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Pitt Tonight and Tomorrow
Undergraduate Jesse Irwin, a film studies major, figured out his dream job: late-night talk show host. He just needed an actual show—with writers, a house band, cameras, guests. Welcome to Pitt Tonight.
—By Cristina Rouvalis

Lives of a Poet
The creative journey of Yona Harvey, a poet and Pitt English professor, spans decades and melds literature, community, and even comic books. It all begins in a little pink room in Mount Healthy, Ohio.
—By Ervin Dyer and Em DeMarco

Enigma
When a mysterious illness suddenly emerged in his Brazilian hometown, Pitt Public Health researcher Ernesto T.A. Marques mobilized with colleagues to decode its unknowns. The work may help infectious-disease researchers stop or stall new epidemics.
—Cover story by Laura Clark Rohrer

EDITOR'S NOTE

Every spring, Commencement season offers graduating students a moment in time to reflect on their personal journeys and successes. Each of them has a story to tell, and plenty of family and friends who are proud to share it.

Recently, while browsing through some of these moments from Pitt’s Commencement 2017 (www.commencement.pitt.edu/photo-gallery), I was struck by the joy and significance of this life event. Commencement signals the beginning of something new, brimming with aspiration.

In reviewing the pages of this issue, and seeing all of the content together in one place, I was also struck by a related notion—these are stories about a brighter tomorrow because of Pitt people.

From feature stories to Pitt Chat and Sketchbook, from Front Page to Class Notes, from Commons Room to Inspire and Engage, the aspirations and accomplishments of Pitt people are evident everywhere. Commencement is truly just the beginning.

Cindy Gill  
Editor in Chief
**Feedback Welcome**

Comments are subject to editing for length and clarity. Although we don’t have space to include all correspondence, we always appreciate hearing from you.

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**Global Ventures**

Just a proud Pitt alum here. I recently traveled to India for business and decided, if you’re going to visit one of the Seven Wonders of the World, you might as well represent Pitt, too. Pitt alum work all over!

Rob Willis  
Business ‘09G  
Wexford, Pa.

**Wherever You Are**

We only moved across town, but please continue to send Pitt Magazine. I enjoy keeping up with people and events at Pitt. I look forward to future issues of this excellent magazine.

Elsa McKeithan  
Arts and Sciences ‘73G, ‘77G  
Winston-Salem, NC

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**Read On!**

I’m an alum and avid reader of the magazine. It’s terrific. Thank you and H2P!

Jan Marcus  
Arts and Sciences ’85  
Thurmont, Md.

**Write On!**

Thanks for the feature story on Kenyon Bonner (Winter 2017). The writer, Ervin Dyer, did a great job profiling a man who is passionate about helping our students by lifting as they climb.

Shawn Ahearn  
Public and International Affairs ’07G  
Student Affairs/Pitt  
Pittsburgh, Pa.

**Print, Please**

I’ve always enjoyed reading Pitt Magazine. I prefer the print version. I find it easier to read in print rather than online, and I pass on the publication to other people when I’m done reading it.

Drew Porvaznik  
Arts and Sciences ’75  
Homestead, Pa.

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Eighty Years Young

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the Cathedral of Learning’s official completion. Construction on the neo-gothic skyscraper took nine years and resulted in the tallest educational structure in the nation. To celebrate the Cathedral’s legacy, the Pitt Alumni Association challenged Pitt students, faculty, staff, and alumni to create their own replicas of our educational icon. Check out some of the winning replicas at pi.tt/80years.

Front Page is written by Susan Wiedel, unless otherwise noted.

Pitt was awarded the 2017 Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization for its commitment to international education and the strength of its global programs.
Hacking for Good

This spring the Department of Defense (DoD) challenged Pitt students to spend the semester hacking—for credit. That’s “hacking” in the sense of creating novel solutions with limited time and resources. The DoD collaborated with Pitt’s Swanson School of Engineering for the new course “Hacking for Defense,” in which graduate students from across the University developed new products and technologies to tackle real problems faced by the nation’s defense and intelligence communities. Now that’s hands-on learning.

One Day, Millions of Dollars

Panther pride echoed worldwide for the inaugural Pitt Day of Giving. On February 28—Pitt’s 230th birthday—thousands of alumni, students, faculty, staff, family, friends, and fans from all 50 states and 22 countries donated an amazing $5.7 million to the University. In addition to attracting and supporting future generations of Panthers through scholarships, these generous gifts will help strengthen the academic and extracurricular programs and organizations that make Pitt “it.”

Polio-Vaccine Pioneer, a History-Maker

Julius S. Youngner, a world-renowned virologist best known for his contributions to the development of the first effective polio vaccine alongside Jonas Salk, died April 27, 2017, at age 96. More than just an outstanding and inspiring scientist, Juli, as Youngner was known to friends and colleagues, was warm, compassionate, and down to earth with a wonderful sense of humor. He joined the University of Pittsburgh in 1949, and served as professor and chair of the Department of Microbiology from 1966 to 1985, and as professor and chair of the Department of Microbiology, Biochemistry, and Molecular Biology from 1985 until his retirement in 1989. He remained a large presence in the department, attending seminars as recently as last year.

“Julius Youngner once told a reporter that he intended to stay at the University of Pittsburgh for only a short time following his work on the Manhattan Project. But he soon fell in love with Pitt and the research opportunities here,” said Pitt Chancellor Patrick Gallagher. “I am grateful that he stayed and that his work, with Jonas Salk and others, led to the polio vaccine. He was one of the world’s preeminent virologists and our University community will miss him immensely.”
For the Win

Heather Lyke has been appointed the University’s new athletic director. With 22 years of experience in collegiate athletics administration, Lyke comes to Pittsburgh from Eastern Michigan University, where her inspired leadership garnered national praise. Lyke, the first woman appointed to lead Pitt’s athletic department, promises to continue advancing the University’s sports achievements. “Heather Lyke has a passion for success in the classroom, on the playing field, and in life after graduation,” said Chancellor Patrick Gallagher. “She is the perfect person to lead our Department of Athletics into a new era of excellence.”

Crusaders Against Cancer

One of the most prestigious awards in the field of medicine was presented this winter to Yuan Chang and Patrick S. Moore, faculty in the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. The duo, whose Chang-Moore Laboratory is credited with discovering two of the seven known human viruses that directly cause cancer, received the 2017 Paul Ehrlich and Ludwig Darmstaedter Prize. The award is given annually to medical researchers who have made significant contributions in the fields of immunology, cancer research, microbiology, and chemotherapy.

-Honoring Students

Pitt celebrates the University’s top scholars and achievers every February at the Honors Convocation. Among those recognized at this year’s event were two rising stars who received the top awards for graduating seniors.

Abigail Loneker, a bioengineering major, received the Emma W. Locke Award for “a senior of high scholarship, character, and devotion to the ideals of the University.” As an undergraduate, she served as a teaching assistant for sophomore bioengineers and also earned first-author listings on two research publications. Marcus Robinson, a neuroscience and anthropology double major received the Omicron Delta Kappa Senior of the Year Award for outstanding leadership.

During his time at Pitt, he was a 2015 Browne Leadership Fellow in the School of Social Work, served on multiple student boards, and was appointed to Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto’s LGBTQIA+ Advisory Council.
CO Poisoning Antidote
Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning is one of the world’s leading causes of poisoning death. Now, a group of Pitt researchers has made a major advancement in developing an antidote. Mark Gladwin and his research team modified a known protein to better bind to CO and remove it from the bloodstream. The technique has proved highly effective in treating CO poisoning in mouse models. The researchers plan to continue their investigations, ideally advancing to clinical trials in humans within the next few years. Gladwin is chair of the Department of Medicine in Pitt’s School of Medicine.

Cyber Law Leader
David Hickton, former U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, now leads the University’s new Institute for Cyber Law, Policy, and Security. An experienced champion of cybersecurity vigilance and an expert in cybercrime threats, Hickton (LAW ’81) led a number of internationally prominent indictments of cybercrimes. As the Pitt institute’s founding director he will collaborate with students and faculty across the University community, particularly in the newly established School of Computing and Information.

“The challenges of the digital platform and cybersecurity are real,” he said. “This is broader than just law enforcement. This is about applying law to digital space and developing laws and norms and rules to apply to this open environment.”
—Sharon S. Blake

Rewriting Family History
One Pitt poet is “making history a creative act” with support from a prestigious fellowship. Lauren Russell, assistant director of Pitt’s Center for African American Poetry and Poetics and assistant research professor of English, was awarded a 2017 Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Through the award, Russell will work on a book-length manuscript inspired by the diary of her great-great-grandfather, a Confederate Army captain who fathered children with three of his former slaves, including her great-great-grandmother. Her project aims to give a voice to women that history silenced.

