"What is life if not grief, love, lost love, jealousy, ambition, illness, faith, lost faith and transcendence?" p. 7

Northwestern

SPRING 2026

Lauded Laureate

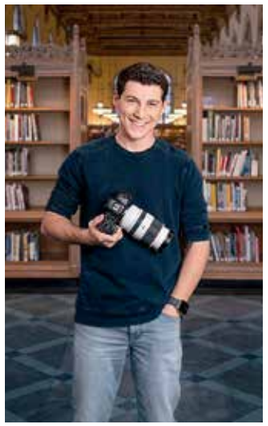
Nobel Prize winner Joel Mokyr is an economist, historian and unwavering optimist. p. 20

Sleigh Ride
In February, Yohan Eskrick-Parkinson '22, far left in foreground, competed as a brakeman in the four-man bobsleigh, representing Team Canada at the 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Olympics in Italy. However, this was not his first Olympic endeavor. Eskrick-Parkinson, a former Northwestern diver, nearly qualified for the 2024 Summer Olympics as a member of Jamaica's first synchronized diving team. Eskrick-Parkinson is a dual citizen of Jamaica and Canada.

Learn more about him at alummag.nu /Eskrick-Parkinson.

PHOTO: ANTHONY BEHAR/SIPA USA VIA AP IMAGES

Contents



26

Four Years in Photos
Senior Josh Sukoff recounts his Northwestern adventures through the lens of photography.
By Josh Sukoff

20

Our Nobel Winner
A professor of economics and history, Joel Mokyr identified the societal factors that drive economic growth. The future, he says, looks bright.
By Stephanie Kulke ’21 MS

42

Building Blocks for Fun
Julie Ritchey ’07 created a groundbreaking theatrical experience that gives children agency to tell their own stories.

40

← “My acting teacher Mary Poole … said, ‘Britt … you’re not allowed to take notes in my class anymore. I want you to just be present.’ And it was the best advice she could have given me.”

— Britt Lower ’08, Emmy-winning actor on the sci-fi thriller series Severance

SUKOFF: JOSH SUKOFF ’26; LOWER: MANNY CARABEL/GETTY IMAGES; BURTON: SHANE COLLINS

32

Comeback Kid
After being cut from the Dallas Wings, Veronica Burton ’22 rebounds as the WNBA’s Most Improved Player.

FLOWERING DOGWOOD: NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY/DIGITIZED BY INTERNET ARCHIVE; LEE: SPORTOGRAF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

12

Medicinal Plant History
An exhibit on the Chicago campus put a spotlight on early botanical illustrations.

11

Triathlete Sets a Guinness World Record
At 21 years old, senior Taeyoung Lee became the youngest person to complete an Ironman triathlon on six continents. And he did it in just 11 months.

On the cover: Joel Mokyr. © Nobel Prize Outreach. Photo by Nanaka Adachi.
Back cover: Veronica Burton ’22. Photo by Shane Collins.

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Talk Back

KIND OF A BIG DEAL

I sat next to Richard Kind '78 ["One of a Kind," winter 2026] in one of Irv Rein's communication studies classes during winter quarter 1978. Professor Rein assigned the task of interviewing a "famous person" and writing a paper about the experience.

The following week Rein read a paragraph from every paper to the class. Most interviewees were local TV, radio and newspaper celebrities, as well as a few Northwestern bigwigs. He saved Richard Kind's paper for last. After a short buildup, Rein announced Richard's interviewee: Joan Rivers. We were stunned. I looked at Richard and said, "Joan Rivers? *Really?*" He shrugged and said, "Yeah."

Rein asked Kind how he managed it, and Richard regaled us with how he had staked out the lobby of the Drake Hotel (she was appearing onstage downtown), waited for her to come in, walked up and asked her! Richard's big personality being what it was — and still is — she agreed. And naturally, his interview was a hit with the class. One of my favorite memories of Northwestern.
Margie Davis Riordan '78
St. Petersburg, Fla.

Richard and I were classmates, and I fondly recall him as a hysterical and wonderful guy. He's one of many remarkable performers who've been launched at Northwestern but also one of a kind.
Richard Eisenberg '78
Westfield, N.J.

CALM UNDER FIRE

I ran the Chicago Fire Academy when Chris Serb '95 MS, '09 MBA and his brother Steve joined the Chicago Fire Department [CFD] in the same class ["Freelancing Fire Chief Fulfills Journalism Dream," Voices, winter 2026]. So I had a front-row seat to watch Chris start to build his amazing career. The Serb brothers graduated at the top of their class, of course. Over the years I was always impressed with Chris' calm under fire. He is a true professional worthy of all he has accomplished with the CFD. I'm now retired, but I'm blessed to have more time to read Chris' books.
Steve Chikerotis
Mokena, Ill.

CRISIS SHAPES US

Bradley Akubuiro's short essay on crises ["Crisis Teaches Us Who We Really Are," Voices, winter 2026] and what they do to us — or rather what we choose to do with them — hit home, though not quite as literally as the plane crashes or gunshots that Akubuiro '11 had to deal with. But having gone through major restructuring prompted by crisis in my own life, I punched the air at every other word. Thank you for the insights — and for validating everyone's effort at gaining their own.
Dragana Djordjevic '99 LLM
New York City

AI TO THE RESCUE

The work of Nyck AI looks promising ["In the Nyck of Time," Innovation, winter 2026]. It seems like there is a real need for AI products like this in the ever-changing, fast-paced small business environment with respect to effectively managing inventory, supply chain, and operational and financial suites.
Don Overberg
Hillsboro, Ohio

REPAIRING THE WORLD

Loved the profile of Michele Lowe '79 so much ["Stage Plays and High Holy Days," Class Notes, fall 2025]. What a genius way to continue being creative and helping to repair the world, one sermon at a time. Michele's warmth and intellect shine through.
Dani Sando Shear '87
Sherman Oaks, Calif.

JEOPARDY! CHAMP

I was one of the first, if not the first, Northwestern grad to win on the revived *Jeopardy!* in 1984–85 ["Northwestern on *Jeopardy!*," Class Notes, fall 2025]. On my second show, "Journalism" was a category. I am a Medill [School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications] grad, and everyone knew I was a journalist! I chose the category saying, "At risk of embarrassing myself ... ." Alex Trebek chimed in with "'Journalism' for the journalist." I answered four of the five questions correctly (the name of a newspaper I was writing for was one). I lost the game, however. Turned out another contestant knew quite a lot more about "Flowers"!
Sal Manna '76
Burson, Calif.

Northwestern Magazine welcomes signed letters from our readers. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Email letters@northwestern.edu.

Voices

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Medical Diagnosis Requires a Human Touch

By Alexandra Sifferlin

There is perhaps no medical information more important than an accurate diagnosis. It is not only an explanation of symptoms but also the entry point to care. It's the basis for a treatment plan and the mechanism by which insurance providers grant coverage.

And yet for millions of people, getting a correct diagnosis is a long and uncertain journey. In 2023 a study led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine estimated that some 795,000 Americans become permanently disabled or die each year because dangerous diseases like infections and cancers are misdiagnosed.

It might seem natural to turn to technical fixes, such as more accurate tests or more artificial intelligence. But better diagnosis won't come from technology alone; it will also require a more human approach.

Brian Garibaldi, director of the Feinberg School of Medicine's Center for Bedside Medicine, embodies this balance. Since launching the center in 2024, he has sought to figure out the best ways to combine emerging diagnostic technologies with traditional clinical skills to improve patient outcomes.

"Over the past 30 years, maybe longer, there's been a decline in overall bedside skill," he told me. At the center's inaugural conference in November 2025, young doctors and veteran faculty participated in hands-on examination sessions with real patients to help build their physical exam skills. "People who have been in practice for decades were coming out and saying, 'That's the first time I've ever felt a spleen,' or 'That's the first time I felt a kidney,'" recalls Garibaldi, who is the Charles Horace Mayo Professor of Medicine.

When meeting a patient for the first time, Garibaldi will sometimes begin the visit in the waiting room and walk the patient to the exam room himself. He notes the strength of the patient's handshake and observes their gait and breathing as they walk. In that short period of time, he has done "part of a cardiac exam, part of a pulmonary exam, part of a neurologic exam," Garibaldi says. With these early impressions, he can begin piecing together a diagnosis even before the appointment officially begins.

A focus on these skills isn't a rejection of technology. Garibaldi embraces tools such as AI and ultrasound, seeing them as potential bridges back to the bedside rather than replacements for physical exam skills. "If in the future there's a digital stethoscope with an embedded AI algorithm that's better at diagnosing heart failure than I am, that would be amazing," he says. "But there will still be a role for empathy and curiosity, and for the power of touch, as part of the healing process."

Those qualities may improve not only diagnosis but also trust, which is increasingly fragile in American medicine. A 2024 Gallup poll found that only 44% of surveyed Americans said the quality of U.S. health care was excellent or good — the lowest rating since 2001. Garibaldi believes doctors also prefer it when more of their time is spent in bedside care rather than on the administrative tasks that increasingly dominate medical care.

"People rate their physicians not based on their actual outcomes but on how the physician makes them feel," he says. Improving diagnosis through better doctor-patient interactions isn't just practical — it can restore a measure of humanity and trust to a system that needs it.

AMIR HAMJA

↑ **Alexandra Sifferlin**

Alexandra Sifferlin '12 leads health and science coverage for The New York Times *opinion desk. She wrote* The Elusive Body: Patients, Doctors and the Diagnosis Crisis, *from which this essay is partially adapted.*

SOUND OFF

Dillo Day Rocks!

Alumni share memories from Northwestern's legendary spring concert.

Chris Rooney '96, '02 MBA of Oak Park, Ill.
POI DOG PONDERING, 1993

I didn't realize at the time how big a deal they were and how important they were to the Chicago music community. It was a gorgeous sunny day with gentle lakefront breezes, a great day to be introduced to new music. To see many of the members still rocking 30 years later is a real treat and makes the memory even more special.

Raedell Cannie Boateng '07 of Seattle
GAVIN DEGRAW, 2004

Gavin DeGraw was super memorable. I hadn't heard his music — he hadn't gotten big yet — and I just loved it, especially "I Don't Want to Be." I bumped into him in the crowd, and he was so friendly and funny and signed my poster.

Asahel Church '07 of Palmyra, Pa.
GEORGE CLINTON AND THE PARLIAMENT-FUNKADELIC, 2005

It brought a smile to my face remembering the year that George Clinton and P-Funk headlined. It was a beautiful night on the Lakefill, and the band was on fire. The unforgettable guitarist Garry "Diaper Man" Shider pranced around the stage dressed in a singular white cloth. Long past quitting time, they were still bringing the funk. Getting desperate, the stage crew turned off the stage lights. Of course, the crowd went wild, and the band continued for another 10 minutes at least!

Amanda Fasoli Archer '06 of Norwich, Vt.
BEN FOLDS, 2006

I capped off the day dancing with a new friend, Tyler Lorenzi '10. I was a senior, he was a freshman, and we probably would have never hung out if we hadn't been "Rockin' the Suburbs" together that day. We kept in touch over the years. ... He was one of those positive people who made you feel hopeful about the world. I learned that he died a few years later in a sailing accident. I'll always remember him, his joy of life and that dance we shared.

Chris Danzig '08 of Oakland, Calif.
THE DECEMBERISTS, 2009

My favorite Dillo Day shows were the ones I covered as a photographer. I still have the photos I took of N.E.R.D. — featuring Pharrell Williams before he became a superstar — and the Decemberists, one of my favorite bands since I discovered them freshman year in the dorms. It's pretty cool that we got to see these bands before they became massively successful.

CHRIS DANZIG '08

→ **Colin Meloy, lead singer of the Decemberists, jams at Dillo Day in 2009. Share your memories at alummag.nu/DilloDay.**

MY NORTHWESTERN DIRECTION

Psychology Taught Me How to Tell Real Stories

By Rita Chang-Eppig '04

Rita Chang-Eppig is an author and clinical psychologist based in the Bay Area. Her debut novel, *Deep as the Sky, Red as the Sea*, was published in 2023.

One of the best things about my Northwestern experience was being surrounded by smart, talented peers. One of the worst things about my Northwestern experience was being surrounded by smart, talented peers.

Fall 2002: At the start of my junior year, I sat down for my first class with the 14 other fiction-writing majors who'd been accepted into the creative writing program that year, feeling pretty full of myself. Despite having learned English as a second language, I'd earned a spot in this competitive major. I figured my book deal would arrive soon enough.

My fellow writing majors quickly disabused me of this notion, not through any malevolence on their part but simply through their skill. Week after week, I read their stories and marveled at how *fully formed* some of them felt as writers. Several would go on to publish books. One would go on to win a MacArthur "genius grant" and have her work short-listed for the National Book Award.

