RUN TO FIGHT CANCER

The story on GCU's move to Division I

Arts revival the result of dean’s vision
I'm excited that they cared enough to do that," said Bartuske, who has been a Life Leader on campus, played on the women's soccer team and this year was the communications director for ASCU. "Our class has been through all the big changes here on campus the last four years!"

Dr. Kathy Hayer, associate professor at GCU, said the change also was made in order to keep the ceremonies more personal as the University continues to grow. About 1,000 traditional students are expected to participate in commencement, and about 4,000 non-traditional students are expected to graduate in May (twice as many as last year), and about 4,000 non-traditional students are expected to participate in commencement.

"We still wanted to maintain a special experience for students on the campus of GCU versus moving off site to a massive facility," Hayer said. "As we occasions, students get time to walk across the stage in front of their family and friends, shake the hand of their dean as their name is announced and their photo is displayed. If GCU rented an off-site setting, the ceremony would be so massive it would force us at GCU Arena to use the same space that they are.

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"I thought my world was crashing down again and I would lose the man I had waited my whole life to find," said Amy, who had been through one divorce in her life. "But Amy, who grew up in a military family, knew what a barrier it was to the ceremonies for traditional students who attend classes on campus. Two commencements are planned May 2 for traditional students, followed by four more commencements May 3 and 4 for non-traditional students who attend classes online.

"I like the idea," said Christenberry, an education major at GCU, "so the two made a deal."

"I've been having pain and bleeding related to severe endometriosis, a violent cervix and an enlarged uterus. That required a hysterectomy and the revelation that, medically, there was no way she should have been able to conceive T.J.," Amy said. "But Amy, who grew up in a military family, knew what a tour in Afghanistan meant.

"I'm an inspiration, but I do know if I can do it, anyone can!"

Amy Blowers
PERSISTENT
PERFECTION

Amy finished her master’s degree in August of 2011 with a 4.0 grade point average – just two months after having her first child, T.J., with Timothy. (Amy also had two children from her first marriage. Matthew, 15, Megan, 12, and Michael, 8.)

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Timothy loved the Army and already had completed several tours, including tours to Iraq, before he met Amy. And he was closing in on 20 years in the military, which would have made him eligible for retirement benefits.

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- Megan was diagnosed with pars planitis with cystoid macular edema, an eye condition that can lead to loss of vision. She is currently in remission after many trips to see specialists.
- Michael broke his arm that summer ("Having an 8-year-old with a broken arm and a pool in the back yard is not a fun," Amy said).
- Amy and Timothy then decided to fight for custody of Timothy’s son from a previous marriage, Jerramy, a process that initially took a year to reach and resulted in many trips to New York, only to end up back in court again when Timothy’s ex-wife appealed. ("That case just ended in October, and by the grace of God, we won again.")
- And, finally, during the past year, Amy was dealing with her own medical condition. She had been having pain and bleeding related to severe endometriosis, a violent cervix and an enlarged uterus. That required a hysterectomy and the revelation that, medically, there was no way she should have been able to conceive T.J., let alone carry him to full term. ("We call him our miracle baby.")

"Now, I have to live up to my promise."

"It was the best deal Amy Blowers has ever made. Her newlywed husband, Timothy, a member of the Army National Guard, was about to re-enlist for a tour that would take him to Afghanistan."

"I would have agreed to anything at that point just to have him home safe with me, and I did," Amy said.

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"He sacrificed a lot. He loved being in the Army. In exchange, he pushed me to be even better than I was and pursue a dream I never even began to dream.

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The roughest treatment is over. Grace Kostyk needs a spinal tap every four months now. She takes her daily chemotherapy pills with applesauce.

Grace, now 7, served as honorary race starter at last year’s Grand Canyon University Run to Fight Children’s Cancer, the fast-growing annual event with 10K/5K races and a cancer survivors’ walk at the west Phoenix campus. This year, her family’s Amazing Grace team is one of dozens of fundraising groups among thousands of runners, walkers, and other supporters fighting against childhood cancer.

Proceeds from the March 9 race, which organizers hope will near $100,000 this year, benefit the non-profit Children’s Cancer Network and Phoenix Children’s Hospital. The money helps families to offset heavy health care costs and stress from a cancer diagnosis.

