Laser Focused

Vadim Backman explores the color spectrum’s outer edges to uncover hidden signs of cancer. p. 38
Last April the School of Communication assembled a star-studded cast for A Starry Night. The evening performance brought together some of Northwestern’s most famous entertainment alumni, including Ana Gasteyer ’89, Heather Headley ’97, Brian d’Arcy James ’90, Richard Kind ’78, Harry Lennix ’86, Tony Roberts ’81 and, of course, Stephen Colbert ’88, ’11 H, who hosted the night of merriment. The show was part of CommFest, a weekend of reunions, master classes, workshops, exhibits and demonstrations. The festival weekend helped support new graduate programs, including a master of fine arts program in acting, and a downtown Chicago performing and media arts center. Relive the experience at commfest.northwestern.edu.
Students, from left, Michael Smith ’70, ’72 MA, Steve Colson ’71, Dan Davis ’69, ’78 MA/MS and William Eric Perkins ’70 appear onscreen during the premiere of the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association–commissioned documentary The Takeover: The Revolution of the Black Experience at Northwestern University. The film, which was screened at the NUBAA Summit and Salute to Excellence Gala in May at Chicago’s Swissôtel, examined the May 1968 Bursar’s Office takeover by more than 100 African American students protesting inequitable campus policies and attempting to improve awareness of African American students’ experiences. Northwestern honored the 50th anniversary of that protest with a week of commemorative events and an exhibition at Deering Library.
15

“Programs that are based on cognitive behavioral therapy help people recognize situations when it’s useful to stop and think before they act.”

—Jonathan Guryan, professor of human development and social policy, on the Becoming a Man program

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Roots: Northwestern’s Oaks
It was the majestic oak trees near the shore of Lake Michigan that caught the eye of Orrington Lunt, one of the University’s founders, on his first visit to the land that today is Northwestern’s Evanston campus. Many stately bur and swamp white oaks, some well over 200 years old, still stand in splendor on the campus.

By Stephanie Russell

38

The Far Side of Violet
Vadim Backman has developed an innovative strategy for detecting cancer.

51

‘Shroom Art
The San Francisco–based art collective FoldHaus enlisted tech help from then-undergrad Romani McClendon ’17 when it was building Shrumen Lumen for Burning Man 2016.

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OAK ILLUSTRATION: AITCH; SOFTBALL: TOM LYNN; BECOMING A MAN: NICOLE WONG; EXHIBIT: FOLDHAUS, SHRUMEN LUMEN

PHOTO BY RON BLUNT; VADIM BACKMAN: KYLE MONK
Northwestern Pushes Toward New Frontiers

I

love fall at Northwestern. A new academic year kicks off, and it’s about a lot more than parking lots getting more crowded or the lines getting longer at our campus eateries. It’s about that renewed burst of energy that the whole Northwestern community gets, from Evanston to Chicago to Doha, Qatar. It’s also about recognizing how that energy is driving a great university forward in an incredibly wide-ranging mission — to build up some of the world’s most promising young talent, to push forward frontiers in every academic field and to provide the best health care, culture and community service to the larger world. And, of course, it’s also time for another season of Northwestern athletics and that give-it-your-all Wildcat spirit.

That same spirit, in our alumni and the broader University community, has helped support initiatives to expand opportunities for our students, build on our areas of excellence and transform our campuses. As you’ll see inside this issue of the beautifully redesigned Northwestern Magazine, we have surpassed our original, joint goals for the Campaign for Northwestern, which will open in early 2019 on our Chicago campus. It will house more than 800 Northwestern researchers, along with an additional 640 researchers from Lurie Children’s Hospital. Together they will investigate the causes — and, we hope, develop the cures — for diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Lou Gehrig’s, cancer and others that affect so many people and their families.

The Simpson Querrey building symbolizes our distinct identity at Northwestern. One of the things that sets Northwestern apart is that it isn’t just a premier university — it’s a premier research university, proud of its ability to solve the world’s most pressing problems. We’ve risen dramatically in research productivity compared with our peers in recent years, and we now receive more than $700 million in research funding annually, placing us among the top 25 universities nationally. Thanks to the addition of the Simpson Querrey building and renovations to key science and engineering buildings on the Evanston campus, Northwestern can attract even more of the best scientific researchers.

Of course, student life is the beating heart of the Northwestern experience, and that heart is beating ever stronger. The class of 2022 that just recently participated in March Through the Arch is a remarkable group chosen from more than 40,000 applicants, of whom only 8 percent were accepted. The ACT middle-range score for the class is 32–35 on a 36-point scale. The students come from 69 states — I’m determined that we’ll get a great one from North Dakota next year! — and 54 different countries. They’re incomparably bright, and they bring an especially broad range of interests and skills.

We’ve been building even greater diversity and quality into the Northwestern student body: For the past several years, we’ve enabled more high-achieving students from any financial background to attend Northwestern by increasing our financial aid and by eliminating loans for undergraduate students. Here’s another milestone: This fall, 20 percent of the entering class is eligible for Pell Grants, which help lower-income students to attend college. This means that Northwestern is now near the top of all private research universities in terms of the economic diversity of its undergraduate students. We’ve also made strides in expanding support for our graduate students and in increasing financial aid for law, business and medical school students, in order to reduce their loan burdens and give them stronger starts in their careers.

I’m pleased to report the appointment of some talented new academic leaders, including Kimberly Yuracko, the new dean of the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, and Annelise Riles, executive director of the Buffett Institute for Global Studies. They bring outstanding academic credentials and deep experience to their posts. Working with Provost Jonathan Holloway, who’s moving into his second year at Northwestern, they will provide strong leadership to these key academic areas. We also have begun the search for a new dean for the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications.

If you haven’t been to our Evanston campus lately, there’s so much new to see. The heightened energy at Northwestern that I mentioned at the beginning is magnified by the world-class expansion of facilities that our alumni and friends have made possible. Walk through the astonishing Ryan Fieldhouse and Walter Athletic Center, the Ryan Center for the Musical Arts, Kresge Hall, the Kellogg Global Hub and the newly restored Welsh-Ryan Arena, and you’ll get the sense that something historic is happening. Your generosity makes dreams come true.

And so allow me to cordially invite you to return to Northwestern this year — for Homecoming, class reunions and other events on our campuses. If you can’t be here, Mimi and I hope you see you at one of the many alumni events that we’ll host around the globe this academic year. We’ll be there to say thank you — and to talk about what comes next for our Northwestern family.

Best wishes,

Morton Schapiro
President and Professor

“We’ve been building even greater diversity and quality into the Northwestern student body: For the past several years, we’ve enabled more high-achieving students from any financial background to attend Northwestern by increasing our financial aid and by eliminating loans for undergraduate students. This fall, 20 percent of the entering class is eligible for Pell Grants, which help lower-income students to attend college.”

FROM THE PRESIDENT

FROM THE PRESIDENT
The Story Behind Our New Look

Welcome to the new Northwestern Magazine.

Our goal for the redesign was to reflect the unique spirit and attributes of Northwestern and its community of faculty, students and alumni in a more flexible and engaging format. And, of course, we wanted to continue to be a strong storytelling venue where we explore issues, themes and topics in depth through first-rate journalism.

It’s been eight years since our last redesign, so the magazine was due for a makeover.

We admit it — the old layout was text heavy, and there wasn’t a lot of white space, much to the dismay of our designer.

So we knew we needed more than a visual redesign. It was time to rethink and rethink the editorial content as well.

We think the new design delivers all that we asked for — and we hope you agree.

Our thanks to Pentagram’s design team in New York City for helping us create such a vibrant, elegant and classically modern look for Northwestern Magazine and our online site.

In the front of the magazine you’ll find more visuals - photo spreads, illustrations, large images — and lists and shorter news stories. We’ve added Voices, a collection of first-person essays (including My Northwestern Direction), Q&As, a social feed and quotes ...

Stephanie Russell  
Executive Editor

About the Cover

The cover was designed by Paula Scher, who worked with Pentagram to create a new look for vibrant, elegant and classy Northwestern Magazine. It was time to rethink and retool the magazine's editorial content as well. That's what we did, with the help of Pentagram, which brought a fresh perspective to our magazine and our online site.

We're also launching a new website: magazine.northwestern.edu. Many of you access the magazine website from your mobile devices, so we think you'll be delighted to visit our new site and discover photography and design innovations that deliver a clean and simple online reading experience.

It's a mobile-friendly, contemporary website that allows us to showcase long-form feature stories and short news items from the print magazine, along with the latest University news and exclusive online content.

We're also ramping up our social media presence to keep you connected. And we want to hear from you.

If you see something you like, tweet it and tag us. If you have an interesting story, guided and redirected career paths, and fostered lifelong friendships and relationships. We hope that Northwestern Magazine helps you connect to the University and your fellow Wildcats wherever you go in the world.

