

# GCU TODAY

## MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2013

Volume 3 – Issue 3

## THE MOVE INTO MESA

University plans to open  
satellite location in 2015



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# STORY TIME at CHAPEL

## Fall's speakers to reflect on personal integration of God's plan

— by Cooper Nelson

Weekly Chapel services in GCU Arena bring music and message to one place for GCU's students, faculty and staff.  
Photo by Darryl Webb

This year's Chapel will encourage students to seek God's purpose for their life through the theme of "His Story, Your Story."

Chapel speakers scheduled for the fall semester will be asked to tell the story of an influential biblical figure and to highlight how God weaved His plan and purpose into their lives. They will share how God seeds His plan into their personal "stories."

Dean of Students **Pastor Tim Griffin** said he wanted this year's Chapel services to challenge students to examine how God's plan is integrated into their lives.

Griffin hopes the personal stories will enhance GCU students' relationship with God.

"I think everybody likes to hear other people's stories (about their faith), and Chapel is a wonderful opportunity to meet people and learn their stories," said Griffin, who will lead services three times in the first semester. "Hopefully, this allows them to better understand God and learn about people's loves and hopes and dreams."

Students and staff will hear from GCU-affiliated speakers, influential pastors, authors, and other national Christian speakers. Services are at 11:15 a.m. Mondays in GCU Arena.

The list of non-GCU speakers includes best-selling Christian writer **Lee Strobel**, who is the author of a number of textbooks used in GCU classrooms and the father of College of Theology faculty member **Kyle Strobel**. Students will hear from returning speakers **Jon Demeter**, campus director for Athletes in Action, and **Jeremy Jernigan**, executive pastor of Central Christian Church of the East Valley.

"I love seeing the energy of the students and their eagerness to grow in truth and community," said Jernigan, who will speak at Chapel for a third consecutive year.

"In my own life, college was such a pivotal time for me to challenge all I'd been taught as a kid and to emerge with

my own ideas that I had tested and wrestled through. I love to play a small role in this for the students at GCU."

**Dr. Jason Hiles**, new dean of the College of Theology, will join President/CEO **Brian Mueller** and Griffin as the only GCU-affiliated speakers this fall. Hiles comes to the University from Louisiana College, where he served as associate dean of that institution's divinity school.

Griffin sees the growth of campus as an opportunity for speakers' stories to resonate with a larger crowd of students and spread God's Word.

"Obviously we have a whole new crop of students coming in that will help grow the Christian community," Griffin said. "Hopefully Chapel will continue their Christian formation." ■

## FALL CHAPEL SPEAKERS

- AUG 26:** Tim Griffin
- SEPT 9:** Brian Mueller
- SEPT 16:** Jeremy Jernigan, Central Christian Church of the East Valley
- SEPT 23:** Mark Martin, Calvary Community Church
- SEPT 30:** Dr. Jason Hiles
- OCT 7:** Jon Demeter, Athletes in Action
- OCT 14:** Tim Griffin
- OCT 21:** Lee Strobel, author of "The Case for Faith"
- OCT 28:** Agnes Umuligirwa, international speaker for refugee women
- NOV 4:** Dustin Tappan, youth pastor, Christ's Church of the Valley
- NOV 18:** Sean Cooper of The Traveling Team, an organization that addresses college students across the country
- DEC 2:** Brian Mueller
- DEC 9:** Tim Griffin

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# The Arts COME OF AGE

## Fourth-year GCU program has developed depth, variety

– by Doug Carroll



Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard," presented last February, was one of the highlights of the Ethington Theatre Series for 2012-13. Photo by Darryl Webb

Before the arts program was reinstated at Grand Canyon University three years ago, in the summer of 2010, even the Ethington Theatre workshop was bereft of tools. Talk about your blank canvas.

Dean **Claude Pensis** had 100 theatre, choral, dance and film majors – most of them freshmen – and the only resource in large supply was their enthusiasm. And yet, from the opening night of "The Pirates of Penzance" through eight months of productions and concerts, it became clear: The College of Fine Arts and Production was no ordinary start-up. GCU's students and instructors were abundantly talented, and their extraordinary dedication carried them through the year's challenges.

Those pioneering freshmen are now seniors ready to deliver a spectacular 2013-14 arts season for the college, which has grown to nearly 600 majors and added instrumental music and graphic design programs in the past year. An unprecedented number of arts events – many of them free to students and the community – will take place on campus and at nearby First Southern Baptist Church, which continues to serve as a concert hall until the University has its own.

"I'm pleased that we've become so embedded in the University and the community this quickly," says Pensis, whose stellar faculty includes **Bill Symington** and **Michael Kary** (theatre); **Dr. Juan Hernandez**, **Dr. Sheila Corley** and **Gabe Salazar** (vocal music); **Paul Koch** (instrumental music); **Gregg Elder** (digital film); **Susannah Keita** (dance); and **Sheila Schumacher** (graphic design).

Here's a preview of what the coming year will bring:

### THEATRE

The Ethington Theatre Series opens with Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," followed by Eugene O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness!" and the Mozart comic opera "Cosi Fan Tutte." In the spring are C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" and Stephen Sondheim's "Into the Woods." Also, there will be at least three student-directed plays during the year, along with performances by a student improvisational comedy troupe. And "Arts Under the Stars," a community outreach event, will be back for a second year.

The Class of 2014 "will be our first big wave of graduates, and it will be interesting to see what our students move on to," says Symington, noting a recent increase in the number of internship opportunities for GCU theatre students. Current partnerships include Arizona Opera, Valley Youth Theatre, Childsplay and Phoenix Theatre.

**New this year:** LED lighting in Ethington and a 30-foot revolving stage piece that will be used for the first time in "Ah, Wilderness!"

### VOCAL MUSIC

Highlights include a Beethoven choral program on Oct. 8, as well as a third year of Handel's "Messiah" with the Phoenix Symphony (Dec. 5), the annual Christmas concert (Dec. 10) and Brahms' "Requiem" (March 11). The New Life Singers, coming off a year of 100-plus performances, will release their first CD in the fall and plan to enter an international collegiate competition.

"We're every bit as good as a large university program in quality and quantity (of performances)," Hernandez says. GCU has three times as many music majors (120) as it did three years ago.

**New this year:** GCU's community chorus, the Choral Union, has been renamed the Canyon Choral Society. Three concerts will involve the Canyon Symphony Orchestra, the new name given to the nearly four dozen professional musicians who have accompanied GCU's choirs in the past.

### INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The Thundering Heard, GCU's high-energy pep band directed by Koch, debuted last basketball season with 55 members and expects to have more than 90 this year.

**New this year:** The concert and jazz bands, which performed last spring to rave reviews, will present their own fall and spring concerts, on Nov. 5 and April 8.

### DIGITAL FILM

The annual 48 Hour Interschool Challenge, a competition hosted the first weekend in November by GCU, has grown dramatically in entries and quality. Under Elder, GCU film students have landed internships recently with CNN, the Arizona Cardinals, the Milwaukee Brewers, the History Channel and the Discovery Channel.

### DANCE

The department will stage its annual winter (Dec. 11 and 12) and spring (April 23 and 24) concerts, and **Sarah "Anindo" Marshall** of the Debbie Allen Dance Academy in Los Angeles is scheduled as an artist in residence in November.

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

GCU's program, which includes Web and animation design, will be involved in various aspects of Phoenix Design Week (Oct. 18-25) and also in message-board communication on campus. ■



# A CAMPUS IS COMING

GCU's satellite location in Mesa should have a  
community feel right away

– by Doug Carroll & Janie Magruder









*Renderings courtesy of DMB Associates and  
provide only an approximation of land use*

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Grand Canyon University, becoming known throughout the West for bringing a sleepy campus to life, is poised to do the same thing with a dirt patch of land formerly inhabited by jackrabbits, tumbleweeds and Corvettes.