Grace Kostyk (right top) and Olivia Baumgardner (right bottom) are still fighting leukemia, though their health has improved since serving as race starters for GCU’s Run to Fight Children’s Cancer. Photo by Darryl Webb

Children’s Cancer Network organizes gift bags for new patients at the hospital, links families to practical resources and provides programs to build a sick child’s self-esteem.

In the year since Grace started the 2012 race, she progressed to a point where she can play her favorite sports and get back on track with her schooling. But even though there are no more frightening hospital stays, doctors cautioned her family to maintain regular checkups until she is 11, nearly five years from diagnosis.

“I just feel like I’m determined to do everything,” Grace said in the midst of a busy afternoon in her north Phoenix neighborhood, shuffling from a baton-twirling class to a quick snack prior to meeting her academic tutor. Olivia Baumgardner, the inaugural race starter from the fall of 2011, was 4 years old when she was diagnosed with the same form of leukemia as Grace and this year’s race starter, Cooper Gokee.
"I’ve also seen kids can live through it and persevere," said Baumgardner, Jose Moreno, GCU’s community outreach manager, remembered Grace, Olivia, Cooper and every other childhood cancer survivors will receive gold, superhero-like capes for the festival-like event. He and others have advocated for a cancer focused his attention to the cause.

More than 30 years ago, he was that teen mom. After Geraldine gave birth to her daughter, LaTonya, she refused to give up on college or a career. Her parents in Tulsa, Okla., cared for the girl while Geraldine earned a bachelor’s degree in special education from Oklahoma State University, graduating in 1983. Mother and child moved within a year to the Dallas area, where Geraldine found work teaching children with learning disabilities.

She’s still there, teaching at Robert T. Hill Middle School in the Dallas Independent School District, and self-esteem. Geraldine acknowledges that she benefited from the assistance of her parents, Gerald and Mary Reynolds, who recognized that their daughter was destined to go places in life. LaTonya says there’s no better mentor than their mother. "My inspiration was my children. I had to be a model for them, so that they’d know all about the challenges facing teenage mothers as they try to continue their education."

If you’re keeping score, that’s two women, as doctoral residencies, four degrees from GCU – and one huge inspiration to us all. “We basically grew up together,” Geraldine says of their close bond. Both are members of the Southwest Dallas County Alumni Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, a predominantly African-American sorority of college-educated women.

There’s more. Geraldine married LaTonya’s father, Charles Davis, in 1986, and their two sons – Eric, 24, and Davi, 20 – also know the meaning of hitting the books. Eric graduated magna cum laude from Morehouse College in kinesiology, health and physical education and is taking pre-med classes toward becoming an orthopedic surgeon. Davi is studying criminal justice and playing football at Texas A&M University-Commerce.

“Education is so vital to success,” Geraldine says. “It determines your livelihood... My inspiration was my children. I had to be a model for them, so that they’d be even more successful than me. I was the first of five siblings to graduate from college. ‘We’re beginning a legacy.’ To hear them tell it, Geraldine and LaTonya are just getting warmed up. Their goal is to launch a nonprofit organization that will provide services and support for teen mothers. “The vision has a three-point thrust of career, health and education,” Geraldine says. “We want to motivate and encourage them to pursue their dreams and goals.”

LaTonya, who is on the staff of St. John Church in Grand Prairie, Texas, where Geraldine also is a member, says the women have observed an aching need in the Dallas area and plan to start locally.

“We see teen pregnancies every day,” she says. “They don’t know what to do. They need the moral support, someone as an example. Their mother may not have been a teen mother. “(A college education) may not be for everyone, but everyone needs to have a successful career to be able to provide for their family.”

Geraldine acknowledges that she benefited from the assistance of her parents, Gerald and Mary Reynolds, who recognized that their daughter was destined to go places in life. LaTonya says there’s no better mentor for young women who are at a crossroads than one who has been at that difficult place herself.

