

GCU TODAY

MAGAZINE

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Volume 3 – Issue 1



RUN TO FIGHT CANCER

The story on
GCU's move
to Division I

Arts revival
the result of
dean's vision

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GCU TODAY MAGAZINE is a quarterly publication of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs at Grand Canyon University.

Written and Edited by

DOUG CARROLL
Communications Director
602.639.8011
doug.carroll@gcu.edu

MICHAEL FERRARESI
Senior Writer
602.639.7030
michael.ferraresi@gcu.edu

BOB ROMANTIC
Senior Writer
602.639.7611
bob.romantic@gcu.edu

COOPER NELSON
Junior Writer
602.639.7511
cooper.nelson@gcu.edu

Cover Photo Collage and Design by

DEANNA FUSCO
SoHo Southwest

Foreground Cover Photography by

DARRYL WEBB
University Staff Photographer
602.639.6375
darryl.webb@gcu.edu

Office of Communications and Public Affairs

BILL JENKINS
Vice President

On the Cover

Olivia Baumgardner (left) and Grace Kostyk, cancer survivors and former starters of the GCU Run to Fight Children's Cancer

Grand Canyon University
3300 W. Camelback Road
Phoenix, AZ 85017



Commencing Anew

Graduation to have separate Arena ceremonies in May

– by Bob Romantic

Ambler Christenberry does a lot of things with her circle of friends at Grand Canyon University.

There's intramurals, events to attend, homework, movies and eating together on campus. She even competes alongside some of them as a member of GCU's track and field and cross country teams.

This May, she'll be doing something else – going through commencement at GCU Arena with the same people she has shared those experiences with.

For the first time, the University is creating separate graduation ceremonies for traditional students who attend classes on campus. Two commencements are planned May 2 for traditional students, followed by four more ceremonies May 3 and 4 for non-traditional students who attend classes online.

"I like the idea," said Christenberry, an education major who has served on the Associated Students of GCU since transferring to the University as a sophomore. "I would like to walk with the people I have been here with for three years.

"Online students have their own community in a sense, too, so it's a good idea for them to walk with people experiencing education the same way that they are."

Dr. Kathy Player, associate provost 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 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 offsite to a massive facility," Player said. "With six ceremonies, 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 offsite setting, the ceremony would be so massive it would force us at some point to just confer degrees by groups and students collectively stand up and sit down.

"By keeping it smaller through hosting six ceremonies, it lets families and friends see them make that special walk."

Shelby Bartusek, who graduates in May with a bachelor's degree in exercise science with an emphasis in physical therapy, also likes the new format.

"I'm excited that they cared enough to do that," said Bartusek, who has been a Life Leader on campus, played on the women's soccer team and this year was the communications director for ASGCU. "Our class has been through all the big changes here on campus the last four years." ■

Commencement 2013 at GCU Arena



Traditional students

Thursday, May 2, 10 a.m.

College of Nursing and Health Care Professions

Thursday, May 2, 3 p.m.

College of Arts and Sciences, College of Fine Arts and Production, College of Education, College of Theology and Ken Blanchard College of Business

Non-traditional students

Friday, May 3, 10 a.m.

College of Arts and Sciences, College of Theology

Friday, May 3, 3 p.m.

Ken Blanchard College of Business

Saturday, May 4, 10 a.m.

College of Doctoral Studies, College of Education

Saturday, May 4, 3 p.m.

College of Nursing and Health Care Professions

Note: Registration deadline for commencement is March 29. Go to www.gcu.edu/graduation.

Photos by Jak Keyser



PERSISTENT PERFECTION

Nothing keeps Florida online student from maintaining 4.0 GPA

– by Bob Romantic

Through all of the curveballs that life has thrown her way, Amy Blowers is proud that she has maintained straight A's.

It's 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.

Timothy loved the Army and already had completed several tours, including one 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.

But Amy, who grew up in a military family, knew what a tour in Afghanistan meant.

"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.

So the two made a deal.

At the time, Amy was taking online classes at Grand Canyon University from her home in Daytona Beach, Fla., to complete her master's degree in education. The decision to go back to school was part of a process of rediscovering herself after the split from her first husband.

Timothy's offer was simple: If Amy agreed to finish up her master's and then get her doctorate degree as well, he would leave the military.

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

"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."

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 three children from her first marriage: **Matthew**, 15, **Megan**, 12, and **Michael**, 8.)



Amy's husband Timothy has been her biggest supporter as she works to complete her doctorate degree at GCU. Photos courtesy of Amy Blowers

ONLINE

She began her doctorate at GCU in March 2012, when a slew of new obstacles suddenly came her way.

- 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 mix," Amy said).

- Amy and Timothy then decided to fight for custody of Timothy's son from a previous marriage, **Jeremy**, a process that initially took a year to resolve and involved 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 a full term. ("We call him our miracle baby," Amy said.)

Through all of that, Amy never wavered on her education and the deal she made with her husband. And Timothy, who now works for the Daytona Beach Police Department, has been her biggest supporter.

"There were many times I said, 'This is ridiculous. Why am I trying to do this right now? It's too much trying to deal with everything,'" Amy said. "But my husband always said, 'I'll take care of this, or I'll take this child to see a specialist.' There were so many times that we were travelling in the car to New York for a hearing and I'd have my laptop air card getting my schoolwork done.