GOOD WORD
In May, more than 30 ambassadors from around the world toured the Nationality Rooms and the Human Engineering Research Laboratories as part of a three-day visit to the Pittsburgh campus.

GOOD WORD
Two Pitt student startups—Aeronics and uTranslated—were selected by the National Council for Entrepreneurial Tech Transfer as two of the 40 “Best University Startups” of 2017.
Thomas E. Starzl, who advanced organ transplantation from a risky, rare procedure to an accessible surgery, died in Pittsburgh on March 4, 2017, at age 90.

Breaking barriers was a hallmark of Starzl’s innovative career. He performed the world’s first liver transplant in 1963 and the first successful liver transplant in 1967. Faced with the ongoing challenge of preventing organ rejection, he pioneered advancements in immunosuppression therapy. His work made transplantation feasible not only for the kidneys and the liver but also for the pancreas, lungs, and intestines.

Starzl joined the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine in 1981 as professor of surgery and led the team of surgeons that performed Pittsburgh’s first liver transplant. Thirty transplants were performed that year, launching the liver transplant program—the only one in the nation at the time.

Until he retired from clinical and surgical service in 1991, Starzl served as chief of transplantation services at three Pittsburgh hospitals, overseeing the largest and busiest transplant program in the world. He then assumed the directorship of the University of Pittsburgh Transplantation Institute, which was later renamed the Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute. Since 1996, Starzl held the titles of director emeritus of the institute and Distinguished Service Professor of Surgery at Pitt.

Beyond his colossal career achievements, Starzl was known to colleagues and family as a focused and compassionate humanitarian. “Tom Starzl’s tremendous respect and affection for his patients became the life force of his career,” said Arthur S. Levine, senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and John and Gertrude Petersen Dean of the School of Medicine. “Countless lives were saved through his advances in technique and his pioneering work to prevent organ rejection. There is not a transplant surgeon worldwide who has not, in some way, been influenced by his work.”

—Joe Miksch
A S L I C E  O F  C A M P U S  L I F E

C O M M O N S  R O O M

Wheels in Motion

BY HALEY FREDERICK

Peyton Miller stands in the doorway, a basketball cradled at his side. The Pitt sophomore came to shoot hoops at Bellefield Hall, but he sees now that the basketball court is already in use—and not in a way he expected.

Athletes in wheelchairs cruise down the court, passing a ball between them. A number of players appear to be learning how to use the chairs; they practice moving forward, backward, and taking tight turns over the gym’s glossy floor. The activity looks strenuous but fun. Miller is intrigued, but he’s never used a wheelchair before; would he be allowed to join?

Soon, one of the players notices the young man and invites him in, offering a chair for his use. It turns out that many of the athletes in the gym are rookies to the sport, and there’s a mix of people with and without disabilities. Yet, all are welcome at Pitt’s open-gym wheelchair basketball practice. After a little more encouragement, Miller takes to the court.

Pitt’s Students for Disability Advocacy (SDA) group and the Office of Intramurals and Recreation organize the weekly practice sessions, raising awareness of adaptive sports and creating a space where students from a diversity of backgrounds can interact.

“Anybody can play wheelchair basketball,” says SDA president and Rehabilitation Science graduate student Brandon Daveler. “It’s fun, it’s a good workout, you’re part of a team, and you work together.”

Practices are led by members of the Pittsburgh SteelWheelers, a local organization that coordinates wheelchair sports throughout the region. The group loans Pitt athletes the specially designed basketball wheelchairs needed to play the game and coaches newbies on the rules and techniques.

As Miller gets the hang of handling the chair, SteelWheeler Chris Mielo leads the group in warm-up drills before organizing a scrimmage. Two teams of five form to face-off midcourt. Everyone tries their best to score for their team, but those who use wheelchairs everyday easily outmaneuver the others in the high-energy game. When someone makes a basket, even the opposing team cheers.

A number of students that came to practice tonight are in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, like Alexa Schreiber, a graduate student studying occupational therapy.

“Occupational therapy is all about helping people who have impairments to do all the things that they want to do and need to do in their everyday life,” Schreiber says after practice, adding “I have gained a much greater appreciation for these athletes, because this game is not easy.”

When the scrimmage is over, the score is unknown—but no one came here to win, except in the game of life.
Thriftsburgh

BY HALEY FREDERICK

Mannequins in thrifted ensembles stand in the front window, grabbing the attention of passersby. Racks and racks of clothing fill up the room. A customer walks through the door carrying a stuffed bag.

“Donations?” Maura Kay asks as the woman hands over the bag. Kay, a junior studying political science and urban studies, dumps the bag’s contents onto a table. Those who donate clothes receive in-store credit, so Kay invites the customer to start looking around. Meanwhile, the Pitt junior sorts through the just-donated clothes.

Two years ago, this room in the O’Hara Student Center was a conference room. The transformation into a store began with an idea generated by a group project in a class called Sustainability. After the class ended, two environmental studies students from the group, Anna Greenberg and Paul Heffernan, launched the project. With the help of PittServes, the dean of students, and others, they got their storefront in O’Hara and hired coordinators. On March 18, 2015, the University of Thriftsburgh opened.

“We want a place that will divert waste from the waste stream and give students somewhere to bring stuff that they might otherwise throw away,” Greenberg says, explaining that the motivation isn’t profit, but the environment.

People come to Thriftsburgh looking for everything from clothes to wear for job interviews to pieces to add to their Halloween costumes. Kay says that she especially loves helping people find coats and sweaters that will keep them warm during the Pittsburgh winter, which many international or out-of-state students aren’t accustomed to.

“As much as we love our weirdness and our quirkiness, the best moments are when we realize we’re actually serving a need,” says Kay, who puts the donated clothes on hangers, attaching colored pricing tags. The least expensive items are jewelry, which cost a dollar each, and the most expensive are the yellow-tagged clothing items at $10.

Recycling isn’t the only mission. The Thriftsburgh board, including Greenberg and Kay, decided that the store should have social and economic benefits to the Pitt community, as well. They keep the clothes affordable and support other sustainability efforts by donating their proceeds to the Pitt Green Fund, a student group that allocates grants to sustainability projects on campus.

The success of the store hasn’t stopped them from thinking about ways to improve. Both Greenberg and Kay mention that they’d like to be able to take donations of furniture and appliances to sell.

“I’d love to see the store expand beyond clothing to completely negate any end of semester waste. I’d love to see it become a one-stop shop source for that,” Kay says.

The customer leaves the store, Kay puts the clothes the woman donated out on the racks, where they wait for the next thrifty customer.

No U-Turn

BY ELIZABETH HOOVER

The lobby of Hillman Library featured a bold graphic: a black-and-white U-turn sign circled and crossed out in red, to signify No U-turn. It was the historic logo from China’s first-ever exhibition of avant-garde art in 1989, and it symbolized a dramatic story.

The curator of the groundbreaking exhibition in Beijing was Gao Minglu, now a professor in Pitt’s Department of History of Art and Architecture. Using rare materials from his personal archive, Hillman Library hosted a 2016 exhibit that chronicled the barriers, nearly 30 years ago, to mounting a show of experimental art in communist China. “Despite challenges, Gao Minglu refused to give up,” the Hillman catalog read.

The library’s display revealed how Gao discovered and defined the emerging world of Chinese avant-garde art. It included photographs of Gao in the early 1980s with shaggy-haired young men and women, some of whom eventually became famous artists. They were scattered throughout the country, and they shared a similar sentiment, noted Gao, who visited these “underground” artists when he was an editor at China’s only art magazine. “They are anti-everything,” he said at the time. “They are anti-old, anti-academy, and anti-institution.”

That wasn’t a popular stance in communist China a generation ago. To mount an avant-garde art exhibit in that era, Gao had to
obtain official seals of approval from multiple governmental organizations—no easy task given the political climate. The Hillman display included those hard-won official letters, as well as Gao’s extensive notes related to negotiations with the National Art Museum of China, site of the exhibition.

In a photograph from the February 5, 1989 opening, Gao is flanked by banners featuring the “No U-turn” logo. But his challenges were far from over.

