by his online persona, Angry Asian Man. "*Past Lives* is a quiet, character-driven drama. That concept constantly gets explored throughout Hollywood; it just almost never involved people of color in a meaningful way until recently."

Still, Yu isn't surprised that Lee has had trouble pitching Asian American stories, even with the success of *Past Lives* and the Academy Award-winning *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. "Asian American projects have proved their mettle on market, critical and audience levels," he says. "But Hollywood is so risk averse, and they're just leaving money on the table."

So Lee, ever the chameleon, pushes on. She thrives in situations where she can test boundaries. That's exactly what led to her role in the latest *Tron* iteration, a Walt Disney Pictures sci-fi film scheduled for release in 2025. Lee will play Eve, a video game programmer and tech company CEO — a large leap from the quiet force of Nora in *Past Lives* or the high-stakes drama of Stella in *The Morning Show*. "I always wanted to do something more physical," Lee says of her decision to take the *Tron* role. "This is completely new for me, riding a motorcycle and running all night long. It's thrilling."

When it comes to choosing her projects nowadays, Lee insists she doesn't have an agenda. "I'm mostly led by my own curiosity," she says. That curiosity, and her ability — and desire — to adapt, is a hallmark of her career.

At the very least, it's what pushed her to leave Los Angeles for the Midwest two decades ago, a decision she commends 16-year-old Greta for getting right. "I learned how to do a keg stand, became an excellent artist, got a husband and made some lifelong friends," she says, thinking back to her Evanston days. "I think on some level, I feel annoyingly like the poster child for Northwestern at this moment."

Carolyn Twersky '18 is a staff writer at W Magazine. She lives in New York City.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM SUPERAGERS

Northwestern researchers study brains — of the living and the dead — to better understand memory, aging and the human spirit.

BY MARTIN WILSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANE COLLINS



It's a strange experience to hold a human brain in your hands.

The mass of spongy tissue — home to all our thoughts and memories — is a little smaller than a football and weighs about as much as a half-gallon of milk. Yet its worth is immeasurable.

“I don't know how to describe the feeling of holding the brain of someone you've known,” says Tamar Gefen. “It's intense. There is a sense of overwhelming respect and honor because, my God, this is their most precious donation.”

On a quest to end the scourge of neurodegenerative disease, Gefen hopes brains like the one she's holding — donated by generous and passionate research participants — will reveal the secrets to understanding memory and aging. Gefen '12 MS, '15 PhD is a clinical neuropsychologist at the Mesulam Center for Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer's Disease in Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine. She helps lead the center's SuperAging Program, which studies older individuals with exceptional memories. “We're flipping the ethos of aging on its head,” Gefen says.



SEL'S SECRETS:

- I speak two languages.
- I keep my hands busy while I'm watching TV by knitting hats for the homeless and making jewelry.
- I belong to a book club.

Sel Erder Yackley was born during an earthquake in Istanbul in December 1939. And 84 years later — wearing a colorful, feathered scarf while bustling around her Chicago apartment — she retains her flair for the dramatic.

Yackley grew up in a multilingual household: While the family spoke Turkish,

her mechanical engineer father learned German, and her mother spoke French. To keep pace, Yackley attended a special school in Ankara, Turkey's capital, to learn English.

After graduating high school, she won a scholarship to attend Arizona State University in Tempe, Ariz.

"I thought I would become a psychologist," Yackley remembers. "But the only C I got was in psychology. Everything else was A's and B's, so I decided psychology is not for me!"

She turned her attention to journalism and received another scholarship, this time to attend Northwestern

in what is now the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications.

Yackley earned her master's degree in journalism and immediately landed a broadcast wire gig with United Press International, adapting written articles to be transmitted over the radio.

After three years, she heard about a job at *The Chicago Tribune*. There was just one problem. "I always considered myself a liberal," she says. "And in my mind, *The Chicago Tribune* was way too conservative. I didn't think I would want to work there."

Despite her doubts, Yackley worked in neighborhood news for the *Tribune*, where she sat across from a "troublemaking" reporter, the late Michael Killian. Even within the "conservative" *Tribune*, Yackley too found ways to make some trouble. She remembers writing a series of articles in the 1960s about several of Chicago's south suburbs that were successfully desegregating their public schools.

"I won an award for that," Yackley says. When a parent's club in Arlington Heights, a predominantly white suburb on Chicago's northwest side, invited her to speak, "I didn't get booed, but I didn't get any applause either."

Today, Yackley credits her SuperAger status partially to her upbringing in a multilingual household and her active lifestyle. She serves on the board of the Turkish-American Women's Scholarship Fund, knits hats for people experiencing homelessness and published a memoir in 2006.

Her participation in the SuperAging Program continues her family's longtime connection with the University. "All three of my children went to Northwestern to get their bachelor's degrees. I'm very proud," Yackley beams. "Northwestern was a second home to all of us."

Today, the Mesulam Center brings together physicians, scientists, social workers and others to study the brain and all the various challenges that can come with aging — working to uncover clues that will help us understand, treat and prevent dementia.

It's a big brain place.

And Gefen is one of the most promising brains on the case. In person, she combines the focused energy of an ER doctor with the soulful intensity of a therapist. As she talks about her work, she maintains an urgent and steady gaze, even as her eyes occasionally glisten with emotion.

She sees the critical need for advances in neurological care as she works every day with individuals dealing with a wide range of dementias or cognitive decline. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia for people over 65 — an estimated 6.9 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's in 2024.

"There's no question they need help," Gefen says. "They need a cure. I need a cure. We all need to work harder and faster."

WHAT MAKES A SUPERAGER?

There's no such thing as a "typical" SuperAger. They are not a monolithic group of joggers or teetotalers or churchgoers. Some are globetrotting jokesters; some are quiet homebodies. Some eat acai; some eat Snickers. But all have cognitive abilities that defy the odds of aging.

For research purposes, a SuperAger is defined as someone who is over age 80 but has the memory capacity of someone

in their 50s or 60s and "sometimes even younger than that," says Gefen.

The study, now in its 25th year, has about 110 active participants, the majority of whom have agreed to donate their brains to the program after their death. "We have about 70 donated brains," says Gefen. "That's incredible."

Every year, Gefen and her team meet with each SuperAger to test their memory, language, executive functioning, visuospatial functioning and more. Researchers also take MRIs of each participant's brain and collect blood samples to track longitudinal changes. "We're trying to find a biomarker for successful aging," says Gefen. Some of the participants in the program have been doing this for decades.