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 <b>Hospital</b>	 <b>Grocery</b>	 <b>Hotel</b>	 <b>Student Union</b>
 <b>Corporate Offices</b>	 <b>Main Street Retail</b>	 <b>Classrooms</b>	 <b>Student Housing</b>

At the end of July, the University announced a partnership with developer DMB Associates to acquire 100 acres in east Mesa, Ariz., as part of a unique mixed-use project called Eastmark that also will include retail businesses and single-family homes.

Classes would begin on the site in 2015, and enrollment eventually could approach 10,000 students.

The land, near Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and Arizona State University Polytechnic, once was home to the General Motors

Proving Ground, which closed nearly five years ago, and represents GCU's first major expansion beyond its west Phoenix campus. A total of four sites in the southeastern sector of metropolitan Phoenix – known to locals as the East Valley – were considered.

In 2012, the gift of a campus in western Massachusetts was briefly considered by the University, and a satellite site in the Tucson area remains a possibility. Branches of GCU's College of Nursing and Health Care Professions operate out of six cities.

Against a cheering backdrop of purple-clad faculty, staff and students at GCU Arena, Mesa Mayor **Scott Smith** congratulated GCU and DMB officials for hammering out the deal, describing it as "a great example of how government and the private sector can work together."

Smith said, "This will be more than a college campus, this will be a little village," adding that the site will be an economic driver for the region, creating an estimated 2,000 faculty and staff positions.



“People will come from all over the country to see how it’s done,” he predicted.

Smith and other elected officials, including Phoenix City Councilman **Daniel Valenzuela**, whose district includes the University, and Mesa City Councilman **Scott Somers**, praised GCU for being a fine neighbor whose good works now will illuminate a suburban region that also includes the cities of Tempe, Chandler, Gilbert and Queen Creek.

“GCU’s heart is in the community,” Valenzuela said.

The University has revitalized west Phoenix, even filling a financial void created when federal grant money assisting law enforcement in reducing crime dried up, Valenzuela said. As a result, the crime rate in a wide swath of the city – much larger than GCU’s immediate neighborhood – has slowed, he said.

“This is extraordinary what you’re getting,” Valenzuela said, addressing Mesa officials at the July 30 news conference. “When it comes to GCU, it’s not just a higher learning institution, it’s an opportunity to get our kids a private, Christian education, and it gives many students opportunities that they otherwise might not have.”

## ‘Palette of opportunity’

**Drew M. Brown**, founding partner and chairman of the board of DMB Associates, praised **Brian Mueller**, GCU’s president and CEO, for being able to see the Eastmark acreage not as a brown expanse of tumbleweeds but as a “palette of opportunity.”

“We had a vision of a truly complex, integrated place that is not just more urban sprawl but is a special place

in Mesa,” Brown said. “It was the budding relationship with GCU that allowed us to start the complex weave that makes a place.”

That connection began in January 2013, when DMB learned of GCU’s interest in the East Valley and responded to the University’s request for proposal, said **Dea McDonald**, DMB’s senior vice president and general manager. DMB was impressed by the University’s growth and performance over the past five years, its goals and vision for the future, and its educational programming, he said.

“We worked diligently to get in front of Brian and the GCU team to let them know what Eastmark is about and DMB’s long-term commitment to the region,” McDonald said. “It was pretty clear that the light went on, and they saw this was a huge opportunity to develop in a place that was much more than a university campus.”

But the idea of building a master-planned community anchored by a university, a notion that McDonald called “a groundbreaking move,” was percolating at DMB as early as 2007.

“We were working on a vision for a community that we knew would be much different from anything else DMB had done before,” he said. “We haven’t done a university per se, but we always develop partnerships in health care and education in all our communities in some sense – elementary schools, high schools, research centers – and given the location of this property, the likelihood that we could attract a university was greater here than in any of our other projects.”

McDonald said GCU’s excellent nursing and education programs and its planned entry into the biosciences and engineering also caught DMB’s eye.

“We were enamored and intrigued with the nursing program and how it would fit with our health care partners,” he said.

Brown said DMB will deliver a home for GCU, and “in turn, Grand Canyon is going to bring its wonderful students and faculty, who will give vibrancy to our community, and a windfall that will allow jobs to be created in the East Valley.”

**Mark Bistricky**, principal of Valley Christian High School in Chandler, said the GCU expansion will strengthen an already solid partnership between the two institutions and provide additional opportunities to more students.

More than one-third of Valley Christian’s past two graduating classes have gone on to GCU, he noted.

“Grand Canyon University opening a campus in the East Valley will offer even more ways for both schools to serve Christian students,” he said. “Our staff also takes advantage of the many professional development opportunities GCU extends to us.

“(GCU is) helping make Christian education in the Valley better at every level.”

Somers said GCU has the right mix of aesthetics, ambiance and educational quality to complement the Eastmark development, where housing, retail and open space will thrive. »

“This will be more than a college campus, this will be a little village. People will come from all over the country to see how it’s done.”

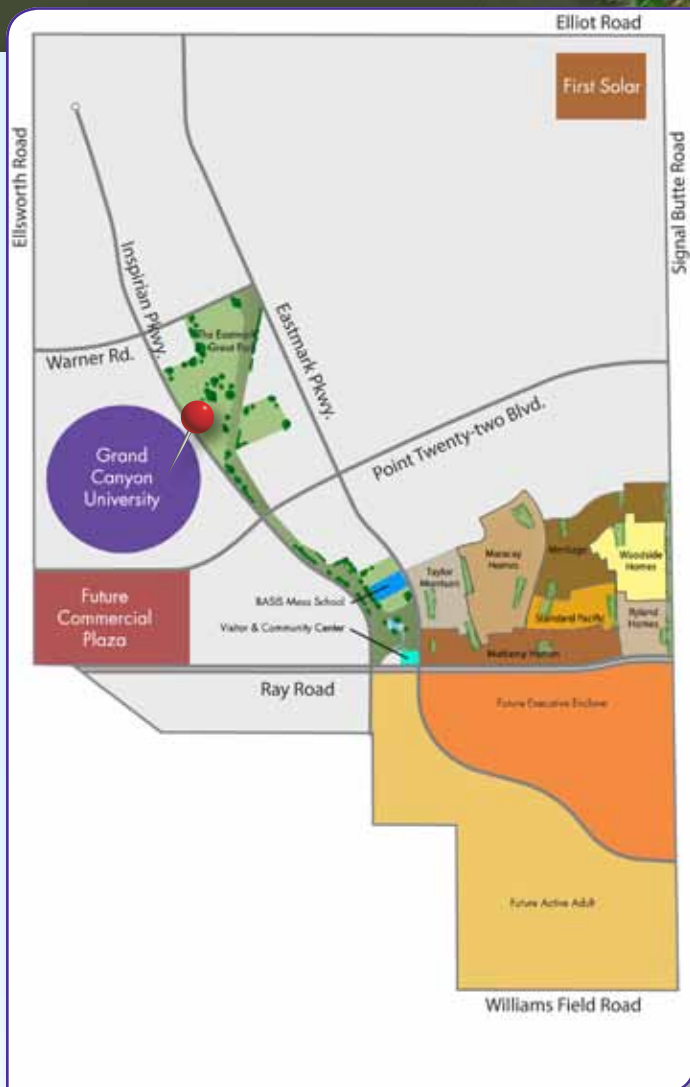
*Mesa Mayor Scott Smith on Grand Canyon University’s Mesa site*



“We had a vision of a truly complex, integrated place that is not just more urban sprawl but is a special place in Mesa.”

*Drew M. Brown, founding partner and chairman of the board of DMB Associate*





«Mesa is quietly becoming a college town,” Somers said. “It’s becoming a place that has a human-capital-powered knowledge economy. Mesa is now a place to live, work, play and learn, and that’s an exciting opportunity.”

Somers said that Mesa developed a vision for 100,000 high-wage jobs back in 2006, positions that demand the science and technology skills for which GCU has been tailoring its programs.

“Employers want a ‘knowledge work force,’” Somers said, “and that’s where this fits in.... The future is about campuses that are part of the fabric of the community. This is the opportunity (GCU) will have at Eastmark.”