Two hours after the historic exhibition opened, artist Xiao Lu fired two bullets into her sculpture, resulting in the immediate shutdown of the show by authorities. The artist’s action, which was a surprise to Gao, was captured in a dramatic photo featured in the Hillman exhibit. Included, too, was a note the artist wrote at the time, explaining the incident as performance art, not a political protest. Also on display was the official letter from the National Art Museum of China closing down the show and fining the organizers for Xiao’s actions.

After tireless lobbying by Gao, the avant-garde exhibit re-opened, but 14 days later a bomb threat closed it permanently. Despite its short run, the exhibition was a defining moment in the history of Chinese art.

“It’s extremely rare to meet somebody who defined a field,” said Barbara McCloskey, professor and chair of his department. “Gao has done that, in part, due to his collecting.”

Gao continues to travel to China to document the work of avant-garde artists there. He estimates he has 8,000 slides of art works, 5,000 pages of artists’ notes and drafts of manifestos, and 700 letters, among other material.

Efforts are under way to digitize and make accessible his collection. For now, selections from his rare archive are in the online library guide that accompanied the Hillman exhibition at pi.tt/gao1989.

Worldly Welcome

BY ADAM Reger

Outside the Cathedral of Learning, two students pause to take in the scene.

“We welcome,” says a volunteer, holding out black markers. “Would you like to sign our banner?”

She points to a large white banner with a message welcoming international students. Dozens of names already fill the white space, along with scrawled jottings of the countries they call home.

The two students, Valentin Paquin and Vianney Mixtur, add their names and home country, France, on the banner. Then, they pose for a photo before a blue and gold backdrop.

The occasion is Pitt’s international students’ reception, a celebration welcoming new and returning international students to the University with food, conversation, and music. Right now, the beat of bongos and a steel drum fills the courtyard. Faculty and staff are in the crowd, mingling with students from 64 different countries at an institution that is home to more than 3,000 international students.

Paquin and Mixtur are both graduate students in the Swanson School of Engineering and came to Pitt from the same school near Paris. They’ve been pleasantly surprised by the friendliness of their fellow students, says Mixtur, who also embraces the opportunity to improve his English language skills. After attending a Parisian school with just 800 students, they expected to be daunted by the size of Pitt, but that hasn’t been the case. “People here are so friendly,” says Paquin, who is intrigued by the prospect of discovering another culture. “They really go out of their way to help you.”

Nearby, Feyintoluwa Tola-Adelani, a law student whose family is originally from Nigeria, heartily agrees. Her fellow law students have made her feel right at home, she says, while her advisors have been incredibly helpful as she gets her footing at Pitt and considers options for the future.

“No question is a dumb question,” she says, laughing.

Tola-Adelani’s family came to the United States in 2001 to pursue better opportunities, and she views obtaining the best possible education as a key part of that pursuit. She’s taken advantage of special programming for international students, which includes seminars ranging from finding internships to stress relief.

“America is the land of opportunities,” she says. “I strongly believe that.”

Meanwhile, the Pitt Panthers mascot, Roc, walks through the crowd, accompanied by Pitt cheerleaders. Chancellor Gallagher chats with a group of students, asking what they plan to study. Before long, he mounts the stage, welcoming the students in a variety of languages: “Welcome. Bienvenido. Namaste.”

He tells them he is glad they’ve chosen Pitt: “You enrich this campus by being here. You are bringing the world to us.”
Pitt Tonight and Tomorrow

Undergraduate Jesse Irwin, a film studies major, figured out his dream job: late-night talk show host. He just needed an actual show—with writers, a house band, cameras, guests.

Welcome to Pitt Tonight.
When Jesse Irwin walked into Professor Robert Clift’s office in September 2015, he was a kid with a crazy idea. “I really want to start an on-campus late-night talk show,” Irwin said matter-of-factly.

A late-night talk show? Seriously?

An assistant professor of film studies, Clift was taken aback by the student’s ambitious plan. But instead of saying, “Are you kidding?” he offered to contribute production equipment and otherwise help however he could.

Three months later, a few hours before the first live performance of *Pitt Tonight* on Dec. 14, 2015, Clift couldn’t believe the high-energy atmosphere when he walked onto the set. Students carrying walkie-talkies. Writers running jokes. A slick logo portraying a moon bisecting the Cathedral of Learning.

But the biggest surprise of all was Irwin himself. As soon as he stepped onto the stage of the Studio Theatre of the Cathedral, he let out a primal scream, his arms helicoptering to the drawn-out notes of the trumpets in the house band. Students in the audience roared back.

Looking dapper in a black suit, Irwin was loose and breezy as he cracked jokes about pre-med majors, the house band—and himself as an improbable late-night show host.

Clift watched the whole thing unfold from the audience. As a documentarian, he had done a film on stand-up comics and knew what he saw. Irwin had the rare natural timing of a comedian.
hat started as a crazy idea quickly became a history-making first at Pitt, with a student turned star. Eleven episodes later, *Pitt Tonight* is one of the most popular student-run productions anywhere. It quickly attracted 3,500 Facebook followers, and members of the Pitt community line up once a month throughout the academic year to get into the free show, taped live on Sunday evenings and edited for broadcast via the Internet.

*Pitt Tonight* is more than a cherished campus fixture. It has won national credibility as a finalist for two Emmys from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' Mid-Atlantic Chapter; for Student Production in the arts and entertainment/cultural affairs division and for Irwin in the ‘Talent’ category.

On April 15, Irwin stepped onto the stage to host *Pitt Tonight’s* season finale, leaving behind a legacy that he will pass onto a successor. The 23-year-old is a senior and expects to earn a bachelor’s degree in film studies this summer.

Irwin says he wouldn’t have been able to transform himself into a comedy show host without his 70-plus person staff, consisting mostly of students. “They make every aspect of the show twinkle. Without them, I would just be a weird kid standing on stage in the dark.”

That team is a microcosm of the campus. Engineering and creative writing majors hash out jokes in their own writers’ room. Other students book talent, operate cameras, work the teleprompter. Sometimes editors stay up all night to go through hours of footage to put the latest show onto the *Pitt Tonight* Web site (pitttonight.com).

“Jesse built *Pitt Tonight* from nothing to something huge and awesome,” says Noah Wilps, a junior film and fiction writing major and staff member of the show. “He brings everyone along with him.”

Jesse being Jesse—something his staff members always say—he didn’t stop at the success of his own show. He became an activist for student-generated media at Pitt by proposing the merger of *Pitt Tonight* with University of Pittsburgh TV (UPTV). The UPTV station that relaunched this year will be home to six students book talent, operate cameras, work the teleprompter. Sometimes editors stay up all night to go through hours of footage to put the latest show onto the *Pitt Tonight* Web site (pitttonight.com).

“The dedication and focus he developed to make his mark at Pitt,” Irwin says, “it was destiny,” he says. Pitt would soon launch a new academic program, a track in Film and Media Production, which combines the critical skills of film analysis with the technical and creative aspects of production. From the start, Irwin was determined to make his mark at Pitt.

At the age of one, Irwin already liked to perform. Sitting in a baby seat attached to the dining room table, he would cock his head to the right, then to the left, getting his Mom to pantomime him. Adding another comedic beat, he would repeat the entire routine in double time, and when Mom played her part, baby Jesse would let out a laugh.

“I would always say he could entertain before he could talk,” says his mother Lynn Snyderman.

His natural showmanship was evident in musical theater, where he pranced around an umbrella, a la Gene Kelly, in an elementary school program based on *Singin’ in the Rain*. By middle school, he played the lead in *Footloose* and acted in productions of *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Bugsy Malone*.

At Taylor Allderdice High School in Squirrel Hill, he dropped out of theater because of teen peer pressure, a decision he still regrets. He threw himself into sports instead.

His mother remembers the day he came home and told her that he was going to be a kicker on the football team. She looked at her scrawny son who hadn’t yet hit a growth spurt. “Do you know how to kick?” she asked.

“I think I can figure it out,” said the teenage Irwin, who then practiced constantly until he got the hang of it. He not only made the high school team but went on to be named an all-city kicker.

The dedication and focus he developed to kick his best in a crucial play gave him the courage to stand on stage and deliver jokes with perfect timing. “I feel a similar adrenaline rush,” he explains.

After high school, Irwin entered Penn State as a broadcast journalism major. Five months later, he was forced to withdraw because of a severe case of Crohn’s disease, an inflammatory bowel condition. He underwent surgery and was hospitalized for two months. His mother recalls: “He was super sick. But by March, he finally came out of the cloud.”