Let us know how you like the magazine’s new look. And by all means, keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Russell
and took a position at Cornell University. There he founded what is now the very active department of Africana studies. Both he and his wife also have been strong voices for racial and economic justice in Ithaca’s public schools.

Although he is now officially retired at the university, Professor Turner continues to be an important figure in the Cornell community.

Gregory S. Alexander ’73 JD
Healdsburg, Calif.

As an alum from the class of 1970 I lived through the tumultuous events on campus in the late 60’s more as an observer than a participant. Eva Jefferson Paterson’s reflection gives me a new appreciation for the movement and those who made a significant difference in a troubled time. Thanks, Eva.

Dan L. Miller ’70
Roslindale, Ill.

THEN: THE WAY THEY WERE

I could not believe my eyes when I saw the article on The Way They Were (“Entertainment Icons Gathered for Grand Gala,” then, spring 2018, page 2) detailing an event about which I have told people for decades. It was sold as a “special” or “edition” [editor’s note: In October 1980 some of Northwestern’s most prominent alumns working in Hollywood and on Broadway assembled in Evanston to celebrate the completion of the Theatre and Interpretation Center. The event, recorded and edited as a television special, aired three times in prime time to a national audience.] I was an elementary schooler in Berkeley, Calif., who had just discovered my singing voice when I watched that television special and decided that night I absolutely wanted to go to Northwestern. There were so many famous alumni whom I had heard of (even at such a young age) that I figured it had to be an excellent school!

Back in those days, 2,000 miles away from campus, Northwestern students didn’t otherwise have on my radar. I’m so thankful for that wonderful show that changed my life and appreciate the great memory!

Sharon Landquist ’91
Oakton, Va.

THE ALL-OR-NOTHING MARRIAGE

Although I agree with much of what Eli Finkel [“The All-Or-Nothing Marriage,” spring 2013] has to say regarding what makes for a fulfilling and lasting marriage, I want to add to his saying that “We no longer need a spouse to help us get food, clothing and shelter” is just reflective of present public discourse, in which poor people, including many of those employed in the services industries/businesses, do not exist.

In the Chicago college where I taught, I encountered numerous students who exist in families that depend on not just a spouse but other family members who need to work to meet basic family needs. Such a reality places a great deal of stress on family dynamics, in which economic survival, not boredom, was the major impediment to a successful marriage. This is not to say that those of lesser means do not want their partners to foster self-expression and personal growth, but it is much more difficult to do so when your mind is on how you are going to pay the rent.

Louis Silverstein ’70 PhD
Evanston

CORRECTION:
The close-up on Alexander Pancose “Climbing for a Cause” [Alumni Life, spring 2018, page 57] incorrectly states that Mount Aconcagua is in the Andes Mountains in South Africa. It is located in the Andes Mountains in Argentina.

CGRANTS TO OUR IPAD WINNER, JESSICA SMASAL

Congratulations to Jessica Smasal ’14, who won a brand new iPad thanks to her participation in our readership survey last winter. All survey participants were given the opportunity to enter the random drawing.

Smasal, who studied history at Northwestern, is manager of individual giving and special events at Openlands, a Chicago-based conservation nonprofit. Thanks to everyone who participated in the survey.

Voices

JOURNALISTS UNDER FIRE

This was, after all, a man whose news diet consists of more cable TV than print and a politician who has called journalists sleazy, “the enemy of the American people” and “third rate.”

Trump’s compliment of Page juxtaposed with critical news media illustrate a great irony known by Washington insiders: The president privately covers the approval of journalists even as he publicly berates them.

Elizabeth Bumiller, another Medill grad and the Washington bureau chief for the New York Times, said at the same campus event that the president’s constant broadsides about “fake news” amount to “politics that plays to the base nicely” and added that “none of us take it seriously.”

But Bumiller ’77 also noted a consequence of the pervasive, hostile rhetoric. “I do have concerns about threats against journalists,” she said.

That is very worrying.”

Indeed, Bumiller is correct. Threats against journalists are on the rise both in the United States and around the world, an alarming trend.

There are even bigger systemic threats from the president. They’re contributing to an erosion of trust in a free press that is the oxygen of any well-governed democracy. And they’re exacerbating a partisan divide that already has many Americans nested inside their own “filter bubbles” of red and “blue” allegiances ahead of actual facts.

The ripple effects are being felt beyond the Capital Beltway. While shows such as CNN, the New York Times, and traditional news outlets more than national ones, there are troubling signs. A Pew Research Center study last year showed a mere 24 percent of Republicans said they have a lot of trust in information they get from local news organizations.

Eighty percent of journalists work outside the media centers of Washington, New York and Los Angeles. They’re not players in the D.C. food fight. They cover city councils, community schools, local colleges, crime, neighborhood organizations, small businesses, high school sports and entertainment.

They mostly do it for modest pay, and they toil against the backdrop of increasing financial pressures spawned by the digital disruption that has shattered their business models. They do it because they believe in the essential missions of connecting citizens in their communities, helping them live their everyday lives and connecting citizens in their communities, helping them live their everyday lives and contributing to a free press that is the oxygen of any well-governed democracy. And they’re exacerbating a partisan divide that already has many Americans nested inside their own “filter bubbles” of red and “blue” allegiances ahead of actual facts.

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The cultural authority of science, journalism, medicine, law and other knowledge-making institutions has been increasingly in question. If it makes institutions have a much more difficult job, policy was good or bad. Now the partisan cycle, we’re going to be in a position where we no longer be left in a position where we no longer need methods of settling on facts. Where people think facts are fungible, it will be very hard for communities and countries to function.

David Rapp, professor of psychology and of learning sciences

We cannot agree on basic facts because of the cacophony of misinformation and disinformation from so many different sources. Societies need methods of settling on facts. We need to be able to say, “We can make a decision based on these facts we all agree on. We may disagree on what to do about these facts, but we can agree on the facts.” If we get to a point where people think facts are fungible, it will be very hard for communities and countries to function.


We have particular views about what’s really dangerous. So if people that it’s fake news. Once we leave this hyperpartisan cycle, we’re going to be in a position where we no longer need methods of settling on facts. Where people think facts are fungible, it will be very hard for communities and countries to function.

The cultural authority of science, journalism, medicine, law and other knowledge-making institutions has been increasingly in question. If it continues, this trend could potentially undermine the foundations of the project of enlightenment — evidence-based government, public policy, education, health and so on.

“Lying on the ground looking up through maple leaves exactly that color, with an intensely blue sky in the background.”

Laurel Harropulos Bailey

And sometimes they don’t have the energy or time or motivation. So people aren’t sure or aren’t well-practiced in how to check whether the sources they’re hearing from have vested interests. And listeners sometimes have particular views that they want to be true. So if something they’re reading aligns with what they believe to be true, they’re more likely to accept it.

Pablo Boczkowski, professor of communication studies and co-editor of Trump and the Media (2018)

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Seeking Solutions
Climate scientist finds hope in her problem-solving students.

Yarrow Axford, associate professor of Earth and planetary sciences

“Teaching is a really remarkable source of inspiration. I teach classes not just for Earth scientists but also for students in McCormick and Medill, even the law school. And I draw a lot of inspiration from the students in those classes, because it gives me a chance to interact with young people who are oriented toward solving problems. Whether they’re doing graduate research on solar fuels or improving industrial processes to make them more energy-efficient, they want to find solutions to the problems — including climate change. Working with the next generation of scientists and engineers and journalists and politicians and economists and entrepreneurs keeps me hopeful.”

Axford grew up in rural Maine, where she was fascinated by the glacially sculpted landscapes and how they came to be. At Northwestern she studies climate and environmental change, primarily through the lens of paleolimnology — the study of lake sediments and past lake environments. Her work is aimed at understanding climate change and glacier fluctuations in Arctic and alpine environments, including around the margins of the Greenland ice sheet. Her most recent research explored lake mud that provided a record of two interglacial periods in northwest Greenland — information that could help researchers better gauge Greenland’s sensitivity to warming.
Being aware of the dangers of automatic thinking can mean the difference between life and death.

Rather than focusing on education or punitive measures to deter crime, CBT-based programs like BAM offer behavioral strategies that teach youth to slow down and think. The programs also emphasize mentorship and role-playing lessons in a group setting. Participants pick up meditation techniques and learn to express themselves, connect with others and cope with loss. Guryan has found that BAM reduces arrests for violent crimes by half and increases high school graduation rates by almost 20 percent for CPS students who participate in the program.

Guryan’s research on BAM and other programs takes place at the University of Chicago Education Lab. Co-founded by Guryan in 2012, the Education Lab is a close affiliate of the University of Chicago Crime Lab. Both partner with civic and community leaders to identify, evaluate and learn how to scale promising programs that reduce crime and improve education in urban areas.

In part due to findings from Guryan and his colleagues, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel ’85 MA launched the Mayor’s Mentoring Initiative, a $36 million public-private partnership to expand BAM and similar programs. While Guryan and his team continue evaluating BAM, they are also assessing the Working on Womanhood mentoring program and other initiatives.