How are they so good? What are they doing that I'm not? I would turn these questions over in my mind as I tried to sleep. I knew I was missing something as a writer, but I didn't know what.

Spring 2003: I accepted that no book deal was forthcoming. One of my fundamental flaws, I realized, was that I didn't understand people very well. My characters were all thinly veiled versions of myself, and let's be honest: You can pen only so many stories about disaffected young adults before tearing your own hair out. Though the program had done a tremendous job teaching me how to write (shoutout to professors Reginald Gibbons, Sheila Donohue and Brian Bouldrey '85), it couldn't teach me *what* to write. Only life can teach you that.

> **"What is life if not grief, love, lost love, jealousy, ambition, illness, faith, lost faith and transcendence?"**

So I pivoted. I enrolled in a doctoral program in clinical psychology. After graduating, I spent the next 15 years working as a psychologist in private practice, occasionally popping out of my office to teach future therapists in my capacity as an adjunct professor.

By the time I went back to school for an MFA, I'd noticed a change. Years of talking with people about the most human of problems — and years of living through those same problems — had transformed my stories. What is life if not grief, love, lost love, jealousy, ambition, illness, faith, lost faith and transcendence? I'm not talking about singing other people's lyrics here. I'm talking about the melodies all of us come to learn just by being alive, the moments of connection that arise when you're singing your song and another person starts to hum along.

That's why I never know what to say when someone asks me, "What do you write about?" I write about the strangeness of being alive. Whether my main character is a child in rural Taiwan meeting missionaries for the first time or a futuristic cyborg losing her memories as a metaphor for dementia or a 19th-century "pirate queen" struggling to survive during a time of economic precarity, I'm interested in the stories that bind us together across time and space. Do I still write about disaffected young adults now and then? Sure, but from the vantage point of someone decades older who has learned just how much more she had yet to learn.

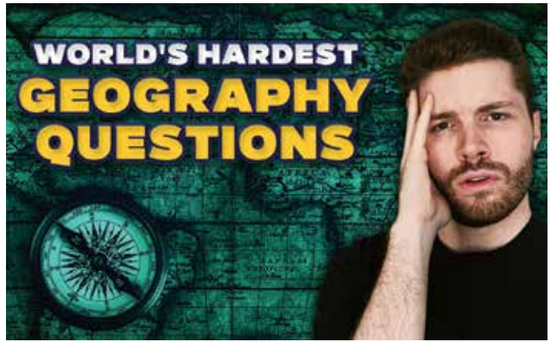
Illustration by Arthur Mount

HOW I GOT HERE

Where in the (Virtual) World Am I?

A geography and trivia whiz finds his place.

Jake Lyons '22, professional GeoGuessr player, tournament broadcaster and content creator



↑ Jake Lyons shares his geography knowledge in his YouTube videos.

I started playing the online game GeoGuessr in high school but didn't get serious about it until my junior year at Northwestern.

In GeoGuessr you're dropped into a random virtual location and have to figure out where you are based on Google Street View imagery. During the pandemic, I watched YouTube videos of people who were good at the game and thought, "I should try that." I studied economics, statistics and MMSS [mathematical methods in the social sciences] at Northwestern, but geography has always been a side interest. I was on the quiz bowl team and did a lot of competitive trivia, so GeoGuessr felt right up my alley. I started playing competitively and never looked back.

In the game, players can duel one-on-one. The goal is to guess the exact location and get closer than your opponent. You're awarded points depending on how close you get.

There's so much to study. It's not only learning the names of cities and neighborhoods, which I find fun, but there's also metadata you can learn. You can find out, for example, what color the Google Street View car was at a particular place, or what season it was the last time the car passed through a location.

I started playing in tournaments in 2021 and built a following on Twitch and YouTube. In early 2023 I reached No. 1 in the world on the competitive leaderboard. It was only for a few days, but it was fun while it lasted. Later that year I was invited to compete at GeoGuessr's first world championship in Stockholm. I represented the U.S. in both 2023 and 2024.

The live competitions can be crazy. I get nervous when there are thousands of people watching me. The best part is meeting everyone. It's a very tight-knit online community, but you don't meet anyone in person until you're at these big tournaments.

Now I do a lot of broadcasting and color commentary for GeoGuessr's major events. It's a lot less pressure. All I have to do is talk about the game.

I hope the game continues to grow. I plan to do more broadcasting work and make more YouTube videos, and I've got other ideas. I'm fortunate because I've found something I'm passionate about and I'm one of the best in the world at it, and that's rare.

HEARD ON CAMPUS

What I Really Think

These four campus speakers didn't hold back.

"There's never a day … even [when] I'm really miserable about writing and I don't want to write … that I don't go, 'I'm really f-ing lucky to be a writer.' "
Gillian Flynn '97 MS, bestselling author and Golden Globe–nominated screenwriter, at a Q&A hosted by the School of Communication in February

"I have a difficult time navigating debate with someone who does not see my humanity as equal to their own."
Stacey Abrams, former Georgia state representative, at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law's Knox Conversations in November

"When I get home after a long, hard day, do I want to listen to a podcast about the Supreme Court? No, I want to watch *Law & Order*."
Nina Totenberg, National Public Radio legal affairs correspondent, at the 36th annual Leopold Lecture in October

"Poetry lets me hurt for the things I love, and poetry lets me fight for the things I love."
Natalie Diaz, Pulitzer Prize–winning Mojave poet, at a reading hosted by the Litowitz MFA+MA Program in Creative Writing and the English department in February

→ From left, Gillian Flynn, Stacey Abrams, Nina Totenberg and Natalie Diaz

LYONS: COURTESY OF JAKE LYONS '22; TOTENBERG: ALLISON SHELLEY/NPR; DIAZ: SCOTT BAXTER PHOTOGRAPHY

News

MEDICINE

A Drug to Halt Alzheimer's Disease

Study uncovers a new Alzheimer's trigger — and a way to stop it.

Northwestern researchers have discovered that an experimental drug called NU-9 shows promise as an early intervention for Alzheimer's disease. Invented by Richard Silverman, the Patrick G. Ryan/Aon Professor of Chemistry, NU-9 is a small molecule compound that is currently being tested as a treatment for ALS, known as Lou Gehrig's disease. A new study shows that NU-9 also improves neuron health in animal models of Alzheimer's.

"In both ALS and Alzheimer's disease, cells

Illustration by Kotryna Zukauskaite

suffer from toxic protein buildup," says neurobiology professor William Klein, who worked on the study alongside Silverman and Daniel Kranz '25 PhD. "Cells have a mechanism to get rid of these proteins, but it gets damaged in degenerative diseases like ALS and Alzheimer's. NU-9 is rescuing the pathway that saves the cell," Klein says.

The team sought to evaluate the drug's effectiveness at halting the earliest signs of Alzheimer's. The scientists identified a previously unknown, highly toxic subtype of amyloid beta oligomers — toxic clusters of peptides — called ACU193+ that appear to drive some of the brain's earliest changes in Alzheimer's. The presence of those clusters "potentially acts as an instigator of early Alzheimer's pathology," says Kranz, the study's lead author.

ACU193+ oligomers bind to astrocytes — star-shaped brain cells that protect neurons and control inflammation. When that occurs, the astrocytes are pushed into a reactive and highly destructive state, releasing inflammatory molecules, damaging synapses and accelerating neurodegeneration. Stopping this process might be one of the most powerful ways to slow Alzheimer's progression, the researchers say.

In the study, the researchers administered NU-9 to a presymptomatic mouse model of Alzheimer's and found that the compound significantly decreased the number of ACU193+ oligomers bound to astrocytes. As a result, the drug mitigated the inflammatory reaction of astrocytes, dramatically reducing neurological damage. They also saw a decrease in an abnormal form of TDP-43, a protein that is a hallmark of neurodegenerative diseases.

The findings point to a potential new strategy for treating Alzheimer's before cognitive decline and other debilitating symptoms begin.

Silverman compared the strategy to early intervention approaches for heart disease.

"People are used to monitoring their cholesterol," Silverman says. "If you have high cholesterol, it doesn't mean that you will have a heart attack soon. But it's time to take drugs to lower your cholesterol to prevent [a heart attack] down the road. NU-9 could play a similar role. If someone has a biomarker signaling Alzheimer's, they could start taking NU-9 before symptoms appear."

In 2024 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved human clinical trials using NU-9 for the treatment of ALS. NU-9 has not yet received clearance for clinical trials addressing Alzheimer's.

The team is currently testing NU-9 in additional animal models of Alzheimer's, including a model of late-onset disease that better reflects typical human aging. The researchers also plan to examine how early intervention with NU-9 affects memory and neuron health over time.

"There are a couple early diagnostic blood tests for Alzheimer's disease in development," Klein adds. "Better early diagnostics — combined with a drug that could stop the disease in its tracks — is the goal."

Editor's note: *Silverman is founder of, and has financial interests in, Akava Therapeutics, a startup company that is commercializing NU-9 (now called AKV9). Klein is co-founder of, and has financial interests in, Acumen Pharmaceuticals, which developed a therapeutic monoclonal antibody currently in clinical trials that targets the subtype of amyloid beta oligomers identified in this study. The University has financial interests (equities, royalties) in both companies.*

A compound being tested as an ALS treatment also improves neuron health in animal models of Alzheimer's disease.

A NEW WORLD RECORD

Swim, Bike, Run, Repeat

On Sept. 28, 2025, 21-year-old Taeyoung Lee finished his sixth Ironman triathlon, becoming the youngest person to complete an Ironman on six continents — a Guinness World Record. And the senior computer science student did it in just 11 months. "Triathlon is really like a bug," he says. "Once it bites you, you just keep going all in."

1) A COLD START
Tempe, Ariz.
Nov. 17, 2024

This was Taeyoung Lee's first full Ironman — a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile run. "It was a very cold swim," he recalls, "contrary to what you'd think for Arizona. … My body would not stop shivering." Before moving from the swim to the bike, Lee had to wait 26 minutes (more than double his usual transition time) to allow his body to warm up.

2) THE MISSING GEAR
Taupō, New Zealand
March 1, 2025

Lee's biggest setback came right before the second race. His box of gear — including his bike, wetsuit, running shoes and all his other Ironman essentials — didn't arrive in New Zealand in time. He spent the day before the race — usually a rest day for him — rushing to find affordable replacements. "I was really fortunate that the people of New Zealand are super kind," he says. He pieced together a new kit of rented or used items and finished the race.

3) WHAT TIME IS IT? GO TIME!
Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa
March 30, 2025

The time between his second and third Ironmans was both the quickest turnaround between races — just 29 days apart — and an 11-hour time difference between locations. While this combination led to Lee's slowest time overall, he remembers feeling a lot of positive energy in South Africa from volunteers who cheered him on.

4) MIND OVER MATTER
Florianópolis, Brazil
June 1, 2025

Lee's enthusiasm waned leading up to the fourth race. Exhausted from his time in South Africa, "I started to feel the mental weight of the world-record chase," he says. "It started becoming a chore." But when the race in Brazil ended up being his fastest finishing time overall, it was just the morale boost he needed. "I actually really enjoyed that race."

5) CHEER SQUAD
Kalmar, Sweden
Aug. 16, 2025

For the first and only time in his Ironman quest, Lee's whole family attended his race. They met in Copenhagen, Denmark, to do some sightseeing before heading to Sweden for race day. "It was really nice that my whole family was there to support me and see what I did," he says. "That trip felt a bit like a vacation."

6) THE FINISH LINE
Gurye, South Korea
Sept. 28, 2025

Lee's final Ironman took place in his birth country. (His family moved to the U.S. from South Korea when he was 3.) Lee chose to study abroad in Seoul during fall quarter last year, meaning his last few weeks of training took place in Korea, which was quite hot and humid. He had to make some adjustments to his training before the final step toward his world-record goal. Upon completing the race, "I was a little emotional," he says. "I was like, 'Holy cow, I just did it.'"

LEE IN BRAZIL: FOCO RADICAL; LEE IN NEW ZEALAND: SPORTOGRAF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS; TICKER: LESLIE-ANNE MOCK

The Ticker

Inventions from the new Querrey Simpson Institute for Translational Engineering for Advanced Medical Systems (QSI-TEAMS)

● Professor John A. Rogers, director of QSI-TEAMS, and communication sciences and disorders professor Bonnie Martin-Harris '91 PhD are developing **wearable devices that track respiratory activities and movements in the throat**, to monitor patients with swallowing disorders.

● Dermatology department chair Amy Paller worked with Rogers to develop **the first wearable device for measuring gases emitted from — and absorbed by — the skin**, offering a new way to assess skin health. The device could help detect infection, track hydration and quantify exposure to harmful environmental chemicals.