But the way to identify a SuperAger in the first place is less high tech: Gefen typically employs paper-and-pencil tests. During these tests, researchers may read a list of 15 words several times to a participant. Then 30 minutes later, they ask the participant to repeat back those words. Gefen says that a typical ager, around 50 years old, would likely remember eight or nine words. But SuperAgers often remember 14 or 15 words, year after year. "I'm almost 40," Gefen says, laughing, "and I can't really see myself remembering that much."

Once enrolled at age 80, participants remain in the program regardless of their annual test performance or their physical fitness. "We can't predict what's going to happen, so part of this study is to evaluate the trajectories of aging," she says. "Many SuperAgers retain their cognitive stability over time."



SuperAger Yvonne Gregwor undergoes annual cognitive testing, administered by research study coordinator Elizabeth Haynes. Gregwor is shown illustrations of various objects and must recall their names as quickly as possible. Later in her five-hour visit, she will also have blood drawn.





Opposite page, top: Brain samples are stored and examined in a variety of ways — small brain samples are fixed in blocks of wax (left), entire dissected brains are stored in refrigeration units (center), and razor-thin slices are stained onto glass slides and stored in what looks like an old card catalog (right). Opposite page, bottom: Tamar Gefen looks at a brain slide. This page: Gefen, left, observes as Allegra Kawles points to an image of neurons and neuropathology while incoming doctoral student Antonia Zouridakis looks on.

Gefen says SuperAgers seem to share some other common traits. “We have shown preliminarily that SuperAgers tend to be more extroverted and less neurotic, based on personality tests,” says Gefen. “We are studying diet. I’m curious about differences in religious proclivity and ethnicity, and one of my students wants to examine their tendencies toward demonstrating grit, will power and tenacity.”

A BRIDGE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

Gefen says the SuperAging Program is arguably the most comprehensive study of successful aging. “It allows for the understanding of cognition, of biomarkers, of anatomy and of pathology at death,” she says. “A SuperAging study of this caliber is unique to Northwestern.”

One of the key differentiators of the program is the sheer length of time the researchers have been tracking their volunteer participants — in some cases for more than 20 years. Another differentiator is the center’s collection of donated brains.

Each brain is carefully tracked and dissected. The dissected brains are then stored, suspended in a fixative solution, in refrigeration units and freezers. Impossibly thin cross-sections are sliced for slides and stained, allowing researchers to see the neurons clearly. Every slide is stored for efficient retrieval in what looks like a card catalog from an old-school library.

“I’m able to study these SuperAgers during life and then study their brains after death,” Gefen says. “The bridge between meeting these individuals, getting close to many of them, and then feeling that same sense of intimacy even after they pass is, for me, not just scientific. There’s a spiritual element too.”

Gefen recalls one SuperAger in particular — memorable both because she was a Holocaust survivor and because she

once tried to set Gefen up with her grandson. “She was very happy and resilient,” Gefen remembers. “And she was funny! It’s been over 10 years, but I still think about her all the time. I still examine her brain.

“Her hippocampus was beautiful,” she continues. “The architecture was well-defined. Her neurons were plump and healthy. I remember thinking how incredible it was that such a stunning and intricate structure could hold such terrible memories — how it managed to withstand a lifetime of experience, good and bad.”

And that’s just a single brain, known in life and examined after death. That same kind of connection and potential for discovery exists in each brain within the collection — each an entire world, and collectively rich with beauty, possibility and mystery.

“There is a sense of immortality in brain donation,” Gefen says. “We will be utilizing this person’s tissue for decades to come. If there is a cure to Alzheimer’s disease, if there is a cure to neurodegeneration, it’s somewhere in those brains. So is that person gone entirely?”



She leans forward and smiles. “They’re still contributing.”

DOING RESEARCH — AND ‘ME-SEARCH’

Gefen half-jokingly worries that people might think the amount of time she spends with brains is “creepy.” But the Mesulam Center collection offers special, nearly limitless research opportunities.

Recent studies show that SuperAger brains are physically different from other brains. Gefen and her team have found that neurons in the hippocampus of a SuperAger brain are bigger and plumper than in the brains of their cognitively average peers and even in the brains of much younger individuals. Further, SuperAgers appear to have lower amounts of the protein tau in their blood compared with their cognitively average peers. Tangles of tau in the brain are characteristic of Alzheimer’s disease.

SuperAgers also have more von Economo neurons (VENs) in the anterior cingulate cortex — an area of the brain responsible for encoding memories — than some people in their 20s and 30s.

“And for reasons we’re still trying to figure out,” says Gefen, “in SuperAgers, the VENs were packed in and lined up

CAN YOU BE A SUPERAGER TOO?

When asked how to become a SuperAger, Marsel Mesulam used to quip, “You have to pick the right parents.” Tamar Gefen and her team are working to identify and better understand SuperAging, but there’s not (yet) a clear roadmap to excellent aging. “It’s not as simple as eating blueberries,” she says. “It’s not as simple as socializing. There’s always going to be an interaction between biology, genetics and other factors that contribute to resilience.” Gefen wishes she had a better answer. “But we’re not there yet. That’s the work.”

like sardines in a can — tons of them.

“Down the line, we need to understand what makes those neurons special. In SuperAgers, why are they resilient to disease? Are they enhancing efficient processing of information?

We’re working systematically to answer all those questions.”