"Timothy always puts things in perspective, figuring out what the barrier is – whether it's time or patience or motivation. And he's always there for me."

Amy works for Volusia County Schools in the online learning department, teaching English for grades 6-12 and college readiness classes for advanced seniors. She is on pace to complete her doctorate in March 2015 – three months before Matthew will graduate from high school ("I have to beat him!" she said).

She also sings on her church's praise team, taxis her children to various activities, cares for her now-19-month-old T.J., volunteers with Timothy's police department, runs three days a week and makes cakes as a side business.

"More importantly, I can proudly say through all of this, I have maintained my 4.0 GPA," Amy said. "I don't know if I'm an inspiration, but I do know if I can do it, anyone can!" ■

THE *Grace* to GO ON

Cancer run's starters show resilience at an early age

– by Michael Ferraresi



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

Things are a little easier than a year ago. Doctors removed the portable catheter surgically inserted into her chest. Not as if the needles ever stopped Grace from smiling or laughing, though. She recently went from a spinal tap to a swim class because she felt her teammates needed her.

Intravenous chemo drips and steroid side effects are now less of a burden than the painful first year of aggressive treatment to prevent the acute lymphoblastic leukemia from spreading.

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



2013 race starter Cooper Gokee

The bruising seemed odd. **Cooper Gokee's** parents figured he had just landed wrong. The boy never complained about pain.

Doctors discovered acute lymphoblastic leukemia after **Jeff and Patti Gokee** took their son in for a checkup. They were stunned. Their lives immediately changed. And at the time, they didn't know it – but their son was about to become a spokesman for a cause.

This year, organizers of GCU's Run to Fight Children's Cancer named 9-year-old Cooper as the honorary race starter. The Maricopa third-grader was diagnosed less than one year ago with ALL, the most common form of childhood leukemia. Like the two girls who served as race ambassadors in the first two events, Cooper will squeeze the air horn to turn hundreds of runners loose on the fight against cancer.

Cooper's cancer journey is just beginning. He still receives deep-tissue shots in his legs and is sometimes restricted from playing physically with his brother **Ben**, 12, because of injury concerns.

Jeff Gokee said the experience is still so new that his family adjusts week to week. The Gokees have found joy to be a powerful thing, and they take as much of it as they can.

Photo by Darryl Webb



Gretchen Baumgardner said Olivia (above), now 5, has a "a no more cancer party" coming up as a milestone in her treatments.



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**.





All race photos courtesy of GCU archives

«Olivia's mom, **Gretchen Baumgardner**, remembered one of their first hospital visits. At one point, Olivia looked up as the two were snuggled under a blanket and cried as she said, "Mommy, I don't want any shots anymore."

"It just ripped my heart out of my chest," said Baumgardner, who, along with husband **Michael** and Olivia's sister **Ella**, 3, will be returning to the race this year. "That's the last thing you want to hear your child say."

GCU's community outreach manager, **Jose Moreno**, and his colleagues from the Office of Communications and Public Affairs have grown the race into more of a festival-like event. He and others have advocated for a national campaign to fight childhood cancer, marked by gold ribbons in September. Runners and walkers will be provided with gold shoelaces to wear, and young cancer survivors will receive gold, superhero-like capes for the cancer survivors' walk.

Race supporters have seen some children pass away in the midst of their fight against cancer, their memories now etched on a Hero Wall. Moreno said the father of a child who died from leukemia drove to GCU from Yuma to help say goodbye and grieve. Like others involved with the race, getting to know the children affected by cancer focused his attention to the cause.

"I've also seen kids can live through it and persevere," said Moreno, who has been instrumental in etching the Run to Fight in more hearts and minds.

This March marks another step toward that goal, with Grace, Olivia, Cooper and every other childhood cancer survivor out the of gate to lead the charge. ■



How to join the fight

For more information, go to the Run to Fight Children's Cancer website at www.runtofightcancer.com.

Friend the race cause on Facebook at [/runtofightchildrenscancer](https://www.facebook.com/runtofightchildrenscancer) and follow it on Twitter @Run2Fight.



Getting to know Children's Cancer Network

Proceeds from GCU's Run to Fight Children's Cancer benefit the Arizona-based nonprofit Children's Cancer Network and Phoenix Children's Hospital. CCN provides programs and services that assist families dealing with the emotional, physical and financial strain of a child's treatment.

Programs: CCN supplies families with basics such as admission bags (care packages with toothbrushes, tissues, writing materials, teddy bears, etc.) and prepaid gas cards to help ease the massive financial burden of cancer. Programs also link families with the best resources based on their individual needs and help childhood cancer survivors develop inner strength and self-esteem.

Formation: **Patti Luttrell**, a former GCU assistant professor of nursing, co-founded the organization after coping with her own son's cancer diagnosis. **Jeff Luttrell** was 5 when he was diagnosed with leukemia and underwent a bone marrow transplant. Now 24, he has survived several relapses of cancer.

Funding: This year, the operating budget has doubled to nearly \$250,000. The organization plans to open its first office in Chandler and will hire its first employees this year as it continues to grow. Luttrell says about 91 cents on the donated dollar goes directly to families in need.

How to help: Go to www.childrenscancernetwork.org for more information.

DUAL DOCTORATES

Mother, daughter from Texas want to inspire teen girls

– by Doug Carroll

Doctoral learners **LaTonya** (left) and **Geraldine Davis** expect to receive their degrees together later this year. Photo courtesy of Davis family



Geraldine Davis knows all about the challenges facing teenage mothers as they try to continue their education.