● Rogers' team developed wearable sensors to wirelessly monitor babies in the neonatal intensive care unit. Now Carolyn Foster, assistant professor of pediatrics, is helping adapt the sensors for children with cardiopulmonary conditions, enabling **continuous, remote monitoring for pediatric patients as they transition home.**

● Senior lecturer of voice and opera Theresa Brancaccio '82, '83 MMus and Rogers are developing **the first wearable device to track vocal use,** alerting users before vocal fatigue and potential injury set in. The device could help people who sing or talk for a living. It could also help clinicians monitor treatment for patients with voice disorders.

For more on QSI-TEAMS, see page 19.

ON COURSE

Chasing Legends

Senior golfer seeks his third Big Ten individual title.

Daniel Svärd is one of only three Wildcat golfers to win two individual Big Ten Championships, joining Sidney Richardson '39 in 1937–38 and Luke Donald '01 in 2000–01.

"To be mentioned in the same category as one of the greatest of all time is an honor," Svärd says of Donald, the former No. 1 golfer in the world. "It humbles you and makes you eager to do more."

A top 5 finisher for the Wildcats at most tournaments, Svärd was the 2023 Big Ten Freshman of the Year and helped lead the men's team to the 2024 Big Ten Tournament Championship. This season he has led the Wildcats with a 70.9 stroke average, coming in at par or better in 13 of 20 rounds. Twice named Big Ten Men's Golfer of the Week, the senior reached No. 16 in the PGA Tour University rankings this spring, putting him ahead of his Big Ten rivals.

Growing up in Jarfalla, Sweden, where youth golf is less structured than in the U.S., Svärd didn't start playing competitively until high school. "Northwestern has a very developmental, long-term, player-focused program. You really get to know your coaches, and you lay out this four-year plan ... to become the best professional golfer you can be," he says.

Svärd, who is majoring in learning and organizational change, says his coaches have helped him hone the mental side of the game. "It's hard to become better at hitting the ball," Svärd says, "but you can excel in the way you approach the game, in your ability to accept a setback and move on."

Svärd hopes to finish in the top 10 of the PGA Tour University rankings and earn a spot on the Korn Ferry Tour.

← Daniel Svärd has his sights set on a second Big Ten team title in three years.

SVÄRD: CHRISTINA LEUNG/NORTHWESTERN ATHLETICS; MOUNTAIN LAUREL: NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY/DIGITIZED BY INTERNET ARCHIVE

COLLECTIONS

Galter in Bloom The Feinberg School of Medicine's Galter Health Sciences Library and Learning Center is home to artifacts related to science and health. Located on the Chicago campus, the special collections feature materials from Northwestern's former dental school and other delightfully unexpected treasures, including books of early botanical illustrations. The recent exhibit *Galter in Bloom: 500 Years of Botanical Illustration* included this mountain laurel (left) from botanist Jacob Bigelow's three-volume *American Medical Botany*. Published in 1817–21, the book marks an important moment in both medicinal plant history and the evolution of printing, as it is the first book in North America to use full-color plates.

'CAT TALES

World War II Top Gun

In fall 1941, Ira "Ike" Kepford '42 was a star halfback for the Northwestern football team. Then, just 15 days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, he joined the U.S. Navy Reserve. Kepford was assigned to Fighter Squadron 17 (known as "The Jolly Rogers") and went on to become one of the most decorated aviators of World War II.

In November 1943 he was part of Operation Cartwheel, an Allied attack on Rabaul, a Japanese military stronghold in the Solomon Islands. In 11 hours of flight time, Kepford shot down four Japanese bombers and damaged another.

At the end of his two tours, Kepford was a leading Navy ace, with 16 aerial victories. He earned several U.S. military awards, including two Navy Crosses, and received a Northwestern Alumni Association Merit Award in 1944. After the war, Kepford worked for the Liggett-Rexall drugstore chain, retiring as president of Liggett Drug Co. in 1960. He died in 1987.

Learn more at alummag.nu/Kepford.

KEPFORD: NATIONAL ARCHIVES; COSMIA: SHANE COLLINS

← Cecelia Olszewski, left, and Claire Coven

ENCORE!

Lifting Every Voice

Student opera group amplifies underrepresented stories.

Cosmia Opera Collective is breathing new life into a classical art form.

The student-run opera group focuses on promoting contemporary works by women and other underrepresented creatives. Founded by senior Cecelia Olszewski in 2024, Cosmia produces operas from the ground up, developing the music and libretto, sourcing costumes, and designing lighting and choreography — all on a shoestring budget.

"We do absolutely everything," says Olszewski, a composition major who wrote the group's first opera, *devoted*, which premiered in March 2024. "We're trying to make Cosmia as close to professional as possible to prepare students for the real opera world." *devoted* imagined the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene in purgatory — in this case, a teenage girl's bedroom.

Cosmia puts on main stage productions up to three times a year and also produces annual fundraiser concerts called "Moth Songs," which pair composers and singers to create new work. Nearly all of Cosmia's productions are written by students, with a focus on underrepresented stories.

The group's winter 2026 opera, *GREEN ROOM*, for example, is set in a World War I prison camp. Produced by 17 students and five recent alums, the show explores the role of queer spaces as sites of survival, identity formation and transformation across time.

"We all have a story to tell," says senior voice and opera major Claire Coven, a co-producer and performer with Cosmia. "And when you go to the opera, to the symphony, to the ballet, you may not see yourself onstage. It's important to promote as many voices as possible. ... It makes you a more authentic and thoughtful ... listener."

"I'm so proud of everything that we've put together," says Olszewski, who also wrote *GREEN ROOM*. "Cosmia is the most rewarding thing I've done at Northwestern. This is what I want to do forever."

Discovery

INTO THE WOODS

Fighting the Uptick in Lyme Disease

Researchers have made breakthroughs to combat one of the trickiest illnesses.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 476,000 people contract Lyme disease each year in the U.S., posing a serious threat to public health.

First discovered in Lyme, Conn., in the 1970s, Lyme disease is transmitted via a bite from an infected black-legged tick. Infections have been on the rise, as milder winters have allowed tick populations to increase across the country.

Lyme can first present as flu-like symptoms. Left untreated, however, it can lead to severe health issues, including inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, arthritis, heart palpitations, facial palsy and nerve pain.

Brandon Jutras, associate professor of microbiology-immunology at the Feinberg School of Medicine, has been studying *Borrelia burgdorferi* — the bacterium that causes Lyme disease — for over a decade.

Lyme has been uniquely difficult to track, diagnose, prevent and treat, Jutras says, in large part because *B. burgdorferi* is "a highly unusual bacterium." While most other bacteria are rod- or ball-shaped, *B. burgdorferi* are "serpent-like bacteria that are ... faster than our fastest immune cells — so they can outrun just about any cell.

"These bacteria coexist in several animals native to the U.S. and many other countries in the Northern Hemisphere," Jutras adds, noting that *B. burgdorferi* is commonly found in healthy white-footed mice. "The real issue is when they get inside of *us*. We're not the natural reservoir or host of Lyme disease. So the bacterium doesn't know what to do inside us, and conversely, our immune system doesn't know how to handle it."

"These bacteria coexist in several animals native to the U.S. ... The real issue is when they get inside of *us*."
— Brandon Jutras

The current standard of care is to administer a high dose of doxycycline, a powerful antibiotic. This treatment, however, also wipes out healthy gut bacteria. What's more, studies have shown that up to 20% of patients treated for Lyme continue to suffer from arthritis, fatigue, cognitive issues and pain, even after the bacterium is seemingly destroyed — a condition called post-acute infection syndrome (PAIS). Until recently, the exact cause of PAIS in those treated for Lyme was unknown.

In 2025 Jutras and his team made two discoveries. In one study, his team provided evidence that PAIS can occur when the immune system continues to respond to remnants of dead *B. burgdorferi* cells. That "debris," says Jutras, is peptidoglycan, a molecule found in bacterial cell walls.

"Virtually all bacteria cells have peptidoglycan," he says, and most people clear it from their systems without issue. But because of its unusual chemical and physical makeup, *B. burgdorferi*'s peptidoglycan sticks around, accumulating in the liver and in joint fluids. Jutras believes there may be an at-risk population with a genetic mutation that causes the immune system to keep reacting to the peptidoglycan as if the infection were ongoing.

Jutras says those patients may benefit from alternative treatment, such as monoclonal antibody therapy. "Monoclonal antibodies can bind to the peptidoglycan. ... So we can either mask the molecule so your immune system stops responding to it ... or we can weaponize the antibodies to destroy the molecule," he says.

In another study, Jutras' team identified an alternative antibiotic treatment with far fewer side effects than doxycycline. In mouse models, the federally approved drug piperacillin was highly effective in killing *B. burgdorferi* at a dose 100 times less than the standard dose of doxycycline.

Jutras' research also focuses on improving diagnostics. Current blood tests for Lyme disease take weeks to process, and they cannot distinguish between an active infection or previous exposure because they only look for antibodies, which may not always be detectable. This has made tracking the disease a challenge.

Jutras has an answer for that too. His lab is developing an acute diagnostic test that can identify Lyme within one to three days of infection. He has a commercial partner and hopes to see these tests available in drugstores soon.

SCIENCE-BACKED TIPS

Protect Yourself

ON THE TRAIL

- ✔ **Use insect repellent** with at least 20% DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- ✔ **Apply sunscreen first** and wait a few minutes for it to absorb; then apply insect repellent.
- ✔ **Apply insect repellent to clothing too.** Some insects can bite through tight-fitting clothes.
- ✔ **Walk on clear paths** and avoid tall grass.

AFTER THE HIKE

- ✔ **Inspect body creases,** such as under the arms, around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees and between the legs. Ticks can be as small as a poppy seed.
- ✔ **Shower within two hours** of being outdoors. Studies show it greatly reduces your risk of Lyme disease.
- ✔ **Check your pets too.**

IF YOU ARE BITTEN

- ✔ **Remove the tick with fine-tip tweezers** by gripping it as close to the skin as possible and pulling straight out with slow, even pressure. Do not squeeze the tick's body. Do not twist or pull sharply.
- ✔ **Save the tick in a sealable bag** with a damp cotton ball to keep it from drying out. Contact your local public health department to find out if your state offers free tick testing. (Many do!)

Illustration by Deena So'Oteh

SCHOLARSHIPS

New University Campaign Will Help Students Shine

Fundraising initiative focused on financial aid will support students across Northwestern.

A first-of-its-kind fundraising effort at Northwestern seeks to ensure that the most promising students can access all the University has to offer, regardless of their financial means.

The Forever Shine Campaign, announced this spring, aims to raise at least $625 million for financial aid and enrichment programs that will benefit undergraduate, graduate and professional school students across all of Northwestern's schools.

The campaign, which takes its name from a line in the University's "Alma Mater," is Northwestern's first University-wide fundraising campaign dedicated solely to supporting students.

"Scholarships have the power to change lives and are essential to the University's continued success," says Interim President and President Emeritus Henry S. Bienen '09 H. "Our students are the future leaders of society, and we must give them every opportunity to shine at Northwestern and after they graduate."

University Trustee Adam Karr '93, who himself benefited from scholarships during his time as a first-generation college student, and his wife, Tonia, will co-chair the Forever Shine Campaign. The Karrs have generously supported financial aid across the University for more than 30 years. Scholarships they established at Northwestern have benefited 77 undergraduate students and counting. A transformative new gift from the Karrs will fund student scholarships and experiences, such as study abroad and summer internships.

"Part of what makes this campaign so special is our commitment not just to access but also to success and belonging," Karr says. "We're investing in Beacon Scholars and other support programs so students can grow, thrive and fully participate in the Northwestern experience. This sets Northwestern apart, because it helps students make the most of every opportunity the University offers." (Learn more about the Beacon Scholars program in the sidebar.)

The amount of need-based financial aid Northwestern provides annually to undergraduate students has increased every year on record to meet the growing needs of admitted students. In the 2025–26 academic year, the University awarded more than $300 million in financial aid — a nearly 50% increase since 2019 — to over 4,000 undergraduate students.

Most undergraduate students whose families make under $150,000 per year attend the University tuition-free, and most students whose families earn less than $70,000 per year attend at no cost.

Financial aid also helps bring the most talented students to Northwestern's graduate and professional schools and empowers them to pursue advanced degrees in fields they are passionate about.

"Expanding scholarship support is a core priority for the Law School because it allows us to welcome exceptional students who might not otherwise be able to attend," says Zachary Clopton, dean of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. "These students go on to become future leaders who pursue critically important work and make Northwestern proud."

Robust scholarship and fellowship packages enable the University to attract the strongest applicants, who are also heavily recruited by peer institutions.

"Graduate students are integral to Northwestern's teaching and research excellence, and funding is essential to competing for the top candidates," says Adrian Randolph, dean of the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences.