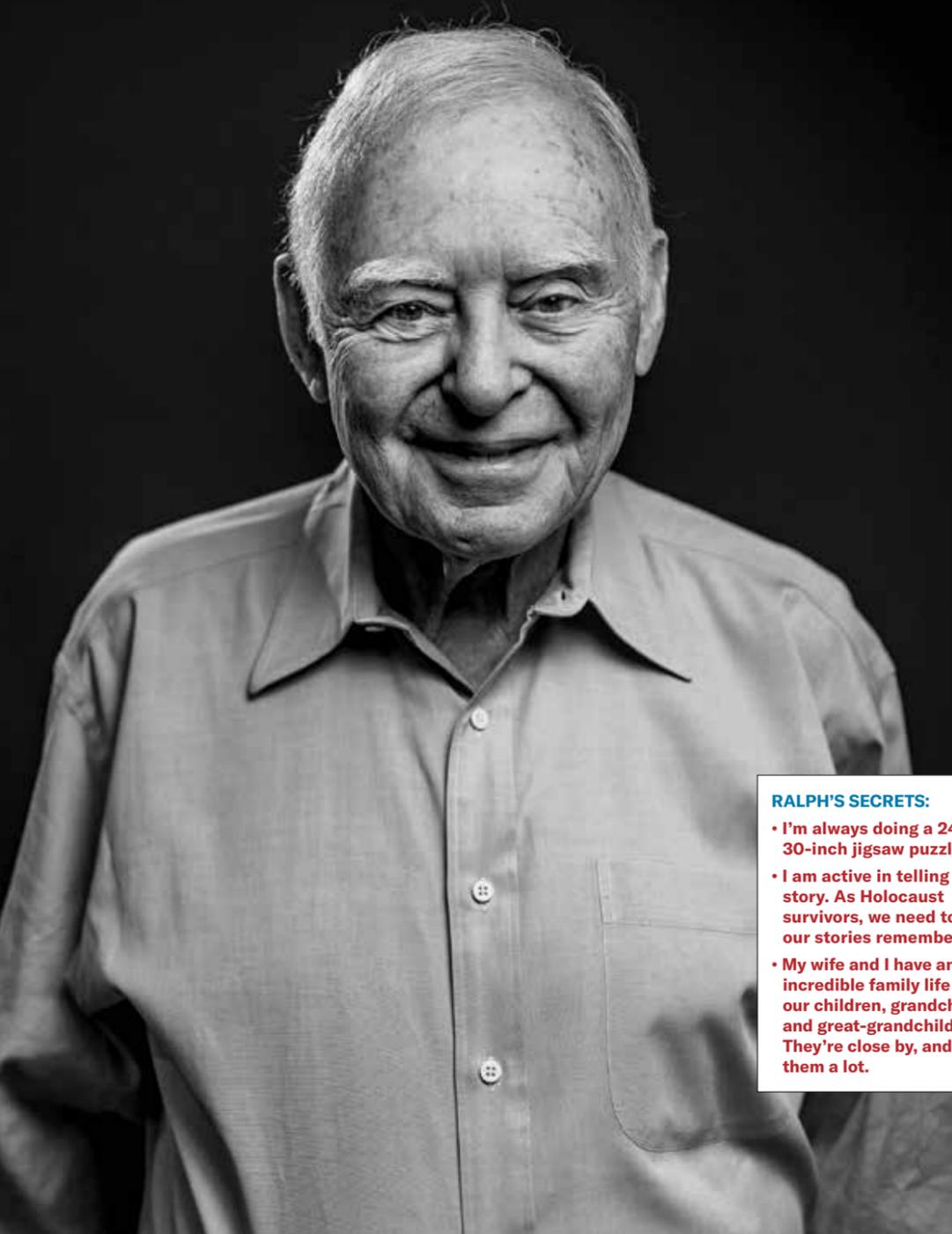
Beyond the published findings and dogged investigation, the research is also personal.

Many of the researchers and scientists at the center have family histories of neurodegenerative disease, including Gefen.

“My grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease at a relatively young age. I was young, but it still left a mark,” she says. “Sometimes in the lab we joke that it’s *me*-search instead of research. It’s only a little bit funny. But the personal connection drives a lot of our hard work and dedication. It’s not just about our participants. It’s our family. It’s everyone around us. We’re not necessarily spared.”

BRAIN TRUST

The SuperAgers program started 25 years ago as the brainchild of Marsel Mesulam, founding director of the internationally renowned Northwestern University Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer’s Disease Center, which was later renamed in his honor; Mesulam may be best known for his pioneering research in primary progressive aphasia, a form of dementia that affects language and speech.



RALPH'S SECRETS:

- I'm always doing a 24-by-30-inch jigsaw puzzle.
- I am active in telling my story. As Holocaust survivors, we need to have our stories remembered.
- My wife and I have an incredible family life with our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They're close by, and we see them a lot.

Ralph Rehbock was born in Gotha, Germany, in 1934. His earliest memories are of a normal childhood, but historical events had already shaped his future before he was even a year old. In 1935 the passage of the Nuremberg Laws stripped German Jews, including his parents, of their

citizenship. Rehbock's mother, Ruth, became convinced the family needed to flee. Fortunately, Ruth was able to obtain sponsorship from cousins she had never met who were living in Chicago. "We got a letter in the summer of 1938 saying that we should appear at the American

Embassy on the 10th of November," says Rehbock. "We got to Berlin on the 8th because we didn't want to be late for the appointment. The night of the 9th we looked out of the hotel room window and there were flames." It was Kristallnacht — the "night of broken glass" — when

German forces attacked and vandalized Jewish-owned businesses, schools, homes and synagogues. Some 30,000 German Jews were arrested that night. The Rehbocks never returned to Gotha. They sailed on the SS *Manhattan* to New York Harbor in 1938 and eventually settled in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. In 1948, in his first science class at Hyde Park High School, Rehbock met his future wife, Enid Solomon '56. Both graduated from Northwestern — Rehbock in 1957 with a degree in industrial engineering and Solomon in 1956 with a degree in speech therapy. They married in 1956 and had two children, Mark and Robert. Today they have been married for 68 years and have eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Rehbock served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War and retired a few years ago after working as a manufacturers' sales rep in the gift industry. Rehbock says he is happy to be a part of the SuperAging Program. "We, as Holocaust survivors, need to have our stories remembered," says Rehbock, who shares the story of his narrow escape from the Nazis with students who visit the Illinois Holocaust Museum.

"When I speak, I ask everyone in the class to go home, get their parents or grandparents together, get out their recording instrument and ask them questions about their lives," Rehbock continues. "We SuperAgers go to funerals all too often, and grandparents are gone, and there's a hole in the background. "That's why storytelling is so important. Life stories should not be lost and forgotten."

In January 2023 Mesulam stepped down, turning the reins over to Robert Vassar, the Davee Professor of Alzheimer Research in Feinberg. A molecular geneticist by training, Vassar is another scientist fueled by personal passion: Experiencing his mother's Alzheimer's diagnosis in 1983 set him on his current research path.

Vassar believes that multidisciplinary collaboration — a hallmark of the center since its inception — is the "secret sauce." "Mesulam's idea was to bring researchers, graduate students and staff investigating all aspects of aging and dementia together under one roof," says Vassar, "to study everything from the gene and the molecule all the way up to the person and society."

The Mesulam Center convenes monthly "clinical-pathological correlation meetings," which bring together the entire team to connect patients' symptoms to their neuropathology — that is, to understand what is actually happening inside each patient's brain. "You can see it all pulled together," Vassar says.

Other big thinkers around the center agree with and echo the center's motto — "from cells to social work." Allegra Kawles '20 came to work at the center first as a volunteer research assistant after her junior year as a neurobiology major in Northwestern's Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and now as a second-year doctoral student in Feinberg.