"My mother is such a wonderful example to all three of her children," LaTonya says. “She’s tough act to follow.”
The estimated cost for California residents to attend a school in the University of California system for 2012-13 is $26,500, which includes tuition alone. Last year, the University of California at Los Angeles charged $25,000 to in-state undergraduate students and $50,000 to out-of-state undergraduate students. Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego charges $18,400 for tuition and fees this year at Arizona State University for out-of-state undergraduate students to 40 percent through January 2015. However, tuition and fees this year at Arizona State University for out-of-state undergraduate students were $23,000, not including room and board.

It’s also competitive, but GCU’s pricing is hard to match. Eager to attract more Californians to Arizona’s three public universities, the Arizona Board of Regents recently raised the cap on out-of-state undergraduate students to 40 percent through January 2015. However, tuition and fees this year at Arizona State University for out-of-state undergraduate students were $23,000, not including room and board.

It’s not the California Gold Rush, although it seems like a higher-education version of it. The Golden State, which enrolls a full tenth of the country’s public four-year college students, has been slashing funding for its universities in the wake of declining tax revenues. The result has been steep increases in tuition that has stepped up—and staffed up—its efforts to show California students and their families the University’s scholarship package of $18,000 per year (for tuition and fees). It has four representatives in all of California; and it’s excited. We are being well-received by California students, and it’s exciting,” said Sarah Boeder, executive VP of operations.

“The word is out,” said Sarah Boeder, GCU’s executive vice president of operations. “When I am traveling (in California) and people find out where I work, most of the time they tell me about the commercial they just saw for GCU and how much they liked it. We are being well-received by California residents, and it’s exciting.”

The College of Arts and Sciences building, which opened on the GCU campus in the fall of 2012, is considered the University’s signature academic building and could be replicated at a satellite site. Photo by Darryl Webb

The Antelope Reception Center, where prospective students are hosted, opened as part of GCU Arena in the fall of last year. University officials have explored the possibility of opening one in southern California. Photo by Darryl Webb

In January, representatives of the cities of Tempe, Mesa, Chandler, Gilbert and Queen Creek came to campus to learn of the University’s interest in developing a location that would open in the fall of 2014 with 1,000 traditional and 250 non-traditional students, potentially growing to a total of 7,500 students and 2,000 faculty and staff by 2020. The University is seeking a site of between 75 and 150 acres.

“We’re open to creating what you see here (in west Phoenix), in an area that’s convenient and accessible,” Brian Mueller, GCU’s president and chief executive officer, told the cities, adding that on-campus housing initially would not be part of the plans.

Noting that more than 70 percent of the University’s traditional student population of 6,500 is from Arizona, Mueller said East Valley students who have been resisting GCU because of a cross-town commute presumably would find a closer location more appealing. In addition to classroom buildings, the satellite campus would have a recreation center and food service among its amenities.

“We want to have a true campus environment, as opposed to a building next to a freeway,” said Dr. Stan Meyer, Grand Canyon’s chief operating officer.

An editorial in the Arizona Republic encouraged the East Valley cities to sharpen their pencils and make it happen.

“Who would be wise to make prudent offers to GCU, recognizing that a midsize college campus is good for everyone, great for the local economy,” the newspaper wrote. “For both Grand Canyon University and the cities, the possibilities are exciting.”

The University has made similar on-campus presentations to the cities of Las Vegas, Albuquerque and Tucson, which also have shown an interest in possibly developing satellite sites.

“When Grand Canyon operates a campus, there’s a lot of upside (for cities),” Mueller said. “We add employees, we bring tuition revenues, we pay taxes and we build our own buildings.”

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Sarah Boeder, executive VP of operations, says GCU’s foray into California has been well-received by high school students and their families. Photo by Darryl Webb

Olivia Meek, a senior at Grossmont High School in San Diego, said she can’t wait to get to GCU, where she will be a Servant Scholar and a nursing major in the fall. She considered Point Loma and California Baptist University (in Riverside) before settling on Grand Canyon.

“I’m excited to go somewhere different,” Meek said. “The dorms are nice, and everything seems brand new.”

GCU has hosted California students at games played by the Antelope men’s and women’s basketball teams in Riverside, Fresno and San Diego. And it has brought students to Phoenix by bus on Fridays for on-campus weekend visits known as “Discover GCU.”