The Northwestern community has already shown enthusiastic support for the Forever Shine Campaign. Among the lead donors are the campaign committee members: the Karrs; Trustee Du Chai '94, '01 MBA and Sarah Chai '96, '03 MBA; Trustee Valerie Friedman '85 and Mark Friedman; Trustee Purnima Puri '93 and Richard Barrera; and Keech Combe Shetty '99, '06 MBA and Akshay Shetty '06 MBA.

"I urge alumni and friends to join these visionary leaders in championing financial aid and life-changing programs," says Stacey Kostell, Northwestern's vice president and dean of enrollment. "Your contributions will empower students to thrive today and for generations to come, as well as enrich our entire campus community by fostering a vibrant environment where everyone can excel."

Visit giving.nu/ForeverShine to learn more about the Forever Shine Campaign or to make a gift.

Alma Mater, praise be thine,
May thy name **forever shine!**
Hail to Purple! Hail to White!
Hail to thee, Northwestern.

— Excerpt from "Alma Mater"

A Guiding **Light**

During her time at Northwestern, senior Cydney Hope Brown has had opportunities to explore various passions and potential careers — from serving as founding president of the Black Poetry Society to interning at iHeartMedia in downtown Chicago.

A communication studies major and Black studies minor from Philadelphia, Brown has made it a priority to be actively engaged in the Northwestern community. While she credits scholarships with helping her pay for college, programs for first-generation and/or lower-income (FGLI) students have enabled her to thrive.

One such initiative is Northwestern's Beacon Scholars program. Launched as a pilot in 2019, Beacon Scholars offers one-on-one mentorship from dedicated staff as well as community-building events that help FGLI students bond.

"The scholars program has definitely helped me to get the resources I need on campus, connect with other students and just feel a sense of belonging," Brown says.

Beacon Scholars enrolls an annual cohort of 30 to 40 undergraduates who demonstrate both leadership potential and a need for academic support. Northwestern's Forever Shine Campaign will raise funds to fully endow the program and expand it to serve a larger group of students.

"Beacon Scholars not only helps students excel academically but also inspires them to lead, innovate and make a meaningful impact on their communities and the world," says Susan Davis, vice president for student affairs. "Supporting this transformative program will help shape a brighter future — one where students rise to their full potential as leaders and changemakers."

GREG REIGH

→ The Beacon Scholars program supports first-generation students like Cydney Hope Brown. Scan the QR code or visit giving.nu/Cydney to play a video about her.

BUSINESS

Ann McIlrath Drake Executive Center Takes Shape

The state-of-the-art facility, named for a trailblazing Kellogg alumna, will advance the school's vision for reinventing business education.

A new destination for global engagement and innovative learning on Northwestern's Evanston campus will bear the name of a steadfast supporter and distinguished alumna of the Kellogg School of Management: Ann McIlrath Drake '84 MBA.

The Ann McIlrath Drake Executive Center will be home to Kellogg's executive MBA and executive education programs while also housing programming for all Kellogg students. Scheduled to open in fall 2027, the center will be named in recognition of Drake's extensive philanthropy to the school. She is the largest donor in Kellogg history.

A trailblazer in the field of supply chain management, Drake transformed her family's warehouse and trucking business on Chicago's South Side into one of the world's leading supply chain management companies. Today she is president and founder of Lincoln Road Enterprises, a philanthropic organization focused on elevating women's leadership and creating a future where women are at the forefront of improving the world. Drake also founded AWESOME (Achieving Women's Excellence in Supply Chain Operations, Management and Education) as well as the Women's Leadership Center at Williams Bay, scheduled to open this year on the shores of Geneva Lake in Wisconsin.

"Ann Drake embodies the bold leadership we cultivate at Kellogg," says Francesca Cornelli, the Kellogg School dean. "She has shaped industries, championed the ambitions of many and invested deeply in Kellogg students and programs. This building will inspire generations to lead with the same vision, courage and commitment to others."

The new facility is the centerpiece of Kellogg's Full Circle Campaign, an ambitious $600 million fundraising initiative by the University designed to transform business education for generations to come. Overlooking Lake Michigan and positioned adjacent to the existing Global Hub, the new center will help create a unified Kellogg campus. The two buildings will be connected via an underground corridor to create "One Kellogg."

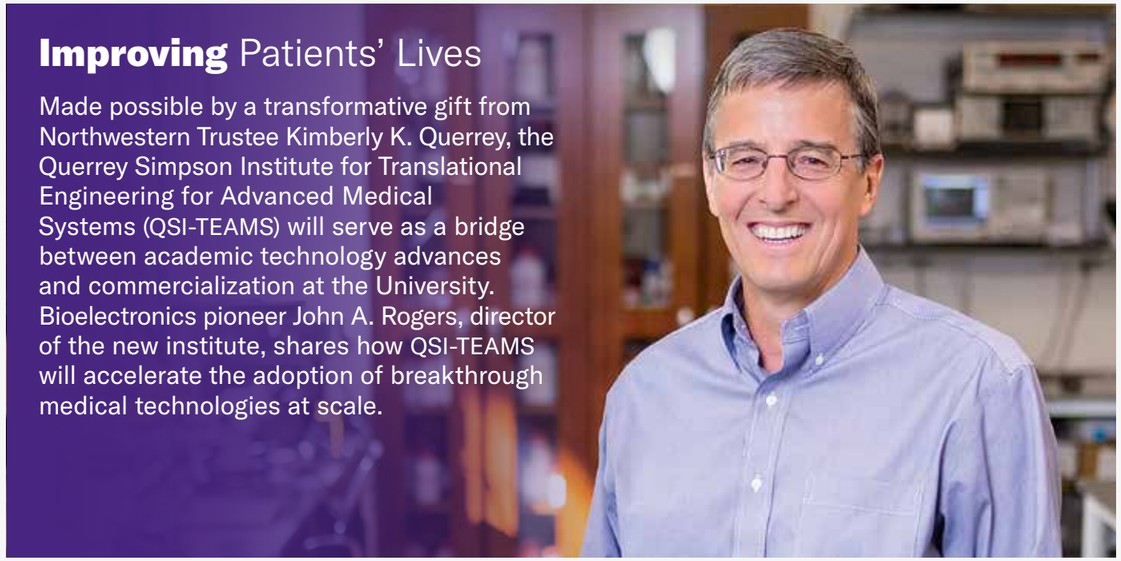
"Ann Drake embodies the bold leadership we cultivate at Kellogg."
— Francesca Cornelli

"This state-of-the-art building is a brick-and-mortar commitment to belief in the power of people collaborating with, learning from and supporting others," says Drake, who earned her executive MBA from Kellogg. "It will bring together students, faculty, alumni, executives and thought leaders in a cutting-edge environment specially designed to encourage innovation and collaboration. That inspires me. That's a future I want to see."

Over the years, Drake's generosity has supported numerous scholarships and faculty development programs as well as the Kellogg Global Women's Summit. She serves as a member of Kellogg's Global Advisory Board.

COURTESY OF THE KELLOGG SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

→ **Rendering of the Ann McIlrath Drake Executive Center, which will be positioned adjacent to the Global Hub on the Evanston campus**



Improving Patients' Lives

Made possible by a transformative gift from Northwestern Trustee Kimberly K. Querrey, the Querrey Simpson Institute for Translational Engineering for Advanced Medical Systems (QSI-TEAMS) will serve as a bridge between academic technology advances and commercialization at the University. Bioelectronics pioneer John A. Rogers, director of the new institute, shares how QSI-TEAMS will accelerate the adoption of breakthrough medical technologies at scale.

SHANE COLLINS

What is QSI-TEAMS?
The name says it all. The goal is to bring researchers from the McCormick School of Engineering — especially the Querrey Simpson Institute for Bioelectronics — into close collaboration with clinicians at the Feinberg School of Medicine to develop new technologies that improve patient care.

Your lab has led the creation of electronic systems that integrate with the human body to monitor patient health. How will QSI-TEAMS scale up this type of work?
Over the years, our University programs have focused on developing innovative technologies that have the potential to move beyond an academic setting into commercial production and deployment, improving how health care is delivered for millions of patients. We've had some significant successes recently through startup companies that emerged from our work. The academic research at the foundations of these startups, however, has been constrained by our limited capacity to operate at scales needed to capture datasets for machine learning inferencing. This is critical for extracting clinically actionable insights and for capturing detailed information on patient interactions, clinical workflow integration and other practical considerations.

What QSI-TEAMS projects are now underway?
I'll describe two of our six launch projects. We're working with Ankit Bharat, Northwestern Medicine's chief of thoracic surgery, to develop soft, wearable devices that simultaneously track airflow in the lungs, changes in cardiac rhythms and chest wall movements to assess lung health at levels of precision that exceed those associated with current clinical practice. And with Lorenzo Gallon from the University of Illinois Chicago, we're developing a thin, microfluidic device that adheres to the skin to measure urea and creatinine levels in sweat. This technology makes it possible, for the first time, to monitor patients' kidney health from home without trained personnel or the need to visit a hospital for a blood draw and lab analysis. The base device technologies in both cases are already proven but only in pilot-scale studies. In activities supported by QSI-TEAMS, we're expanding these projects to refine the technology, validate the insights at scale and publish the results in top medical journals. This work not only helps improve the foundational engineering science but also enhances the technological readiness for commercialization efforts. It provides experiential educational opportunities for students as well.

↑ **John Rogers is the Louis Simpson and Kimberly Querrey Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, Biomedical Engineering and Neurological Surgery.**

How has support from Kimberly Querrey shaped Northwestern's innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem?
The impact is almost impossible to overstate. Kimberly and her late husband, Louis Simpson '58, have been passionate about the idea that technology will provide solutions to grand societal challenges in health care and that science and engineering in the biomedical space will be crucial going forward. They have a record of philanthropy that's very much aligned with that vision and belief. It includes their support for the Simpson Querrey Biomedical Research Center in Chicago, where my team has lab space, and a range of Northwestern research institutes and entrepreneurship programs funded by their gifts.

The Optimistic Economist

Nobel Prize winner Joel Mokyr has spent decades studying the past. Now, he says, the future looks brighter than ever.

BY STEPHANIE KULKE

You might say that this lecture was Joel Mokyr's largest ever. Last December the Northwestern professor stood before a lectern at the Nobel Prize banquet in Stockholm City Hall, prepared to address an audience of 1,300 dignitaries, fellow laureates and guests.

A professor of economics and history and the Robert H. Strotz Professor of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern, Mokyr received half of the 2025 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences — sharing the award with Philippe Aghion of the Collège de France and Peter Howitt '73 PhD of Brown University — for explaining how technological advancements make sustained economic growth possible.

Mokyr had identified three societal prerequisites for economic growth, based on his historical analysis of European civilizations. Aghion and Howitt had created a mathematical model demonstrating the theory of "creative destruction," which posits that new knowledge about nature's laws spurs innovations that drive new industries, replacing old, obsolete ones.

In his banquet speech, Mokyr described the positive aspects of creative destruction — advancements in science and medicine and global wealth, for instance. He also acknowledged its downsides — job elimination, environmental degradation and widening wealth gaps, among others.

Yet Mokyr is an unfettered optimist. His insatiable curiosity has led him to fearlessly challenge prevailing ideas about growth and uncover insights from history that have changed the world's understanding of economic progress. You might say that he is the very personification of creative destruction.

True to form, as he looked out at the crowd, Mokyr was disarmingly direct and unreservedly bullish on his outlook for what lies ahead: "The best way to summarize our technological future is the American colloquialism 'You ain't seen nothin' yet!'"

PRAGMATISM *and* RESILIENCE

So how did Mokyr climb to such great intellectual heights? His origin story begins in Amsterdam during World War II.

Mokyr's parents were Dutch Jews. In 1942 his parents and two older siblings were sent to Theresienstadt, a Nazi transit camp. They were liberated in 1945, but upon returning to the Netherlands, the family discovered that Mokyr's aunt and uncle had died at Mauthausen in Austria. Mokyr's parents had promised that, if they survived the war, they'd find and raise the couple's baby daughter, who had been hidden by the Dutch resistance. His parents placed newspaper ads until they found her.

Mokyr's parents decided to have another child they could raise alongside their 3-year-old niece. Joel Mokyr was born July 26, 1946, 14 years after his brother and a decade after his sister.

Soon after Mokyr was born, his father died of cancer, leaving behind a young family — and an extensive library on European and U.S. history. By age 5, Mokyr was reading his father's books. "These were *stories that happened*," Mokyr says. "I was utterly fascinated."

When Mokyr was 9, his mother moved the family to Haifa, Israel. He learned Hebrew, finished school and completed his military service. He then attended Hebrew University of Jerusalem, majoring in economics and history. It's also where he met his wife-to-be, Margalit.