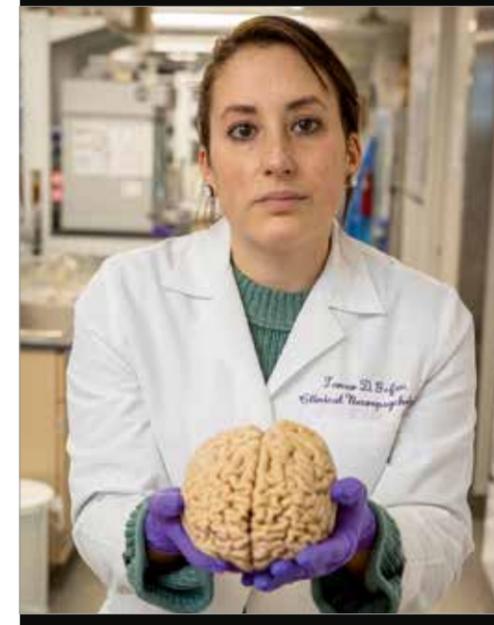
"You have so many eyes on SuperAger research participants at every stage," Kawles says. "The social workers and the research assistants know them. The neurologists and psychologists know them. And then when it comes to an autopsy, the neuropathologist and the research staff know them in another way. There's just so much care being put into each person."

Molly Mather believes this approach makes an enormous difference. Mather is a clinical co-lead of the program and a clinical neuropsychologist who treats patients with issues related to thinking, such as memory or language problems. She says clinicians who work with people experiencing cognitive decline and dementia often take a "best guess" approach to diagnosis, but her position allows for better insights.

"Working at the Mesulam Center — with a brain bank, doing brain research — has allowed me to grasp nuances of brain aging with a depth that would not be possible otherwise," Mather says. "It can often take years for new findings about the brain to trickle down to clinical practice. This type of multidisciplinary

"My job entails working with life and death. It's a study of aging, time, humanity."

— TAMAR GEFEN



research center shortens the path from discovery to impact."

THINK OF THE FUTURE

Gefen and Vassar are excited about their progress and the future of their work.

"We're finally, as a field, making progress with treatments for Alzheimer's," Vassar says. "The first disease-modifying therapies for Alzheimer's disease have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. ... We're part of a clinical trial that is using these drugs as a prevention strategy. It's a long trial ... but it's really exciting."

"We still have to think of other therapies that attack different aspects of the disease. ... But someday we'll have a toolkit with a number of different therapies to individually treat people on a personalized level."

For her part, Gefen wants to make progress toward scientific and clinical breakthroughs. But she also wants to challenge every brain — even young and healthy ones — to think differently about aging.

"I want to break the assumption that old age is synonymous with intellectual decline. I want people to understand that aging can be good," she says, sitting in her downtown Chicago office.

"And I want people to understand the dedication of our donor participants to brain science, to trying to solve Alzheimer's disease, so much so that they are willing to hand over their brains so that we at Northwestern can make a discovery."

Above her desk there's an intricately painted wooden sign in Hebrew.

"That sign was made for me by a SuperAger," Gefen explains. "He's an artist, and he asked me for my favorite quote. The quote [from Psalms] says, 'Do not forsake me in my old age.' It can mean exactly what it says: 'In my old age, don't cast me away, take care of me.' The second, more hidden meaning can be a person speaking to their own mind: 'Don't forsake me in my old age.'"

It reminds her that her work is critical — and intimate. "My job entails working with life and death," she says. "It's a study of aging, time, humanity. And I'm hopeful. I have a family history of Alzheimer's disease. Understandably, I'm nervous. My family is nervous. But SuperAgers offer hope that there's a path."

Martin Wilson '10 MS is director of creative production in Northwestern's Office of Global Marketing and Communications. Yes, he held a brain while reporting this story.

The 2024 Northwestern Alumni Medalists will receive the Northwestern Alumni Association's most prestigious award for exceptional achievement in their careers and service to Northwestern during Homecoming and Reunion Weekend.

BY DANIEL P. SMITH

ALUMNI WHO LEAD



ENGINEERING SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

**Willard "Will" S. Evans Jr.
'77, '81 MBA**

When Will Evans arrived at Northwestern in fall 1973, he entered unfamiliar territory.

A first-generation college student from Chicago, Evans had never set foot on the Evanston campus and soon began to experience the University's rigorous academics.

"I had no road map," Evans says of his 18-year-old self. "I began traveling down this road of going to college, and Northwestern has helped me year after year."

The University put him on the path to success, providing direction and spurring a decorated career in business. He had a 40-year career with Peoples Gas and its sister company, North Shore Gas, including a six-year run as president of both natural gas utilities.

learned at the McCormick School of Engineering with the business acumen he acquired from his studies at Kellogg to ascend the company's ranks. He became president of Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas in 2008 and steered the monumental effort to modernize Illinois' natural gas infrastructure with the passage of the Natural Gas Consumer, Safety and Reliability Act in 2013.

Over the past decade, Evans has continued to lead, serving on corporate, civic and nonprofit boards for organizations such as Chicago Commons, which provides educational opportunities for adults, supports early childhood education and cares for senior citizens. He also completed a three-

year stint as chairman and CEO of the Illinois Tollway.

Along the way, Evans has kept close ties with his alma mater. He has co-chaired multiple Reunion committees, has given talks on campus and served as president of the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association (NUBAA) from 2018 to 2020.

Now Evans is focused on endowing the curator for the Black experience, a position at Northwestern University Libraries currently held by Charla Wilson, to preserve the stories of Northwestern's Black alumni.

"There are Northwestern Black alumni who have had such a profound effect on our society, and University Archives can be a place where those stories can be kept and secured and protected for all of time," Evans says.

"My time is my volunteerism, and my giving is my treasure," he notes. "It's the chance to connect to this family of friends but also to give back to this University that has given me so many gifts."

Evans decided to major in electrical engineering at Northwestern to capitalize on his aptitude for working with electronics. Early on, though, he lacked the requisite scholarly focus. Evans recalls a professor calling out his half-hearted effort, which pushed him to work harder.

"I had everything I needed in me to succeed," he says. Evans rededicated himself to his studies, often retreating to a cozy spot on the second floor of the Black House on Sheridan Road for solitude. He found encouraging mentors such as Milton Wiggins, associate dean of African American Student Affairs, and Evans' confidence soared as he took on leadership roles within campus groups, including For Members Only and the National Society of Black Engineers.

Upon graduation he entered the Kellogg School of Management's MBA evening program and began his career at Peoples Gas, where he had interned as an undergraduate.

At Peoples Gas, Evans combined the fundamentals of problem-solving that he

DRIVING INDUSTRY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Renetta Walker McCann '78, '12 MS

Renetta McCann divides her four-decade career in advertising into three distinct stages.