“We receive great feedback from these events, and they will continue through the end of April,” Boeder said.

In an appearance recently on the morning TV show “San Diego Living,” Boeder said one of the show’s anchors told her that her daughter needed to be considering GCU.

“He was thinking of sending her to a private university in California,” she said, “but he said it was too expensive after seeing our price.”

Boeder said that in talking to California students and their parents, GCU representatives emphasize the University’s scholarship program, which takes unweighted GPA and date of registration into consideration. They also show the maximum a student would pay for on- or off-campus housing.

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March 2013
The chaos of the last two years has been a perfect storm which ruled the NCAA violated antitrust laws by creation of the triumvirate of postseason configurations — the BCS, the Bowl Championship Series. This series, which was created in 1995, has been dominated by the Big Ten, Big 12, and SEC conferences. But given what has transpired in just the last two years, when each of the five major conferences has signed lucrative TV deals, it is clear that the BCS is on its way out. The most recent move by the Big Ten to join the SEC in forming a new conference is just one example of the growing pressure on the NCAA to address this issue.

The NCAA President, Mark Emmert, has called the BCS a "monopoly" that "violates antitrust laws" and has promised to find a new model for postseason play. The NCAA has also discussed the possibility of creating a "superconference" model, similar to the one used by the Big Ten and the SEC, to replace the BCS. This would involve creating a smaller number of conferences, each with its own conference championship game, that would be eligible to compete for a national championship. However, the NCAA has also acknowledged that this model would be difficult to implement and would require significant changes to the existing structure of college football.

In the meantime, the NCAA is working to ensure that its member institutions are not disadvantaged by the current structure. The NCAA has established new guidelines for conference realignment, which require that any institution leaving a conference must agree to a buyout of its remaining obligations. This has helped to prevent institutions from leaving a conference in a hurry, which could have negative consequences for the remaining members of the conference.

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Curtain Calling

Claude Pensis has rebuilt GCU’s fine-arts program
– and he won’t rest on his success

If Claude Pensis were the type to take a bow and
steak in the applause – and he most certainly is not – then now might be an opportune time.

Consider how the last three years of his life’s work
have gone. In that span, he has been the engine
driving a spectacular revival of the arts at Grand
Canyon University, and evidence of the renewal is
everywhere you turn these days.

Claude Pensis’ 30-year tenure at
Grand Canyon ranks second among
faculty and staff at the University.
Photo by Darryl Webb

• The Music Department, long a source of
pride for the University, has collaborated
with Claude, he tries to make the shows the best they
can be, and that inspires and motivates you. He’s
concerned about everyone’s input, but at the end
of the day it’s about making the work as good as it
can be.

• Dance and digital-film programs are thriving, and
a pep band was an instant success this year. GCU
now has an improvisational comedy troupe, a
student-run “second series” of theatre
productions and a program in graphic design;
none of those three existed before last year.

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**LEADING BY EXAMPLE**

Junior multicultural director preaches hard work, diversity

— by Cooper Nelson

Since she first volunteered for student government in the sixth grade, Grand Canyon University junior Samara “Samy” Carlon never has had much doubt about how to grow as a leader and connect with other students.

She serves as a diplomat for diversity, helping students understand unfamiliar cultures and view the world from an alternative perspective. As multicultural director for the Associated Students of GCU campus government, Carlon supports more than 130 international students.

Her duties include spreading cultural awareness through events such as an international education week and networking markets featuring ethnic cuisine not commonly found in the campus cafeteria. Carlon also serves as vice president for GCU’s chapter of the DECA business club and formerly served as treasurer for the Latino Student Union.

Carlon’s family moved to Arizona from Mexico City when she was 4. She knew that finding a university she could afford would be challenging.

“I was one of those kids that always loved school, and it really hit me hard when I realized how difficult (going to) college would be,” said Carlon, a double-major in business management and sociology who is known around the campus for her work ethic and endearing personality.

“College was always something I had envisioned, but the ‘how’ was becoming more difficult,” she said.

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Carlon served as senior class president at Peoria High and immediately became involved in GCU student government. She ran as a vice presidential candidate as a freshman and joined the ASCGU activities team as a sophomore. She now works in GCU’s Ken Blanchard College of Business to help manage event-planning for the Blanchard-speaker series.