After completing his bachelor's degree cum laude, Mokyr married Margalit, and they moved to New Haven, Conn., to study and work at Yale University. Joel earned his doctorate in economics, and Margalit was a senior lab researcher. They welcomed their first child, a daughter, in 1974. Later that year, the family landed in Chicago when Mokyr joined Northwestern's economics department. They made their home in Skokie, Ill. With Joel's support, Margalit completed her doctorate after the birth of their second daughter, finishing her dissertation in 22 months.

"He already had tenure, so he cared for the baby and the house and even typed up my dissertation on a word processor," Margalit says. "I got tenure at the University of Illinois Chicago shortly after that." She became a full professor (now emerita) of biochemistry and molecular biology.

"He's smart, likes to cook and entertain, and is a great husband," Margalit says of her spouse of 57 years.

Mokyr, sitting nearby, feigns amazement: "You never told *me* that!"

THREE SECRETS *of* ECONOMIC GROWTH

Although his father's books had hooked him on history, Mokyr knew a doctorate in economics would provide other opportunities if he failed to make it as an academic. He found the sweet spot by studying economic history.

"Every area of economics has a past, from labor relations and strikes to tariffs and technology," he says. He began to look at historical economic situations that are now rare to better understand how people and markets of the past functioned.

Economic historian Douglass North, a 1993 Nobel Laureate who had a significant influence on Mokyr's work and in time became a close friend, believed that property rights drove prosperity. North theorized that the desire to define property as "mine or thine" incentivized the work required for ownership and drove economic growth.

Mokyr suspected that there was more to it than that. He focused his studies on the economic history of Europe from 1750 to 1914. He found that, for thousands of years before then, great civilizations had existed, but economic growth had remained stagnant. The knowledge of great thinkers was revered, and their teachings had been passed down through generations without question.

"In a society that has a huge amount of respect for the learning and wisdom of earlier generations, almost any innovation is going to be seen as heresy," he explains. "And we know what past generations did to heretics."

But things changed once discoveries showed that the world was different from what people had been taught — for example, a ship crossing the equator didn't burn, as some Greek philosophers had predicted. When people realized that ancient views of the universe were incorrect, this realization spurred out-of-the-box thinking and a quest for new knowledge, Mokyr says.

Mokyr's insight led to his articulation of the first of three key elements in his theory of economic growth: useful knowledge.

"If not for skepticism of knowledge from previous generations, we'd still be practicing 1,500-year-old medicine," he says. "Given the choice, would you rather see a dentist with today's knowledge and tools or someone practicing dentistry as it was done 1,500 years ago?"

In addition to new knowledge and a desire for progress, people needed the mechanical competence to bring new ideas to fruition, says Mokyr. This understanding led Mokyr to his second requirement for economic growth: skilled labor.

People initially learned trade skills through apprenticeships. But as the marketplace of ideas became more competitive in Europe, demand grew for institutions to disseminate knowledge and sustain innovation. Schools and universities gradually embraced this role.

Mokyr's third prerequisite for economic progress is institutions that incentivize technological advancement. Instead of treating knowledge seekers as heretics and burning them at the stake, society developed positive incentives to motivate people to do the hard work of science.

Those incentives continue to this day, says Mokyr. "In industry, inventors are rewarded with money and a patent," he says. Likewise, academics are rewarded with a stable income and recognition for intellectual achievement. "We academics wouldn't know what to do with a billion dollars," he says with a shrug. "Maybe hire another research assistant?"

↑ The Mokyr family after they moved to Haifa, Israel. From left, Joel; his sister (cousin by birth) Ada; Joel's mother and grandmother; his brother, Rob; and his sister Miriam.

← Margalit and Joel at Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1968

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS: COURTESY OF JOEL AND MARGALIT MOKYR; MOKYR AT PODIUM: SHANE COLLINS

↑ Joel Mokyr discusses his Nobel Prize at a press conference at Cahn Auditorium last October.

> History exemplifies how ingenuity has solved the technical challenges of society.

BENEFITS *and* CHALLENGES *of* GROWTH

With his thorough analysis of civilization's histories, Mokyr has helped explain the economic and intellectual roots of technological progress in European societies and, more recently, China. His research has also focused on the global impact that industrialization and economic progress have had on the average human lifespan and quality of life.

In the past, "people lived short, painful lives," he says. "They were crawling with insects and on the verge of subsistence. If the harvest failed, famine would kill millions. Poor nutrition and childhood disease caused stunting, both physical and mental."

At a Northwestern symposium, Mokyr noted, "The last 150 years have been absolutely miraculous in the history of the human race. Living standards that would have been unimaginable in the 1870s have been attained not just by the

↑ Joel Mokyr meets with doctoral students Chris Sims ’21 MA, center, and Franco Malpassi ’23 MA, right, in Mokyr’s Kellogg Global Hub office.

A Nobel Start

Peter Howitt ’73 PhD, professor emeritus of economics at Brown University, shared the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences with Joel Mokyr and Philippe Aghion. Howitt collaborated with Aghion on a 1992 paper on creative destruction.

Howitt, pictured below, recalls many happy memories from his time as a Northwestern graduate student, starting with painting the walls of a newly rented apartment on Washington Street in Evanston with his wife of three days. “Believe it or not, it was a joyous honeymoon, and we are still married,” he says.

He fondly recalls the weekly macroeconomics seminars held at 629 Noyes Street, an old house where many of the professors’ offices were located. “I learned as much there as I did in any classroom, and that’s where I really felt most at home.

“Northwestern is where I learned that I wanted to become a professional economist — that I enjoyed the fellowship of economists and enjoyed the mental work involved,” Howitt adds.

In a full-circle moment, the Nobel Prize winner returned to Northwestern to deliver a public lecture hosted by the Department of Economics in March.

very wealthy but, basically, by regular citizens. ... We have doubled global average life expectancy.” In the 1870s the average lifespan was in the upper 30s, Mokyr explains. Today it is 76 for women and 71 for men.

Some economists have theorized that the greatest period of economic growth is behind us — that the lower-hanging fruit of technological growth has already been picked, so to speak.

With his irrepressible optimism, Mokyr takes the opposite view. “My argument is that science creates ladders,” he says. And with those ladders, “high-hanging fruits get easier to reach. And what’s more, the best fruits are at the top of the tree — and the tree is still growing.”

Mokyr concedes that new technologies often come with unforeseen costs. “Plastic, asbestos, leaded gasoline — all are miraculous but have created major problems. Technology surprises you, sometimes in a negative way,” he says. “We must keep inventing to mitigate the side effects.”

As old technologies and knowledge become obsolete, people may need to learn new skills. Many have expressed fears about the rise of AI and its potential to replace humans. For those who fear a dystopian future with robot overlords, Mokyr suggests they have been watching too many science fiction movies.

“AI cannot replace human intelligence,” he says. “It can never incorporate human conditioning and drives. Can AI compose an original symphony under the weight of unrequited love like Berlioz? Can AI have nationalistic feelings or write a novel about what it’s like to be under the rule of another country?”

Technology, he adds, is only a tool. “It’s never you. It’s always separate from you.”

Ultimately Mokyr believes continued technological progress is the answer to the “unprecedented existential threats” facing humanity today, including climate change, future pandemics and an aging population coupled with a declining workforce. “The only solution is to adapt and invent ourselves around these problems,” Mokyr said during his Nobel Prize banquet speech. “History exemplifies how ... ingenuity has solved the technical challenges of society, from smallpox vaccination ... to cancer therapy. It must continue to do so — because any alternative will be disastrous.”

AN ACADEMIC LEGACY

Longtime Northwestern colleague Robert Coen ’64 MA, ’67 PhD, professor emeritus of economics, says, “Joel is one of the top in the world in terms of producing scholars who go out and teach economic history. The list of students whose dissertation committee he has served on or chaired is very long, and those students have gone on to high-quality institutions all over the world.”

One of Mokyr’s strongest points of pride is his legacy of “academic children,” including MacArthur “genius grant” recipient Avner Greif ’88 MA, ’89 PhD, co-author of Mokyr’s most recent book, and Ran Abramitzky ’00 MA, ’05 PhD, a senior associate dean at Stanford University.

Greif affectionately recalls Mokyr’s tough-love approach as an adviser on his dissertation, a study that combined game theory and the Cairo Geniza collection of 11th- and 12th-century documents related to long-distance trade.

“Joel told me that he knew nothing about either 11th-century trade or game theory but he was willing to read my work and give me feedback,” Greif recalls. “When I submitted to Joel the draft of my first paper, he returned it with the comment, ‘There may be some good ideas here, but you hide them well.’ This motivated me to work harder and succeed. I had served in the Israeli army, was a father of two, had master’s degrees in history and economics. I could stomach his constructive criticism.”

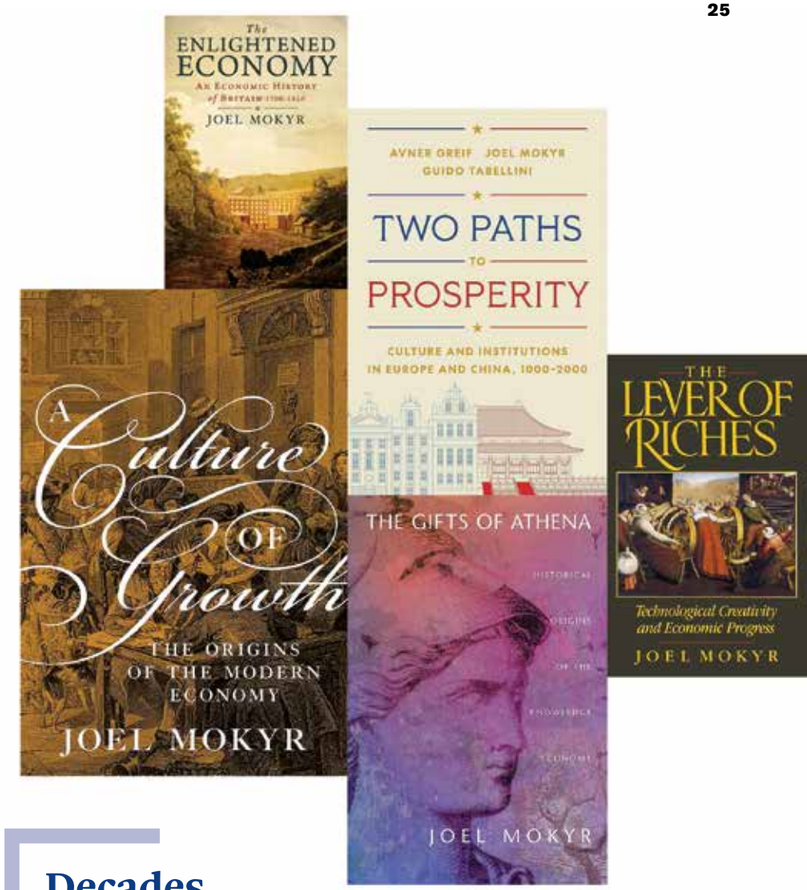
Mokyr also “gave me a key to his office and allowed me to use his extra computer,” Greif says. “My wife and I had two babies in our two-bedroom dorm, so using his office was a great help.”

Along with his Nobel, Mokyr’s connections with his students are the highlight of his career. “My students are my legacy,” he says. “Books and prizes are one thing, but I’m most proud of my intellectual great-grandchildren — students who have students of their own who have students of their own.”

Stephanie Kulke ’21 MS is an editor in Northwestern’s Office of Global Marketing and Communications.

Visit our website for more on Joel Mokyr.

MOKYR: SHANE COLLINS; HOWITT: © NOBEL PRIZE OUTREACH. PHOTO: NANAKA ADACHI



Decades of Wisdom

Browse these books by Joel Mokyr:

THE LEVER OF RICHES (1990)
Mokyr argues that human creativity, not necessity, is the mother of invention and drives technological progress. His compelling narrative cites centuries of big and small inventions in Europe that led to economic growth and examines why some societies innovate and others stall.

THE GIFTS OF ATHENA (2002)
Citing the Industrial Revolution as the “central event of modern history,” this book explains the rise of the knowledge economy, why it began in Britain and how it spread throughout the Western world.

THE ENLIGHTENED ECONOMY (2009)
In this panoramic look at Britain’s economic transformation from 1700 to 1850, Mokyr emphasizes the Age of Enlightenment’s importance as a precursor to the Industrial Revolution and how scientific foundations like the Royal Society made possible the exchange of ideas between industrialists and scientists.

A CULTURE OF GROWTH (2016)
Mokyr links Europe’s intellectual climate to the birth of modern economic growth, showing how a culture that embraced new ideas and debate laid the groundwork for centuries of innovation.

TWO PATHS TO PROSPERITY (2025)
Named a Best Book of the Year by *The New Yorker*, this landmark work examines the divergent economic histories of Europe and China and offers an explanation for why China, once one of the most sophisticated cultures in the world, was eventually surpassed in riches and power by Europe.

Life behind the lens defined my Northwestern experience.