First came learning her craft in the media department at Leo Burnett, the renowned U.S. advertising agency, beginning in 1978. There McCann developed her skills as a daily practitioner in media planning and buying.

Later McCann emerged as an industry leader, including a nearly three-year run as CEO of Starcom MediaVest Group, a Leo Burnett spinoff. In 2006 *Forbes* called McCann one of the world's most powerful women, a nod to her role in driving industry change and Starcom's growth.

Today McCann enjoys her career's third phase: a strategist who operates

at the intersection of organizations and people as the chief inclusion experience officer for Publicis Groupe, one of the world's premier advertising firms.

"There's something magical about advertising, just being steeped in an atmosphere of creativity," she says.

Notably, advertising wasn't McCann's original plan.

The Chicagoan arrived at Northwestern as a political science major with visions of a legal career. Along the way she became fascinated by the art of persuasion, inspired by professors such as David Zarefsky '71. She shifted her professional sights to public relations and her academic home to the School of Communication. After attending a campus presentation by Leo Burnett staffers, she became hooked on advertising.

"Some people will say, 'I always wanted to be in advertising,'" McCann says. "I don't have that. What I have is a deep interest in persuasion."

In advertising, McCann found her path to influence. She crafted innovative

strategies to stretch the marketing budgets of mid-tier clients, propelled the practice of business-to-business advertising and contributed to the industry's rapid transformation by advocating for greater diversity in its ranks and championing different media vehicles to connect with the public.

In 2009 McCann paused her ascendant rise and returned to Northwestern to earn a master's degree in learning and organizational change from the School of Education and Social Policy (SESP).

"I wanted to know more about the demands around how to lead and what it means to drive organizational change in a changing firm and industry," she says.

McCann's graduate school experience underscored what she considers a paramount leadership skill: the ability to ask the right questions.

"Not a day goes by that I don't try to learn something new," says McCann, who in 2023 was inducted into the American Advertising Federation's

Advertising Hall of Fame, the industry's highest honor. "I give a lot of credit to Northwestern for reinvigorating that love of learning."

McCann's devotion to Northwestern shines in various ways, including as a member of the Northwestern Alumni Association's Board of Directors from 2018 to 2020. She is an adjunct lecturer in SESP's learning and organizational change master's degree program, co-teaching courses on organizational design as well as diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

"I love being associated with a learning community," McCann says of Northwestern. "Learning is a superpower."



ACCELERATING GLOBAL FINANCIAL GROWTH

William "Bill" Osborn '69, '73 MBA, '18 H

Bill Osborn understands firsthand the power of Northwestern.

After attending a military school for young men and moving to Evanston from rural Culver, Ind., where he grew up playing basketball and working on a farm, Osborn discovered new perspectives and social dynamics. His worldview expanded as he studied history and comparative politics as a political science major. His writing skills improved. And amid the uncertainties of the Vietnam War and the military draft, he developed life-enriching connections with his classmates.

"Making friends and growing as a person was very important to me," recalls Osborn, the son of former Northwestern basketball player Robert Osborn '41 and Dorothy Anderson Osborn '41. "Sometimes I wish I could be a student all over again."

With gratitude and a willingness to serve, Osborn has worked to ensure his alma mater's vitality for nearly 30 years as a member and chair of the University's Board of Trustees and a devoted supporter of Northwestern's evolution.

"There's always room for improvement ... and the way the world works in competitive terms, if you don't get better, others will, and you'll suffer," he says.

Osborn knows that from his own life. After serving as an airborne U.S. Army Ranger, Osborn joined Chicago-based Northern Trust in 1970. Bolstered by an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management, he ascended to leadership positions in the regional bank's personal financial services and commercial banking business units. In 1993 he was named president and chief operating officer. Two years later he became chairman and CEO, steering advancements in asset servicing and asset management and pushing Northern Trust to become a global financial powerhouse.

In 1996 Osborn brought his business acumen and leadership skills to

Northwestern's Board of Trustees. "I was ready to give back," he says.

Osborn played a pivotal role in numerous transformative changes at the University, including the recruitment of Morton Schapiro '23 H as Northwestern's 16th president and chairing the Board during **We Will. The Campaign for Northwestern**. The fundraising initiative raised over \$6 billion, with a far-reaching impact, including significantly increasing financial aid for undergraduate students, attracting and retaining top faculty through the creation of endowed professorships, advancing and expanding the research enterprise, and supporting the construction of new facilities.

Gifts from Osborn and his wife, Cathy

McCurdy Osborn '72, have propelled advancements at Kellogg, the Feinberg School of Medicine, the Bienen School of Music, Northwestern Athletics and many more schools and programs.

After Osborn stepped down as Northwestern Board chair in 2017, trustees established the Bill and Cathy Osborn Professorships to honor the couple's commitment to the University. The endowed positions focus on areas the Osborns want to emphasize: artificial intelligence and diversity and inclusion.

Now a life trustee, Osborn continues to trumpet Northwestern's mission and merits, calling it a special place that champions interdisciplinary work, ambitious thinking, creative problem-solving and personal growth.

"Northwestern changes people's lives," he says. "I am involved on the Board and with different parts of Northwestern because I want to make the University better."

Visit alumni.northwestern.edu/medal to learn more about the Alumni Medalists.

Mark Your Calendar!
CATSGiveBack
is Tuesday,
December 3.



CATSGiveBack is Northwestern's celebration of GivingTuesday, a global day of philanthropy following the Thanksgiving holiday.

Last year, thousands of donors came together to support more than 420 different areas across the University. This GivingTuesday, celebrate giving back and make an impact on Northwestern.

Learn more at giving.northwestern.edu/CATSGiveBack.



Alumni

“It is my purpose to uphold the rich legacy of artistic excellence that defines this orchestra.”

MAESTRO!

In April, Roderick Cox '11 MMus was appointed music director of the Opéra Orchestre National de Montpellier Occitanie. At 37, he is the youngest permanent director in the orchestra's history. Cox was photographed — conductor's baton at the ready — at the Opéra Comédie, an opera house in Montpellier, France. He starts his new role this September. Read his class note on page 56.

Creation



TIKTOK TUNES

Five Questions with Stella Cole '21

Fresh off a 10-show European tour, a “throwback” singer shares the story of her viral rise and how Northwestern helped her find her voice.

1

How would you describe your musical style?

My sound is inspired by pop and jazz singers of the '40s and '50s. When I was younger, I always felt like the odd one out because I was listening to Judy Garland records and Barbra Streisand cast recordings.

But in college I went through a phase of trying to fit into this box of modern musical theater singing, whatever that means. And it was not working for me. It didn't feel authentic.