ORDER OF THE RISING SUN

Tokyo

Northwestern professor Phyllis Lyon was awarded the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun for her role in promoting Japanese culture, language education and cultural exchange. Lyon, who lived in Japan from ages 9 to 19, taught in Japanese language and literature at Northwestern for nearly four decades and was crucial to the founding of the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures.

FROM THE FLIGHT DECK

Pacific Ocean, Baja Peninsula, Mexico

In April three journalism graduate students reported from the USS John C. Stennis, a naval aircraft carrier roughly 100 miles off the coast of the Baja Peninsula, as part of an in-depth reporting project associated with Medill’s Politics and National Security specialization. The Medill crew got to experience a “trap landing” on the carrier and observed flight operations from the flight deck.

ON TOUR IN ASIA

Beijing

Ninety students from the Northwestern University Symphony Orchestra performed at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing as part of a three-city, weeklong Asia tour last March. Led by conductor Victor Yampolsky, the orchestra played works by Gustav Mahler and Leonard Bernstein ’52 H in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The Ticker

Northwestern-based Design for America received a National Design Award for corporate and social innovation achievement from Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Founded by professor Utter in 2009, DFA now includes 36 universities and more than 1,000 members.

Kimberly Yuracko succeeded Daniel Rodriguez as dean of the Northwestern-Pritzker School of Law in September. Yuracko, who joined the law faculty in 2002, has gained national attention for her scholarship in employment law, antidiscrimination law and gender equity.

In July a Northwestern team launched an X-ray imaging platform that can capture high-resolution images of astronomical objects. Led by physics and astronomy associate professor Emerick Figure-Felix, the team hopes to explore “how ‘X-ray stuff’ is made, because it is what allows the universe to exist.”

Northwestern received the ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year Award for efforts to reduce energy consumption and educate the University community about energy efficiency.

20,000 – The number of rain ponchos distributed to troops, families and guests on June 22, a soggy Commencement day when Chicago received more than an inch of rain.
SPORTS

Season of Success

Recent highlights from Northwestern’s men’s and women’s sports.

Notable senior Olivia Rosendahl of women’s swimming and diving captured her second consecutive platform national title. The Big Ten Diver of the Year also earned All-America honors in the 1-meter. Women’s golf ended its season in the NCAA Championships quarterfinals, becoming one of just three teams to finish in the top 10 at each of the last four NCAA Championships. Hannah Kim ‘18 and Sarah Cho ‘18 concluded their careers having played in all four of the program’s top national championship performances.

Women’s tennis finished its season at the NCAA Women’s Tennis Championships, where the team fell in the round of 16. Erin Larner ‘18 reached the second round of the NCAA Singles Championship, and Larner and Maddie Lipp ’17, ‘18 MS, both All-Americans, fell in the first round of the NCAA Doubles Championship.

The softball team posted its best win total since 2008, ultimately losing to No. 7 seed Georgia in the NCAA Athens Regional championship round.

The women’s lacrosse team fell to No. 2 seed North Carolina in the NCAA Tournament, finishing the year 15-6. Selena Lasota ‘18, a redshirt senior in 2018-19, scored 75 goals this season, leaving her just 52 shy of the program record (254) held by Shannon Smith ’12.

Men’s golf made its first appearance in the NCAA Championships Finals since 2011.

The women’s fencing team won its fifth Midwest Fencing Conference Championship and first overall title since 2016. Northwestern finished eighth at the NCAA Fencing Championships.

ARENA UPDATE

The complete renovation of Welsh-Ryan Arena will transform the student-athlete and fan experience in Northwestern’s most-used and most-variegated venue. Highlights include locker rooms for men’s and women’s basketball and volleyball; new seating throughout the arena; wider, more accessible concourses with improved lighting; new concession areas; and state-of-the-art audiovisual capabilities. The dedication will be held Nov. 2, when men’s basketball hosts audiovisual capabilities. The dedication will be held Nov. 2, when men’s basketball hosts Notre Dame the following day.

CUT OUTS: MICHAEL RINGOR; BELOW: MISHA SYCHEV

OPPOSITE: MIKHAIL GORBACHEV.

When Mary Deeley, ’99 PhD, pastoral associate at Shell Catholic Center, read a spring 2016 Daily Northwestern story about students battling food insecurity, she was shocked. “Why are there students who are hungry on this campus, where food is seemingly everywhere?” Deeley asks.

She quickly set up meetings with the student group Points for a Purpose (now Swipes Out Hunger), another campus minister and the head of Student Enrichment Services. Over the next year, Deeley worked with SES, student-led anti-hunger organizations and other campus ministries to create a pop-up food pantry during holiday breaks. Those partners eventually established the Purple Pantry, where students can pick up nonperishables and fresh fruits and vegetables donated by the University community.

The pantry, which is open one day a week or by appointment, is staffed by Northwestern volunteers and housed at Shell Catholic Center.

Food insecurity continues to be a prominent issue nationally. A 2018 survey of 66 colleges and universities by researchers at Temple University and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab found that more than a third of all college students experience food insecurity in a given month. According to anonymous intake surveys, nearly nine out of 10 Purple Pantry clients said they had skipped a meal at least one day in a two-week period because they lacked adequate access to food; 12 percent skipped meals for four or more days. The most common barriers to food accessibility were inconvenient dining hall hours for those on campus and lack of money for those off campus. More than half of the pantry users reported that they share food with family or friends.

“Often we don’t know what our students’ lives are like,” Deeley says. “We are beginning to see students for whom money is really tight. They’re counting every penny. It is important for people to know this resource exists.”

Photo illustration by David Schwan

For more information on how to volunteer or donate to the Purple Pantry, email m-deeley@u.northwestern.edu.
Climate Change Poses Serious Risk for Some Bees

Warmer temperatures push bees to their physiological limits, may drive local extinction.

As a bee, that means you are usually better. It means you have greater energy stores. As a bee, that means you are likely able to reproduce more.

For insects, size is a big deal. Bigger is usually better. It means you have greater energy stores. As a bee, that means you are likely able to reproduce more.
EATING RIGHT

A Nutritionist in Your Pocket

Feinberg professor helped launch FoodSwitch, an app that promotes healthy eating.

Before you buy that bag of chips to satisfy your craving for a salty snack, check FoodSwitch. The free mobile app, developed in part by researchers at the Feinberg School of Medicine, might recommend a healthier, lower sodium option.

FoodSwitch users can scan a packaged food’s barcode to see its nutritional rating and healthier options. The app, which launched in the United States in June, scores each packaged food’s barcode to recommend a healthier, lower sodium option. The app’s novelty comes from its crowdsourcing features. When users come across a food that’s not in the 268,000-product database, the app prompts them to photograph the packaging, its nutrition panel and the ingredient list so the app’s team can add it.

With some 500,000 packaged foods available in the United States, FoodSwitch will allow researchers to better track changes in the U.S. food supply. Huffman ’11 GME, associate professor of medicine and preventive medicine at Feinberg, says the app could transform the way researchers and policymakers think about global food systems.

“Until now, it hasn’t been possible to imagine having a database of the whole food supply,” Huffman says. He hopes FoodSwitch will both improve American’s knowledge of available food options and press manufacturers to create healthier food for people around the globe.

“For example, breads in America contain 12 percent more sodium than breads in the U.K.,” Huffman says. “By influencing the amount of sodium in the bread supply, we could improve people’s health outcomes.”

Huffman and his colleagues partnered on the project with the George Institute for Global Health in Australia and Label Insight, a Chicago-based data company that tracks packaged foods available in the U.S.

Facts: A 2011 study led by Gupta found that 8 percent of children in the United States — about two children in every classroom — must avoid certain foods.

Myth: Food allergies are rare — and rarely serious.

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1 Myth: Food allergies are rare — and rarely serious.

Facts: A 2011 study led by Gupta found that 8 percent of children in the United States — about two children in every classroom — must avoid certain foods.

2 Myth: Food labels make it easy to avoid contact with deadly food.

Facts: While food manufacturers must identify top allergens, their warnings are hardly comprehensive. Precautionary labeling is voluntary and unregulated.

3 Myth: Eating a little bit of a reaction-inducing food won’t hurt.

Facts: Exposure to even a small amount of food can be dangerous for food-allergic children.

4 Myth: Food allergies mostly affect high-income white families.

Facts: Gupta found that African American and Asian American children have higher rates of food allergies but lower rates of diagnosis.

5 Myth: Food switches are a way to avoid reaction-inducing foods.

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6 Myth: Food allergies are a reaction to high-sodium white families.

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Northwestern student-led startup is commercializing a material that can treat contaminated wastewater from industrial processes more efficiently and effectively than market competitors.

NUMiX Materials will provide industrial users with a platform of water treatment sorbent powders to remove toxic materials from their wastewater streams.

Working with a patented ion exchange technology from the lab of Northwestern chemistry professor Mercouri Kanatzidis, the student startup is bringing to market a material that can capture an array of heavy metals from contaminated water.