BY JOSH SUKOFF

DURING MY FIRST WEEK AT NORTHWESTERN, I marched through Weber Arch with my new classmates, holding a 360-degree camera overhead to document what I hoped would be the beginning of something extraordinary.

The experience that followed was remarkable. And all along, my camera served as my passport to new places and perspectives.

Within two weeks, it brought me to the sidelines of Ryan Field for my first Northwestern football game. I'd started out as a biology major with little interest in sports. So, naturally, I stood on the wrong end of the field. I was baffled when the play ran in the opposite direction, far from where I stood.

But the camera pulled me in and forced me to learn. Understanding the game made me better at capturing it — and I fell in love with sports. That passion pushed me deeper into Northwestern athletics. During a 2024 men's basketball game, I navigated the catwalk high above Welsh-Ryan Arena. With every bucket, the crowd below roared, a noise so intense it rattled the steel beneath my feet. Few students ever set foot on that catwalk — but through a single frame, I brought others there. What the photo couldn't capture was the pride I felt for our team and our school — an emotion shared by every Wildcat fan in the stands.

Drawn by opportunities in news photography, I eventually switched my major to journalism and applied to Medill on the Hill. By junior year I was in Washington, D.C., and even inside the White House, where I photographed some of the most prominent figures of our time. Watching my images move through the world made me consider a career in intellectual property law.

SUKOFF PORTRAIT: SHANE COLLINS; ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHY: JOSH SUKOFF '26

1 NEW PERSPECTIVE
Evanston campus, October 2025
This aerial shot, taken from a drone hovering 200 feet above ground, captures autumn at its peak. Saturated reds and golds frame Deering Library, with a sharply rendered Chicago skyline anchoring the horizon.

When I look back, the best moments I captured were the ones where I forgot I was holding a camera: Rushing to center court to capture the postgame celebration after men's basketball took down No. 1 Purdue — not once but twice. Seeing the Northern Lights swirling high above Lake Michigan. Cheering with people I'd just met at Northwestern Dance Marathon as a six-figure fundraising total was revealed after 30 hours of dancing.

The one constant in my experience has been photography. With a Canon camera slung around my neck, I've chased every opportunity Northwestern had to offer — sometimes in the crowd, sometimes above it. That vantage point has shaped how I've lived these past four years.

Looking back, I realize I was always in the frame, living the story I was trying to tell.

Josh Sukoff, a senior from Oyster Bay, N.Y., plans to attend law school to pursue intellectual property law. He is a student content creator for the Office of Global Marketing and Communications.

2

3

4

“When I turned back to look at the fieldhouse and frame my shot, the sky seemed to be throwing its own celebration.”

2 BOO’S HOUSE

Welsh-Ryan Arena, January 2024
Shooting at one of my first basketball games for Northwestern Athletics, I had a fixed position on the baseline next to the Ohio State bench. At first I felt stuck and distant from Northwestern’s scoring action on the other end of the floor. Then the game intensified. The Wildcats sprinting back on defense came straight toward me, and I realized the value of my position: A long lens from the opposite baseline isolated the players’ emotions as they turned to celebrate. Here, Boo Buie ’23, ’24 CERT, hypes up the crowd.

3 SUN SHOW

The Lakefill, April 2024
Hundreds of people gathered outside to watch the partial solar eclipse. As the atmospheric light began to dim, the air felt cooler. Conversations quieted, then gave way to oohs and aahs as the eclipse slowly took effect. The sun itself was absent from the frame. I was more interested in the human experience — a community sharing a rare moment.

4 FIRE IN THE SKY

Northwestern Beach, May 2024
Yes, the sky actually looked like that. Lightning and heavy rain forced a weather delay during the 2024 Big Ten Women’s Lacrosse Tournament championship, and the final 96 seconds of the game had to be played indoors at Ryan Fieldhouse. Northwestern beat Penn State 14-12. I took this on the beach, just after the on-field celebration. My sneakers were caked with a mix of rubber pellets from the turf and waterlogged sand. When I turned back to look at the fieldhouse and frame my shot, the sky seemed to be throwing its own celebration.

5

5 HAND-PICKED

Guild Lounge, Scott Hall, February 2024 These are the hands of a storyteller. George R.R. Martin ’70, ’71 MS, ’21 H returned to Northwestern for the investiture of his namesake chair in storytelling in the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications. As Dean Charles Whitaker ’80, ’81 MS introduced him, Martin stood listening, hands clasped behind his back.

“Looking at it now is like checking my own rearview mirror: My time on campus is right there, framed close-up, in perfect focus, even as it becomes something behind me.”

6 DAZZLING DEERING

Deering Library, May 2023 I had settled into the library for a long evening of finals prep. Needing a study break, I stepped outside to stretch my legs — my tripod’s legs included — and captured a motion-blurred image of a student moving quickly across the frame.

7 JOURNEY TO JAPAN

Kyoto, Japan, September 2024 I took this photo during a Medill class trip. On a sweltering afternoon, we visited the Kiyomizu-dera temple grounds and paused on a wooded hillside path. The shade offered some welcome relief while I snapped this shot, looking across the ravine toward the Koyasu Pagoda and the city of Kyoto in the distance. The vermilion pagoda served as a striking focal point, capping the vibrant green canopy against an open sky.

8 A BRAVE NEW WORLD

U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., March 2025 During Medill on the Hill, I attended President Donald Trump’s address to a joint session of Congress in the House chamber. I framed this shot through the closing chamber doors as the clamor enveloped Vice President JD Vance. As I photographed this, Republican Rep. Lance Gooden reached across the aisle, snatching a piece of paper from Democratic Rep. Melanie Stansbury’s hand and tossing it into the air. The text read, “This is NOT Normal.”

9 JUMPING FOR JOY

Clark Street Beach, May 2024 Just after sunset, as the light was fading, I held an external flash in one hand and my camera in the other. A group of graduating seniors gathered for silly portraits after a more formal shoot in front of Deering Library. One field hockey player brought the 2021 NCAA championship trophy. Someone said, “Let’s all jump.” I barely had time to increase my shutter speed. Thankfully, the flash froze everything mid-jump. I love how the trophy anchors the shot, and the leaping student looks as if he is surfing. We tried to see if we could nail the shot twice. We couldn’t. The first one had a spontaneity we couldn’t replicate.

10 FROSTED MEMORIES

University Hall, December 2025 While wandering campus after a fresh 4-inch snowfall on a clear, blue-sky afternoon, I found this snow-covered moped parked along a path. Its mirror was angled perfectly toward University Hall. I brushed away just enough snow to reveal the reflection. Looking at it now is like checking my own rearview mirror: My time on campus is right there, framed close-up, in perfect focus, even as it becomes something behind me.

Watch Josh Sukoff discuss his favorite photos.

LEAP YEAR

Cut from her first WNBA squad, Veronica Burton rebounded to become the league's Most Improved Player.

BY LIA ASSIMAKOPOULOS

Photo by Matthew Huang/Getty Images

Veronica Burton ’22 has experienced the highs and lows of women’s pro basketball.

Drafted No. 7 overall by the WNBA’s Dallas Wings in 2022, Burton quickly carved out a role as a rotation player, providing steady minutes off the bench as a defense-first guard.

Two years later, that footing vanished.

In May 2024 — just days before the start of her third WNBA season — Dallas cut her.

“It was definitely a gut check,” she says. “Whenever you get drafted, nothing’s guaranteed. Everyone’s replaceable.”

Burton returned home to Newton, Mass. The former first-round pick spent her days putting up shots at her local YMCA, watching the pickleball players while she waited for an open court.

“It was humbling,” she confides. With only 144 roster spots in the league at the time, Burton was not guaranteed another opportunity.

Her father, Steve Burton ’85, ’88 MS, remembers watching his daughter search for clarity during those difficult weeks back home. One day, he walked into their home office to find her reading the Bible.

“My faith is a big reason why I’m here and why I play,” she says. “I knew at some point I would get another chance. It was just a matter of what that chance would look like and what I would make of it.”

She did get another chance. A month after being waived by the Wings, she landed with the WNBA’s Connecticut Sun for the remainder of the season.

Fast forward to December 2024. The Golden State Valkyries — then the league’s newest franchise — selected Burton in the expansion draft, seeing something in her that other teams had yet to unlock.

Burton entered the 2025 season eager to impress her new team. Instead, in her first Valkyries start, she went scoreless from the field and made just two free throws. She also felt she had committed unforced errors that led to a handful of turnovers.

As Burton walked to the locker room after the game, disappointment lingered. She understood how quickly opportunities disappear in the WNBA — she’d lived it.

“I was really hard on myself,” Burton admits.

Then came a conversation with first-year head coach Natalie Nakase that changed everything.

“She was like, ‘Let’s watch all your turnovers.’ And I thought, ‘Great, just what I want to do,’” Burton recalls. “If there’s one thing I try not to do, it’s turn the ball over. But on every one, Natalie was like, ‘It was a turnover, but it made sense. These three aren’t even your fault. You’re gonna be fine.’

“She provided a level of reassurance and confidence in me that I hadn’t experienced before in the league. That’s when I realized that I was in a different place and that things could go a lot differently for me with Golden State.”

That feeling proved prophetic. Burton’s forgettable debut became a footnote in what turned into a breakout season. The 25-year-old guard set career highs, averaging 12 points, 6 assists and 1 steal per game, and earned the league’s Most Improved Player award while helping the Valkyries reach the playoffs in their inaugural season.

Her dad says that conversation with Nakase, the WNBA’s 2025 Coach of the Year, was a turning point for Veronica. After that, “when she missed a shot, she didn’t have to look over her shoulder and wonder, ‘Am I coming out?’ The coach said, ‘Go be Veronica Burton. Go do you,’” he says.

↑ Veronica Burton, left, defends Chelsea Gray during an Unrivaled game in Miami in February. Burton’s team, the Mist, won the three-on-three league’s 2026 championship.

ALL PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: SHANE COLLINS

Veronica hadn't felt that sense of trust and freedom since Northwestern, where she led the Wildcats to a Big Ten championship in 2020 and an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2021 — the program's first in six years. "She went back to feeling like she was playing for Northwestern again," says Steve.

A NORTHWESTERN FAMILY

Northwestern has always been part of Veronica Burton's life.

Her parents met as student-athletes at the University. Steve played quarterback for the Wildcats football team. Veronica's mother, Virginia "Ginni" Vath Burton '85, was an All-American and Big Ten champion swimmer. Veronica's late grandfather, Ron Burton Sr. '60, was an All-American halfback and a pro football player; he is a member of both the College Football Hall of Fame and Northwestern Athletic Hall of Fame. (Veronica wears his number, 22, in his memory.) Three of her uncles also suited up for the Wildcats on the gridiron, including Paul Burton '96, '98 MS, who played in the 1996 Rose Bowl.

"Northwestern made us think bigger," Steve says. "We were around students who dreamed big, and that's what I wanted for my kids: to dream big. It just changed our mindset."

Veronica and her parents have always been close, but they didn't always see eye to eye on Northwestern. While some children dream of following in their parents' footsteps, Veronica took a different approach.

"I actually didn't really care for Northwestern at all," she admits. "A lot of people thought that I was bound to be a Wildcat, but I didn't really see it as part of my future.

"My parents, I think, were secretly emailing Northwestern coach Joe McKeown, begging him to come to one of my high school games."

When recruiting offers from other high-profile basketball schools didn't materialize as she had hoped, Burton reluctantly visited Northwestern and felt an instant connection to the coaches and players who welcomed her.

"I fell in love with it," Burton admits. "I met some of the players, and I just knew that it was my kind of place and my kind of people."

McKeown visited with Burton multiple times during her recruitment, watching her play in tournaments and chatting candidly during her on-campus visits about her potential legacy. "We talked about the things that she wanted to accomplish on and off the court and her establishing her own identity," McKeown says. "It was going to be about Veronica Burton — not her family's incredible history."

↑ The Burton family, from left, Steve; Veronica's sister Kendall; Veronica; and Ginni, with Northwestern coach Joe McKeown at Burton's Senior Night in 2022.

→ Burton defends Iowa's Caitlin Clark.

"I WOULDN'T CHANGE MY EXPERIENCE FOR ANYTHING. IT WAS THE PERFECT PLACE FOR ME. IF IT WEREN'T FOR NORTHWESTERN, I WOULD NOT BE THE PLAYER OR THE PERSON I AM TODAY." — Veronica Burton

McKeown's successful recruiting pitch became Burton's reality.

McKeown instilled confidence in Burton and encouraged her to become a vocal leader. He made her the starting point guard and named her team captain as a sophomore. As a player, as a student, as a leader, "he elevated me," Burton says.

Burton developed into one of the great defenders in Northwestern and Big Ten history, winning Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year honors three straight times. Her tenacity, speed and defensive acumen set her apart. She routinely drew the toughest assignments, including Iowa's Caitlin Clark, a revolutionary scorer who broke the NCAA Division I record for most points by any men's or women's player. She and Burton faced each other five times in college, and in those games, Burton and her teammates held Clark to an average 7 points below her usual scoring output.