More than 30 years ago, she 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 what a story she has to tell.

"It was difficult, but it can be done," says Geraldine, 52, who went on to earn master's degrees in education administration and special education from Grand Canyon University and is tracking to receive a doctorate, also from GCU, in organizational leadership this summer.

And little LaTonya? Now 34, she has a bachelor's in business administration from Texas Southern University and a master's in leadership from GCU and is on pace to receive the same doctorate as her mother from GCU in the summer.



If you're keeping score, that's two women, six 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 Alumnae 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 **Deric**, 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. Deric 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 a tough act to follow." ■

CALIFORNIA, HERE WE COME

GCU making bold moves in 2013 to recruit, expand

— by Doug Carroll

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 the state's governor, **Jerry Brown**, says are unsustainable.

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 and room and board. For the state's private colleges and universities, tuition alone runs at least that much. For example, Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego charges tuition of \$30,000.

Seeing opportunity, Grand Canyon University has stepped up — and staffed up — its efforts to show California high school students that they can receive a private, Christian education at affordable rates. Last year, the University had four representatives in all of California; this year, there are 18, and they're offering a package of \$18,000 per year (for tuition and room and board) to students with a minimum 3.0 grade-point average.

The strategy seems to be producing results. Last year, GCU had 240 new students from

California. In the fall, it is expecting almost three times that many.

"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."

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 undergraduates were \$23,000, not including room and board.



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

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 his 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



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

date of registration into consideration. They also show the maximum a student would pay for on- or off-campus housing.

"Most universities are not this transparent," she said.

Closer to home, GCU is exploring a satellite location in the sector of metropolitan Phoenix known as the East Valley.

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.

The cities "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 Southeast Valley, 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." ■



The Antelope Reception Center, where prospective students are hosted, opened as part of GCU Arena in the fall of 2011. University officials have explored the possibility of opening one in southern California. Photo by Darryl Webb



GRAND ENTRANCE

Antelopes' move to Division I and WAC is sign of the times

– by Bob Romantic

In the game of musical chairs that is NCAA Division I athletics, Grand Canyon University now has a seat at the party and a good idea of where it belongs.

Now all it needs is for the music to stop long enough for the rest of the country to settle down and catch its collective breath.

Since 2011, 70 D-I institutions have switched their conference affiliation (or are in the process of switching) as leagues and universities jockey for position to cash in on revenue streams created by rich television contracts.

GCU, of course, benefited from that instability when it was invited to make the jump to Division I and join the depleted Western Athletic Conference beginning in 2013-14.

"For us, the key was to find our niche that we belonged to, and the WAC seems to be evolving into that niche as a non-football conference," said **Keith Baker**, GCU's director of athletics. "In many respects, the timing has been great for us to come in."

But given what has transpired in just the last two years, what will the rapidly changing landscape look like four years from now, when the Antelopes complete their transition period to Division I and become eligible for postseason play?

Before looking too far into that crystal ball, it would help to look at how we got here.

A perfect storm

The chaos of the last two years has been a perfect storm that has its roots in a 1984 Supreme Court decision (NCAA v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma), which ruled the NCAA violated antitrust laws by controlling the television rights of its member schools.

The resulting deregulation allowed conferences and individual universities to negotiate their own TV deals, and within a year the number of college football games shown on television more than doubled. It also led to the creation of the triumvirate of postseason configurations

known first as the Bowl Coalition, then the Bowl Alliance and finally the BCS – all of which were monopolized by larger universities in major conferences that levied their power to cash in on progressively bigger and better television deals.

"The age-old problem in Division I athletics is the rich don't want to fund the poor and drag them along," said **Dennis Dodd**, a columnist for CBSSports.com who covers the NCAA and wrote a series of articles in 2010 examining conference realignment. "Their mindset is 'We're the ones who established this tradition and made most of this money.'"

That mindset, coupled with the growth of cable television and the boom of the Internet, social media and mobile technology, brought everything to a head in the past two years, when each of the five major conferences landed huge TV contracts.

To reap those kinds of rewards, power conferences have had to expand their footprint and add more schools.

Being in more homes in more major markets in more states means more money in TV revenue. And since only a handful of athletic programs in the country are actually profitable, that money goes a long way.

So the Pac-12 broadened its base to include Colorado and Utah; the SEC added Texas A&M and Missouri; the Big Ten recruited Nebraska, Maryland and Rutgers; the Big 12 went after West Virginia and TCU; the Big East added Memphis, SMU, Temple, Tulane, Houston and Central Florida; and the ACC brought in Louisville, Pitt and Syracuse. And that's not counting Boise State and San Diego State, which accepted offers to join the Big East only to reconsider and return to the Mountain West.

Suddenly, 10-team BCS conferences became 12- and 14-member super conferences – and maybe even 16 before all is said and done.

All that movement created a trickle-down effect, as mid-major conferences that had been raided by wealthier BCS conferences in turn started plucking teams from one another or smaller leagues in order to stay relevant.

NCAA President **Mark Emmert** called the massive conference realignment a "market shakedown" during the Big 12 spring meetings last year.

"What we've got is the conflict between the collegiate model and the commercial model," Emmert told reporters. "Universities need revenue. Everybody thinks everybody is making (a) gazillion dollars in college sports. You know that's not true. ... All (of a) sudden, somebody is dangling some resources in front of you. It's tempting."