The material, a layered metal ion exchange sorbent, is a powder that locks in a range of toxic and precious heavy metals, present in minute concentrations, from industrial wastewater.

The powder compounds are formed by layers of inorganic material with a potassium interior that acts as a placeholder for the toxic and precious metals. Once the material is placed in the contaminated water, the powder releases the potassium to make room for the metal that’s attracted to the inter-layer surface.

The material allows for the removal and filtration of metals faster and with fewer steps than current technology, thereby reducing the amount of waste going to landfills from the treatment process.

NUMiX Materials, which is supported by a Bienenstock Family Social Impact Program grant, developed its commercialization strategy last winter during NUvention: Energy, a course offered by Northwestern’s Farley Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and the Institute for Sustainability and Energy. In April the team reached the semifinal round of the Rice Business Plan Competition and received the U.S. Department of Energy’s regional $35,000 Cleantech University Prize.

The next month NUMiX won first place and $35,000 at Northwestern’s VentureCat student startup competition. The team finished second and won $30,000 at the DOE’s national, invite-only Cleantech University Prize competition in June. NUMiX won a VentureWell E-Team grant, for which they traveled to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in early July.

NUMiX, which operates out of a shared lab space in the Technological Institute, continues to develop and test its product while designing its production processes.

The NUMiX Materials team

INNOVATION

It’s in the Bag

Recent Kellogg School of Management grads Allison Brown ’18 MBA, Cara Maresca ’18 MBA and Kristina Moore ’18 MBA teamed up to launch Cariset, a startup that makes a high-fashion, high-function leather backpack for women. It’s big enough to carry a laptop, workout wear and lunch but won’t look out of place at an important business meeting or an evening happy hour. Cariset earned $5,000 and first place in the business-to-consumer category at VentureCat 2018.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Little Joe Ventures Fellowship Program in Entrepreneurship, made possible by Tony Owen ’97, ’03 MBA and his wife, Monique, supports entrepreneurial ventures at the undergraduate level through a combination of workshops, internship opportunities, networking and mentoring. The inspiration for the program’s name comes from Owen’s mother’s stories about her award-winning 4-H Club cow, Little Joe, a source of pride during her teenage years. To Owen, Little Joe represents the value of pursuing unconventional paths and the importance of getting to know people at a meaningful level.

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Since the Campaign fundraising now stands at least 141,000 supporters. Campaign from at least 141,000 goals of raising $3.75 billion was launched publicly in schedule. more than two years ahead of well beyond its original goal, Campaign for Northwestern fundraising for “Holly” S. French, has pushed '76 MBA and his wife, Hollis T. Bondurant “Bon” French ‘75,

Northwestern increases its target — and its impact. After surpassing its initial Campaign goal in record time, Northwestern is expanding its estate to $5 billion. The “We Will” Campaign has raised gifts for the Campaign. Provost Jonathan Holloway says, “Among those strategic priorities are endowed financial aid support for undergraduate, graduate and professional school students; expanding our expertise and curricular offerings in global studies and the humanities; broadening and deepening our interdisciplinary research and innovation in computer science; updating Kellogg and University programs; and helping students thrive. Funding for graduate fellowships has risen substantially as well. “An important aspect of the “We Will” Campaign is how broadly it is engaging the University, and how it is making a meaningful difference in the world.”

Northwestern benefactors Bon and Holly French have been the “We Will” Campaign’s impact firsthand and hope to inspire additional giving through their support. “Holly and I care deeply for Northwestern and the Kellogg School of Management and are proud to give back to the university that has meant so much to our family over the last seven decades,” says Bon French, a lifelong leader in the field of private equity. Northwestern has the potential to make a significant and lasting impact on the world through strategic investments in education and discovery, and now is our moment.” The Frenches’ latest gift — a transformational estate commitment that pushed Campaign fundraising over $4 billion — will benefit Kellogg and University programs. “Bon and I have been thrilled to be a part of the impact the Campaign has had across Kellogg and the University, and we look forward to growing that impact,” Holly French says. “We hope others will join us in ensuring a better future for Northwestern and its students.” With 37 years of giving to the University, the Frenches are “platinum” members of NU Loyal. They also belong to the Henry and Emma Rogers Society, honoring those who have included the University in their estate plans. Bon French earned a bachelor’s degree in economics from the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and an MBA from Kellogg. He is chairman of Adams Street Partners. A Northwestern trustee since 2004, he is a member of the “We Will” Campaign Steering Committee and will serve as Campaign co-chair in 2019. He is also a member of the Kellogg Global Advisory Board and the Kellogg Finance Network. Holly French volunteers for the Junior League, Northwestern Medicine’s Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital and the Northwestern Women’s Board. Read more at magazine.northwestern.edu/we-will-update/dedicated-donors.

Northwestern Increases Campaign Goal to $5 Billion

After surpassing its initial Campaign goal in record time, Northwestern is expanding its target — and its impact. A major new commitment from Northwestern University Trustee T. Bondurant “Bon” French ’75, ’76 MBA and his wife, Hollis “Holly” S. French, has pushed fundraising for We Will. The Campaign for Northwestern well beyond its original goal, more than two years ahead of schedule. The “We Will” Campaign was launched publicly in March 2014 with the joint goals of raising $3.75 billion from at least 141,000 supporters. Campaign fundraising now stands at more than $4 billion, thanks to more than 150,000 Northwestern alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends. The University is increasing its goals to raise $5 billion from 170,000 supporters, including $5,000 members of NU Loyal — the society that recognizes continuous annual giving to Northwestern — by the end of 2020.

“We are calling on the Northwestern community to continue supporting critically important initiatives that will help the University achieve new levels of excellence,” says Bon French ’76 MBA, Campaign co-chair for participation. “Together, we will help Northwestern continue to make a meaningful difference in the world.”
ATHLETICS AND RECREATION

Elevating the Student-Athlete Experience
New facilities are transforming life for student-athletes.

Ryan Fieldhouse serves as one of the most versatile indoor practice, competition and recreation venues in the nation. Maximizing its location on the shores of Lake Michigan, it features a 44-foot tall glass façade with views to the north and east and is flanked by spaces for football and Olympic sports. Pat Ryan said of Northwestern, “We strive for excellence in everything that we do. When we have the quality of student-athletes that we have, they deserve to be in a state-of-the-art facility.”

Within Ryan Fieldhouse, Wilson Field is striped for NCAA regulation football, soccer and lacrosse, with movable bleacher seating for up to 900 spectators and an automated netting system to subdivide the space.

Speaking to student-athletes, Steve Wilson said, “This is a magnificent building, which will house state-of-the-art equipment, but that equipment and the building are only tools. They’re here to provide you with the opportunity to work even harder to achieve your personal dreams.”

When Adam Hughes ’03 first left Buffalo for Northwestern, “entrepreneur” was neither a common career choice nor one he had in mind for himself. After taking a variety of courses his first year, the aspiring lawyer ended up majoring in the subject he enjoyed most: history. “I really enjoyed the discipline of the reading and the writing of papers, and the teachers were incredible,” Hughes says.

By his junior year — after gaining some exposure to other fields and recognizing that the economy had become less stable — he decided to take a business path.

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His first position after graduation was as a traveling tech consultant for Accenture. He says, “and you get to do that with a smaller company or a startup.” So in 2005 he took the opportunity to join an early-stage venture called Enova, a technology-and data analytics–driven online lending company that then employed just 49 people; the publicly traded company now boasts a market cap of more than $1 billion. There, Hughes held several senior strategy, operations and marketing positions over six-plus years.

In 2012 I took on a new challenge and helped start Avant, he says. As president of Avant — a startup that provides digital technology to banks as well as an online direct lending platform — Hughes oversees technology, product/marketing and operations. The Chicago-based company currently has 500 employees and 750,000 customers.

Hughes and his wife, Maggie Rosevi Hughes ’04 — a fellow Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences graduate who works on client data and analytics at Aon Risk Solutions — welcomed their first child in spring 2017. Shortly thereafter, Adam Hughes began exploring ways to support the institution that had helped launch his career. Inspired by the growth of programs such as The Garage, Northwestern's hub for student entrepreneurship and innovation, he was one of the first alumni to sign the Founders’ Pledge when it launched in spring 2018. The Founders’ Pledge is a new opportunity for entrepreneurs to impact the future of Northwestern. Alumni who take the pledge make a personal commitment to support any area of the University they choose with a meaningful gift when the time is right for them.

Upon taking the Founders’ Pledge, individuals join an exclusive community of Northwestern entrepreneurs — known as the Founders’ Society — who plan to share their wealth, usually once their companies reach a liquidity event, such as a merger, sale or initial public offering.

Hughes has encouraged other entrepreneurs to take the Founders’ Pledge, including Delta Tau Delta fraternity brother Chris Erickson ’04, who has achieved success in the online housing rental marketplace as co-founder of Apartmentlist.com.