## Commuter students at start

Mueller said more students today are opting to live at home and continue involvement in their home churches, and the East Valley is home to several Christian megachurches. Although the Mesa site will open exclusively to commuter students, residential living is possible later on for students, he said.

“To hear that we’ll have another campus, in the East Valley, is super exciting,” said **Jenna Pearson**, a GCU senior from Gilbert who is a member of the Antelope women’s basketball team.

DMB’s McDonald said GCU students and employees who choose to live at Eastmark will benefit from the community life that develops through holiday celebrations, concerts and other activities that DMB is known for promoting at its properties.

“Relationships are created with residents of our communities, and this will be a great opportunity for the GCU family,” he said. ■



# MASTERS of the *Personal Touch*

Enrollment counselors who go above  
and beyond for their students

– by Bob Romantic

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**K**immy Erickson-Moen stood at the bottom of the stairs, arms open wide, waiting for the huge embrace that was about to come from **Ruth Ross** during commencement ceremonies at Grand Canyon University in May.

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The two never had met before that day, but you couldn't tell as they hugged each other, tears of joy streaming down their faces, after Ross received her diploma.

"You did it!" beamed Erickson-Moen, an enrollment counselor at GCU who had volunteered to help during graduation.

"Yes, I did!" said Ross, an online student from Atlanta.

The two first crossed paths a couple hours earlier when Ross entered GCU Arena, sobbing as she looked for her seat. Ross had spoken earlier on the phone with her sisters, who also are GCU online students. And her siblings also sent text messages of support that were displayed on the Arena's electronic ticker. But Ross was still alone, in a different city, on one of the biggest days of her life.

"I asked her for her graduation card so I could learn her name and said, 'Ruth, why are you crying?'" said Erickson-Moen. "She said, 'I can't believe I'm here. But my family couldn't come. They saved up every penny that they could just to fly me here.'"

Erickson-Moen told her everything was going to be OK. "You know why? Because you did it!" she said.

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*Enrollment counselors extraordinaire (from left) Claudia Ward, Kimmy Erickson-Moen and Angella Mejia know what it takes to make GCU a special place for students. Photos by Darryl Webb*

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Still, Ross knew it would be strange walking off that stage with no one to hug and share her joy.

"I told her, 'Don't you worry, Ruth,'" Erickson-Moen said. "She didn't know what I meant at the time and I showed her to her seat."

As Ross' name was called during commencement and she walked across the stage to shake her dean's hand and receive her diploma, she heard "Yay, Ruth!" being yelled from the audience. Smiling, she didn't know where it had come from, but found out soon enough when she saw Erickson-Moen waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

"It meant a lot to me that someone would care enough that, even though she didn't know me, she would stand up as my family and cheer for me," said Ross, who completed her bachelor's degree in business administration. "It felt great to have Kimmy do that for me."

Erickson-Moen volunteered to help at graduation because four of the students she helped enroll at GCU were getting their diplomas on that day. She didn't count on getting a fifth.

"That's the joy of what I get to do every single day," said Erickson-Moen, who left a manager's position at another university in order to become an enrollment counselor at GCU. "And that's what I tell my students. When you graduate, I'm going to be at the bottom of those stairs. I'm going to be there waiting for you. I don't care if your family comes out because I'm family, and we're doing this together."

That kind of passion and relationship-building is what sets enrollment counselors at GCU apart. While Erickson-Moen said other universities are more concerned about how many students an enrollment counselor may bring in, at GCU it is more about putting students' needs first and building relationships.

In that role, the voice at the other end of the phone not only helps students get enrolled and find the right classes to complete their education, but sometimes becomes a confidante or someone who helps a student get through a tough time at home or work.

Many enrollment counselors at GCU typify that spirit, but here are three who stand out: **Angella Mejia** from the main campus, **Claudia Ward** from the University's Tempe site and Erickson-Moen from the Peoria site.

## Angella Mejia

As an enrollment counselor on the main campus, Mejia works with incoming high school students. Or, as she calls them, "my babies."

"For me, this is not just a job. It's not a career, either. I feel like this is my calling," Mejia said. "I feel like I've finally found what I'm good at, and that is working with students and working with families. ... God has me here for a purpose, and I will continue to be here for as long as He wants me to be here."

Mejia, who has worked at GCU for 10 years, still remembers her first "baby," a student named Lance who didn't have the grades to meet admission requirements.



***"God has me here for a purpose, and I will continue to be here for as long as He wants me to be here."***

"He came into the office with his mom. He had a tie and everything, it was the cutest thing ever," Mejia said. "I remember he was embarrassed when I asked him for his transcripts. I told him, 'It's OK, we all make mistakes. As long as we learn from them, you should be good in life.' Of course, they were not going to admit him because his GPA was low."

"But he really wanted to come to Grand Canyon. He said, 'Besides the fact that my mom wants me to come here, I want to show people that I'm not done. I just made bad choices in high school.'"

Mejia, convinced that Lance deserved a chance at higher education, was able to enroll him with certain stipulations attached, including maintaining a qualifying grade point average.

"So we built that relationship right there, that trust," Mejia said. "When he got admitted, I saw him every day and he was so happy. His confidence went through the roof. His mom noticed a change and thanked me for believing in him and giving him that hope."

Lance majored in biology, maintained his grades and graduated from GCU.

"I made an appointment to go see my eye doctor," Mejia said, "and guess who happened to be the person doing my eye exam? My boy Lance. I was talking to him and he is getting ready to go to optometry school in New York. He told me right there, 'If it wasn't for you believing in me and giving me that opportunity, I wouldn't be here.'"

Mejia stresses to her students that she is not there just to get them enrolled, but to be there for them until they graduate.

"Just because I get them here, it's not like 'Thank you for coming' and they go their own way," Mejia said. "I can't do that because I now have a relationship with the students. I have a relationship with their families. It's not just numbers. It's not just John Doe here. You're an actual student and an actual person here, and I'm very blessed, honestly, to be part of their life. I just do everything I can to make sure my students are good to go and that there's no doubt in their mind that GCU is the place for them."



## «Claudia Ward

In the 2½ years Ward has been at GCU, she has been part educator, part counselor, part coach and part cheerleader in her role as an enrollment counselor for the College of Doctoral Studies.

"Some need a little more guidance than others, but I certainly feel like I want to be their biggest cheerleader because when they do finally make that decision to move forward in their doctoral journey, especially for an online learner, they want and appreciate knowing they have that lifeline and that connection to the University," Ward said. "So many times learners will say it's incredible the amount of support they have been receiving throughout their doctoral program at GCU, in comparison to their bachelor's or master's degrees at other universities. That's something that not just doctoral but GCU prides itself on."

Ward's doctoral students are typically well-educated teachers, principals, administrators, behavioral health professionals or business people looking to further their education. Still, Ward said she may be in contact with a prospective doctoral learner for six to 12 months before they know what path they want to take and are ready to enroll.

"Most of the time they know what they're looking for in a doctoral degree, but part of my job is educating them about, say, the difference between

a Ph.D. and a doctorate of education. And from there, determining what type of learner you are so that when you get into a program, you're in the program in which you are going to be successful. It's a lot more than just walking them through the admissions or application package."

Ward got her master's degree in community counseling and worked for Terros Behavioral Health Services for two years before coming to GCU. Those experiences only helped her in her transition.

"There is a lot of personal satisfaction in this job because I find that I am able to use all my counseling skills and communication skills in a healthy environment," Ward said. "My first group of students will be graduating and attending next May's commencement, so I plan on being there and I'm sure I'll have my box of Kleenex with me. It's a journey for me, too. Just to know that I've had somewhat of an impact in getting them to that point. ... It's pretty cool when you can go home at the end of the day and say, 'You know what, I'm making a difference in people's lives.'"

## Kimmy Erickson-Moen

In a management position, Erickson-Moen knew she could help people and have an impact at her former university. But it wasn't the same as dealing directly with students as an enrollment counselor.

So when an opportunity to work at GCU came along, she knew she had to take it.