WAC expansion, subtraction

Once upon a time, the Western Athletic Conference was the one adding teams and broadening its footprint.

After the collapse of the old Southwest Conference in 1995, the 10-team WAC brought in Rice, San Jose State, SMU, TCU, Tulsa and UNLV, giving it 16 teams stretching from Oklahoma to Hawai'i.

At the time, however, the revenue wasn't sufficient to split 16 ways and cover travel costs. So by 1999, eight WAC members – Air Force, BYU, Colorado State, New Mexico, San Diego State, UNLV, Utah and Wyoming – left to form the Mountain West Conference.

Over the years, other schools followed suit, with Boise State, Rice, Tulsa, Fresno State, Hawai'i and Nevada among them. After this year, Louisiana Tech, Utah State, San Jose State, Texas State, Texas-San Antonio and Texas-Arlington are departing. And Idaho has announced its intention to leave in 2014.

The exodus has been so great that, just to survive, the WAC next year will become a non-football-playing conference, ending a 50-year history of football that included a national champion (BYU) in 1984, a Heisman Trophy winner (**Ty Detmer**) in 1990 and two undefeated Boise State (2006, '09) teams that made national headlines.

Among the nine schools that will comprise the remodeled WAC in 2013-14, including GCU, none was part of the league prior to 2005. Three members

(Texas-Pan American, Chicago State and Missouri-Kansas City) have been added since GCU was invited in November.

"It's still a very, very fluid situation among conferences," interim WAC Commissioner **Jeff Hurd** said of the NCAA shuffling. "One of the primary differences today, compared to two years ago, is it has trickled down to what many people call the non-football-playing conferences. I think we'll see more movement take place (in the next year) that will affect the landscape and affect conference makeup across the board."



"GCU has a number of things attractive about it. One is geography. One is ease of access to the city, another is the multisport sponsorship it has, another is the expansion of its campus and its academic programs. It has shown enormous growth potential."

– Interim WAC Commissioner Jeff Hurd

Hurd hopes to increase WAC membership by one school (two once Idaho leaves) to create a 10-team league. He said it's important to look five years ahead to maintain stability in a conference.

"From our standpoint, GCU has a number of things attractive about it," Hurd said. "One is geography. One is ease of access to the city, another is the multisport sponsorship it has, another is the expansion of its campus and its academic programs. It has shown enormous growth potential."

"When you look down the road and look at programs and institutions, those are some of the items you try to target."

Forecast remains cloudy

As Hurd pointed out, the conference shuffling isn't complete.

But will it quiet down once the SEC and Big East complete their television contracts and the dominoes finish falling from expansion of the BCS conferences?

Will those conferences look to get even bigger, expanding to 16 teams?

Or is the endgame even more extreme, where those major conferences leave the NCAA and form their own federation, taking all their revenue with them?

Dodd doesn't like the idea of 16-team conferences – "Anything beyond 14 becomes a little too unwieldy; you're almost operating as a federation instead of a conference" – but he's not about to rule out that possibility.

"The divide between the haves and have-nots, no one is sure what form that will take," Dodd said. "And there's technology that nobody even thought about that will now be monetized. TV is everywhere, where you can watch games on your phone, a tablet or a computer. ... I think the super conferences and the increase in technology will really revolutionize college sports in the coming years."

Baker said an endgame in which big schools essentially secede from the NCAA would be devastating to mid-range schools, in essence relegating them to second-tier status.

"It would seem farfetched," Baker said, "but money makes people do crazy things sometimes." ■

Cashing in on TV rights

The five major conferences have signed lucrative TV contracts with ESPN, FOX and/or CBS in the past two years:

Conference	Avg. annual payout	Payout per school
Pac-12 (12 teams)	\$250 million	\$20.8 million
Big Ten (12)	\$248 million	\$20.7 million
Big 12 (10)	\$200 million	\$20 million
ACC (14)	\$240 million	\$17.1 million
SEC (14)	\$205 million	\$14.6 million

On the opposite page: Thunder descends descends from the rafters at the Arena rally on Nov. 27 announcing GCU's invitation to join the Western Athletic Conference. Photos by Darryl Webb