By her final two seasons, Burton had developed a more well-rounded game, with her offensive abilities catching up to her defensive reputation. She became the first Wildcat in program history to be named an Associated Press All-American and finished third in career assists. (Senior Caroline Lau passed Burton for third all-time in 2025–26.) Burton also ranks second all-time in steals at Northwestern and second in the Big Ten since 1987–88.

"She was labeled as this defensive player, but in my mind, she was scoring the most on our team the last two seasons I was there," Northwestern teammate Jordan Hamilton '21 says. "She's much more than an elite defender."

Burton's well-rounded game made her a solid fit for the WNBA. McKeown, who retired in March after his 18th season as Northwestern's head coach, says he knew Burton had pro potential by the second week of her first year. Hamilton knew on day one.

"She was different," says Hamilton, who was a sophomore when Burton joined the team in fall 2018. "When Veronica and her class got to Northwestern, their buy-in was immediate, and she was leading the charge. Her demeanor was, 'I can be great, and I'm going to be great.'"

Hamilton says Burton also brought the fun. She remembers a road trip to Wisconsin during her junior year when Burton helped coordinate a team talent show. Burton sang "We Are Young" by fun., with all her teammates as her background dancers.

Those off-the-court memories remain Burton's favorites too, like when her team won the 2019 Student-Athlete Advisory Committee lip-sync battle and proudly displayed the trophy in the team's locker room.

Even four years after graduation, Burton still speaks daily with some of her former teammates and returns to Evanston once a year for a Wildcats game.

"Going to college is really daunting," Burton says. "My teammates fully welcomed our first-year class and made it a family environment from the jump. It set the tone for my entire Northwestern experience. And then when I became older, that's exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted everyone to feel the love and the sisterhood.

"I wouldn't change my experience for anything. It was the perfect place for me. If it weren't for Northwestern, I would not be the player or the person I am today."

Maybe her parents were right after all.

COURTESY OF NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

COFFEY: ATLANTA DREAM; SPENCER: GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS; NANCE: MILWAUKEE BUCKS; BARNHIZER: OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER; NEWSOME: JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS; SLATER: LOS ANGELES CHARGERS; ADEBAWORE: INDIANAPOLIS COLTS; SKORONSKI: TENNESSEE TITANS

PRO 'CATS

Veronica Burton is one of several former Northwestern stars playing in a major professional sports league. Here are a few others as of mid-March.

WNBA

Nia Coffey '17
ATLANTA DREAM
The 6-foot-1-inch forward is in her second stint with the Dream. She was the fifth overall pick in the 2017 WNBA draft.

NBA

Pat Spencer '20 MA
GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS
The nation's best college lacrosse player *before* he suited up for Northwestern men's basketball, Spencer averages 7 points and 3 assists per game as a guard for the Warriors.

Pete Nance '22
MILWAUKEE BUCKS
The 6-foot-9-inch forward averages 5 points in 12 minutes per game.

Brooks Barnhizer '25
OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER
After an injury shortened his senior season for Northwestern, Barnhizer was drafted in the second round of the 2025 NBA draft.

NFL

Greg Newsome II '21
NEW YORK GIANTS
The cornerback tallied 52 tackles and an interception while playing for the Cleveland Browns and Jacksonville Jaguars last season. He signed with the New York Giants in the offseason.

Rashawn Slater '21
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS
Just days after signing the most lucrative contract extension ever for an offensive lineman, the former first-round pick tore his patellar tendon and spent the 2025 season on injured reserve.

Adetomiwa Adebawore '23
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS
A defensive tackle, Adebawore recorded 4 sacks and 36 tackles, including 5 tackles for a loss, in 17 games in 2025.

Peter Skoronski '23
TENNESSEE TITANS
Skoronski started all 17 games at left guard and played 100% of the team's offensive snaps in 2025. He also won the 2025 Eddie George Media Good Guy Award, named for Eddie George '09 MBA.

↑ Veronica Burton averaged 12 points and 6 assists per game for the WNBA's Golden State Valkyries, helping the expansion team reach the playoffs in its inaugural season.

RELENTLESS IMPROVEMENT

Burton is challenging herself to build on her 2025 success.

Last season she was the only Valkyries player to start all 44 regular-season games. In a mid-August game against the Phoenix Mercury, she became the first player in the WNBA to record at least 24 points and 14 assists without a turnover. She also became the first player in WNBA history to increase her season averages by at least 5 points, 2 rebounds and 2 assists per game from one season to the next.

"I knew the door was wide open with the new franchise," she says. "I was really excited to be a part of 'the first' somewhere and to help build that culture."

Burton and her Valkyries teammates exceeded expectations, reaching the playoffs in the team's first season. And the Bay Area embraced the upstart squad — the Valkyries sold out all 22 home games and set a new WNBA attendance record at "Ballhalla," as the Chase Center in San Francisco is affectionately known.

Now the Valkyries are looking to establish an identity as a franchise and make a deeper postseason run.

"A championship is always the goal," Burton says. "We put ourselves in a good position to continue to grow.

"Personally, I want to stay confident regardless of performance — and to just enjoy it."

Check out our video interview with Veronica Burton.

As of late March, Burton's immediate future was uncertain as the WNBA and the players union worked out the details of a new collective bargaining agreement. Free agency began in mid-April.

Burton spent part of the 2025–26 offseason (October through April) playing for the Mist Basketball Club in the Miami-based three-on-three Unrivaled league and training with the USA Basketball Women's National Team. She helped lead the Mist to the Unrivaled championship in March.

Those who are close to Burton say her hunger never fades. Her entire basketball career has been defined by treating each milestone more as a starting point than a finish line. That includes last season's Most Improved Player award.

"It was a big honor," Burton says. "It highlights the growth that I've been hoping for. But it's just a start. 'Most improved' says that I wasn't that great the year before. It says I had a lot of room to grow — and I still do.

"My grandfather would always say, 'Once you stop getting better, you're no longer good.' I am appreciative of the acknowledgment of my growth, but it excites me even more to continue to get better."

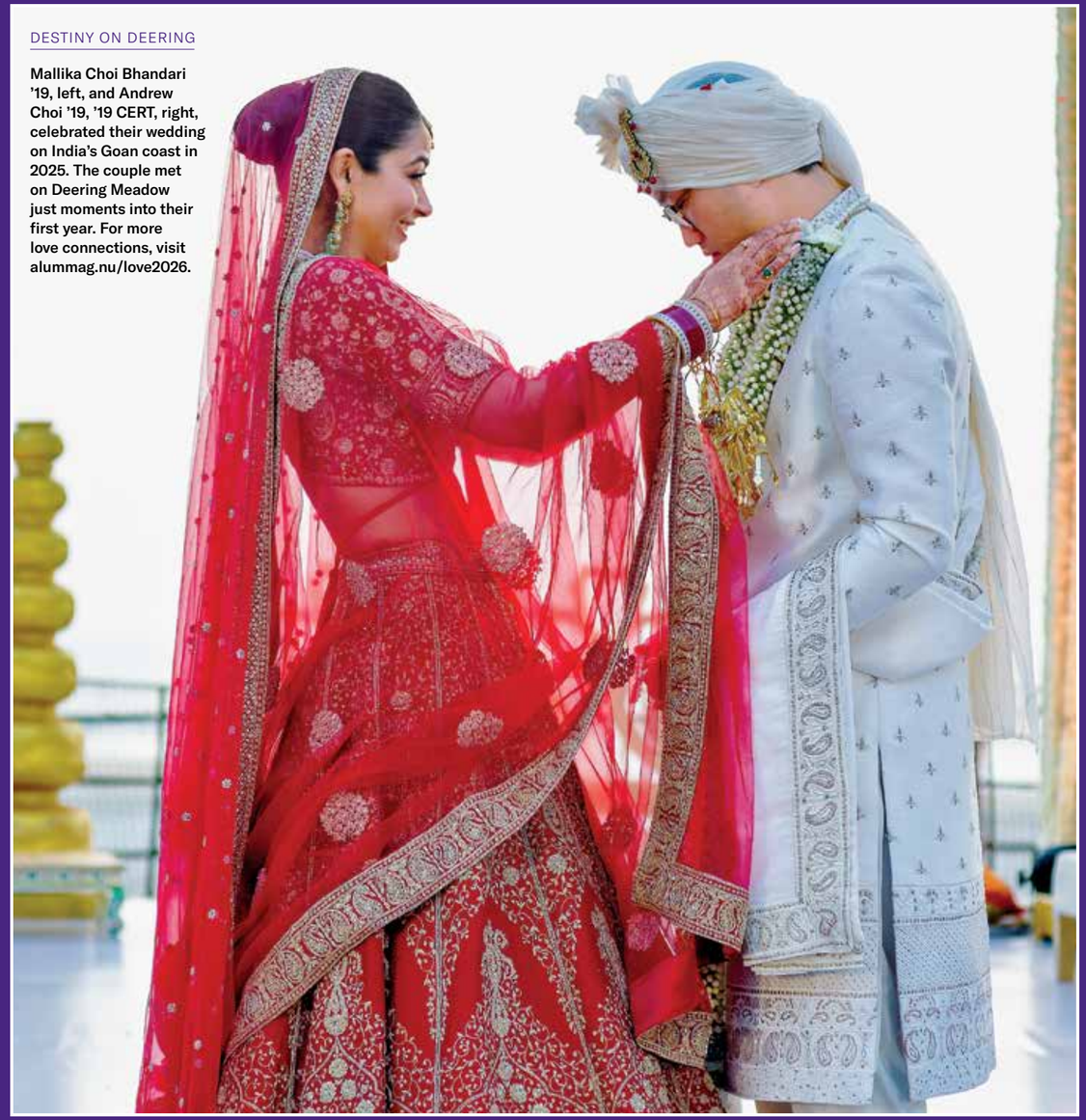
Lia Assimakopoulos '22 covers the Dallas Stars, Southern Methodist University and other college sports for The Dallas Morning News. *As a Northwestern student, she was editor-in-chief of* Inside NU *and president of the Northwestern chapter of the Association for Women in Sports Media.*

BURTON: MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES

Alumni

DESTINY ON DEERING

Mallika Choi Bhandari '19, left, and Andrew Choi '19, '19 CERT, right, celebrated their wedding on India's Goan coast in 2025. The couple met on Deering Meadow just moments into their first year. For more love connections, visit alummag.nu/love2026.



Creation

PLAYFULNESS IN ART

Five Questions With Britt Lower ’08

Emmy-winning *Severance* actor talks about Northwestern friendships, her tightrope-walking aspirations and the importance of being present.

1

What is it like to be an actor on *Severance*? The first question in the series is, “Who are you?” The show dives into themes of identity and who we are in different spaces in our lives. That’s something we can all relate to.

I am grateful to be a part of this collective conversation. This show has hit the zeitgeist in a way that’s touching multiple generations. I often talk to people who are watching the show with their teenage kids. I love imagining that ... there are these intergenerational conversations happening about our strange little office.

2

Has anything surprised you about working on the show? It surprised me how much it reminded me of Northwestern. I was technical director of WAVE Productions [the student-run theater group]. I loved the student involvement in creating a project from page to stage, having a real understanding of what it takes in every department — sewing, using power tools, but also flyering and getting people to come see the show.

On *Severance*, I feel like every character is a group project. My makeup artist was reading this book about Carl Jung. ... Something she said about the book clicked with me about the duality of my characters, Helly R. and Helena, and it totally transformed the way I approached a scene that day. ... Teamwork is something I valued at Northwestern, and I’m so grateful I get to keep doing that on *Severance*.

3

What stands out from your time at Northwestern? The close group of friends I made at school is still my close group of friends. There have been several weddings over the past few years, my own included, where Northwestern friends have shown up ... and it’s like we’re back on the theater board, helping to create these moments with each other.

My acting teacher Mary Poole ’75 MA/MS, ’87 PhD also stands out. ... She used to say, “In the theater, it’s called a *play* because that’s your job.” At the time I was a really good notetaker. She called me into her office, looked at my notes and said, “Britt, these are so great, but you’re not allowed to take notes in my class anymore. I want you to just be present.” And it was the best advice she could have given me.

4

Can you explain your fascination with the circus? And if you could be part of the circus, what would your act be? At a circus, everything is happening in real time. It’s brave. It’s human. And it’s this art form that’s both nostalgic and always evolving.

In the circuses that I’ve performed in, I operate as a ringmaster of sorts, playing my ukulele and interfacing with the audience. But if I had a specific skill, I would want to be a tightrope walker.