2

How did you find your voice again? During my sophomore year, I took a class with Stephen Schellhardt [a former music theater lecturer] on the Great American Songbook. I'm not sure I'd be here if not for that class.

Singing made me quite anxious at that point, but on one of the first days of class, I had to sing a song. He assigned me “Happy Days Are Here Again,” the iconic Barbra Streisand song. I was so nervous — probably close to hyperventilating. He had me turn and sing to a wall so I couldn't see my classmates, and he said, “Just ignore everything. Ignore how you sound. Just sing. Tell the story of the song.” That was a life-changing piece of advice.

Afterward he and my classmates were like, “Wow, you can sing!” I think I sang for the first time with my full chest. That helped me break out of my insecurities about singing.

When COVID-19 happened during my junior year, I moved home and was watching all my old comfort movies to fill my time: *The Sound of Music* and *Singin' in the Rain*, *Mary Poppins* and *Meet Me in St. Louis*. I was telling my dad how much I missed singing, and he said, “You should start posting some singing videos on YouTube.” I said no because my friends might see them, and it'd be embarrassing. ... But there was this new app called TikTok. ...

STELLA COLE: IVANKA CORRAY

I wasn't getting into any of the musicals, and I thought, “Maybe I'm not good at this.” So I quit singing for a while at Northwestern.

3

You went viral on TikTok. What happened next?

I moved to New York City after I graduated. I was trying to do the theater thing and had my “survival job,” walking dogs. I wondered if I could make more money singing, so I emailed restaurants and hotels. My first gig was this restaurant called Giovanni's Brooklyn Eats. I wasn't really making much money at first, but I was getting paid to sing, and that was so, so exciting!

4

What's been surprising about your career so far?

What surprised me is how many hundreds of people have come up to me after my shows and said that they were brought to tears by my music or that watching my videos has been a comfort during a difficult period in their life. I've seen the way that music, and specifically this music, can touch people's souls. As an artist, that's the goal.

5

What can fans expect from your debut album?

Every song on the album feels like it was written about my life. They're all standards, but they feel so personal. For people who have only seen 30-second videos of me on the internet, I'm really excited for them to get to know me as a singer in a deeper way.

Read more at alummag.nu/Cole.

GILBERT: JESSICA FITZGERALD



SUGAR SKULLS FOR DEPARTED SOULS

Genesis Garcia '18, '19 MS makes decorative sugar skulls (above) in preparation for Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Traditionally celebrated Nov. 1–2, the holiday is widely observed by people of Latin American heritage to commemorate loved ones who have died. Garcia, who is Mexican, Guatemalan and American, recalls her grandparents preparing for the celebration. “They were always the makers for this holiday,” says Garcia, whose grandparents are now deceased. “But I'm the first in my family to actually make the sugar skulls from scratch.” Garcia hosts pop-up skull-decorating workshops across Chicago and sells DIY kits nationwide. See more of her creations at alummag.nu/Garcia.

PUPPY LOVE

For the Love of Dogs

A week after Gail Bartholomew Gilbert '81, '18 MFA brought home Scout, a healthy Labrador retriever puppy, in 2012, he suddenly lost his ability to walk. She brought him back to the breeder, Cindy Nauer, and discovered that several puppies from the litter had developed varying degrees of paralysis. Several vets advised euthanizing the puppies, but Gilbert and Nauer refused. Instead, they developed a physical therapy regimen for the puppies and refined their diets. All four puppies they worked with eventually regained the ability to walk.

Gilbert, a filmmaker and editor, filmed the puppies' rehabilitation journey. Years later, she took a documentary course as part of her MFA in screenwriting. When

she was tasked with creating an eight-minute film for the course, she knew she had the perfect story to tell. That class project eventually became *Puppy Love*, a 2023 documentary that is available for streaming on Apple TV and elsewhere.

Read more at alummag.nu/Gilbert.



Puppy Love director Gail Gilbert and Scout



The Arc Sport, a 23-foot, high-performance EV boat designed for wake sports

WAVE OF THE FUTURE

Electric Boats Hit the Water

Arc founders Ryan Cook and Mitch Lee aspire to electrify everything that floats.

Nothing beats a day on the water.

But pleasure boating is not all idyllic. Gas-powered boats are noisy and spew noxious fumes. Fuel at the marina is not cheap. And boats are notoriously expensive to operate and maintain.

Enter electric boat-maker Arc.

“Electric boating makes a ton of sense — maybe even more than electric automotives,” says Ryan Cook ’12, who co-founded Arc with Mitch Lee ’11 in 2021. With a team of SpaceX, Rivian and Tesla veterans and backing from high-profile investors, the Los Angeles-based company unveiled the Arc Sport, a high-performance EV boat designed for wake sports, in spring 2024.

Cook and Lee met at Northwestern, where they both studied mechanical engineering. Upon graduating, they worked together at Boeing. Then Cook became a lead engineer at SpaceX and Lee founded a software startup.

“We were both thinking about what we wanted to do next,” says Lee. With a

mutual interest in hardware innovation and environmental impact, they decided to launch an all-electric boat.

Cook says the University gave the Arc founders the complementary skills that make innovation successful. “Mitch and I work well together because we contrast each other,” Cook says. “If I have a proposal, Mitch will take the other side of that argument, whether he agrees with it or not, just so we can debate it.”

Lee says the McCormick School of Engineering’s Design Thinking and Communication (DTC) program was formative for him. The program tasks first-year students with solving real design problems submitted by nonprofits, entrepreneurs and other clients. “DTC helped solidify my love for the business aspect of engineering,” he says. “That exposure inspired the brainstorming that Ryan and I were doing and the openness to founding our own company.”

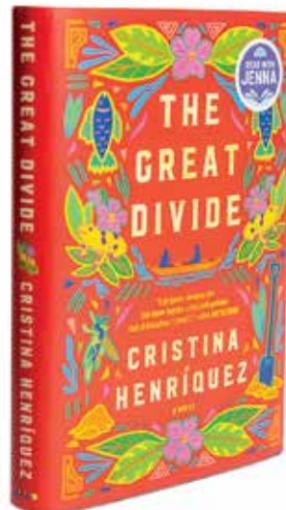
Read more at alummag.nu/ArcBoats.