If one positive came out of his illness, it was his transfer to Pitt in fall 2013. “I feel like it was destiny,” he says. Pitt would soon launch a new academic program, a track in Film and Media Production, which combines the critical skills of film analysis with the technical and creative aspects of production. From the start, Irwin was determined to make his mark at Pitt.

His middle school acting skills came in handy when he did play-by-play commentary at basketball and football games. With his breezy manner and sonorous voice, he had the natural skills of a host for campus events, and he was tapped by University Communications for on-the-scene video feeds of the action during last fall’s White House Frontiers Conference. The event, co-hosted by Pitt and Carnegie Mellon University, featured top national scientists and entrepreneurs, along with then-President Barack Obama.

Irwin sharpened his journalism skills by doing multimedia work for *The Pitt News*. Behind the scenes, he was known for throwing out zany ideas and what-if schemes. For April Fool’s Day, he did a segment asking students about their favorite TV show ... then promptly told them it was cancelled.

Irwin was sitting in his apartment on Craft Avenue the night that changed his life—and soon the life of the campus. It was Feb. 17, 2014...
when he tuned in to Jimmy Fallon’s debut on The Tonight Show and was charmed by the easy presence of a natural comedian.

Then it hit him. He knew exactly what he should be doing. As the host of a late-night talk show, he could pursue all the things he loved most about film and media—comedy, politics, and interviewing people for news stories.

A lot of college kids might dream about being the next Jimmy Fallon or Conan O’Brien—then they get back to their political science homework or hanging out with friends.

But there’s nothing typical about Irwin’s drive. He called his good friend Mason Lazarcheff, a film studies major, who was used to talking Irwin down from ambitious, sometimes zany ideas. Like the time Irwin proposed a cross country trip, finding a good story in every state. No, Lazarcheff told him. Too expensive. But when Irwin laid out the late-night talk show host idea, Lazarcheff not only thought it was great, but he also offered his help leading the production side of the show.

Hoping to generate interest and formalize it with the University, Irwin started the late-night show as a student club. He drew up a constitution for Pitt Tonight that summer and planned the first meeting for the fall. Lazarcheff remembers watching his friend fidget and work on the logo as he waited to see if anyone actually came. Thirty students showed up for that initial meeting.

Joe Marchi, an engineering major, was among them. Now the 22-year-old is one of three head writers who loves hanging out in the writers’ room, spittingballing and refining jokes. “Jesse jives with our writers. We have developed our own voice, which is somewhat absurdist.”

“If you would have told me that Pitt would have a late-night show, which is such a huge undertaking, I don’t think anyone else could have pulled it off but Jesse.”

Gabrielle Sieber, a communications and English major, attended the first meeting fresh off an internship with Jimmy Fallon. “I honestly thought it was destiny. But I didn’t know it would grow so big. Jesse has a natural ability to connect to people. He knows everyone’s name from freshmen to people who have been there the whole time.”

As the staff worked on the fourth episode, Shannon Kelly, a fiction writing major, walked into a meeting for the first time, not knowing what to expect. Irwin greeted her, asked her name, and told her to deliver the jokes exuberantly so they could collaborate on a joke. “I had never formatted a joke before,” she said. Even though that first joke didn’t make the show, she was hooked. Her favorite part of the week is going to the two-hour weekend meetings. “If I don’t go, I’m sad,” she says. During a rehearsal for the March episode, Jesse went over jokes for his monologue with writers. The theme tied in with Women’s Empowerment Week on campus. It was a fine line to walk, making jokes about women and then going to a serious subject. “It was hard finding the right balance,” says Irwin.

He cuts out one joke about women in business—that’s what your grandfather calls secretaries—because it doesn’t sit well with someone on the staff. “Our humor comes from women and then to go to a serious subject. “It was hard finding the right balance,” says Irwin.

Minutes before the show, he rehearses a female-oriented riff on March Madness, pitting prominent women against each other such as Hillary Clinton vs. Condoleezza Rice. His staff tells him to deliver the jokes exuberantly instead of as a straight man.

He is at ease as he interviews the three guests, Pitt professor and jazz pianist Geri Allen; undergraduate Sidney Cannon-Bailey, who does science experiments on stage; and Sydney Harper, a student government officer in charge of Women’s Empowerment Week.

In five or so years, he can foresee alumni of Pitt Tonight working on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, and other late night TV. As Irwin puts it, “Pitt Tonight will be able to create a community and a pipeline of talent.”

Despite the bittersweet feelings of letting go of the show he and his fellow students built from scratch, he knows they have made something that will last. In five or so years, he can foresee alumni of Pitt Tonight working on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, and other late-night TV. As Irwin puts it, “Pitt Tonight will be able to create a community and a pipeline of talent.”
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Where did you start?
I wanted to create something to go underneath a helmet for extra protection. I watched an NFL game and noticed that players wore skullcaps under their helmets. I thought, what if I put protection in a skullcap? Professional athletes don’t want added equipment to worry about, and kids don’t want to be teased for wearing something uncool.

How did you transform your idea into a product?
First, I Googled to research protective materials. I requested samples from companies and evaluated them based on breathability, comfort, and flexibility of material. Then, I bought regular skullcaps and cut the seams, and my neighbor sewed in shock-absorbing material. We made samples and sent them to a lab for protection testing. Next, I found a patent attorney, filed trademarks, and created a logo for our protective skullcap, called 2nd Skull.

What advice would you give to other entrepreneurs?
As an entrepreneur, you have to be relentless. Initially, the manufacturer said that production would be impossible. I had no idea about stretchable fabrics and manufacturing, but I pushed back and asked for proof. So, the manufacturer tried it—and did it.

What gave you the confidence to invent a new product?
2nd Skull is the culmination of my entrepreneurial experience and everything I learned at school. My Pitt MBA helped a lot, leading me to pursue marketing and innovation. I worked for my grandfather’s business in Monterrey, Mexico, which sold buckets for citronella candle-wax producers. I suggested a change in the bucket design, and suddenly a $2 million product line made $3 million the next year.

What was your biggest challenge in this entrepreneurial venture?
I only had nights and weekends because I was working full time in marketing at Kellogg’s, but I was convinced I could make a difference, and that’s why I went for it. I never played sports and didn’t have a manufacturing background. I had to surround myself with experts and learn. I met Tyler Palko (A&S ’06), a former Pitt quarterback, and invited him to join me. He has experience and connections in high school, college, and professional sports and has been instrumental to our success as 2nd Skull’s vice president.

There’s a lot of attention on concussions, particularly in sports. Can 2nd Skull help?
My company is trying to create awareness for parents. Football isn’t the only sport with the problem; it’s any sport. My son, now 12, wears 2nd Skull when he plays football, basketball, and baseball. My daughter, who’s 10, plays softball and loves wearing her headband. I feel better knowing they’re wearing 2nd Skull.
When a mysterious illness suddenly emerged in his Brazilian hometown, Pitt Public Health researcher Ernesto T.A. Marques mobilized with colleagues to decode its unknowns. The work may help infectious-disease researchers stop or stall new epidemics.

At a clinic in the coastal city of Recife, Brazil, a pediatric neurologist pores over the day’s case files. Vanessa Van der Linden has never seen anything like this before. Babies born with microcephaly—abnormally tiny heads and disordered brains—are suddenly appearing in her maternity ward. All of the area’s hospitals combined see no more than 10 cases a year. Today alone, she has diagnosed three.

Worry swells in the doctor’s chest. She picks up her cell phone and calls her mother, another pediatric neurologist working in a nearby hospital. “Mommy,” she says in Portuguese. “Há algo errado.” There is something wrong.

Soon, physicians across northeastern Brazil report similar surges of microcephaly cases rising like a tide from the region’s poorest neighborhoods. The search is on to find the cause behind the crisis.
About 10 months before that moment in the clinic, at the start of Brazil’s equatorial rainy season in late 2014, doctors were grappling with a different kind of medical mystery. Reports emerged of an unidentified but seemingly benign illness in the country’s northeast. Its symptoms were graciously mild. Most patients complained of a raised, red skin rash, joint aches, and eye irritation. Some had low fevers. The discomfort lasted only a few days and rarely required treatment beyond a pain reliever. No one guessed that it was the first, early sign of new trouble.

Dengue fever, a mosquito-borne viral disease well known to Brazil, also causes fever, rash, and joint pain—but the match wasn’t exact. Dengue, which belongs to the flavivirus genus, is more debilitating. Some infections can generate severe and deadly symptoms, causing hemorrhagic bleeding and joint pain so crushingly intense that a common nickname for the virus is “break-bone fever.”