5

What’s it like to perform with fellow alumni in the improv group Frat Boyz? A dear friend of mine, Philip Markle ’08, is the artistic director of the Brooklyn Comedy Collective. We got the idea of putting together a group of Northwestern people who had done improv. It’s a joy to do the thing we were doing while on campus but in this new chapter of life.

For more, visit alummag.nu/Lower.

JUSTIN BETTMAN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

MURPHY: COURTESY OF NANCY HAYS ’84 MS; RICKARD: RACHELE RICKARD

RESTORING LOST HISTORY

While producing an event at the Kentucky Derby Museum in Louisville, Ky., in 2019, Nancy Hays ’84 MS discovered a dimly lit gallery that highlighted the history of Black jockeys. A lifelong fan of horse racing, Hays was surprised: “I had never seen a Black jockey,” she says. She spent the next seven years uncovering the history of Isaac Burns Murphy (above). Born into slavery in 1861, Murphy won three Kentucky Derbies and four of the first five American Derbies in Chicago. Seeking to restore Murphy’s memory, Hays worked with her filmmaker son, Eddie Heffernan, on a screenplay in 2020–21. Last December she published *Riding for America: The Story of Isaac Murphy, Sports Icon of the 19th Century*, a young adult novel. She also developed a stage play and an educational program to share Murphy’s story. Learn more at alummag.nu/Hays.

Jason Rickard, left, and his brother, Jordan

GOOD EATS

Chef Brothers Earn Accolades

Jason Rickard ’11 and his brother, Jordan, own FioRito, an Italian eatery in Wichita, Kan., that serves “Midwest Italian,” putting a unique spin on classic dishes.

One of their most popular plates is the Calabrian fried chicken bowl: pasta stuffed with potato and cheddar cheese, accompanied by spicy chicken bites and a sherry wine sauce. The restaurant uses local ingredients and makes everything from scratch.

It must be good, because this year the brothers were named James Beard Award semifinalists for best chef in the Midwest.

Both brothers learned to cook at an early age but pursued other careers until they were drawn back to the kitchen. In 2013 Jason quit his job as a paralegal and took a minimum wage position at a taco shop. He worked his way up from dishwasher to sous chef at fine-dining restaurants in Colorado. Then, the Rickards opened FioRito in May 2022.

“You expect James Beard Awards and Michelin stars in places like Chicago,” Jason says. “But when you move home to Wichita, your first thought isn’t, ‘This is how I win awards.’ It’s like moving out of Hollywood and getting an Oscar.”

Learn more at alummag.nu/Rickard.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Play Matters

Theater-making gives children more agency.

As a self-described "high school theater nerd," Julie Ritchey '07 believed there were only two ways to pursue a career in theater: Become a Broadway star or become a high school drama teacher.

Luckily, she says, at Northwestern "I learned there's more to theater than that." After taking professor Rives Collins' course on theater for young audiences, Ritchey found a niche that allows her to work in theater while championing a cause she cares about.

"Young people are losing the ability ... to just go outside and play freely with their friends," says Ritchey. "I wanted to create a space where young people have the agency to do what they choose."

Theater-making felt like an obvious answer. "Dramatic play and theater really are the language of children," she says.

In 2007 Ritchey and fellow alum Christian Libonati '07 founded Chicago-based Filament Theatre with the goal of creating an "anti-oppressive space" for youth. As artistic director, Ritchey began producing narrative-driven and immersive plays. Then, in 2017, she had a radical idea: "What if we truly turn the whole space over to young people and see what happens?"

The result was *Forts: Build Your Own Adventure*. First produced in December 2017, the immersive, hour-long experience invites participants into a room filled with cardboard boxes, sheets and clotheslines to engage in unstructured, unscripted playtime. Adult facilitators stand by, providing building supplies and ensuring participants' safety without interfering in their storytelling.

"So many choices we make in theater are about controlling behavior," Ritchey says. "My favorite definition of 'play' is anything that is freely chosen, self-directed and intrinsically motivated."

Today Ritchey is neither a Broadway star nor a schoolteacher — and she couldn't be happier. "When 8-year-old Mabel says, 'This was the best day of my entire life!' — that's on my resume," Ritchey says proudly.

This year *Forts* traveled for the first time to Minneapolis and Toronto.

RITCHEY: EMMA HOLLAND; *HOUSE OF FIDELITY*: SHANE COLLINS

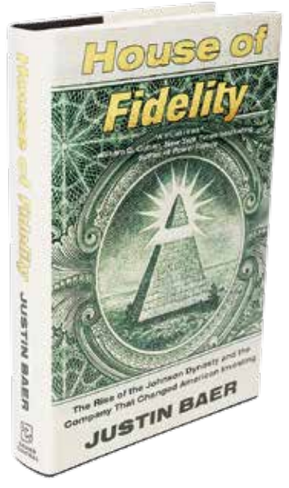
GENERATIONAL WEALTH

House of Fidelity by Justin Baer

Wall Street Journal editor Justin Baer '97 MS explores the famously secretive, family-owned company Fidelity in his new book. *House of Fidelity: The Rise of the Johnson Dynasty and the Company That Changed American Investing* details the history of the financial services giant from its founding in 1946 by Edward C. Johnson II to its explosive growth and omnipresence today. Baer estimates that one in five Americans today have some form of account with Fidelity, which manages more than $15 trillion.

But unlike many similar corporations, Fidelity remains a privately held company under the control of one family. Baer was intrigued to look inside such a massive yet opaque company, partly because so little is known about its inner workings.

He describes the book as an "epic family saga" replete with power struggles. "And as time marches forward, you have these historic, important figures intersect with the family. I was looking at historical moments ... through the lens of this one company."



DIY FITNESS

Slide Hustle

A cyclist turned a homemade slide board into a sports training staple.

Growing up in Northbrook, Ill., Barry Slotnick '93, '00 MBA was friends with speed skaters, so he knew about the fitness benefits of slide boards — smooth, low-friction devices designed to facilitate low-impact lateral movement exercises and mimic speed skating technique. At Northwestern, Slotnick was a member of the cycling team and was looking for an indoor activity to maintain his lower body strength during the winter. So, in the fall of his senior year, he picked up plywood, two-by-fours and a laminated shower wall panel — and built a slide board in his off-campus apartment.

Shortly after his graduation in 1993, Slotnick got a call from Paul Torricelli, the Northwestern men's tennis coach at the time, who asked if he could make a slide board for the tennis team. "A day or two later, I received another inquiry," Slotnick says. "At that point I thought, 'Well, maybe this is something.'"

Slotnick officially launched UltraSlide in December 1993. Early customers included the Chicago Bulls — thanks to a cold call — and the New York Knicks. The Bulls wanted an octagonal board for multidirectional training. "I had no concept of how to do that, but I wasn't going to tell the Bulls no," says Slotnick, who studied political science — not engineering — at Northwestern. "So, in my parents' garage, a carpenter friend and I created an octagonal slide board. It looked like a giant stop sign."

Today UltraSlide boards come in a variety of designs and lengths. They build core stability, improve lateral agility, strengthen the lower body and can be used for high-intensity cardio workouts. They are also used extensively for physical rehabilitation, says Slotnick.

Training facilities across pro and collegiate sports use UltraSlide boards. You can find them in Northwestern's weight and training rooms. Slotnick, whose family members have been devoted Wildcats fans and supporters, says he is especially proud to have Northwestern athletes training on UltraSlide boards.

Field hockey star Maddie Zimmer '24, '25 MA is the first Wildcat to partner with UltraSlide on a name, image and likeness licensing deal. "It was important to feature Maddie and highlight female athletes at Northwestern," says Slotnick, "because our women's sports have been so incredibly dominant over the past decade."

Maddie Zimmer, left, and Barry Slotnick

ZIMMER AND SLOTNICK: TOM MCGRATH '03

NOW RECORDING

Capturing Every Note

An impromptu jam session might just be a musician's breakthrough moment. But what if they didn't record it?

"That's happened many times," says pianist and software engineer Charles Weinberger '15. "I played something really well and thought, 'I'll never play that again. Why can't I always be recording?'"

In 2024 Weinberger created JamCorder, a device that attaches to a piano and automatically records what is played.

While many audio-recording devices exist, most produce audio files that can quickly become quite large. By comparison, JamCorder transcribes data on the pitch, timing and velocity of every note played, using a digital music interface called MIDI, a standard technology developed in the 1980s for connecting keyboards to computers.

"By recording just the notes, it reduces the amount of data by about a thousand times," Weinberger explains. Twelve hours of music can take up about the same amount of data as a single smartphone photo.

Using the accompanying JamCorder app or other software that can read MIDI data, musicians can then review exactly what they played — and *how* they played it.

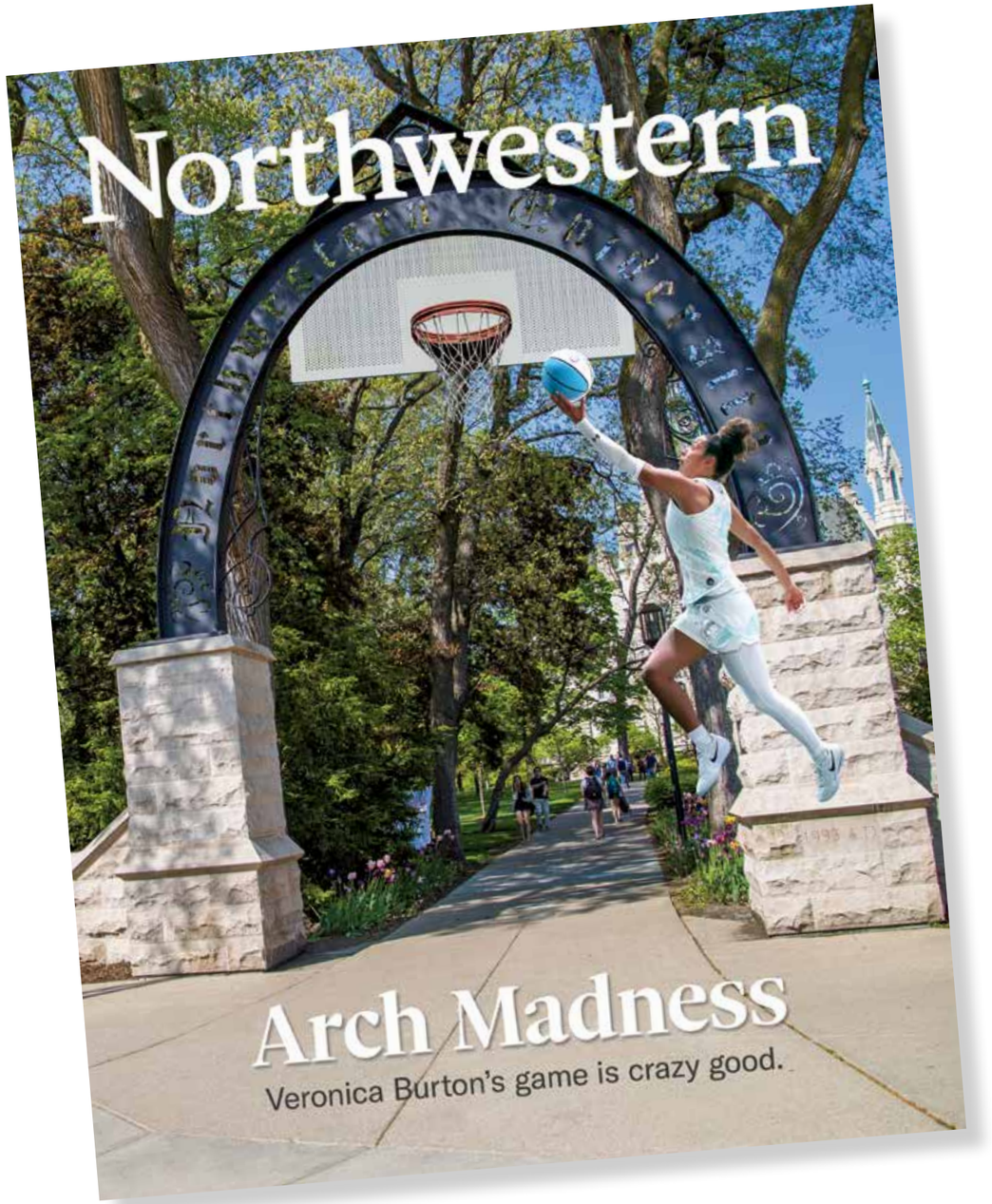


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: SARINA BENOIT; ARCH PHOTO: MICHAEL GOSS; BURTON PHOTO: LEONARDO FERNANDEZ/GETTY IMAGES

One of the best defenders in Big Ten history, Veronica Burton '22 was named the WNBA's 2025 Most Improved Player as a guard for the Golden State Valkyries. Learn about her journey on page 32.

Northwestern

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Bounce Back

Veronica Burton ’22 overcame adversity to become a rising star in the WNBA.

Get to know her on page 32.