"I wanted to find that passion again of my students," Erickson-Moen said. "I wanted to hear that smile in their voice. I wanted to hear the satisfaction. I wanted to hear the purpose. I wanted to know that what I did today changed their life. And that's what I do on a day-to-day basis. Every day, day in and day out, when I talk to my students, I know that I've made a difference."

At GCU, Erickson-Moen works with online students and cohort students who take classes at GCU in the evening – moms and dads and people looking for a new career.

"My students are with me through graduation," said Erickson-Moen, a student herself who is majoring in sociology. "I make that promise to them. You do this for me, I do this for you. I hold your hand, you hold mine. That's the way that we go."

CLAUDIA WARD, Tempe site



*"Some need a little more guidance than others, but I feel like I want to be their biggest cheerleader."*

And, she found out, it works both ways. Erickson-Moen had to take a leave of absence when three people close to her were stricken with cancer within six months. Her father died in April 2012. Her boyfriend was diagnosed with cancer that same July and has been treated. And her mother found out in October that she had thyroid cancer and is still dealing with that.

While Erickson-Moen was away, her email box was flooded with students' messages asking about her whereabouts.

"It was truly heartfelt and you could tell they cared," Erickson-Moen said. "It's more than just being a counselor. You truly build partnerships and friends and family and you find out about their dogs, and their kids, and their Aunt Jo and Cindy and Bob. You know everything that goes on in their life and you counsel them. It doesn't matter what it is.

"It's amazing, it really is. And then they turn around and do the same thing for me."

Even if it's the first day they've met, as was the case with Ruth Ross.

"For that particular student who had nobody here and saved every penny just to get here, I had to make it an experience for her," Erickson-Moen said. "She's going into her master's program now with me, so obviously we made a difference to impact her and to still pursue more of her education.

"She's going to go very far, and all it took was for somebody to truly care." ■



KIMMY ERICKSON-MOEN, Peoria site

*"Every day, day in and day out, when I talk to my students, I know that I've made a difference."*

# INNOVATING from the INSIDE



## Center for Science, Engineering and Technology launches

– by Michael Ferraresi

As Dr. Michael Mobley explored the possibility of joining Grand Canyon University, he saw the potential for developing the next generation of Arizona technology wizards.

The former associate director of Arizona State University's Biodesign Institute understood GCU had yet to develop an engineering program or computer science curriculum – but he noted the potential for integrating science and technology projects through the University's colleges of Nursing and Health Care Professions, Arts and Sciences, and Business. The possibilities seemed limitless.

Mobley recognized the void he and other tech-savvy GCU staff could help fill through the development of GCU's new Center for Integrated Science, Engineering and Technology. Earlier this year, he was named executive director of the center with the plan of helping the University develop an "engineering mindset" to attract science-minded students.

The idea with the center, known as Ciset, is to take the first step in developing GCU as a premier Christian university for training in four key academic areas: science, technology, engineering and math.

"But before that takes place, it's really laying the groundwork for what we need both in terms of introducing new majors and this integration across multiple disciplines," said Mobley, who served as a research and development director at Proctor & Gamble for more than 20 years, working on brands such as Crest toothpaste and Ivory soap, before shifting full time into the academic world.



Dr. Michael Mobley (left) was named executive director of GCU's Center for Integrated Science, Engineering and Technology. Associate directors Haley Peebles (right) and Maria Quimba (lower left) will help Mobley build an "engineering mindset" at the University. Photos by Darryl Webb

Mobley also has been published dozens of times on subjects ranging from quantum mechanics to "fluoridated hydroxyapatite surfaces" and other complex scientific trends.

As Ciset evolves in its first year, GCU will develop a bachelor's degree program in computer science to launch for the fall of 2014. A bachelor's degree program in engineering is expected to be available in the fall of 2015.

The ultimate goal, according to Mobley and other staff, is that GCU establish a new college of science, technology and engineering by 2016.

Science, technology, engineering and math are known as the "STEM" competencies. Mobley characterized Ciset as a consortium for collaboration in those academic areas.

By the time GCU launches its computer science program next year, students likely will be working through Ciset for additional training, internships and real-world experience in their chosen fields of study.

"We have to be demanding of our students," Mobley said. "If they're not up to the capabilities, we're not going to be able to get them placed. It's not going to be a soft program from that point of view."

"Having said that, the employers I've heard from believe in the strength of the Christian value system GCU imparts to its students."

Dr. Hank Radda, GCU's provost, said the University aims to provide students with the tools to develop not only traditional math and science skills, but also how to use research in a timely manner by helping them develop strong project-management abilities across various disciplines.

Arts and Sciences Professor Haley Peebles, who oversaw GCU's dissection course at the campus cadaver lab for years, and Maria Quimba, an assistant dean for the College of Nursing and Health Care Professions, will serve as associate directors of Ciset.

Peebles and Quimba will focus on developing a center called GCU's Center for Connected Care, which will function as a center within a center under Ciset.

The concept is to link health care studies with information technology innovations.

Ciset's focus on connected care could provide GCU students and staff with more opportunity to develop new ways of analyzing data from devices such as insulin pumps or pacemakers, or to figure out more efficient ways to catalog medical records.

Quimba said she envisioned nursing students working closely with other GCU students through Ciset to innovate new ways to provide personalized health care options for patients as part of a coordinated, interdisciplinary effort.

"Imagine our students taking genetic material, testing it, identifying actual markers, and then creating a plan of care for that particular individual," Quimba said, "but then taking that information and working with a mathematician to determine statistically how significant that value is, then walking over to an engineer and asking if we can engineer something to help this person address an issue, because it's going to happen. There's so much opportunity there." ■



# WHAT'S NEW for FALL? PLENTY



– by Bob Romantic

1 Student Union	2 New swimming pool/rec center/convenience store	3 Retail eateries	4 New dorms	5 Freshmen only, please
A new Starbucks on the second floor. A more expansive library with plenty of comfortable seating and private meeting spaces. Expanded dining on the first floor. And did we mention the views? The Union will be the place to be. Unless ...	Unless everyone is hanging out at the new pool (GCU's second) on the north end of campus. A 4,000-square-foot fitness center, men's and women's locker rooms, and a convenience store are in nearby Chaparral Hall.	For the first time, GCU has outside retail restaurants on campus. Chick-fil-A and Subway are taking up residence in Thunder Alley, replacing campus eateries Jazzman's coffee shop and Cobrizo's Mexican food. Mein Bowl (Chinese) remains but will slide over into the spot where Cobrizo's existed to make room for Chick-fil-A.	Chaparral and Saguaro residence halls become the sixth and seventh dormitories on campus. Each is five stories and holds about 600 students.	Hegel, Canyon, Sedona and Chaparral halls are designated freshmen-only dorms this school year. There are two reasons behind this: 1) We've got a LOT of freshmen! And 2) It helps students who are new to the college atmosphere to be around other students sharing the same experience. Another dorm change: Hegel Hall is no longer a men's-only dorm.

# 10 things campus students should know about



## 6 More housing options

Because of high demand from students, GCU will break ground in October on a 1,000-bed residence along 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in the parking lot just south of Sedona Hall. Retail is under consideration as part of the project.

## 7 Also coming soon

GCU will break ground soon on a new classroom building in the grassy area north of the College of Arts and Sciences building and east of the bookstore. The four-story classroom building will be about half the size of CAS, with a similar look, and should be ready by the fall of 2014.

## 8 On the move

Campus Operations is now located in the Student Union mailbox area. Students can still pick up mail in this area. Career Services has moved to Camelback Hall, and two dance rooms and classrooms have moved into Saguaro Hall.

## 9 Intramural field

Expansion of the synthetic turf intramural field was completed this summer. It can now hold two full-size soccer fields. Sand volleyball courts that had been located in this area are being moved just east of the Tim Salmon Clubhouse.

## 10 The Gathering/Chapel

The Gathering, GCU's student-led worship service on Tuesdays at 8 p.m., is moving to a more intimate setting in Antelope Gym, where the sound system has been amped up. The start time for Chapel services in the Arena on Mondays has been pushed back to 11:15 a.m. to accommodate class schedules.