THE NEW **WAC**

WESTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

FOR 2013-14



- 1 Grand Canyon University**
 - Founded: 1949
 - Location: Phoenix, AZ
 - Enrollment: 7,500 traditional, 44,600 non-traditional
 - Sports: 22
 - Nickname: Antelopes
 - Fun fact: Learfield Cup winner for NCAA Division II, 2011-12
 - Websites: gcu.edu, news.gcu.edu, gculopes.com
- 2 Seattle University**
 - Founded: 1891
 - Location: Seattle, WA
 - Enrollment: 7,800
 - Sports: 18
 - Nickname: Redhawks
 - Fun fact: Jesuit affiliation (Roman Catholic)
 - Websites: seattleu.edu, goseattleu.com
- 3 University of Idaho**
 - Founded: 1889
 - Location: Moscow, ID
 - Enrollment: 11,000
 - Sports: 14
 - Nickname: Vandals
 - Fun fact: Got nickname from defense-minded basketball teams described as "vandalizing" opponents
 - Websites: uidaho.edu, govandals.com
- 4 New Mexico State University**
 - Founded: 1888
 - Location: Las Cruces, NM
 - Enrollment: 18,500
 - Sports: 16
 - Nickname: Aggies
 - Fun fact: Offers equestrian as women's sport
 - Websites: nmsu.edu, nmstatesports.com
- 5 University of Texas-Pan American**
 - Founded: 1927
 - Location: Edinburg, TX
 - Enrollment: 19,000
 - Sports: 12
 - Nickname: Broncs
 - Fun fact: Joined UT system in 1989
 - Websites: utpa.edu, utpabroncs.com
- 6 Chicago State University**
 - Founded: 1867
 - Location: Chicago, IL
 - Enrollment: 7,000
 - Sports: 12
 - Nickname: Cougars
 - Fun fact: Alumni include four founding members of rock band Styx
 - Websites: csu.edu, gocsucougars.com
- 7 California State University Bakersfield**
 - Founded: 1965
 - Location: Bakersfield, CA
 - Enrollment: 8,000
 - Sports: 17
 - Nickname: Roadrunners
 - Fun fact: Has program in petroleum geology
 - Websites: csu.edu, gorunners.com
- 8 Utah Valley University**
 - Founded: 1941
 - Location: Orem, UT
 - Enrollment: 33,000
 - Sports: 13
 - Nickname: Wolverines
 - Fun fact: Community college until 1993
 - Websites: uvu.edu, wolverinegreen.com
- 9 University of Missouri-Kansas City**
 - Founded: 1933
 - Location: Kansas City, MO
 - Enrollment: 15,500
 - Sports: 13
 - Nickname: Kangaroos
 - Fun fact: President Harry S. Truman attended its law school
 - Websites: umkc.edu, umckkangaroos.com



Curtain Calling

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

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

– by Doug Carroll

If **Claude Pensis** were the type to take a bow and bask 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.

- Ethington Theatre, dark for four years during an arts program hiatus, has come alive with more than a dozen productions since the fall of 2010, everything from Shakespearean classics to Gilbert and Sullivan musicals to Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard," which was presented in February.

- The Music Department, long a source of pride for the University, has collaborated with the Phoenix Symphony in bringing "Handel's Messiah" to campus twice and also has performed Mendelssohn's challenging oratorio

"Elijah," along with a host of well-received seasonal choral concerts.

- 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.

It's one thing to oversee such sweeping change – but quite another to insist that all of it be autographed with excellence. Yet that's what Pensis has done, and continues to do, as dean of the College of Fine Arts and Production. "Good enough" are words you'll never hear him say.

Those who know him best aren't surprised that the quality has come quickly. It's why they came to GCU in the first place, eager to roll up their sleeves and re-engineer the arts program into something better than what it was before.

Assistant Dean **Bill Symington**, who has known Pensis for more than 10 years, signed on as the Theatre Department's scenic designer after 16 years in a similar role at Arizona State University. He teaches classes in design and stagecraft at GCU, working alongside his students in a mentor/apprentice model.

"I was in a position (at ASU) where everything I was doing was accepted and no one was really pushing me to be better," Symington says. "When you work 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.

"He's a quiet, shy guy, but he knows what he's doing and what he wants. This is someone who will ask you to do something new, something better. ... And he's as hard on himself as he is on anybody."



Michael Kary as the Major-General was a highlight of "The Pirates of Penzance," which announced the return of theatre to campus in the fall of 2010. Photo by Jak Keyser



Last December's performance of "Handel's Messiah," conducted by Michael Christie of the Phoenix Symphony in GCU Arena, involved a choir of 200 voices. Photo by Darryl Webb



"Beauty and the Beast" was one of two one-act operas presented last October, with the Beast represented by a huge, six-person puppet. Photo by Darryl Webb

3 seasons of Ethington excellence

2010-11

"The Pirates of Penzance"
"All in the Timing"
"Inspecting Carol"
"The Comedy of Errors"
"The Frogs" (at GCU pool)

2011-12

"You Can't Take It With You"
"Dracula"
"Amahl and the Night Visitors"
"A Midsummer Night's Dream"
"The Boy Friend"

2012-13

"Much Ado About Nothing"
"Comedy on the Bridge" and "Beauty and the Beast"
"A Christmas Carol"
"The Cherry Orchard"
"H.M.S. Pinafore" (April 12-14 & 19-21)

Pensis, 55, arrived at GCU seeking something new – and found it. Fresh from a master's degree program in stage direction at the University of Wisconsin, he showed up for an interview in August 1982 in a three-piece wool suit that he refused to take off. (He still got the job.)

"The spirit then was as it is now," he says of the University. "It was infectious. It got me here, and it's what I'm still here for."

As chair of what was then called the Department of Theatre and Drama, he initiated the five-production Ethington Theatre Series of three plays, one musical and one opera, hoping to build a program that was as good as the ones he saw up close in Wisconsin, first as an undergraduate in Oshkosh and then in Madison.

This year, he has directed three of Ethington's four productions to date.

"Early on (in college), I started thinking about directing, primarily because I wanted to say more than I could as an actor," says Pensis, who studied the violin and photography and played four sports while growing up, discovering theatre as a high school senior.

"You have to ask, 'Why are we putting on this play, and what do we have to say?' Get a bunch of theatre people together and you'll find they are driven by something, and that's ultimately to reveal some sort of truth."

Alumnus **Michael Kary**, who went on from GCU to an acting career and is now a theatre instructor at the University, says Pensis has "a keen sense" of the big picture.