Hughes also supports his alma mater through mentorship at The Garage. And in December he will host undergraduates for a “career trek” at his company’s headquarters through Weinberg College’s Waldron Student-Alumni Connections program.

“Entrepreneurship is what nearly how it is now back in 2003,” Hughes explains. “Just look at the way Northwestern supports the startup mindset today. I’m excited to be a part of it.”

Learn more at unewi.northwestern.edu/founders.

Founders’ Society Members
Deanna Khosh Charles ’86, founder, Mambo LLC
Chris Erickson ’04, chief operating officer and co-founder, Apartmentlist.com
Adam Hughes ’03, president, Avant
George Markoualkis ’15, founder, Spense
Donovan Morrison ’14, CEO, Luna Lights
Rachna Patel ’04, CEO, Dr. Rachna Patel: The Medical Marijuana Expert

Adam Hughes mentors students at The Garage.
If you want to break into the music recording business, multi-Grammy Award–winning producer and songwriter Thom Russo would like to bend your ear. BY STEPHANIE RUSSELL AND ALEX GARCIA ’89

Music producer Thom Russo works with actress Alanna Ubach, his wife, at his WoomRoom Studio in North Hollywood, Calif.
Russo knows a lot about building relationships with singers. First, as an engineer and mixer and now as a producer and songwriter, he’s spent more than two decades in Los Angeles working with major artists such as Prince, Michael Jackson, Audioslave and Jay-Z, Johnny Cash, Eric Clapton, Juanes and Maná. A sought-after sound engineer and mixer who was Quincy Jones’ right hand for many years, Russo ended up on one of the sessions when asked. You help out and give them what they need, and that’s a street smarts thing, in a way. You’re polite and you’re quiet and you only offer your opinion when asked. You help out and give them everything they need. But beyond that, Michael was comfortable around me. That’s why that worked.

“When you’re working with artists of that caliber, you have to know how to be around them. That’s a street smart thing. You can work till 2 a.m. and finish this. ”

Michael Jackson's people skills were put to the test early in his professional career.

In the Studio with Michael Jackson
Four years after graduating from Northwestern, Russo got a job as a staff engineer at Larrabee and hit the ground running. “Some weeks were 100-hour weeks, because I was the guy they could always call,” says Russo. Within three months of landing at the studio, Russo was invited into a project that jump-started his career. He happened to be at Larrabee’s North Hollywood studio, where Michael Jackson was working on his album Dangerous in 1991.

“It was bananas that it happened this way — not just right place, right time,” he says, “but the fact that I knew my stuff enough when Michael rented out the entire building and that I was proficient enough to be on the production team.”

Russo ended up on one of the sessions with Bruce Swedien, a legendary audio engineer and producer who was Quincy Jones’ right hand for many years.

“Bruce could tell that I was one of those young, hungry dudes who knew a lot, that he could say, ‘OK, I’m going home. You can work till 2 a.m. and finish this.’”

One night the megastar started talking with Russo and suggested that he join Jackson’s team. Although nervous at first, Russo quickly figured out how to interact with him.

“When you’re working with artists of that caliber, you have to know how to be around them. That’s a street smart thing. You can work till 2 a.m. and finish this.”

Michael Jackson was upset that Jackson hadn’t finished it. “Michael was still writing lyrics in the recording studio in 1991.”

What also happened is that the record was released on the same day as the World Trade Center attacks. “It’s a balancing act; sometimes you have to deal with music business people.”

“In addition to dealing with agents, you have to deal with music business people. So it’s a balancing act; sometimes you have to play good cop-bad cop.”

“For the best part of a year, that’s what happened.”

Meanwhile, Russo’s manager told him he had a voicemail that the young artist who should be in the recording industry for 25 years, and I still hear him. “If this isn’t a young artist who should be world famous, then I don’t know who is.”

When she opened her mouth, “I thought, ‘Oh, my — this is just a God-given talent,” says Russo ‘88. “I’ve been in this industry for 25 years, and I still hear him. “If this isn’t a young artist who should be world famous, then I don’t know who is.”

“You’ve got to have mad people skills,” Russo says. “When you’re dealing with musicians and up-and-coming singer. “This is the time to build up a relationship, because it’s the beginning that matters.”

1. Four of Thom Russo’s 16 Grammy Awards. He has won 13 Latin Grammys.

How to Break into Audio Production and the Recording Industry

Nowadays, there aren’t as many big studios where you can go in and get your experience, says producer Thom Russo. But there are plenty of smaller studios throughout the United States. “The whole world is done on a laptop, including big records and little records. But we still use the studios for many things, like live recordings, better sound and troubleshooting technical issues.”

Here’s his advice on breaking into the business:

1. Hang out at recording studios and be a fly on the wall. Start at the bottom. Get tea, run errands — so you can see how music is made by professionals.

2. Get your technical chops together. That should be your primary focus. It’s something you learn and then you do by rote. As long as you have your technical and musical skills together in every genre and format, you’ll be ahead of the game.

3. Learn people skills. In addition to dealing with artists, you have to deal with music business people. So it’s a balancing act; sometimes you have to play good cop-bad cop.

4. Keep your eye on the finish line. You need to be able to deliver by the strict release date, no matter the obstacles or excuses.

5. Don’t take things personally. The most important thing you have to realize is that it’s not about you — it’s about the music.
Advice for Artists in Search of Producers

Most musicians and bands seek independent contractors today, because the large commercial studios are a thing of the past. If you’re a musician or band looking for a producer/engineer or mixer, Thom Russo offers these tips:

Know what you want to be. Have an established identity and goal.

Don’t be shy about playing rough demos. We’re not looking for finished records.

Put your best foot forward in terms of your songwriting.

Don’t be afraid to approach experienced sound engineers. Half the bands that contact me say, “We heard your music and we really want to work with you.”

Thom Russo spent late nights in the studio while working with Prince on Diamonds and Pearls (1991), the artist’s 15th album.

It was what Russo did outside his major that helped him figure that out. He wrote music for the Waa-Mu Show, played in several bands (including the house band for the Mee-Ow Show) and hung out with a lot of musicians from many genres. He also got involved with the newly formed Niteskool Project, a student-run record label and music video production company that began in 1983.

“Then I started taking a computer music class, computer programming, and then an analog synthesis class, and that started to ignite my desire for music,” he recalls. “I started taking a computer music class, computer programming, and then an analog synthesis class, and that started to ignite my desire for music,” he recalls. “I wrote over to Benj’s Evanton studio, Studiomedia Recording Co., on a Niteskool project,” Russo recalls. “Walking into that studio, it all suddenly made sense. These records that I loved but never really understood how they were made, it all came to me in a way — through Benj’s class and working on the Niteskool projects. I was like, ‘Oh, my God. This is it. This is what Steely Dan and Pink Floyd and all those bands are all about.”

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ROOTS
Northwestern’s Oaks: The Eyebrow of Beauty

It was the majestic oak trees near the shore of Lake Michigan that caught Orrington Lunt’s eye on his first visit to the land that today is Northwestern University’s Evanston campus.

“The thought first struck me that here was where the high and dry ground began,” Lunt, one of the University’s founders, later wrote. “It continued in my dreams of that night, and I could not rid myself of the fairy visions constantly presenting themselves in fanciful beauties — of the gentle waving lake — its pebbly shore — the beautiful oak openings and bluffs beyond.”

Bedazzled by the oak savanna along the Lake Michigan shore 12 miles north of Chicago, Lunt helped convince the other founders that this was the place to set down roots for a new university in the Northwest Territory. In 1853 they purchased 379 acres of land for $25,000.

Many stately bur and swamp white oaks, some well over 200 years old, still stand in splendor on the Evanston campus. You’ll find these hardy natives by the John Evans Alumni Center, the Weber Arch and in the wooded groves between University Hall and Deering Meadow and north of Deering Library. They are home to squirrels, cardinals, Cooper’s hawks and crows that often roost in them in late afternoon. — Stephanie Russell

THE OAK SAVANNA
Someone once poetically described the crescent-shaped oak savanna on campus as “the eyebrow of beauty,” but no one knows for sure who said it. An oak savanna is a type of savanna, or lightly forested grassland, where oaks are the dominant trees. These savannas were maintained historically through wildfires set by lightning or humans, grazing, low precipitation and/or poor soil.

Oaks were often used as trail-marking trees by Native Americans. There used to be several such oaks on campus. The iconic “Old Oak” was thought to have been a trail marker tree.

THE OLD OAK
Before there was the Rock, students gathered at the “Old Oak,” a giant white oak that grew near University Hall until 1904. The tree was estimated to be at least 500 years old at the turn of the 20th century. Students used the oak as a place for speech, song, trysts — and class photos.

THE OAK SAVANNA

Northwestern University landscape architect Ann Ziegelmaier is nuts about trees. “Everyone thinks, ‘Oh she just does the flowers.’ But the trees mean everything to me,” says Ziegelmaier, who has planned, nurtured and beautified the Evanston campus since 1984.