# AT the HEAD of THEIR CLASS

Here are three to watch in a crop of uber-talented freshmen

– by Cooper Nelson



**I**t's another fall of record enrollment on the campus of Grand Canyon University: about 8,500 students, an increase of 2,000 from 2012.

More than 4,200 students moved onto campus during Welcome Week in late August, many of them part of the largest freshman class in school history (more than 3,000).

The freshman class boasts a cumulative grade-point average of nearly 3.5, the highest ever. The class also claims a basketball player who volunteers his time to help the less fortunate; a nursing student whose academic path reflects her love for her cancer-fighting sister; and a clarinet player who can literally blow you away.

**Sarah Boeder**, GCU's executive vice president of operations, said she expects the quality of the class to enhance the quality of life for all students.

"Because of the nature of the incoming class, with their increased GPA, diversity and Christian element, they are going to have a profound impact on what the campus is like and its culture," Boeder said.

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## NICOLE KOSTYK: Inspired by sister's struggle

**Nicole Kostyk** will add grace to the GCU nursing program this fall.

Nicole spent most of the last two years in hospitals with her younger sister, **Grace**, who was diagnosed with cancer in 2011 and has undergone numerous chemotherapy treatments and spinal taps. Nicole stayed by her sister's side and gained a new perspective on life.

After observing the positive impact of nurses on Grace, Nicole decided to pursue a nursing degree.

"I saw how the nurses worked and how they made a difference with Grace's treatment," Nicole said. "I really liked the way they worked with her. It made me feel more comfortable with the situation."

Nicole, 18, said the trials associated with a family cancer diagnosis served as her motivation to help others.

"I've always known that I wanted to do something in the medical field and, yeah, it's scary, but it will be cool to be able to help," she said. Her goal is to become a pediatric neurologist.

Grace, 8, served as the honorary race starter for GCU's Run to Fight Children's Cancer in 2012. The annual event is a 5K/10K race and cancer survivors' walk starting on the GCU campus, with proceeds benefiting the non-profit Children's Cancer Network and Phoenix Children's Hospital.

GCU's former community outreach manager, **Jose Moreno**, who oversaw the cancer run through the University's Office of Communications and Public Affairs, said Nicole's experience and passion will help her make an impact in the College of Nursing and Health Care Professions.

Nicole "has had to live and breathe it through her high school years," Moreno said. "When it comes to a medical student in nursing, from her experience, she can empathize (with them), not just sympathize.

"She has had to learn and live with what these people have to go through. Now she can pay it forward." ■

## JUSTIN OWENS: New start, new heart

A passion for helping others led **Justin Owens** to become an Antelope.

As a second-year senior at Westwind Preparatory Academy in north Phoenix, Owens volunteered his Sunday evenings to feed the homeless. He said he chose to attend GCU because of its devotion to local outreach.

"I really want to continue (GCU's) mission and make that stronger," said Owens, who will pursue a degree in sports management. "I knew (GCU) had a strong community outreach program and it allows me to keep up what I'm doing."

As a high school student in Baltimore, Owens' lifestyle reflected the crime-saturated area where he was raised. He reached out to family friend **Tim Hightower**, a former Arizona Cardinals player, for guidance.

Owens took Hightower's advice to seek a better situation, earned a scholarship to Westwind Prep and moved to Phoenix in 2011 to live with his sister, **Daya Foster**.

Foster said she was hesitant at first, telling Owens he had one chance to change or he would be sent back. But she wasn't surprised when he began helping others.

"He was always helping others ever since he was a little kid," Foster said. "What I was most surprised about was how quickly it grew and how others wanted to help."

Owens, 19, said that the loss of close friends – one from cancer, the other murdered – convinced him to change.

"I snapped and knew I needed to help people," Owens said. "I made up in my mind that once I got to where I can help people, I want to do it."

Owens turned down basketball scholarship offers from other universities to come to GCU, where he is not planning to play his sport.

"I fell in love with the campus and everything that it had to offer," Owens said. "I felt like GCU was the place I needed to be, to reach the goals I want to reach." ■

## DANIELLE WIEMEYER: She's with the band

One freshman who will be making noise on campus – and is encouraged to do so – is **Danielle Wiemeyer**.

Wiemeyer, who goes by "Ellie," will be part of the Thundering Heard pep band this year as a clarinet player. The band, which plays at all GCU home basketball games in addition to concerts and other campus events, has more than 90 members this year, nearly half of them new.

Wiemeyer, 18, arrives after an illustrious four-year band career at Mountain Ridge High School in Glendale that included all-region and all-state honors and selection as one of 150 high school band All-Americans.

She also graduated with an unweighted 4.0 GPA, served as captain of her cross country team and competed twice at state, as a sophomore (track and field) and junior (cross country).

Wiemeyer plans to pursue a degree in nursing along with studying clarinet and participating in the new GCU wind ensemble. She said she hopes her involvement in band will help in her transition to college life.

"I'm looking forward to meeting lots of new people in pep band and contributing to the 'Lopes school spirit," she said. "I couldn't be more excited to be able to have the opportunity to continue music."

**Paul Koch**, GCU's director of bands, said talented new players such as Wiemeyer will make a good band even better.

"Ellie comes from one of the better programs in the state," Koch said. "She reached a certain level and wanted to keep that going into college."

Koch said he was "blown away" by Wiemeyer's audition to join the band.

"Ellie came in and played, and I was like, 'Good grief, Ellie,'" Koch said. "She is a pretty good clarinet player." ■

# PREPARED to PROTECT

Public safety upgrades, training help GCU keep students and staff safe

– by Michael Ferraresi

A team of Phoenix Police officers glided through the hallways of a vacant Sedona Hall as **Kenny Laird** monitored their moves.

The officers angled their faux weapons toward a make-believe gunman as part of an active-shooter training exercise at the Grand Canyon University residence hall. In light of recent campus shootings and common public safety threats, GCU and Phoenix Police partnered on a number of safety initiatives to ensure officers and campus security are prepared in the event of an emergency.

That means addressing the grisly realities of a potential mass-casualty situation on campus. It's an issue every American university, high school – and even elementary school, as the Newtown, Conn., tragedy proved – is forced to deal with in an open and honest way within their campus communities.

"We've got to stop the loss of life before we can treat victims," said Laird, a 22-year Phoenix Police veteran, who joined GCU earlier this year as a full-time assistant director of public safety.

"It's important to neutralize and stop the threat," he said, adding that GCU officers have had a chance to participate in the police department training.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security stresses a "whole community approach" to active-shooter preparedness, because situations such as those at Virginia Tech, Columbine and other campuses tend to be "unpredictable and evolve quickly," according to a DHS overview of active-shooting training.

Mitigating campus violence requires officers to have updated training on how to clear facilities such as large residence halls, classroom buildings and similar structures. Also, earlier this summer, GCU faculty and staff were introduced to a Homeland-funded video titled "Run. Hide. Fight. Surviving an Active Shooter Event." The five-minute video provides simple tips for people to follow in the event of a workplace shooting.

**Rich Oesterle**, assistant campus development director over public safety, said steps to enhance public safety have included strengthening barriers around campus; adding public safety officers at all entries to the campus or nearby GCU sites; and encouraging everyone from students to staff to report suspicious behavior.

"Every incremental step puts a barrier in front of the criminal, the bad guy," Oesterle said. "Each of these steps improves the safety of students, staff and faculty on campus."



GCU students and staff have the ability to contact public safety officers quickly via 16 emergency blue-light call boxes around campus. More are being installed this year. Photo by Darryl Webb



*Kenny Laird, GCU's assistant public safety director, works with Phoenix Police on an active-shooter training exercise at Sedona Hall on campus. Laird, a former Phoenix sergeant, has emphasized partnerships between campus and local cops. Photo by Darryl Webb*

"In spite of all the incremental steps you take, the primary deterrent is an observant population."