In the absence of other credible theories and with conflicting lab data, many experts, including those at the Brazilian Ministry of Health, hypothesized that the unknown illness was dengue, but in a mild form. By March 2015, more than 7,000 cases had been reported.

Pitt researcher Ernesto T. A. Marques closely followed news of the so-called “dengue light” cases. An associate professor of infectious diseases and microbiology in Pitt’s Graduate School of Public Health, Marques splits his time between Pittsburgh and Recife.

“I have, let’s say, a job-related double personality,” Marques notes with a laugh. His attention often shifts between two different worlds simultaneously—the United States and Brazil; the classroom and the lab; English and Portuguese. But the mystery around the unidentified, enigmatic disease gave the researcher’s focus yet another target.

Marques grew up in Recife, the grandson of a pharmacist. His father ran the business. As a boy, dark-eyed and curious, Marques would watch as neighbors came to the drugstore for help with what ailed them.

He was still in high school when he decided to become a doctor, but it wasn’t until he reached medical school at Universidade Federal de Pernambuco in Recife that he chose the research track. The detective work of medical research excited him. He loved to explore a problem from all of its angles, delving into its most complex components to better understand its whole.

“I was curious,” he says. “You’re learning these very broad medical theories, and I wanted to know, how did people figure that out? And how could it be done a little better?”

Marques was drawn to translational research, to science that could be turned into solutions to major health problems. The study of human immunology, or the way the body’s immune system responds to different diseases, became the lens through which he could investigate viruses and their potential preventative vaccines—particularly those that plague Brazil. He felt something of a duty to serve people in his home country, just as his father and grandfather did.

“Others may have the resources and opportunity to respond to Brazilians’ issues, but they don’t have the actual experience of the reality that the patients live,” Marques says. “I think I can see with the eyes of people who actually have to deal with the problems.”

One problem that Marques saw troubling Brazil was dengue. He zeroed in on the disease, among others, while earning a PhD in pharmacology from Johns Hopkins University. He became a dengue expert, developing new ways to detect its most severe manifestation and inventing a prognostic tool that helps doctors predict the health outcomes of dengue-infected patients. But as he finished his postdoctoral work, he knew that to best study dengue and other mosquito-borne diseases, he had to be close to the people most affected.

So there, in the sprawling, beach-lined city where he grew up, Marques built a collaborative lab with one of South America’s most prestigious medical research institutions, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (FIOCRUZ) Institute. In 2009, when he accepted a professorship at Pitt, the Recife laboratory became one of three international research sites partnered with the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. Marques serves as a liaison between Pitt and FIOCRUZ, connecting scientists from both institutions.

The nature of the research unfolding in the Recife lab is similar to what’s taking place at Pitt’s Center for Vaccine Research, where Marques is also affiliated. It’s translational and incremental, with each study moving researchers closer to unpacking the mysteries of infectious diseases in an effort to better identify, treat, and stop them from spreading.

But viruses are particularly tricky subjects. Experience has taught Marques that they are capable of unexpected behavior, and that studying them can be like trying to stare steadily at a moving target. The reach of a virus and its effect on a human host hangs on a multitude of factors including the history of community exposure to similar viruses. Big and small changes in things like environment, human behavior, immune responses, or the virus’s genetic composition can alter its scope, allowing it to jump countries or continents, spreading widely or receding quietly. Researchers often aren’t even aware of a virus’s full capability until it is demonstrated by an outbreak. But buried within the structure and behavior of a virus, there are clues about how best to diagnose, treat, and even stop it.
At the time of the appearance of the mystery illness, Marques and his lab were focused on a collection of studies investigating dengue immunology. Immersed in this research, he eyed the “dengue light” outbreak closely, though he remained relatively unconcerned. Whatever it was, it didn’t appear to be dangerous. “That,” he says, “was the assumption.”

As a 2015 unfolds in Brazil, a meeting was called between Brazilian clinicians and infectious disease specialists at FIOCRUZ. The group’s aim was to determine through laboratory testing just what was making people sick in the northeast.

As the meeting convened, Marques participated from a continent away. From his office on the ninth floor of Pitt’s Biomedical Science Tower 3, he engaged with the proceedings through a video feed on his computer. He listened as the group combed through a list of viral possibilities both obscure and common. There was dengue, of course, but also chikungunya, Mayaro, and Zika, a little-known flavivirus last seen in early 2014 on the tiny islands of French Polynesia.

“To be honest,” says Marques, “it was not my favorite on the list.” He felt dengue was more likely because Zika had never been seen in Brazil before. But his Brazilian colleague Carlos Brito argued that Zika’s symptoms matched those currently reported. He also pointed to an apparent uptick across the region of a neurological condition in adults called Guillain-Barre syndrome. Data from French Polynesia’s Zika outbreak revealed a similar increase.

The meeting ended with an agreement to put Zika on the shortlist of culprit viruses. Marques’s lab was already testing “dengue light” patient samples for dengue and another virus. He signed on to test samples for Zika, too. While other scientists searched for evidence of a Zika outbreak in Brazil, the Pitt researcher’s lab had a narrower focus—to see whether there was evidence that those with recently diagnosed Guillain-Barre had also been infected with the Zika virus.

Within two months, colleagues confirmed that Zika was in Brazil. Soon after, the Pitt/FIOCRUZ lab released its findings, too: the virus’s antibodies were indeed present in the blood of Guillain-Barre patients tested—and, for the first time, it was identified in their cerebrospinal fluid as well. That suggested, worryingly, that in certain cases Zika might selectively target the body’s nervous system.

One thing was clear—the virus traveled across time and vast territory to reach South America, likely through global travel and trade. It was first identified in 1947 in a rhesus monkey living in a tropical forest in southern Uganda. Researchers named the new virus after the forest where it was discovered. Zika, in the area’s native Lugandan language, means “overgrown.”

The first documented human cases of the virus appeared in East Africa in 1952, transmitted, just as it was to monkeys, by the bite of an infected aedes aegypti mosquito. Over the subsequent decades, because of its mild symptoms, the virus didn’t inspire much alarm or research. Prior to 2007, only 14 cases of Zika were recorded throughout the world. There had never been a known outbreak of the scale now suggested in Brazil.

But it appeared that Zika had begun to live up to its “overgrown” name.

Back in Pittsburgh, Marques took the news of Zika’s emergence to Donald Burke, dean of Pitt’s Graduate School of Public Health, and UPMC-Jonas Salk Chair in Global Health. Burke, a world-renowned expert in emerging diseases, has an intimate understanding of viruses and outbreaks. He was already familiar with Zika, having written the definitive textbook description of the virus more than a decade ago. And, like Marques, he knew the benefit of vigilance.

Although the virus appeared to be a benign infection of adults, the two men drafted an email to a former colleague of Burke’s working in the Biological Threats Defense department in the White House.
“If Zika is in fact spreading in Brazil,” wrote Burke, “it is of concern for several reasons. 1. It will cause confusion about what is dengue and what is Zika, and what will be vaccine preventable. 2. It could spread more widely in the Americas. 3. There may be surprising interactions of Zika and dengue.”

“I think it is important that surveillance for Zika be implemented ... as soon as possible,” Marques wrote. “Much needs to be done.”

The note, written in spring 2015, did not provoke immediate governmental action. Though Zika was slowly revealing its capabilities, the virus wouldn’t become an international concern until the outbreak took a strange and alarming turn.

The first suspicious case of microcephaly observed by pediatric neurologist Vanessa Van der Linden appeared in late August 2015. The baby’s mother was healthy. She didn’t report exposure to any of the common microcephaly causes during her pregnancy—no measles, toxoplasmosis, drugs, or alcohol. She did, however, remember having a light red skin rash during her first trimester. It lasted only one day; she thought little of it.

By late September, Van der Linden and other physicians had seen many cases like the first: healthy mothers who may have had a viral infection during pregnancy, and their severely disordered babies. Troubled, she shared her findings with colleagues including her old med school classmate, Ernesto Marques.

He shared her concern, and so did their colleague, physician Carlos Brito, who again pointed to Zika. “He made the connection that the mothers would have been in their first trimesters at the peak of the Zika outbreak,” Marques explains. And the fact that the virus could infiltrate the central nervous system of some adults provided an additional clue.

Did these babies contract the virus from their mothers while in the womb, the infection disrupting their development? The Pitt/FIOCRUZ lab began testing to find out.