Although the Evanston campus has lost a lot of oaks since the University’s founding, Ziegelmaier and the groundskeeping crews have planted about 375 oak trees — 70 percent of the 517 oaks on campus!

“We’ve been planting oaks like crazy,” says Ziegelmaier, “a lot of swamp white oaks and bur oaks, especially by Annie May Swift and on the way to Deering Meadow.”

The Northwestern community will enjoy the majestic tree landscape for generations to come, along with a very special hardscape landmark that Ziegelmaier created in 1993 — the Weber Arch, which welcomes all who enter the University grounds.

THE OAK SAVANNA

Northwestern University landscape architect Ann Ziegelmaier is nuts about trees. “Everyone thinks, ‘Oh she just does the flowers.’ But the trees mean everything to me,” says Ziegelmaier, who has planned, nurtured and beautified the Evanston campus since 1984.

Although the Evanston campus has lost a lot of oaks since the University’s founding, Ziegelmaier and the groundskeeping crews have planted about 375 oak trees — 70 percent of the 517 oaks on campus!

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JOHNNY APPLESEED, GIVE WAY: MEET NORTHWESTERN’S ANNIE OAKLEY
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THE OAK SAVANNA
Lurks

Biomedical engineering professor Vadim Backman has developed a stunning and effective new strategy for detecting cancer in its earliest stage — essentially a Pap smear for most cancers. BY AMANDA MORRIS ’14 MA

The Far Side of Violet: Where Cancer Lurks
In the outer edge of the color spectrum of visible light lies a mysterious place on the far side of violet. As red morphs to orange and then fades to yellow and so on, the wavelengths become shorter and shorter. Until finally — concealed by the diffraction limit — there is a wavelength so short that it cannot be viewed by common optical microscopes. But this is exactly the hidden place where Vadim Backman believed he might find the secrets of life.

“The theory of the diffraction limit goes back almost 200 years,” says Backman’s longtime collaborator Allen Taflove ’71, ’72 MS, ’75 PhD. “It says that with normal microscopy, you cannot detect structural changes within cells much smaller than about 200 nanometers or so. But Vadim posited that the key to cancer detection lay at much smaller length scales — 20 to 50 nanometers. The skepticism he met was profound. People thought he was violating 200 years of theory, he seemed like absolute science fiction.”

In the face of great doubt, Backman teamed with Taflove to develop partial wave spectroscopy (PWS) nanocytology, a new technology that not only views cells at these elusive length scales but also uncovers the shrouded malignancies that Backman hypothesized.

“Cancer is a terrible way to die, and it is a traumatic experience for the patient’s family,” says Backman, the Walter Dill Scott Professor of Biomedical Engineering in Northwestern’s McCormick School of Engineering. “I knew that I had to at least try to address this question, because it could end up saving a life.”

There is a vast treatment gulf between stage 4 cancer, which is almost unbeatable, and stage 1, where the rate of survival is close to 100 percent. The problem is that very early-stage cancers rarely exhibit symptoms and are difficult to detect, so physicians have no indication to treat them. But with PWS nanocytology, diagnosticians can detect what Backman refers to as “pre-precancer” in cells, something that could not be done with conventional microscopes. That means that this new technology would save more lives than the one that Backman initially aimed for. It could potentially prevent thousands of cancer-related deaths each year.

“When Vadim started working in 2003, he was greeted with a lot of skepticism from the cancer research community,” says Hemant Roy ’99 MD, another longtime collaborator. “But Vadim was clearly ahead of his time.”

BREAKING THE DIFFRACTION LIMIT

When Backman joined Northwestern’s faculty in 2002, he and Taflove, a professor of electrical engineering in McCormick, began collaborating almost immediately. Newly graduated from the Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology combined program in medical engineering and medical physics, Backman was establishing himself as an expert in biophotonics, a field that uses light to study biological molecules, cells and tissues. Taflove, on the other hand, is a world-renowned expert in Maxwell’s equations, which explain how electricity and magnetism interact to form electromagnetic waves.

“We are like puzzle pieces,” Taflove says of his relationship with Backman. “Our connection is simple. Vadim studies light, which is an electromagnetic wave. And in the visible spectrum, the interaction between light and materials is governed by Maxwell’s equations.”

To study the minute waves cellular nanostructures react and interact with ordinary visible light in the range of 20 to 50 nanometers, Backman needed to overcome the diffraction limit. For that, he needed Taflove to solve Maxwell’s equations to determine these interactions.

“Many people have tried to circumvent the diffraction limit,” Backman says. “But I thought, ‘Maybe we don’t have to visualize very small structures in order to measure them.’

That is exactly how he designed PWS nanocytology to work. Instead of visualizing particles smaller than the diffraction limit, it senses their presence and organization by analyzing the light they scatter. The different angles of scattered light tell a story about the health of cells, which can lead to an accurate cancer diagnosis at even the earliest stages of cancer formation. This provides information not only about individual cells but also about cells’ fundamental building blocks, such as proteins, DNA and RNA.

“We essentially don’t have a limit for how small the structures are that we can sense,” Backman says. “This can be done fairly easily in a robust, reproducible manner, so it can be translated to real health care.”

COMING TO AMERICA

Although his grandfather died when Vadim Backman was young, he remembers hearing stories about his father’s family had suffered under Josef Stalin’s oppressive regime and spent time in Soviet gulags. “He always had a suitcase ready, packed with clothes, because he knew he could be arrested at any time,” Backman says of his grandfather.

Backman and his immediate family remained trapped behind the Iron Curtain until the Soviet Union began to dissolve in the early 1990s. After making it to the United States — a place Backman instinctively felt was his true home — he immediately felt an overwhelming sense of pride and patriotism. Backman shares that patriotism, in his own words: “A lot of times I hear people talking about coming to the United States in pursuit of economic opportunities. It’s funny for me to hear that because, for my family, it was never about money or economics. It was about the United States being a beacon of freedom. When I think about the Declaration of Independence, it’s not just a piece of paper to me. It has a lot of meaning — probably more meaning than for some people who grew up here, because they have not experienced any other way of life. Thanksgiving dinner for me is not just Thanksgiving dinner. It’s celebrating the United States and freedom. When I stand up for the national anthem, I think of my grandparents and great-grandparents getting arrested by the communist government for no crimes other than ‘thought crimes.’ After you have lived in a country with no free press and no elections, it makes you appreciate democracy so much more.”

When Backman completed rotations with other medical students and learned he enjoyed being on the hospital floor interacting with patients, “I loved being in the laboratory,” Backman says. “But seeing a patient connects my work to a real person. That gives me a sense of urgency.”

His desire to help others not only guided his career but helped attract his wife, Luisa Marcelino, who is also a close collaborator. In 2002 Marcelino was struggling with her molecular biology research at MIT and had completely hit a wall. Thinking that Backman could give some insight, a mutual friend connected the couple. Backman brainstormed an algorithm that helped Marcelino get unstuck, but that’s not what impressed her. She was so excited by the amount of time he spent trying to help.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The field effect postulates that cancer can be detected merely by measuring nanoscale changes in tissues outside the tumor — the cancer’s “field.” First proposed in 1953, the theory has been validated by Backman and his team. Why does this matter? Because researchers can use the field effect to assay the health through minimally invasive procedures. Currently, physicians can diagnose cancer only by taking a biopsy or image of a tumor.

How the Science Works

Partial wave spectroscopy (PWS) nanocytology combines a traditional optical microscope with a spectroscope, which looks at the variable visible light wavelengths — color spectra — emitted from a cell. Although you might see just one color, the combined equipment can deconstruct an image to see the specific color of each pixel. Backman hypothesized that by using the color spectrum of each pixel to determine the degree of randomness of organization of the nanostructures in each cell. A surplus of red and orange pixels indicates random and disordered nanostructures — a sign of cancer.
When Vadim Backman paired his chromatin-protection therapeutics (CPT) with chemotherapy, nearly every cancer cell in a cellular culture died within days. 

“Realized on July 4, 2005, that I was going to marry him,” she says. “He was planning to go to a barbecue, but he missed the whole party because we were on the phone for seven hours discussing my project. I was really impressed by his commitment. To me, that sealed the deal.”

A NEW PAP TEST

Backman’s PWS-based test makes use of the “field effect” — a long-debated biological phenomenon in which seemingly normal cells located some distance from the malignant or pre-malignant tumor undergo molecular and other changes. The new technology is so sensitive that it can detect cancer in one organ by using more accessible cells from a neighboring area. Backman and Hermant Roy, a physician formerly at NorthShore University HealthSystem in the Chicago area and now a professor of medicine at Boston University, tested the technology on field-effect alterations associated with seven different cancers. Time and time again, they saw the same results.

Cells swabbed from inside a cheek, when examined with PWS nanotechnology, showed signs of lung cancer. Cells from the duodenum showed pancreatic cancer. Cells from the cervix showed ovarian cancer. Cells from the rectum showed colon cancer. The list went on.