« “He’s really intense about the College of Fine Arts and Production, but he’s equally so about its function in the University as a whole, and he doesn’t stop there,” says Kary, who recently played Ebenezer Scrooge in a strong Ethington production of “A Christmas Carol” and will direct “H.M.S. Pinafore” in April.

“In his mind, theatre at GCU (is) a viable part of the Phoenix arts landscape.”

Pensis allows that there are certain limitations for a college theatre troupe, such as its inability to play a range of ages in a production. He compares the difference between college and professional theatre to the one between college and pro sports, and says he’ll take college-level passion every time in both.

“This has got to be bloody good theatre, period,” he says. “We’re a college producing the best that it

possibly can, and we’ll let the chips fall where they may. I’d never say (to a student), ‘You’re doing well – for a college actor.’”

Last spring, **Christina Cullers** got a taste of the perfectionist in Pensis when she played the female lead in the musical “The Boy Friend.”

“Working with him is intense,” says Cullers, an opera singer by training. “He’ll get you to where he wants you to go. He was relentless in pulling me to do my best. He has every piece (of a production) mastered, and he’s invested in you as a student.”

Indeed, Pensis thinks nothing of spending an hour and a half with an actor, one on one, to get it *just* so.

“If you didn’t understand,” he says, “you might think that person was being picked on. Sometimes it’s an

GCU’s choirs (above), under the direction of Assistant Dean Juan Hernandez, have packed First Southern Baptist Church for their annual Christmas concert. Photo by Darryl Webb

actor who has accomplished things but hit a plateau. When we get close to a performance, I have to remind myself to praise what’s working.”

He also has to remind himself that plenty of things are working.

“The goal is to represent Grand Canyon in the best way that we can and to reflect as much honor and achievement as possible,” Pensis says. “We’re in the ballpark. We still have lots more work to do. We’re going to grow and mature and continue to progress, and that’s exciting.

“I don’t want to do three steps forward and two steps back. It’s full speed ahead.” ■

‘H.M.S. Pinafore’ part of Guild fundraiser

The GCU Guild, a volunteer organization established in 1994 to support and encourage students through prayer, scholarships and campus activities, will hold its annual fundraiser in conjunction with the Ethington Theatre production of “H.M.S. Pinafore.” The Gilbert and Sullivan musical is the final production in the theatre series for 2012-13.

The fundraiser will start with a silent auction at 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 14, followed by dinner at 5 p.m. in the Arena and the performance at 7 p.m. in Ethington. Tickets are \$60 per person and \$500 for a table of 10. Proceeds will go toward the GCU Guild Scholarship Foundation and the Student Emergency Fund. For tickets: www.GCUArena.com/GuildGala.



The dance program has grown in numbers and quality under Susannah Keita, evidenced by its winter concert, “The Road Less Traveled,” last December. Photo by Darryl Webb

LEADING *by* EXAMPLE

Junior multicultural director preaches hard work, diversity

– by Cooper Nelson

Diversity is more than a buzzword for Samara “Samy” Carlon, GCU’s student government multiculturalism director. Photo by Darryl Webb

Since she first volunteered for student government in the sixth grade, Grand Canyon University junior **Samara “Samy” Carlon** never has lost sight of 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 monthly farmers’ 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.

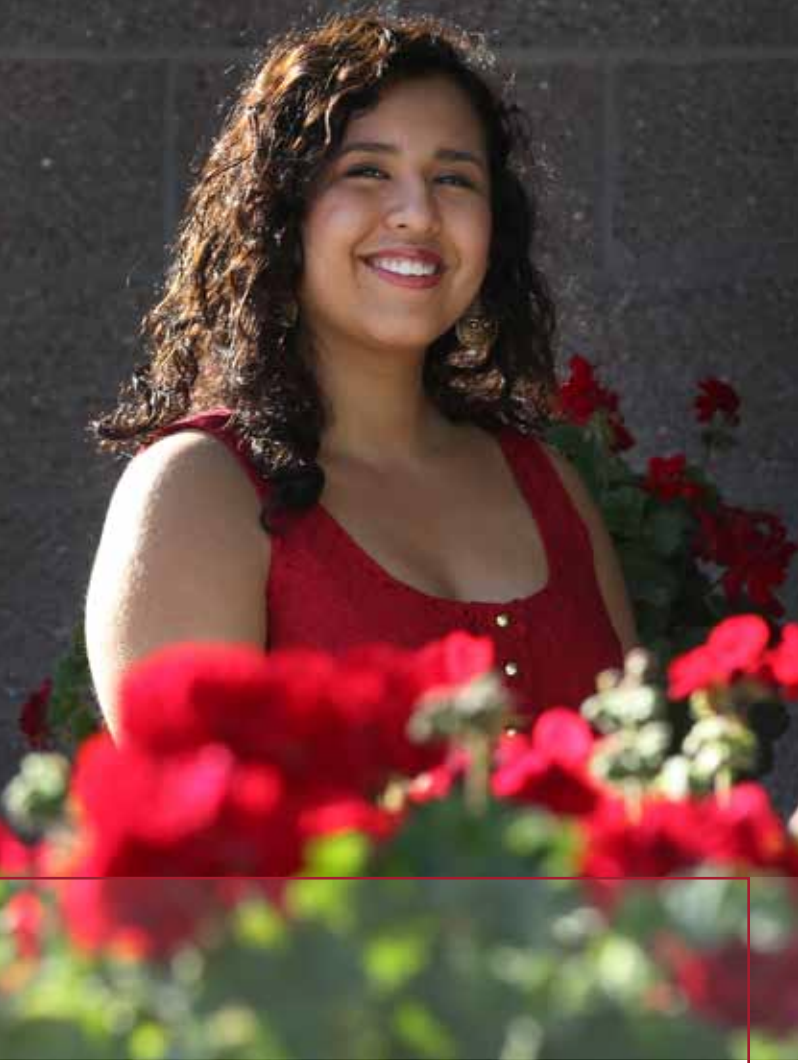
Carlon’s family moved to Arizona from Mexico City when she was 4. She knew that finding a university she could afford would be challenging.