Thirty newborns with microcephaly were tested—and the results showed that all of them once had Zika. Marques, along with fellow researchers Marli Tenorio Cordeiro, Lindomar J. Pena, Carlos Brito, and Laura H. Gil, published their findings in the medical journal *The Lancet*, becoming the first researchers to provide “strong evidence that the microcephaly was a consequence of Zika virus infection.”

One line of inquiry Marques is exploring is why Zika infections can be devastating to some, while others are unaffected. Since arriving in South America, the virus has spread to at least 84 countries, including the United States, but no other population has the same high number of Zika-affected babies as Brazil. Why?
Even before the research was published, Marques was working on the next set of questions in urgent need of answers. Zika no longer presented as the benign virus it appeared to be 70 years ago; it had revealed itself to be complex and capable of harm.

Last fall, despite the continued spread of the virus, the World Health Organization declared an end to Zika’s classification as a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern.”

But, says Marques, it is hard to define a threat that is still coming into focus.

“The hope that Zika is gone,” says Marques, “is not quite right.”

Much about the virus remains unknown and—given Zika’s unexpected capabilities to cause serious harm in some cases—research has more to tell us about viral diseases and how to stop them.

“All of the easy questions have been answered,” says Marques about Zika. “Now, we’re working on the difficult ones.”

One line of inquiry Marques is exploring is why Zika infections can be devastating to some, while others are unaffected. Since arriving in South America, the virus has spread to at least 84 countries, including the United States, but no other population has the same high number of Zika-affected babies as Brazil. Even there, not every infected pregnant woman gives birth to a child with a Zika-related disorder. Why?

Marques’s recent lab data have shown that the presence of dengue antibodies can make a Zika infection more severe, both for the initial host and for a fetus that may contract the virus through a mother’s placenta. The process is called antibody-dependent enhancement. If, as Marques suspects, enhancement is playing a role in Zika’s seemingly selective effect, that piece of information will play a vital role in the development of a safe and effective vaccine, while also helping infectious disease specialists to anticipate and prevent new viral epidemics.

And that’s at the heart of most infectious disease specialists’ mission—to dig ever deeper, excavating unknowns in pursuit of either stopping diseases before they emerge into deadly epidemics, or stemming their impact.

At the Graduate School of Public Health and Pitt’s Center for Vaccine Research, building a global network is a vital component of this work. Labs like the one in Recife—positioned at the frontlines of potential outbreaks—can offer researchers a head start in tackling the next emergency. When you’re studying viruses, which are covert and often fast moving, there’s a real advantage to being even one step ahead of the curve.

Recently, Marques and his team developed a new, faster, and better way to diagnose Zika, potentially making response to the outbreak and the development of vaccines that much easier. But if there’s any chance of preventing the world’s next Zika epidemic, the research must be done now.

Pitt’s Graduate School of Public Health is seizing the momentum. Marques and Burke founded Cura Zika, an international research alliance that targets the epidemic through continued collaboration between researchers at Pitt and FIOCRUZ.

The Cura Zika foundation provides funding for studies across both institutions with efforts that range from research to better understand Zika’s impact on mothers’ placentas to the engineering and evaluation of a Zika vaccine. In recent months, the work of Cura Zika has been highlighted in the New York Times and other media. In 2017, Celina Turchi—a FIOCRUZ epidemiologist who is a scientific advisor with Cura Zika, a close collaborator with Marques, and the senior investigator in the case-control study that linked Zika to microcephaly—was named one of Time magazine’s most influential people of the year.

Yet, much about the virus is still unknown. “There are potentially decades more work for us,” says Marques, whose pace remains urgent.

These days the Pitt researcher spends most of his time working in his lab, on airplanes, and behind the blinking cursor of journal articles in the making. But no matter where he is, Marques is likely thinking of Zika and Brazil, sifting the possibilities, the knowns and unknowns.
he drummer of the thrash metal band Mantic Ritual is pestered by minor health issues: his skin doesn’t look good, his hair isn’t healthy, his digestive system doesn’t run smoothly. He’s young—in his early 20s. He thinks he should feel on top of the world. He doesn’t, and he wants to do something about it.

“I decided not to outsource my health,” says Adam Haritan about his youthful health epiphany. “I thought, ‘I know my body the best and am the best person to take care of it.”

At the time, he was studying music at Duquesne University. He began to pay attention to his diet and became interested in clean eating. This new health awareness led him to Pitt’s dietetics and nutrition program in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences.

That decision culminated in his true passion. Today Haritan (SHRS ’14) is a wild-food enthusiast, researcher, and forager. He leads educational foraging walks, offers presentations on topics such as Mushrooms of the Fall, and sells his own handcrafted wild-plant-and-mushroom-based supplements on his Web site, LearnYourLand.com. His work is more than just a way to make a living; it’s a lifestyle. Through it, he “discovered some of the healthiest foods aren’t found in supermarkets but in forests, parks, city parks, and nature.”

When Haritan first started learning about nutrition, he went on a walk offered by a local foraging group in Pittsburgh’s South Side neighborhood. It was eye opening. “I did not acknowledge plants until this time in my life,” he says. “I would walk right past them, not see them lower or turn into fruit or seed. That walk demystified plants for me.”

Now the natural world is central to Haritan’s life and health. “You can build yourself out of the land, by eating it,” he says, and that is what he tries to teach others when he’s lecturing at Phipps Conservatory, or L.L. Bean, or leading a guided walk through Schenley Park.

Of course, as poison ivy sufferers know, not all encounters with plants are beneficial. Research is key to understanding what is safe to eat. Haritan is grateful for his Pitt education, especially the knowledge that enables him to delve into and assess original source material. “When I talk about the medicinal benefits of this plant or its toxic properties, I have all the terms in my lexicon,” he says.

Haritan’s diet includes many foraged foods—acorns, for example, which he turns into flour for baking or breakfast porridge; or stinging nettles, which can be cooked like any leafy green and are highly nutritious; or reishi mushrooms that, while too tough to chew, can be turned into a tincture said to boost the immune system. All three of these are plentiful in the Pittsburgh region if you know where to look and, like Haritan, decide to open your eyes and your mind.
David de la Cruz (GSPH '91) was among the volunteers in Liberia fighting the largest Ebola outbreak in history.
Uniquely Brainy
Research reveals a whole new way to view the brain

BY ROBYN K. COGGINS AND LAURA CLARK ROHRER

There are many elements that make you distinctly you, including your background, your genes, and even your fingerprints. Now, research published by Pitt’s Fang-Cheng (Frank) Yeh proves that something else makes you uniquely different from anyone else: the neural-circuitry architecture of your brain.

Yeh, assistant professor in Pitt’s neurological surgery department, was lead author in a study identifying a new imaging technique that allows scientists to map the brain’s structural connections, effectively creating a brain “fingerprint.” Application of the technique proved what has long been suspected by experts—that these connections are highly unique to each individual person. Not only that, but Yeh’s work also demonstrates that the brain’s fingerprint changes over time in response to factors including life experience and environmental changes. The findings have significant implications, including potential advances in how mental illnesses are diagnosed, treated, and, possibly, prevented; and how certain shared experiences, like war or poverty, affect the brains of those who experience them.

The brain is composed of a complex circuitry of neurons that links different parts of the brain to each other. Previous research enabled scientists to visualize structural connections, known as the connectome, but Yeh and his team wanted to find a way to further characterize the whole brain’s neural connections, and look into their unique patterns. So, they developed a new method of applying a non-invasive technology called diffusion magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to map out the “connectome fingerprint.”

Every cell, in this case each neuron, contains a little bit of water that sloshes around as it does its duties. Diffusion MRI allows scientists to detect and map that molecular movement. When they mapped all those tiny movements together within a standard framework, the unique patterns of the connectome emerged like a fingerprint.

“This helps us understand how brain function and structure relate,” Yeh says.

To test the accuracy of their technique, the researchers mapped the local connectome “fingerprint” of 699 different brains. They then performed more than 17,000 identification tests which revealed that each brain fingerprint is distinct, even between people who are genetically related, according to the study published in PLOS Computational Biology. The maps also showed neuroplasticity over three months—in other words, Yeh could watch the brain change between scans.

“We found that the brain is shaping itself over time,” he explains. “And that makes sense, because each person has life experiences—that is, things to be encoded in your brain connections.”

Yeh’s fascination with brain function started during medical school in Taiwan, where he enjoyed pondering “one of the biggest mysteries in the medical field” on his rounds through the psychiatric department.