“The technology is highly innovative,” Roy says. “But the biological and clinical applications are astonishing.”

These findings translated into a minimally invasive early detection test to screen for a wide variety of cancers, exactly like a Pap smear. In 1926 Greek physician Georgios Papanikolaou discovered that if he gathered cells from an easily accessible area, he could examine them under a microscope and detect early signs of cervical cancer. Soon physicians worldwide began administering the “Pap test” during routine patient visits. Early diagnosis naturally led to early treatment — significantly reducing cervical cancer incidence and death rates.

“If we had comparable screens for other types of cancer, we could reduce cancer deaths tenfold,” Backman says. “When else have we seen such a discovery? Never.”

Until now, that is. Backman’s early detection technique could soon be available for physicians to use with their patients. Several large clinical trials are already in progress, and within three years tests for lung, colon and prostate cancer — which are among the most common types — should enter the market. Much like the Pap test, these new screens could become part of regular primary care, putting physicians one step ahead of cancer — poised to prevent it from getting out of control and untreatable.

Suspicious signature gives way to new treatments

In testing samples from seven types of cancer, Backman noticed they all exhibited the same signature. The way the chromatin — or genome structure — was arranged seemed to determine whether or not the cancer would be susceptible to treatment. Chromatin is a group of macromolecules — including DNA, RNA and proteins — that house genetic information within cells and determine which genes get expressed. In the case of cancer, chromatin has the ability to regulate the capacity of cancer cells to adapt to treatment by expressing genes that allow the cancer cells to become resistant to treatment.

“If you think of genetics as software, then chromatin is the software,” Backman says. “Just by looking at the cell’s chromatin structure, we can predict whether or not it will survive ordinary treatments.”

Chromatin is packed together at different densities throughout the cell’s nucleus. By using PWS, Backman examined chromatin in living structures in real time. He discovered that the packing density of chromatin in cancer cells produced predictable changes in gene expression. The more heterogeneous and disordered the packing density, the more likely cancer cells were to survive — even in the face of radiation and chemotherapy. The more ordered and conservative the packing density, however, the more likely the cells would die during treatment.

This discovery lit a light bulb. Backman realized that cancer might not require new treatments. Maybe it just needs to be made more vulnerable to existing treatments.

Backman developed a solution to alter chromatin’s structure in a way that prevents cancer from evolving to withstand treatment, making it an easier target for existing drugs. He tested the strategy in cellular cultures and it almost completely wiped out the disease.

“There is one thing that all cancers do,” Backman says. “They have a phenomenal ability to change, to adapt, to evolve in order to evade treatment. Cells with normal chromatin structures die because they cannot develop this resistance.”

Backman says the treatment has shown promising results in an animal model, and he aims to start human trials within a year.

“Whether or not this ultimately leads to a treatment, we don’t know yet; Taflove says. “But I’ve learned to keep an open mind with Vadim. He does great work.”

Backman believes this cancer treatment could be his most important research yet. As his diagnostics near implementation in the hospital, he has shifted his focus to pursuing chromatin-protection therapeutics. And his collaborators, including Taflove, who is nearing retirement age, are right there with him.

“I am going to ride shotgun alongside Vadim the entire time,” Taflove says. “I could retire, but I don’t want to because I want to see this through. This is the most exciting I’ve been in my career, and I’m in the game to win.”

Amanda Morris ’14 MA is a science and engineering writer in the Global Marketing and Communications department at Northwestern.
They are leaders and pioneers, deal-makers and pathbreakers. Meet the four exceptional alumni who received the 2018 Northwestern Alumni Medal.

Investing in the Future
Louis A. Simpson ’58, Trustee

Lou Simpson’s distinguished career as an investment adviser began on a golf course in Glencoe, Ill., where, in his youth, he worked as a caddy and saved enough money to buy two stocks. He would later go on to manage a $4 billion portfolio as president and CEO of capital operations for Geico Corp., the Berkshires Hathaway insurance subsidiary. Called “one of the investment greats” by Berkshire’s legendary chairman Warren Buffett, Simpson now executes a strategy honed over several decades — take a long-term point of view, run a concentrated portfolio and buy good companies for a fair price — as chairman of SQ Advisors LLC, an investment company in Naples, Fla., that he owns with his wife, Kimberly K. Querrey.

In recent years, Simpson, who studied at Northwestern and became a University trustee in 2006, has drawn on his financial success to make an investment of a different kind — in the future of Northwestern. He and Querrey, who also is a University trustee, have given several visionary gifts to Northwestern across many areas, including athletics, regenerative medicine, epigenetics and biomedical research.

Their focus on the sciences is driven by the prospect of funding high-risk, high-reward research at Northwestern that, if successful, could be transformative to society, he says. The Louis A. Simpson and Kimberly K. Querrey Biomedical Research Center, scheduled to open in 2019 on the Chicago campus, will provide a home for groundbreaking, collaborative research on many of the world’s most prevalent diseases, including cancer, heart disease and neurodegenerative disorders.

Northwestern professor Samuel Stupp ’77 PhD got to know both Simpson and Querrey over the past decade. “Through their generosity, Lou and Kimberly have had an enormous impact on scientific research at Northwestern, particularly in biomedical areas that will be transformative in future medicine to benefit the entire world,” says Stupp, the Board of Trustees Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, Chemistry, Medicine and Biomedical Engineering and director of the Simpson Querrey Institute.

Simpson has had a longtime commitment to education. “I’m a big believer in giving people access to education,” Simpson says. “I’m a big believer in having high standards and excelling in whatever you’re doing, and Northwestern aims very high.”

Simpson puts these beliefs into practice as a senior fellow and adjunct professor of finance at Northwestern’s Kellogg School of Management, where he allows students to manage a real endowed fund. But it’s the intellectual challenge that goes into making investment decisions — analyzing a company’s numbers, considering future trends and assessing how the current political situation might impact an industry — that has kept him interested in the field since those early days on the golf course. “You’re putting together a lot of different factors to come up with decisions,” he says. “My approach is to read a lot, to think a lot and to do very little.”

Standing Up for Equality
Johnnetta B. Cole ’59 MA, ’67 PhD, ’92 H

Throughout a life dedicated to education and the struggle for empowerment and equality, Johnnetta Cole has drawn on her training as an anthropologist to ask fundamental questions about humankind.

Questions like “What makes us similar and different?” and “Where do systems of inequality come from?” have shaped a remarkable career in education and the arts. “Even today, when I’m not teaching cultural anthropology and doing fieldwork in some part of the world, I continue to wear what is like a pair of glasses — anthropological lenses through which I see and try to understand the world,” Cole says.

Born in Jacksonville, Fla., in the segregated South, Cole knew early in life that she would be involved in the fight for civil rights and social justice. As a student at Oberlin College, she discovered anthropology and began to study the origins of the concept of race and the persistence of racism in American culture.

She also developed a deep interest in the cultures of Africa. Her professor, sociologist George Eaton Simpson, recommended that she pursue graduate work with Melfire J. Herskovits, the renowned anthropologist who founded the nation’s first African studies program at Northwestern.

Cole arrived at Northwestern as a graduate student in 1957. But when she proposed a master’s thesis topic that would examine the influence of African traditions in an African American church on Chicago’s South Side, Herskovits questioned — as many anthropologists did at the time — whether one could objectively study one’s own culture. Cole stood up for her right to do so, and Herskovits finally agreed to supervise her master’s thesis.

After receiving her master’s degree in anthropology, she conducted fieldwork in Liberia and earned her doctoral degree in 1967.

At Washington State University, Cole was the founding director of one of the first black studies programs in the United States, where she taught anthropology, women’s studies and African American studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Hunter College and Komo University. In 1987 she became the first African American woman president of Spelman College, and in 2002 she began serving as president of Bennett College. She is the only person to have served as president of both of these two historically black colleges for women.

From 2009 to 2017, Cole was director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art. Currently she consults for Cook Ross Inc. and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Celeste Watkins-Hayes, associate vice president for research at Northwestern and one of many Spellman alumnae whom Cole has mentored over the years, says Cole never hesitates to challenge inequality and uses a combination of storytelling and teaching to help students understand the struggles of others.

“Dr. Cole makes calling out inequality into a teachable moment,” Watkins-Hayes says. “She does it in a way that’s loving, but very intellectual, and gets people to think.”

Cole often draws on lessons from anthropology in these ongoing efforts.

“This struggle has got a ways to go, but a good African proverb tells us that no matter how long the night, dawn will break,” she says. “So there’s no choice but to continue.”