HISTORICAL FICTION

The Great Divide by Cristina Henríquez

Growing up, Cristina Henríquez ’99 and her family regularly visited Panama, her father’s homeland. Those visits often included a trip to the Panama Canal. “We would sit in the blazing sun,” she says, “and watch ships achingly, slowly inch their way through the locks.” But as she grew older, she wondered about its history. Henríquez spent years researching the canal, gathering insights that informed her latest novel, *The Great Divide*. Set in 1907, at the height of the canal’s construction, the book begins when 16-year-old Ada Bunting arrives in Panama from Barbados looking for work. When she sees a young Panamanian named Omar collapse, she rushes to his aid. John Oswald, an American working to eradicate malaria in Panama, witnesses her assistance and offers Ada a job. The novel follows Ada, Omar and John as the canal’s construction shapes their lives.

Read more at alummag.nu/GreatDivide.



THE GREAT DIVIDE: SHANE COLLINS



Annah Abetti Korpi, left, and her son, Isidoro

LET’S ALL PLAY

Recess for Everyone

Alum is on a mission to make school playgrounds inclusive for all children.

Each day Annah Abetti Korpi ’03 picked up her son, Isidoro, from school in Albany, Ohio, she bristled at the sight of the playground. Steps leading up to slides, mulch-covered ground and a single

wheelchair entry ramp meant there were few options for her son to play. He could only use a single swing, adapted to support a child’s back.

Isidoro was born with cerebral palsy and epilepsy.

Now 7 years old, he is nonverbal and unable to climb up steps. He cannot easily maneuver his wheelchair over the playground’s mulch, limiting his interactions with other children at Alexander Elementary School.

“If there were no books in the library for a kid or no seat for a child in a cafeteria, we would not be OK with that,” Korpi says. “But for some reason, on a playground, people are OK with there being nothing for children with disabilities to do. ... And I’m not sure why.”

So Korpi took action. She partnered with the mom of another student with disabilities and began a fundraising campaign to renovate Alexander Elementary’s playground.

Construction began in June 2024 with the addition of rubber surfacing and ramps to a large portion of the playground

equipment. But beyond making equipment accessible, Korpi wants to ensure that play is inclusive. Now she is raising funds for wheelchair-friendly spinners, sensory activity panels that encourage cognitive development, musical chimes and more.

“The next step,” Korpi says, “is asking, ‘How can we make this possible for other schools? How can we create funding and enforce national guidelines for accessibility?’”

Read more at alummag.nu/Korpi.



A see-saw with high back seats and a center saucer accommodates kids of all abilities.

INTERACTIVE THEATER

Dot’s Home Live

A video game plays out onstage.

This spring, Christina Rosales ’11 brought an unusual production to Northwestern’s Wirtz Center Chicago: a stage adaptation of a video game.

Dot’s Home Live is a play based on the 2021 video game *Dot’s Home*, which Rosales co-created to raise awareness about housing injustice. In the game, you play as Dot Hawkins, a young Black woman in Detroit who travels back in time to see how racist housing policies have affected her family over generations. Dot’s family members face difficult choices: For example, stay put in a crumbling apartment complex or leave



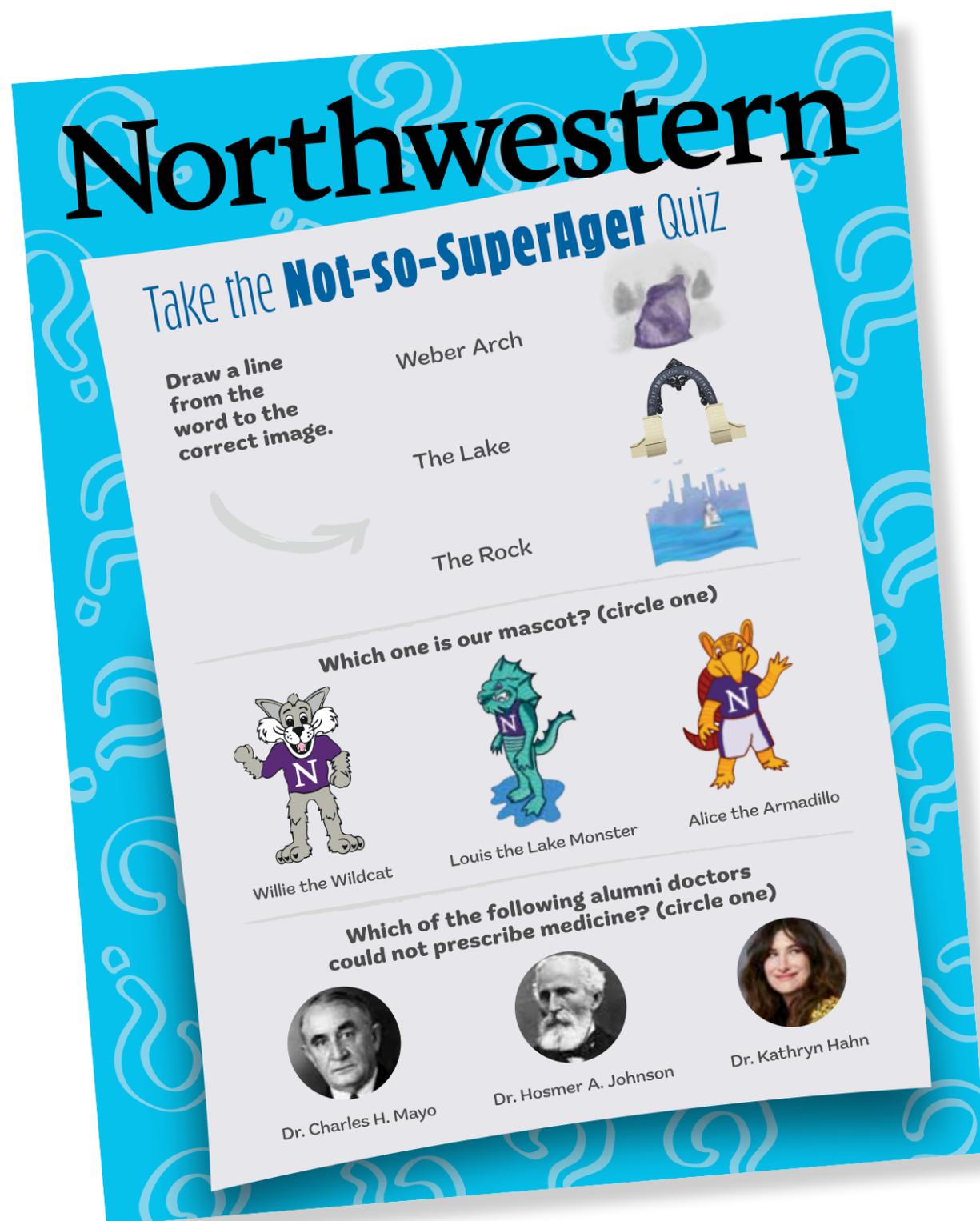
Rosales partnered with Detroit-based theater company *A Host of People* to cast the roles of Dot (played by Morgan Hutson, right) and Mr. Murphy (played by Jackson Meade, left) in this Wirtz Center Chicago production of *Dot’s Home Live*.

a beloved community behind in search of better housing? As *Dot*, you must help her family choose — and then see how those decisions affect their community.