Stacy Garrett, director of professional studies and academic excellence for the business college, said Carlon “emerged as a leader right away.” She has since developed as a trusted representative for GCU undergraduate business programs.

Garrett said Carlon’s schedule keeps her busy, though perhaps her biggest contribution to GCU is her service to the campus Hispanic community. Since joining the Latino Student Union two years ago, Carlon helped increase Latino student involvement on campus, and she leveraged her position as multicultural director to help other students understand the often-polarizing political issues that impact many Latinos.

GCU senior Viridiana Hernandez assisted Carlon in bringing Latino heritage events to campus and campaigns for current Phoenix District 5 City Councilor Daniel Valenzuela, a firefighter and first-time political candidate who two years ago became the first-ever Latino representative of his vasty Latino district.

Hernandez said Carlon’s position as multicultural director gave her the ability to serve the Latino community that makes up nearly one-third of the campus student population.

“No one’s ever really going to get us out of the dictionary. We are the only ones who can achieve this,” said Carlon.
The students in Gina Tricamo’s early-morning yoga class twisted and formed their bodies into poses as their instructor recited scripture from Ezekiel and Philippians.

Contorted and stretched-out bodies sprawled across purple mats in the Sanctuary studio. The group of young people at Grand Canyon University’s Student Recreation Center resembled a traditional yoga class. But the soothing Christian music and focus on God clearly set it apart as holier than the common exercise routine.

Tricamo, a former probation officer who began teaching therapeutic yoga four years ago, said the Christian version of yoga – known as Holy Yoga – allows her to blend fitness with prayer. After seeing drug addicts, prostitutes and others turn their lives around through the Eastern meditative tradition, Tricamo knew she had found her calling. She said yoga helps people channel God. The challenge is helping students make that connection.

For some evangelical Christians, yoga’s roots in Hinduism cause them to completely avoid the practice. Some pastors have spoken out against yoga. However, practitioners on the GCU campus believe the practiced stretching and breathing help Christians focus on God’s Word.

“God wants to see His Word in every place and every situation,” Tricamo said. “And if we can bring the Word in a gentle and nurturing way to people through the practice, and that person discovers who they are, then that’s all we need to do because He truly is the author of everything.”

GCU’s Holy Yoga students said the popular Rec Center classes allow them to spend time with God and minimize the daily distractions that interfere with prayer.

Some students have attended Rec Center yoga since their freshman year. Others said they would like to see more Holy Yoga classes offered to accommodate students, including working professionals who might not make it to campus as often. Tricamo’s classes currently draw 20 to 30 students to three weekly morning classes.

Kelsey Graner, a junior nursing student from Ohio, said Holy Yoga helped her slow down and take more time to listen to God.

“I probably would’ve never gotten into Holy Yoga, and had it help me so much, if they didn’t offer it here at GCU,” said Graner, one of the regulars in Tricamo’s classes.

“It’s really helped me in other aspects, too,” Graner said. “It’s all about breathing. Now that I’ve been doing yoga so long, I find myself doing that all the time.”

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Holy Yoga instructor Gina Tricamo says the ancient Hindu tradition helps Christian students with meditation and prayer.

Holy Yoga converts Eastern tradition into Christian fitness

– by Rachelle Reeves / Special to GCU Today Magazine
BUCKING SUCCESS
Rodeo clown’s online master’s degree could rope him back into teaching
– by Cooper Nelson

Harrison takes the role of class clown seriously. The 37-year-old Grand Canyon University alumnus maintained his prankster reputation from school and turned it into a lucrative career as a rodeo clown. But when rodeo life ends, he has a master’s degree to fall back on.

Harrison earned his master’s in teaching from GCU in 2002. But, similar to his personality, his path to a graduate degree was anything but normal. As part of GCU’s non-traditional online degree program, Harrison listened to lectures on VHS tapes and submitted his assignments through snail mail.

After two years of classes, he earned his degree and went on to become one of the Northwest’s most recognizable rodeo bullrunners and entertainers. He knows the higher degree will help him after his rodeo career ends.