Educator and activist Johnnetta Cole made history as the first African American female president of Spelman College.
As a child growing up on Chicago’s South Side, Armstrong spent many Sundays in a movie theater, watching kung fu films with his older brothers. Although he loved television and movies, he says he never imagined working in the entertainment industry. Now, as the executive vice president of worldwide business affairs for Warner Bros. Pictures, Armstrong leads a team that negotiates key deals with directors, producers, writers and actors. He has touched some of the most lucrative, influential movies of the past decade, including *The Dark Knight*, *The Departed*, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*, *The Departed* and *The Departed*. Over the past two decades, Armstrong has sought to develop strong connections and achieve great success in the motion picture industry. “It’s always determined to be a part of the change,” he says.

Despite his full slate, Armstrong, an executive committee member of the Pritzker Law Board, remains dedicated to the University that provided his educational foundation, and his volunteer commitments run longer than some movie credits. “The real appreciation comes once you graduate — once you look back at your experiences and at the lifelong friends you made,” Armstrong says.

While Armstrong shies away from the limelight, he continues to thrive in Hollywood by leaving his ego at the door and formulating effective negotiation strategies. “My contribution to our organization that selects Oscar winners and has sought to diversify its membership. “There have been a lot of changes in the academy over the last couple years,” Armstrong says. “I’m proud to be a part of the change.”

Since 1932, 103 alumni have received the Alumni Medal — the Northwestern Alumni Association’s highest honor.
Save the Date

January 24, 2019

Northwestern Connects

Northwestern Connects is a networking event held on the same night in cities across the globe. Meet fellow alumni, expand your personal and professional network, and show your Purple Pride.

Registration begins December 13
Learn more at alumni.northwestern.edu/northwesternconnects
Five Questions with Katrina Lenk

The former viola performance major turned Broadway star won the 2018 Tony Award for best performance by an actress in a musical for The Band’s Visit.

1. What does winning a Tony for an atypical Broadway show like The Band’s Visit mean to you? My brain is still around in a diamond bathtub. Do you still play viola? I do! After not being able to play the viola out of guilt for neglecting it, I missed the sound it made under my chin. I do wonder if perhaps our show isn’t that “atypical”? It was labeled “atypical” in their own way. Look at Hamilton, of course, Once, Fun Home and this season SpongeBob and Mean Girls. I think “atypical” could actually be a new, gloriously open and exciting norm, and I think we’re all looking forward to it being more inclusive.

2. You are a musician, singer, dancer and actor. How do you decide where to focus your energies? I love discovering things and creating things. When I’m doing acting work, I submerge myself entirely in that. When an accent is required, I go bananas on that. Any time learning is involved, or discovery, I’m like a raccoon for a sparkling thing. I usually don’t get to focus on more than one at a time, unless I’m working on a musical, and then I’m like a raccoon rolling around in a diamond bathtub.

3. How did you make the transition from music to theater performance? I had an extraordinary viola teacher who was also a professor at Northwestern. I wanted to continue studying with him, and there was also an amazing theater school at Northwestern! I thought I could keep doing all the things — and I did for the first two years. But then a required credit conflicted with my favorite dance class. I found the thought of living without that class and the joy it gave me unbearable. So I let go of the focus on the viola.

4. Do you still play viola? I do! After not being able to play the viola out of guilt for neglecting it, I missed the sound it made under my chin. In my sternum, the way it felt under my fingers. So one day I picked it back up. I composed music with it. I played in rock, pop, country and folk bands in Chicago, LA, NYC, and I use it in my own band as well. It also came in handy when the opportunity to audition for Once came around.

5. What were the most valuable lessons you learned at Northwestern? Everyone tells you, but somehow you don’t believe it — practice actually does lead to improvement. Peter Sliwok, my viola prof, taught me how to practice efficiently, how to break something down that seems overwhelmingly impossible into small pieces, how to investigate those pieces, how to love them, how to deal with mistakes made — and then boom! That thing isn’t overwhelming at all. And I have definitely used those tools in every facet of my life. The second is from my voice prof. Kurt Hansen ’73, ’83 MS, and my dance profs, Juanita Lopez and Billy Siegenfeld. They taught me that having a teacher believe in you when you feel like you’re nothing can fuel a million hours of that practice.

Interview conducted by Stephanie Kulke, fine arts editor in Global Marketing and Communications at Northwestern.
A Home Bartender’s Three-Ingredient Guide

People often ask Robert Simonson, the New York Times cocktail writer for more than a decade, what drinks he makes at his home bar. His latest book, 3-Ingredient Cocktails: An Optimized Guide to the Most Enduring Drinks in the Cocktail Canon, helps answer that question.

The book, a finalist for the 2018 James Beard Foundation Book Awards in the beverage category, includes several timeless classics, a sampling of easy-to-make modern drinks and a few of his very own recipes.

Simonson ’86, who studied English literature and covered theater — under the pseudonym Robespierre Simonson — for the Daily Northwestern in the 1980s, says we’re in the midst of a long-running cocktail revival, and that popularity has inspired an influx of cocktail books.

“Someone to make at home,” says Simonson. “I thought it would be a good idea to remind people that it’s kind of a ridiculous title, but it’s a good drink,” Simonson says of mixologist Dan Simonson’s “It’s kind of a ridiculous title, but it’s a good drink,” Simonson says of mixologist Dan Beard Foundation Book Awards in the beverage category, includes several timeless classics, a sampling of easy-to-make modern drinks and a few of his very own recipes.

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Simonson’s “The Eau Claire Old Fashioned”

When Tyler Kraemer ’83, ’97 JD and Tammy Henley Kraemer ’97 JD met as students at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, fragrance wasn’t the first thing on their minds. But in 2015, after balancing legal work and a successful operation, the couple decided to embrace their passion for perfume. Together they revived Blocki Perfume, a company started by Tyler’s great-great-grandfather, John Blocki, 150 years earlier. A chemist by trade, Blocki became an early player in America’s budding perfume industry, and his company’s grand boutique on Michigan Avenue became a retail attraction. While Blocki Perfume hasn’t returned to its former space, its long history continues to guide the company’s work today. For example, a family memoir published in 1872 influenced the first set of fragrances launched by the Kraemers, and a newer offering, Sannova, is a modern reimagining of a 1911 perfume created by Blocki after his visit to the Italian coast.

“Perfume is about join de store and telling stories,” says Tyler, who studied chemistry, physics and materials science as an undergrad. “We are inspired by the past, not copying it.”

Blocki remains committed to its early values, including sustainable sourcing, promoting conservation and using only the highest quality natural materials, Tyler says. That means creating scents that are a longer, more delicate process, but Tyler says he relies on his childhood memories for inspiration.

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Blocki remains committed to its early values, including sustainable sourcing, promoting conservation and using only the highest quality natural materials, Tyler says. That means creating scents that are a longer, more delicate process, but Tyler says he relies on his childhood memories for inspiration.

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Mark Vadik ’89, ’04 MA has proved you can balance creative talent with a practical, business-savvy approach to life. After graduating from Northwestern with a degree in performance studies, Vadik became a lawyer and started his own entertainment law firm in Chicago. Eventually he went back to Northwestern for a master’s in theater, focusing on arts marketing and management, and then spent the last 14 years adapting, directing and producing theatrical productions — and feature films. His latest endeavor: He directed and wrote the feature film adaptation of A Chance in the World, the true story of corporate executive Steve Pemberton, who overcame an abusive foster family to find personal and career success.

The film premiered on more than 600 screens nationwide during National Foster Care Month last May, and afterward Vadik moderated a live panel discussion on the U.S. foster care system at the Paley Center for Media in New York.

My mother sort of guilted me into going to law school. She said, “You can be an actor or an O’Casey play, so I can’t do an absurdist play if I do one based in realism.”

A Chance in the World was a unique experience, because as you’re putting the story together in your head, you’re realizing that Steve Pemberton is a real person, and sometimes the imaginary world you’re creating runs headfirst into reality.

One of the projects on my back burner is another adaptation, but it’s of an Ibsen play. If you want to shut down a venture capital pitch, just mention that.

I still use my legal background daily. We were at the American Film Market once and got a lot of offers for The Thirsting, which was my first movie and will always have a dear space in my heart, even though it was kind of a cheesy B-list horror movie. And we were talking to this woman, and she pulled out the contract and offered us a distribution deal right there.

I started to page through it, and she said, “Oh, you’ll probably want to have your lawyer read that.” I said, “Well, actually, I’m an attorney.” Without skipping a beat, she took it out of my hand and reached into her bag to give me a different contract. “Oh, I didn’t realize you were an attorney. You’ll never sign that one.”

When you talk to some of the younger directors, you see they don’t have an inkling of how the business side works. That’s horrible, because the business is unforgiving. If you go out of the gate with a financial disaster, you’re going to have a very hard time getting a second film. My old manager, Kevin Pavley, used to say, “The two hardest parts about making a movie are getting the money [to produce it] and getting the money back [for investors].”

“Mark Vadik” (left) and “Mark Vadik” (right), on the set of A Chance in the World

Balancing Act

Mark Vadik went from entertainment law to moviemaking — and he couldn’t be happier.
Trees on campus, including this white oak, one of 517 oaks (read about our “Roots” on page 36)