“We still don’t know how the brain functions!” he says today. “So far, the only thing we know is that the brain is far more complicated than we thought.”

After completing medical school, Yeh pursued a PhD in biomedical engineering at Carnegie Mellon University, where he found himself collaborating with Pitt researchers to develop new methods and applications for imag...
History Mystery
In the 15th century, the indigenous Colla people suddenly abandoned their fortified hilltop town in the Peruvian Andes. A recent excavation of the site led by Pitt archeology professor Elizabeth Arkush unearthed clues to the nature of the town’s demise, including bronze jewelry and metal tools, which suggest that the Colla were forced to flee quickly, possibly due to an enemy attack. Her findings, published in the Journal of Field Archeology, help to illuminate the region’s late pre-Colombian history.

Women Work
Studies in the economics department’s Pittsburgh Experimental Economics Lab found that women are consistently more likely to be asked to volunteer for and to accept requests to do tasks that help the group but put them at a relative disadvantage. One study—coauthored by Mellon Professor Lise Vesterlund and then-graduate student Maria Recalde—revealed that, more so than men, women do non-résumé-boosting tasks, like writing reports or planning events. The study, published in The American Economic Review, highlights how duty distribution can create barriers to career advancement for women and suggests that awareness may be key to solutions.

Heart Hope
Little freshwater zebrafish are capable of a big feat: regenerating parts of their own hearts. Yadong Wang, a professor of bioengineering in the Swanson School of Engineering, is examining how this ability might be harnessed to help humans. His research has already revealed that the extracellular matrices—or the cellular “scaffolding”—of zebrafish hearts can be used to regenerate damaged heart tissue in mice. Though further research is necessary, Wang’s findings may offer a new path for curing heart disease.

“We found that the brain is shaping itself over time. And that makes sense, because each person has life experiences—that is, things to be encoded in your brain connections.”
—Fang-Cheng (Frank) Yeh
Author Irina Reyn says the book that would become The Imperial Wife (Thomas Dunne Books 2016) sat in a drawer for years. She’d been chipping away at the story of a woman who was successful at work—“not just a cog in the wheel ... a woman who loves her job and is good at her job,” she explains. But something about the story just wasn’t clicking.

After the book had sat dormant for a while, Reyn, an assistant professor in Pitt’s Department of English, happened to be reading Catherine the Great’s memoirs and realized there was a connection between her shelved book’s main character, fine art dealer Tanya Kagan Vandermotter, and the longest-ruling female leader of Russia. Out of the drawer it came.

“Not only did Catherine excel at work, she grabbed a job she had no right to,” Reyn says. (Essentially, Catherine seized the throne from her husband, Peter III, who abdicated and was then assassinated.) Catherine’s rule saw a massive expansion of the Russian Empire.

The two women’s stories became Reyn’s second novel. The book’s parallel narratives alternate between modern-day Vandermotter’s tale of professional success and the historical drama of Catherine’s ascent to the throne. The two stories resonate with Reyn’s, as well. Both Reyn and Vandermotter are daughters of Russian immigrants. Both are concerned about art’s place in the modern world. And like Catherine and Vandermotter, Reyn says she’s always felt like a bit of an outsider, in part due to her Russian-Jewish heritage.

Reyn earned her master’s degree in Slavic languages and literatures at Pitt in 2001. The program, she says, “was necessary to figure out my relation to Russianness and its vocabulary.” Reyn in turn used that structured knowledge of Russia’s language and history to better depict Catherine’s era, and to understand her own place in the world. As an instructor in Pitt’s Writing Program, Reyn (A&S ’01) helps launch young writers into their own creative careers.

Despite having written stories since she was a child, it took Reyn until well into adulthood to land on author as a career. “I didn’t realize being a writer was something you could do,” she says. Her first essay was published when she was 25; a colleague noticed the work and offered an anthology of American immigrant stories that just so happened to be a place in the modern world. And like Catherine and Vandermotter, Reyn says she’s always felt like a bit of an outsider, in part due to her Russian-Jewish heritage.

As she wraps up her book tour in 2017, Reyn’s already working on a new novel. She says she feels an urgency to create more art in a changing global political climate.

“Historical fiction makes us see more about the present day,” Reyn says. “The juxtaposition helps us see how far we’ve come.”

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Computing as Writing
From analysis of the 2010 movie The Social Network, about the creation of Facebook, to examination of contemporary debates surrounding intellectual property, Computing as Writing (University of Minnesota Press) highlights unlikely comparisons in writing and computing environments. Author Daniel Punday (A&S ’88) unpacks the way we use computers as technologically advanced tools for writing, as well as the impact this has on our creative activities and the way we think about them. Punday, who heads the English department at Mississippi State University, connects the job of a novelist to the job of a computer programmer, making this book a unique read.

—Madeleine Adamiczyn

The Things I Learned in College
As a current senior administrator for the University of New Haven, Sean-Michael Green (A&S ’98) exudes a passion for higher education. That’s why, at age 34, he decided to spend a month at each of the eight Ivy League schools. The Things I Learned in College: My Year in the Ivy League is an entertaining and insightful story of Green’s collegiate exploration, revealing everything from the classroom environments to the more colloquial experiences of each institution. The author formerly worked in Pitt’s Office of Admissions, and his book was a finalist for the 2016 Journey Awards for Narrative Nonfiction.

—MA

A Man Comes from Someplace
A young Jewish man from Ukraine suffers the loss of his father and brother during the Russian Revolution. He spends a year finding his way to another brother in Pennsylvania. In A Man Comes from Someplace, Judith Pearl Summerfield (EDUC ’63, A&S ’67G) combines decades of research with tales of her father’s journey. Summerfield, professor emerita at Queens College, believes that narratives are reaffirmations. “I hope that my father’s stories will inspire others to tell or write the stories they need to tell.”

—Christiana Dillard

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—Christiana Dillard

Mega Man 3
There’s not much of a plot in the beloved 1990 video game Mega Man 3, and perhaps that was all the better for Salvatore Pane (A&S ’10G) and his imagination. Pane’s latest book, Mega Man 3 (Boss Fight Books) traces the game’s co-creation by Akira Kitamura (an unsung hero, Pane argues) alongside his own childhood and eventual obsession with video games. Pane says he hopes readers “enjoy learning what it was like programming video games in the early days of this huge, crazy medium.” He is an assistant professor of English at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota.

—Robyn K. Coggins
Last summer, Yona Harvey, the poet and University of Pittsburgh writing professor, sojourned to the flatlands of Illinois, to a quiet, pastoral artists’ colony just outside of Chicago. She was there to make progress on a memoir that chronicles the death of her sister.

One evening, yearning to take a break from the solitude of writing, she walked to a nearby coffee shop. Free to connect with the world, she text-chatted with her friend, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the noted author, MacArthur “genius grant” winner, and national correspondent for The Atlantic. She hit send on a text congratulating him on his recent collaboration with Marvel Comics and the revival of its “Black Panther” series.

Coates texted right back: “You want to write one?”

With that question, Harvey, a winner of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, was drawn into a history-making journey. Not long after, she signed the contract, becoming one of the first African American women to write the stories of Black female characters for Marvel’s “World of Wakanda.”

Harvey built the genesis tale for Zenzi, a revolutionary figure who lives in Wakanda, a fictional African society. The issue, debuted in November, sold more than 300,000 copies.

A few months ago, Marvel again worked with Coates and Harvey on a limited edition of “Black Panther and The Crew,” a series about heroes set in Harlem, N.Y. Part of Harvey’s assignment was writing for the character Storm, who can fly and has the power to manipulate weather. Harvey is the first African American woman to write for the character.

But before the stories of Storm and Zenzi, there is the story of Harvey. We pick it up in a Cincinnati suburb, in a little pink room ...
WHERE I GREW UP WAS IN THE SUBURBS, WHICH WAS SUPER BORING AND SUPER RESTRICTIVE. THERE WAS NO BUS NEARBY. THERE WAS NOWHERE TO GO.

HER IMAGINATION TOOK HER OTHER PLACES...

AND THIS OFTEN CAME BEFORE HOMEWORK.

JOURNALING SINCE THE 2ND GRADE!

I DIDN'T KNOW BOOKS COULD MAKE YOU CRY... I IMMEDIATELY SAW THE POWER IN BOOKS.
So many things to read -- essays, biographies, black feminist books, and all of her favorite poets have particular ways of seeing, feeling, experiencing.

Poetry is like the air she breathes...

...but teaching came into her life almost by accident.