“You can’t run away from a bull at 65 years old or with a surgically repaired knee,” said Harrison, a native of Washington who lives in Walla Walla and performs in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

“My master’s degree is something I can fall back on when my days in the rodeo are over,” he said.

Harrison earned his undergraduate degree in teaching from Washington State University. After graduation, he sought a school to help advance his education and improve his career as a teacher.

“GCU offered the best program,” Harrison said. “Online was the best option because I couldn’t afford to stop working to get an education.”

Harrison began working around bull-riding and rodeos when he attended Washington State. After graduating, he taught science and social studies for eight years at Garrison and Pioneer middle schools in Walla Walla. He stepped away from teaching in 2008 to join the rodeo circuit full time.

Since then, Harrison has performed at major rodeo events such as the Columbia River Circuit Finals and the National Finals Rodeo, which is considered an all-star event for rodeo. He emerged as a celebrity in the Northwest for routines such as dancing into the arena in an inflatable pink fat suit and dirt-skiing behind horses.

Through his rodeo success and fame, Harrison maintained his love of education. He kept his teaching certificate updated and prides himself on a family-friendly act.

“Kids love my master’s degree, and they love that I can make them laugh,” Harrison said. “I do a great job in the rodeo, though,” he said, adding that his performances are something that can keep me laughing, and I’ve seen them 50 times.”

Harrison met his wife, Melissa, when both worked at Garrison Middle School. Melissa works as the director of marketing at Walla Walla Community College, where James works part time as a promoter.

She said that her husband and son Huck, 6, are her two biggest supporters. Melissa enjoys the rodeo life but understands the impact it could have on their future.

It’s hard to imagine Christina Cullers ever sounding “like a dead horse,” says Cullers, 22, who was GCU’s Musician of the Year for the 2011-12 academic year. “I learned a ton without singing, about the emotional and physical freedom that leads to vocal freedom.”

After she had healed sufficiently to sing again, she headed off to Zwickau, Germany, for three weeks at the Schumann Liederfest, another program for young artists with career potential. She received private coaching and took classes on diction and vocal interpretation, and during her stay she visited the church in Leipzig where Johann Sebastian Bach had been the organist and Martin Luther had been a choruboy.

She also performed for the Germans, an experience that was both nerve-wracking and exhilarating.

“You’re singing their music, in their language, and that’s the awesome thing,” Cullers says. “You can see them listening to you, and you realize this is their heritage.”

The little girl whose big voice used to turn heads before she was even a teenager (“I would just bust out singing”) has auditioned for master’s degree music programs at Arizona State University, the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma. In the meantime, she is training with GCU’s Dr. Sheila Corley and working part time as an instructor with the Arizona Youth Chorale.

Cullers says her study as an undergraduate with Corley, who has a stellar reputation as a voice coach, was “the best thing to ever happen to me,” providing a level of instruction and mentoring that she couldn’t have received elsewhere.

For every student, there’s a right teacher, and she was that teacher for me,” says Cullers, who grew up in Phoenix not far from the GCU campus. “It was a God-ordained match.

“She investing in her students so much that it even breaks down her health. She’s a seasoned teacher and a godly woman who wants her students to be stewards of the gifts God has given them.”

Cullers says she isn’t sure where her career path will lead, adding that she’s looking to God for guidance. At GCU, she broadened her horizons with leading roles in Ethington Theatre productions of “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” a one-act opera, and “The Boy Friend,” a musical. Her senior recital, performed in the magnificent surroundings of Trinity Cathedral in central Phoenix, was spectacular.

“It could be that God has a career for me so that I can be an influence and a light to others,” Cullers says. “Theatre and opera can be dark places, with people who are broken and need God... If God pushes, I will follow. I want to be on stage only if that is where God has called me to be a witness.”
Longtime Phoenix Police leader found focus at GCU

by Michael Ferraresi

West Side Pride

Hampton graduated from his hometown Grand Canyon University in 1985, when it was truly a little Christian school. The quiet buildings where he took undergraduate night classes were replaced by state-of-the-art high-rises now bustling with students.

The longtime Phoenix Police Department leader grew up just a few miles from GCU. He knew the place well, yet barely recognized it.

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