“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.

Carlon, 20, initially applied to Arizona State University but was deterred by expensive out-of-state tuition. A counselor at Peoria High School encouraged her to apply to GCU, where she earned a \$10,000 scholarship for her grades.

“I was like, there is no way I could get paid to do something I love,” Carlon said. “I felt like God was calling me (to GCU).”



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 ASGCU 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 campaigning for current Phoenix District 5 City Councilman **Daniel Valenzuela**, a firefighter and first-time political candidate who two years ago became the first-ever Latino representative of his vastly Latino district.

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

“With Samy being in her position, you see (Latino cultural representation and education) on the walls and you see it happening on campus,” Hernandez said. “It’s good to see something around campus that talks about other cultures.

“Seeing (Samy’s efforts) around GCU makes a difference to the individuals of other cultures that see it.” ■

THE Flexibility of FAITH

Holy Yoga converts Eastern tradition into Christian fitness

— by Rachelle Reeves / Special to GCU Today Magazine

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 use 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 this 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." ■

GCU REC CENTER PROGRAMS

Holy Yoga is the only faith-based fitness program offered through GCU's 55,000 square-foot Student Recreation Center. Other popular classes such as turbo kickboxing, Zumba and intermediate yoga classes draw dozens of students weekly. Classes are free and open to all GCU students.

For more information about fitness programs at the Rec Center, call 602.639.7400.



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



GCU student Alejandra Valenzuela (top left) stretches and Rachel Hoard (above) checks her form during Holy Yoga classes at the Student Recreation Center. Photos by Darryl Webb

BUCKING SUCCESS

Rodeo clown's online master's degree could rope him back into teaching

– by Cooper Nelson



Professional rodeo clown JJ Harrison says his GCU master's degree could help him get back into teaching after he hangs up his spurs. Photos courtesy of JJ Harrison



JJ 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 to professors 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 barrelmen 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 rodeo 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 keeps his teaching certificate updated and prides himself on a family-friendly act. For example, he chose a soft drink instead of a beer as his barrel sponsor.

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 JJ also works part time as a promoter.

He said that his wife and son **Huck**, 4, are his two biggest supporters. Melissa enjoys the rodeo life but understands the impact of JJ's advanced degree and the importance it could have on their future.

"(Right now) he's not using his master's degree for his education career, but it has helped him to get to where he is today," Melissa said.

"He's doing a great job in the rodeo, though," she said, adding that his performances "are something that can keep me laughing, and I've seen them 50 times." ■

NOTEWORTHY PERFORMER

Soprano Christina Cullers sees God's design in her singing

– by Doug Carroll



It's hard to imagine **Christina Cullers** ever sounding "like a dead horse," but that's how she says last summer began for her.

Cullers, who graduated from Grand Canyon University's College of Fine Arts and Production last May, was just starting an intensive, two-week OperaWorks program in Los Angeles in June when she was thrown for a loop by a vocal nodule that temporarily ruined her beautiful soprano.

The doctor's prescription: no singing or talking. Even with those severe restrictions, she stayed on at OperaWorks.

"I had to learn to communicate without the use of my voice," 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 choirboy.

She also performed for the Germans, an experience that was both nerve-racking 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 Girlchoir.

Cullers says her study as an undergraduate with Corley, who has a sterling reputation as a voice coach, was "the best thing to ever happen to me,"



Christina Cullers says she never thought of herself as an actor, only as a singer, until she took the stage at GCU. Photo by Darryl Webb

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 invests 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 onstage only if that is where God has called me to be a witness." ■

WEST SIDE PRIDE

Longtime Phoenix Police leader found focus at GCU

– by Michael Ferraresi



GCU's library is one of a few buildings Phoenix Police Cmdr. Tim Hampton remembers from 1985, though he says his alma mater is well-known in law enforcement circles. Photo by Darryl Webb

Sunlight reflected off the gold-plated badge pinned above **Cmdr. Tim Hampton's** heart as he strolled the campus where he launched his police career. He knew the place well, yet barely recognized it.

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 policed the area as an officer and oversaw west Phoenix as a patrol supervisor, often finding himself involved with his alma mater on crime-reduction programs.

Hampton expects to earn his Ph.D. in organizational leadership this year and would then like to teach at GCU. For him, teaching and mentorship are more of a responsibility than a goal – and GCU encourages that mentality.

"The atmosphere of teaching, the camaraderie here – it's just different," said Hampton, a 23-year Phoenix police veteran who oversees the department's Property Crimes Bureau.