Ramping up training is just part of how GCU is preparing to secure its traditional west Phoenix campus and other sites. Other public safety enhancements include:

### Security staffing increase

Last summer, GCU had about 27 public safety officers. By the start of 2013, the University added enough positions to bring the total of 56. To extend its commitment to campus safety, the University will hire additional officers to cover new residence halls and the new 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue Office Center. Recent hires include officers with decades of professional police experience, such as **Randy French**, a former Youngtown, Ariz., officer who lost his previous job when Youngtown laid off its entire police department through severe budget cuts. French, 43, a former field-training officer, has helped train his fellow GCU officers on everything from ethics to use-of-force standards. Other training opportunities such as the Phoenix Police active-shooter drill are encouraged.

### Arming officers

Public Safety Director **Henry Griffin** expects more officers could be trained in the near future to carry .40 caliber handguns on campus. Currently, about 12 public safety staffers are certified to use handguns on duty to prevent threats with potentially lethal force. Several of GCU's public safety officers are certified as Arizona peace officers, and others with professional police department experience could be hired as GCU continues to grow and expand across other sites.

### Dispatch efficiency

Earlier this year, GCU modified the way it dispatches public safety calls to officers on campus. The public safety office at Camelback Hall developed a new 24-7 dispatch center, and many GCU officers have had a chance to work the radios to learn best practices for putting calls out to officers in the field. Training emphasized the need for dispatchers to try to obtain as much information as possible from callers. "They need to be able to put it out to us in a way that we know what we're going into," French said.

### Sirens, text alerts and crime reporting

GCU will install three sirens across campus this fall as a way to notify the University community in the event of an active-shooter situation or similar event where the campus is placed on lockdown. Oesterle said the sirens will be audible across the entire west Phoenix campus. The sirens will work in tandem with GCU's text-message alert system, which students and staff can sign up for via [gcu.edu](http://gcu.edu). Additionally, crime tips can be forwarded to the public safety office digitally via the website.

### Emergency 'blue light' coverage

There are 16 emergency blue-light call boxes around campus, providing students and staff with a quick way to contact the public safety office in the event of an emergency. Blue-lights are positioned primarily around campus parking areas and promenades. More will be added this year. ■



Miss Arizona Jennifer Smestad, who is enrolled to study communications and exercise science at GCU, says her struggles have made her a stronger person. Photo courtesy of Mayda Mifflin/Miss Arizona pageant

# Faith Over Fear

## Miss Arizona, a GCU student, conquered Tourette syndrome

– by Doug Carroll



It's difficult to believe as she talks about it, but there was a time when **Jennifer Smestad** hated to be seen in public.

The current Miss Arizona, who is enrolled at Grand Canyon University for the fall and will compete for the crown of Miss America on Sept. 15 in Atlantic City, N.J., felt embarrassed and misunderstood as a sufferer of Tourette syndrome. She was first diagnosed at the age of 10.

"My great-uncle had it," says Smestad, 20, who is from Gilbert, Ariz. "It was very hard for me to go through, and I tried to hide it. But there was no way I could hide every single tic."

Smestad says she was teased by "people who didn't know they were hurting me" as she endured the head jerking and hand twitching common with Tourette's. It wasn't until she underwent six weeks of alternative medical treatment, including acupuncture, that her symptoms receded as a pre-teen.

She says the disorder remains under control, adding that the struggle supplied some hard-won spiritual strength.

"I really grew with God through this," she says. "I would ask Him why I had it, and I even asked Him to take my life away. My mom told me He gave it to me for a reason, and that I'd do something good with it someday. Now I thank Him for it and for the opportunity to help others."

Smestad, who has been active in the Arizona chapter of the Tourette Syndrome Association, says she was about 8 when she took an interest in beauty pageants. Her mother discouraged participation, she says, so instead she played sports

(volleyball and softball) and joined cheerleading and dance teams.

**Jessica Peacock**, her cheerleading coach at Chandler High School and a special-education teacher, remembers Smestad more for her volunteer spirit.

While organizing a Special Olympics cheer team that included disabled youths, Peacock was impressed by Smestad's enthusiasm for the task.

"Although she was busy with school and extracurricular activities, she never missed a Special Olympics practice or event," Peacock recalls. "She did an outstanding job of encouraging (those with) intellectual disabilities, building confidence and a sense of belonging."

That experience led Smestad to join Chandler Buddies, a club at the school that was designed to foster one-on-one relationships between disabled students and their peers. She also stopped by Peacock's class to visit those students and sought them out in the hallways or at lunch, the teacher says.

"She has impacted the lives of many with disabilities," Peacock says.

Smestad attended Chandler-Gilbert Community College for two years and had planned to transfer to one of the three Arizona state universities or GCU. After visiting only Arizona State University and GCU, her decision was made.

GCU "is not too big," she says, "and the vibe (of the campus) seemed to fit me."

Although she is relatively new to the pageant game, with slightly more than a year of competing, she says her faith helps keep her nerves in check.

"I say a prayer every time before going onstage," Smestad says. "I don't know what to expect (in Atlantic City). I'll be taking God there with me."

Team Smestad also includes two makeup/hair stylists, two trainers and a vocal coach. Smestad says she eventually wants a career as a country singer or sports broadcaster – she will major in communications and exercise science at GCU – but for now she's the one all the little girls want to be.

"They just stare at me, and they love to try on the (Miss Arizona) crown," she says. "They look up to the crown. They want to be the princess." ■

### MISS AMERICA 2014 FINALS

**When:** Sunday, Sept. 15, at 6 p.m. (Arizona time) on ABC-TV

**Where:** Atlantic City, N.J.

**First pageant:** 1921

**Miss Americas from Arizona (2):** 1949 (Jacque Mercer), 1965 (Vonda Kay Van Dyke)



# CALMING FORCE

## In wake of Texas explosion, first responder proved steady

— by Cooper Nelson

**M**ichael Wilson was at a gas station in Hubbard, Texas, when he felt the blast. From the shaking of the walls and volume of noise, he thought a car had slammed into the building.

Wilson rushed outside but, to his surprise, the parking lot showed no indication of an accident. Then he saw the plume of smoke in the distance. The thunderous blast had come from a fertilizer plant explosion in West, a city nearly 20 miles away.



Wilson, a Grand Canyon University alumnus and Texas first responder, immediately made a phone call to see how he could help. Shortly thereafter, he was at the site of the explosion.

"My first thought was, 'How big is it? How many people were impacted?'" said Wilson, who earned an online bachelor's degree in emergency management with an emphasis in public safety administration from GCU in 2012. He currently serves as an emergency preparedness planner for the Heart of Texas Council of Governments (HOTCOG) in Waco.

"If it did have to happen, thank God it happened when it did, so that lives were spared," Wilson said. "Sadly, we lost a number of responders that made the ultimate sacrifice."

The fertilizer plant explosion on April 17 killed 15 people and wounded more than 100 others. The death toll included nine first responders, who arrived on location to extinguish a fire at the facility. Several buildings, including a school and apartment complex near the plant, were destroyed. Wilson's team was one of the first on the site after the explosion.

Wilson, 28, who goes by "Boyce," held three different jobs during the multiple-day relief effort while working out of a mobile communications trailer near the plant site. He served as logistics section chief, organizing volunteers and supplies, on the night of the explosion before transitioning to documentation unit leader and then planning section chief over the next few days.

After the initial response to the explosion, his core duties included facilitating the city's recovery efforts and recording documentation of the event. Wilson credits the learning community fostered by GCU's online degree programs. He said his ability to interact with, and learn from, his fellow classmates provided the communication techniques necessary to succeed at his position.

He said his online professors' first-hand experience prepared him for situations such as this one.

"A lot of the operational stuff is learned from training, but the online classes at GCU prepared me for when we had to bring in outside agencies and how



*The West Rest Haven Nursing Home in West, Texas, collapsed the day after an April 17 fertilizer plant explosion. Michael Wilson (inset), who earned a degree in emergency management from GCU in 2012, helped in several roles in the relief effort. Photos courtesy of Michael Wilson*

to communicate effectively with them," said Wilson, who returned to GCU to pursue an online master's degree in leadership with an emphasis in disaster preparedness and executive fire leadership in 2013.