“I wanted to bring *Dot’s* story into a space where people could grapple with housing justice issues together,” says Rosales, who is housing and land justice director at the nonprofit PowerSwitch Action. “So I worked with a team to adapt the game script for the stage.

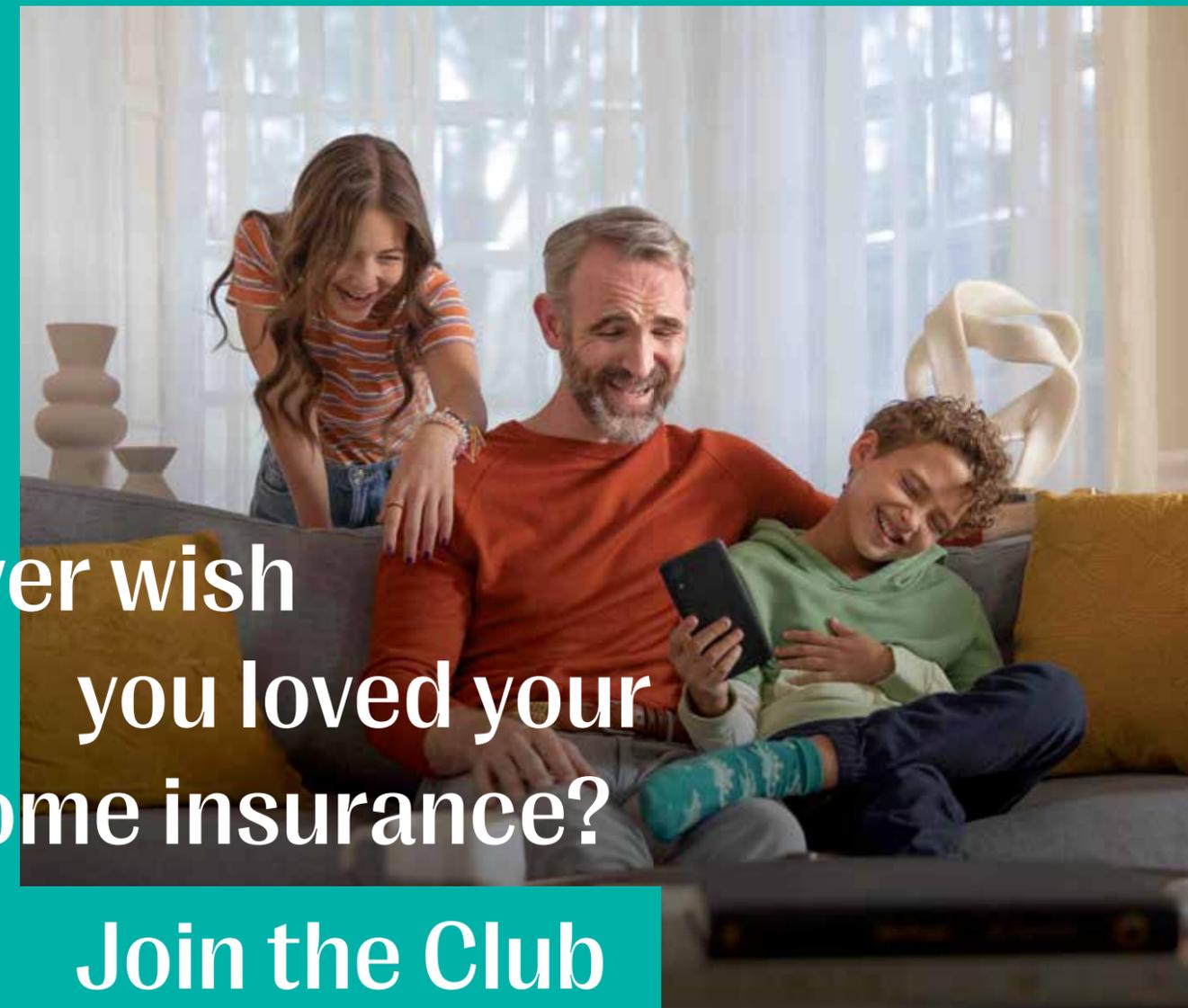
“We made a new character called 4D ... to help the audience make decisions collectively,” says Rosales. As the name suggests, 4D breaks the fourth wall by “pausing” the action onstage and asking the audience what *Dot* should do. The audience’s decisions affect how the show progresses — and how it ends. *Dot’s Home Live* premiered in Detroit in 2023 and traveled to Nashville, Tenn., this summer.

Read more at alummag.nu/Rosales.



To learn about the actual quiz used to evaluate SuperAgers in Northwestern's efforts to combat neurodegenerative disease, see page 26. And for more on the moving Commencement speech by Kathryn Hahn '95, '24 H, recipient of an honorary doctor of arts degree, see page 12.

LESLIE-ANNE MOCK



Ever wish
you loved your
home insurance?

Join the Club



Visit purein.com/northwestern to request a quote.

high value home | auto | watercraft | jewelry & art | umbrella | flood | cyber & fraud

PURE Insurance is the marketing name used to refer to Privilege Underwriters Reciprocal Exchange (PURE), a Florida domiciled reciprocal insurer. PURE Risk Management, LLC (PRM), a for-profit entity serves as PURE's attorney-in-fact for a fee. PRM is a subsidiary of Privilege Underwriters, Inc., a member of the Tokio Marine Group of Companies. This material is descriptive only. The precise coverage offered is subject to the terms and conditions of the policies issued. PURE membership requires an executed Subscriber's Agreement & Power of Attorney. Allocations to Subscriber Savings Accounts are subject to the terms of this agreement and approval by the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation. This agreement and additional information are available at pureinsurance.com. Trademarks are property of PRM and used with permission. ©2024 PRM. All Rights Reserved. 44 South Broadway, Suite 301, White Plains, New York 10601. PURE HNW Insurance Services, CA Lic. 0178980.

Northwestern

NORTHWESTERN MAGAZINE
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
BOX 1603
2020 RIDGE AVENUE
EVANSTON, IL 60208-4340

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

15,000 POUNDS

In May, six Northwestern students worked with the Ocean Plastics Recovery Project to clear Alaskan shorelines of 15,000 pounds of marine debris, such as plastic bottles, wrappers, bags, fishing nets, packaging material — even rubber duckies.

Read more on page 9.