"That's what's special about this campus," Hampton said. "You actually feel a sense of direction and mission here. It's not like other universities where it's just like a herd of cattle moving along."

GCU has long prided itself on being involved with community efforts such as the federally funded "Weed n Seed" programs to clear crime and blight from nearby neighborhoods. Hampton says the University has committed to being involved with community-based justice, assisting whenever possible to help residents and police in the area around campus. He often found himself at community meetings hosted by his alma mater.

As a GCU undergrad, Hampton majored in behavioral science the same year he became a probation officer. He credited the writing and analytical skills taught at GCU as inspiration to get past the "grunting and sweating mentality" of chasing radio calls. Now, in today's era of tight city budgets, even beat cops are asked to act as detectives.

"Now with the complexity of crimes, you have to have the ability to comprehend and the cognitive skills necessary to investigate," said Hampton, whose detectives investigate everything from identity theft and residential burglaries to multimillion-dollar white-collar crimes.

Moving up at a police department is also more difficult without the proper degrees. Phoenix police **Sgt. Kenny Laird**, who oversees officers assigned to neighborhoods around GCU, said there is a higher standard now for promotions. Online criminal justice degrees through GCU have become an attractive option for working cops who can't attend class during traditional hours.

Laird, who doubles as GCU's assistant public safety director, said Hampton is known for his ability to connect with everyone from line officers to neighborhood leaders. How would he be as a college instructor? Hampton understands the need to have well-rounded, well-trained officers on the street – and his reputation for being brutally honest with his fellow officers could serve future cops well.

"The unedited version of Tim Hampton would be interesting to see ...," Laird said. "It would benefit a lot of people." ■

Tim Hampton

Hometown: Phoenix.

Police experience: Commander over Property Crimes Bureau at Phoenix Police Department, the latest of dozens of assignments in his 23-year career.

Education: Bachelor's in behavioral science, Grand Canyon University (1985); master's in educational leadership, Northern Arizona University; is completing a doctorate in organizational leadership.

Community service: Served as senior pastor at Desert Cove Assembly of God and on several executive boards of organizations dedicated to improving quality of life for Phoenix residents.

TAKING THE FIELD WITH FAITH

Recent grad huddles up with evangelical Athletes in Action

– by Cooper Nelson

Kasper Axtell described his spiritual transformation as a modern Saul-to-Paul story.

Rather than seeing a blinding light or hearing the voice of God, it was a Christian youth camp after his senior year of high school that led him to the Lord.

Although he was known for his Christian community outreach during his time at Grand Canyon University, Axtell, now 24, said he overcame an immoral lifestyle at an early age to earn a chance at a college degree. The 2012 graduate is now confidently on his way to a career in sports ministry.

Axtell currently serves as an intern for Ohio-based Athletes in Action, where he manages facilities and assists with customer service for the national evangelical Christian ministry group. He finds the most joy in his work when he has the opportunity to share the Gospel with young athletes facing challenges similar to the ones that he did when he was a teen.

"Before I knew God, I had struggled with many self-destructive habits," Axtell said. "I was battling an identity crisis, not knowing who to please, which is very dangerous." While attending Flagstaff High School, Axtell found himself trapped in a shallow lifestyle of drinking and carousing. During his senior year, he moved in with **Adam Serrano**, a Christian teammate on his baseball team.

Serrano became like a brother to Axtell and encouraged him to come to GCU in 2009.

As a student, Axtell helped lead GCU's Spiritual Life office with community service events such as clearing trash from neighborhoods near campus, cleaning graffiti and serving food to the homeless.

Axtell faced the difficult decision of returning to GCU to pursue a master's degree and work for Spiritual Life or pursue full-time employment in sports ministry. In the end, he stayed in Ohio to help others with their faith.

"God pressed it on my heart to get out of my comfort zone," Axtell said. "Somewhere like GCU can be a safe haven for believers, but it can also be a comfort that holds back believers. I wanted to get out of something I knew and into something I didn't know."

Axtell has stayed with the same family near Athletes in Action's Dayton headquarters since he moved there. The family is involved with the organization's basketball ministry department. **Kelly Michalski**, Axtell's internship surrogate mother, said he endeared himself to her family and the staff at AIA with his determination to grow his faith.

"I see him as a man God plucked out of a bad situation and is now using to spread His word," said Michalski, who houses AIA interns every summer.

"The way he acts and loves God, you would never know the baggage he has had in his life." ■



GCU graduate Kasper Axtell found his calling in sports ministry with Ohio-based Athletes in Action. Photo courtesy of Kasper Axtell



Alumni Relations main page: www.gcu.edu/alumni

To update your information and tell us about the latest with you: www.gcu.edu/UpdateAlum

Director of Alumni Relations:
Don Fraser | 602.639.6418 | donald.fraser@gcu.edu

Grand Canyon University
3300 W. Camelback Road
Phoenix, AZ 85017



GCU ARENA UPCOMING EVENTS



LIVING PROOF LIVE WITH BETH MOORE

Friday, March 22 and Saturday, March 23



CHRIS TOMLIN - BURNING LIGHTS TOUR

Wednesday, May 1



PROMISE KEEPERS

Friday, May 17 and Saturday, May 18

PRIMAVERA MUSICAL AND LUCHA LIBRE

Sunday, April 21

On Sale TBD

2013 GCU COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES

Thursday, May 2 to Saturday, May 4

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Sunday, May 19

On Sale TBD

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