Wilson was raised in a low-income household but overcame adversity to graduate high school with honors and join the Marines. He was granted an honorable military discharge in 2005 to take care of his ailing mother. He began working at HOTCOG when he was only 23. He is one of the youngest emergency preparedness planners in the state of Texas.

Wilson's wife, **Alicia**, said she was amazed at the level of responsibility her husband took on. The level of knowledge he possessed and his handling of the situation inspired her to pursue her own public safety degree with GCU.

"To see the mayor and city council and all those people coming to him and asking him what to do was really inspiring," she said. "To know where he came from and see what he has accomplished, he is pretty amazing." ■



# CLUB MED

## Biology program prepares students for medical school challenges

– by Michael Ferraresi



*Serving as a Navy medic taught Ryan Miller the value of being able to save lives. He graduated from GCU in May and began this summer at the University of Arizona's College of Medicine. Photo by Darryl Webb*

The handshakes and “attaboys” were nice, **Ryan Miller** thought. But he refused to get too comfortable.

Miller enjoyed the White Coat Ceremony that marked a rite of passage for his University of Arizona College of Medicine class, taking the opportunity at the traditional Aug. 9 introductory event to rub shoulders with classmates who had excelled in pre-med programs at Caltech, Stanford and Princeton. He realized just how difficult the next four years would be as he pursued his dream of becoming an emergency room doctor.

“It’s the sheer amount of stuff you have to memorize and understand by Friday,” Miller joked about the weekly routine for medical school students, likening the barrage of assignments to drinking from a fire hose.

Miller, 28, a Navy corpsman, said Grand Canyon University’s pre-med program helped prepare him for the rigors of med school. He graduated from GCU in May and moved his family from the Phoenix area to Tucson over the summer.

Graduating with a pre-med degree and being accepted into a top medical school capped years of recovery from military service. Miller survived a traumatic brain injury from a roadside bomb in Afghanistan in 2008 while serving as a medic attached to Marine battalions, and he fought through other wartime injuries to remain available to treat wounded Marines.

He remembered the day he decided to go into medicine. The memory weighed on him in his first days at the U of A. His squad was ambushed in Afghanistan and pinned against a waist-high wall. He recalled seeing a close friend gravely wounded and feeling, in the hail of gunfire and chaos of the “kill zone,” a sense of helplessness as he struggled to understand how best to treat his friend’s hemorrhaging.

The incident reminded Miller about the potential costs of not knowing how to treat a patient. His friend survived with the help of another medic. While Miller did everything he could, given the nature of war, he wanted to do more – and swore he would do anything in his power to avoid that feeling of uncertainty again.

GCU’s pre-med program helped solidify that passion for serving in health care, providing Miller and other students with the one-on-one instruction, mentorship and practical training many students miss in lecture classes of several hundred students at larger universities.

Miller saw it first hand while studying briefly at Arizona State University, where he grew frustrated with the disconnection between course material and instructors, with whom there was limited interaction.

He transferred to GCU, where professors made complex courses such as organic chemistry and genetics seem more applicable.

“You come into the class and the lecture isn’t entirely passive,” Miller said. “You don’t sit there and zone out.”

“It’s broken up where you see the information, and then have to apply it – which really makes it stick.”

### Stressing practical training

**Mark Wireman**, the assistant dean for GCU’s College of Arts and Sciences who oversees science programs, said the University often receives feedback from graduates who have gone on to medical schools. They observe classmates struggling with coursework in their first year.

In addition to the University of Arizona, GCU pre-med students have been accepted to prestigious programs at Harvard Medical School, Cleveland Clinic, the University of Michigan and other schools. Some of GCU’s best and brightest earned their way to osteopathic doctorate programs at Arizona-based A.T. Still and Midwestern universities.

Wireman said the Arts and Sciences college hired several new faculty members over the summer to keep pace with the rapid growth of the University.

***“The lecture isn’t entirely passive (at GCU). You don’t sit there and zone out. It’s broken up where you see the information, and then have to apply it – which really makes it stick.”***

**– Ryan Miller**

At many large university pre-med programs, a common complaint of students is that labs are taught almost exclusively by teaching assistants. Many of the new Arts and Sciences faculty will teach labs exclusively, emphasizing the one-on-one interaction.

“They’re qualified to teach the lecture classes, but their passion is teaching labs,” Wireman said. “It’s more hands-on. In the lab they can interact with students, unlike lecture classes.”

The pre-med program, Wireman said, will have the largest undergraduate campus enrollment for the College of Arts and Sciences this fall, with more than 700 students. Despite the growth over the past few years, he said Arts and Sciences faculty continue to make time for students and treat them “like their kids, like family.”

This fall, Arts and Sciences also will introduce a new science coordinator who will be focused exclusively on guiding top students into internships and underperforming students into study programs to help them get back on track to graduate. Additionally, plans are in place to develop a more refined program dedicated to helping students prepare for the Medical College Admission Test – known as the often-dreaded “MCATs.”

GCU also offers students the rare opportunity to dissect an entire human cadaver on campus, mostly through the dissection course taught for years by **Haley Peebles**, who recently took a new role at the Center for Connected Care (story on Page 11).

Learning from a cadaver provides an experience that other students might only approximate with cartoonish textbook pictures or a plastic dummy.

“That’s not realistic,” Peebles said. “(GCU students) use that as a tool to give them a bearing of where things should be, but they need to investigate a lot more – see the unseen, and see where certain things are leading to and coming from.”

## From cancer survivor to doctor

After surviving brain cancer, **Dan Hannon** knew he wanted to be a doctor.

The Northwestern University osteopathic medicine student earned his pre-med degree from GCU in 2011 and felt prepared to take the next step toward becoming an oncologist.

Hannon, 27, transferred to GCU for a final year in college after attending Paradise Valley Community College over about five years as he fought cancer.

In just one year at GCU, he had the opportunity to work as a teaching assistant for Peebles, to intern at the Phoenix-based Translational Genomics Research Institute, and to serve in a volunteer research role at the Barrow Brain Tumor Research Center at St. Joseph’s Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix.

“I walked those halls as a patient, and I’d love to go back to help people with brain tumors and that type of cancer,” Hannon said about his dream job of working at Barrow.



*Although Dan Hannon spent just one year in GCU’s pre-med program, he earned internships and student-teaching opportunities that helped him prepare for Northwestern University’s osteopathic medicine program. Photo by Darryl Webb*

At TGen, Hannon participated with a research team responsible for investigating how cancer spreads so aggressively from the lungs to the brain.

“It wants to burst out of the lungs and travel to the rest of the body,” Hannon told a group on the GCU campus in 2012, adding that 1 percent of patients whose cancer spreads from their lungs to the brain survive. However, patients face a 50 percent shot at survival if their cancer is contained to their lungs.

Hannon said that Peebles advised him on how to write his personal statement for medical school applications, helping him find a personal touch that strengthened his case.

That type of mentorship and personal interaction, he said, helped him know exactly what to expect with the intense preparations for medical school. ■

## FROM AGE 19 ...

## Fast-track nursing grad knows what he wants from life

– by Bob Romantic



Chuck De La Riva, who graduated from GCU in August, hopes to open his own health care clinic someday. Photo by Darryl Webb

**C**huck De La Riva knew at a young age how important education was to his future.

So he did what any hard-working, ambitious student would do: He dropped out of high school at age 15 in the middle of his sophomore year.

Really.

That was four years ago. Today, De La Riva is a graduate of Grand Canyon University's College of Nursing and Health Care Professions, was chosen to speak at GCU's commencement ceremonies in May and is president of the Arizona Student Nurses Association.

"I don't know if it was simply a product of impatience or feeling like I could do more with myself, but I didn't feel like high school catered to my needs," said De La Riva. "I guess I was expediting the inevitable. I wanted to get into the workforce as soon as possible to maintain that financial stability.

"Family is very important to me and I look forward to starting my own family. Obviously you have to be financially stable for that, and the earlier you start the better."

De La Riva got his first lesson in the importance of education while growing up in inner-city Chicago. After his parents divorced, he was able to move in with his father, **Charles Sr.**, but one of the stipulations was that he maintain good grades.

"That's when I started to take education seriously," De La Riva said. "Maybe, at that age, I didn't understand the long-term benefits, but the short-term benefits were very important to me. ... My father has always been the person in my life who not only believed in me, but showed me the path to success was education.

"He made me who I am."

De La Riva and his father later moved to Scottsdale, where he enrolled at Desert Mountain High School and was accepted to study in the challenging International Baccalaureate program. He was excelling in class but knew there was a different path awaiting him.

"It was a very risky move," De La Riva said of his decision to leave high school. He talked with two of the teachers he respected most at Desert Mountain, **Samuel Russell** and **Martin Butler**, and "both were very supportive of my plan and said if anybody could do it, it would be me."

So De La Riva left Desert Mountain, enrolled at Scottsdale Community College and earned his GED after turning 16. His father had to return to Chicago, but De La Riva got by on his own by working construction jobs while completing his associate's degree at SCC.

After the economy soured, De La Riva also switched majors, forgoing a degree in international business to study nursing.

"I'm a risk-taker, but I'm a calculated risk-taker," De La Riva said of his decision to switch majors. "I knew the medical field was always very stable and nursing was something that could be achieved relatively quickly."

After extensive research on nursing schools, he knew GCU was the place for him and signed up – of course – for the fast-track program that put him on course to graduate by age 19. He plans to continue his education with a master's degree at GCU and one day hopes to open his own health care clinic.

During his coursework, he also found time to take advanced-level psychology courses for his personal development. And he's an avid reader of Eastern philosophy. One of the philosophies that hits home for De La Riva is psychosocial development, a concept made popular by **Erik Erikson**, who suggested there are eight psychosocial stages that people enter during their life span.

"A lot of times, the socialization process has to do with numbers. You're expected to reach certain benchmarks by a certain age. I wanted to disprove some of those misconceptions because a lot of times when that happens, people get discouraged," De La Riva said. "I believe in maturational readiness. When you are ready, you have to know you are ready for whatever it is, whatever paradigm shift is about to happen.

"And, really, if you know what you want for your life, for yourself or the people you love, why would you wait until you are considered an adult?" ■



## ... TO 90

### 'Joy for living' has prepared counselor to help others

– by Janie Magruder

**P**atti Burson – former preschool owner, European tour director, welfare worker, water-skiing instructor, weight-loss clinic proprietor and clinical trials researcher – runs to the mailbox outside her San Diego home every day. She's waiting for a piece of paper, a certification from the state of California that will enable her to launch yet another career.

In May, Burson graduated with a master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Grand Canyon University's College of Arts and Sciences. She has spent the summer filling out endless paperwork, getting fingerprinted (twice, because the first set was too blurry) and renting office space, the next steps in her plan to become a counselor for discouraged baby boomers and feuding spouses.

She will be 90 in February.

"I loved every minute of it," said Burson, who worked full time while taking courses for 3 ½ years. "The subjects were fascinating to me, the professors, for the most part, were very kind and friendly and, for an online course, it was very personal. I felt so much a part of GCU."

When the company that employed her closed its doors in 2009, Burson started working on her next plan. She looked at several universities around the country, and found out about GCU from rock star **Alice Cooper**, via her cousin who's in the music business. The kindness of a young admissions counselor at GCU sealed the deal.

"She made many phone calls to other universities, and was greeted with 'Oh, you're in your 80s,' but not GCU," said daughter **Karen Farber**, of Westchester, N.Y., a retired principal of a school for special-needs children. "The admissions counselor spoke to her many times during her coursework, when she had problems or needed advice. His inviting voice, the way she was greeted, the reception she got, made her choose GCU."

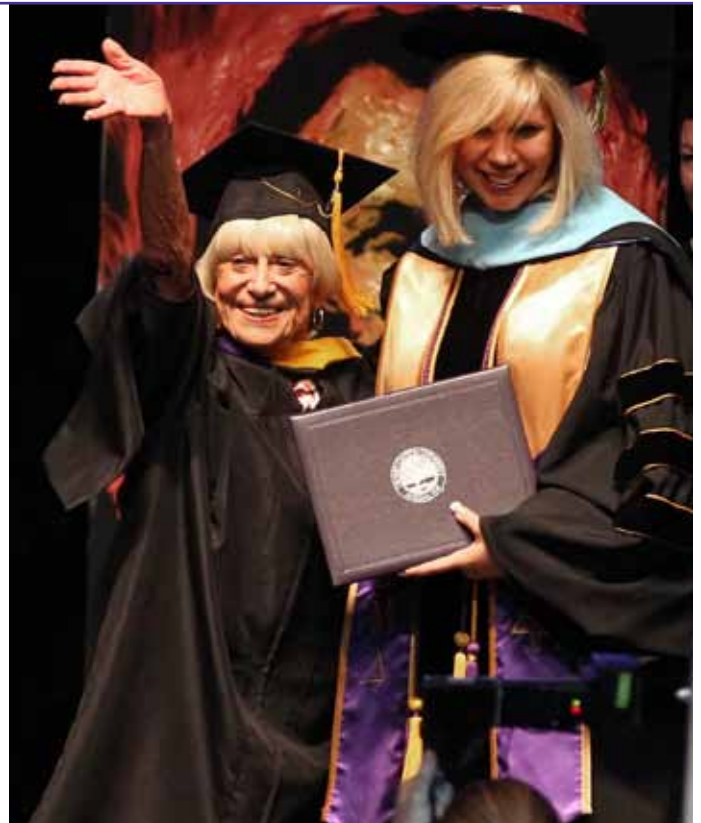
While working on her degree, Burson battled non-Hodgkin lymphoma and spinal stenosis, but she never gave up. That isn't part of her DNA, Farber said.

"She has just a joy for living," Farber said. "She just believes in herself and, maybe more importantly, she believes in others."

After graduation, Burson experienced a bit of media stardom and was interviewed (see [www.pattiburson.com](http://www.pattiburson.com)) by two San Diego television stations, one of which invited her to participate in a weekly call-in program. Her first alma mater, Albright College in Reading, Pa., where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology during World War II, also is planning a story. Her husband and champion, **John Burson**, pitched her to **Katie Couric's** daytime TV program.

And yet, Burson remains nonplussed by all the hoopla. "My gosh, what a fuss!" she said. "But my husband tells me, 'There aren't too many people who go to school at 89 and get their master's.'"

John, 56, a personal trainer, found voice-recognition software that helped Patti compose her essays during her course work.



*Patti Burson celebrates the award of her master's degree during May's commencement on the GCU campus. The University's associate provost, Dr. Kathy Player, presents Burson with her diploma. Photo by Darryl Webb*

"She didn't know much about computers when she started, and I helped her with that," he said. "With her energy level, she seems a lot younger. To this day, some of her friends don't know how old she is. They're amazed by her."

Patti is 30 years older than the people she wants to help in her practice. She is concerned about the baby-boom generation, many of whom are struggling with retirement and too much time on their hands.

"These people retired way too early, and they don't know how much golf they can play or how many trips they can take," she said. "I would like to put a motor on them and get them moving again. They don't have to work again, but they have to have a purpose in life. You just can't go through life without it."

Who better to show them than Patti Burson? ■

Grand Canyon University  
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**VEGGIETALES LIVE!**  
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**BELLATOR MMA**  
Friday, Sept. 20

**AN EVENING WITH C.S. LEWIS**  
Sunday, Oct. 20



**BEAUTY OF A BONZER: CONCERT PARTY FOR CHARITY**  
Saturday, Sept. 21

**THE CASE FOR CHRIST: AN EVENING WITH LEE STROBEL**  
Monday, Oct. 21

**MATTHEW WEST: INTO THE LIGHT TOUR**  
Friday, Sept. 27

**SWITCHFOOT**  
Sunday, Nov. 3



**THE CITY HARMONIC: THE HEART TOUR**  
Thursday, Oct. 10

**LECRAE**  
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