Poetry is what lured me into teaching.
Off-campus, Yona began learning how to structure creative writing exercises with WritersCorps, a national service organization.

These experiences became foundational, gradually shaping her consciousness... the idea of what people have and don’t have.

There would be other foundational moments: teaching in Japan, starting a family, publishing poetry, earning her master’s in library science from Pitt. Diverse experiences that would, eventually, bring Yona back to Pitt as an assistant professor, teaching poetry and creative writing.
IN 2016, SHE IS TAPPED BY HER FRIEND AND PROMINENT AUTHOR TA-NEHISI COATES TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORLD OF WAKANDA, A SPINOFF OF MARVEL COMICS’ BLACK PANTHER SERIES.

That first issue, published in November, rocketed to its third printing within a month.

Her poetry skills helped her write the character of ZENZI, a rebel hero.

Later, she became the first African American woman to write the Marvel character Storm, and she drew on the voices of black women poets for inspiration.

ZENZI AND STORM OFFERED NEW WAYS TO EXPLORE RACE, GENDER, JUSTICE, WHICH COMPLEMENT HER ROLES AS POET AND TEACHER.
PRESENT

I think it's woven in, in terms of listening and paying attention and being invisible.

HOW DOES POETRY FIT INTO YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY, YOUR TEACHING?

I think that, in your office... how do you interact with students?

WHEN YOU TEACH, HOW DO PITT STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM ALL OF THE EXPERIENCES YOU HAVE HAD?

Ideally, the variety of my experiences makes me open to others and able to listen more deeply.

Hopefully, students find themselves in a space where they're encouraged to allow their experiences and interests to influence their writing, and their lives, too.
Marks took on Conner’s case as he does with all his patients—with commitment and compassion. It was this career-long approach and a history of advancing cancer care that recently inspired his colleagues at the Oncology Hematology Association (OHA) in Pittsburgh to establish an endowed chair at the University of Pittsburgh in Marks’s name.

Compassionate Care—a Winning Combination

In November 2015, Pitt student and star football player James Conner received life-altering news. The 20-year-old running back was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system. As his teammates—and Panthers fans across the country—rallied around Conner, so did an expert team of medical professionals at UPMC CancerCenter and the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, one of the largest cancer care networks in the nation.

In charge of the young man’s treatment plan was leading oncologist Stanley Marks, whose dedication to the fight against cancer has earned him the admiration of colleagues and patients alike. A clinical professor of medicine in Pitt’s School of Medicine, Marks is known as an icon in his field and an avid patient advocate. He is chairman of the UPMC CancerCenter, chief of the Division of Hematology and Oncology at UPMC Shadyside, and a leader in community organizations, such as the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and American Cancer Society.

Last May, after six months of treatment, Conner learned from Marks that his cancer was in remission. By the fall, the student-athlete was back on the football field and, this spring, he was chosen by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the NFL draft.

Marks took on Conner’s case as he does with all his patients—with commitment and compassion. It was this career-long approach and a history of advancing cancer care that recently inspired his colleagues at the Oncology Hematology Association (OHA) in Pittsburgh to establish an endowed chair at Pitt in Marks’s name.

A colleague characterized him as “an incredibly talented physician, the kind of physician that we all strive to be in knowledge, demeanor, and patient empathy.”

The Stanley M. Marks-OHA Endowed Chair in Hematology/Oncology Leadership will support outstanding leaders in the Pitt School of Medicine’s Division of Hematology/Oncology and will train professionals devoted to research and improved treatments for patients.
Flying Colors

BY MICAE LA FOX CORN

A vibrant, red painting hangs in the lobby of the Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School. The abstract composition, titled “Fear Not; Choose Love!” is flecked with gold and yellow. Ruby tones radiate in waves from a central orb of white. “It is my biggest and boldest painting so far,” the artist Nancy Richter Brzeski wrote on her website. “My unequivocal affirmation of love and life!”

Growing up in Mt. Lebanon, Pa., during the Great Depression, Brzeski wasn’t always so inspired. A shy girl, she skated by, overlooked by teachers and unnoticed by classmates, she says, in the overcrowded hallways of her public school.

After her father relocated to Washington, D.C., without the family, the girl and her mother moved to a small apartment in Oakland. Despite the growing hardships of 1934, Brzeski’s mother—a struggling young lawyer—enrolled her daughter in The Falk School. “It was the best thing she could have done for me,” says Brzeski.

The Falk School’s dynamic approach to education allowed Brzeski to thrive. Through its affiliation with the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Education, Falk—which serves grades K-8—trains new generations of students and educators. It employs a teaching style that focuses on the individual child, using research and innovative educational methods that emphasize curiosity and active learning. There, Brzeski expanded creatively. “That sense of freedom within limits” guided her personal transformation, she says.

Brzeski went on to earn a bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan and a master’s in sociology from the University of Chicago before pursuing sociological research. Throughout her career, she was drawn to creative pursuits. After settling in California, she began taking art classes and continued to produce her trademark ethereal “dream art.”

Over the years, Brzeski has made numerous gifts and a generous bequest to her beloved Falk School. She has supported the school’s artist-in-residence program since it began and is responsible for the enthusiastic painting in the lobby. She has also donated a copy of her book, The Passionate Art of Nancy Richter Brzeski, and many of her children’s books to the school library.

Even from her home in Davis, Calif., Brzeski feels connected to the place that helped her blossom into someone who values self-expression and chooses love.

Knowledge Trek

BY ADAM REGER

In the years after earning a master’s degree in library science from Pitt, Judith Thompson traveled the world to many overseas locales with her husband, Ward. She spent years living and working as a technical librarian in the Philippines and England and trekked to countries including India and Afghanistan. Today, from her home in Los Angeles, Thompson still vividly recalls one of their most exciting—and challenging—adventures: two years spent living in Tehran, Iran, in the mid-1970s. The brown desert landscape and unfamiliar culture were, at first, a difficult adjustment; but an open mind and abundant curiosity led her to treasure the experience.

Many of the tools that allowed her to embrace life and career opportunities around the globe were cultivated at Pitt, says Thompson (SIS ’72). The professors she worked with during her studies amplified her inquisitiveness to explore the world around her and expanded her flexibility to embrace new perspectives. “That all came from exposure to different instructors with different approaches,” she says.

Thompson often thinks of the lessons she learned from the
J oelle Smith always knew she wanted to write, but it was her first assignment as a rookie reporter for The Pitt News that ignited a lasting passion for journalism. “My first story was on stray cats in Pittsburgh,” she recalls with a smile.

Now, a year after graduating with a Pitt Bachelor of Arts degree in English writing and communication rhetoric, Smith (A&S ’16) is an assistant editor at Men’s Health magazine. It’s a position made possible, she says, by the journalistic experience she acquired while a student—experience supported by Pitt grants and scholarships.

Smith spent a summer interning for Pittsburgh Magazine, where her time as a fact checker and blog contributor focused the young writer’s interest in magazine writing. Yet, she says she might never have applied for that formative experience without support from a PittAdvantage grant, which provides financial assistance to eligible undergraduate students who take an unpaid internship, study abroad, or explore a service learning project.

“Without that award, it would have been really hard to intern at Pittsburgh Magazine,” Smith says.

Then, a different resource helped the Pitt student take advantage of another influential experience. She was accepted to a writing and production internship with CBS Evening News in New York City, along with a $5,000 Anthony and Concetta Ambrosio Internship Award to finance the experience. The Ambrosio Award is offered through the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences to help Pitt undergrads intern with the CBS Corporation, where Anthony Ambrosio (A&S ’82) is a top executive.

“That’s why I love Pitt: the people are so supportive,” Smith said. Her career was launched with help from that support, and she is now poised to go wherever her writing takes her.
Scholars Abroad

Those who knew Florence Williams (EDUC ’47) well remember her as a frugal woman. “She only used money to travel,” recalls Alma Burgess, a friend since childhood. “She traveled to every continent. She was proud of that.”

Inspired by her trips around the globe, Williams nurtured that sense of adventure here in Pittsburgh for decades. In addition to excelling as a long-time educator in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, she became a founding member of the Pitt African Heritage Classroom Committee (AHCC) in the late ’80s. The group led the design and completion of this important addition to the now 30 Nationality Rooms in the Cathedral of Learning. Since then, the AHCC has awarded scholarships to students who are given the opportunity to spend six weeks of study and cultural immersion in African countries.

Williams, who died in 2014, made sure that Pitt students would continue to have the opportunity to see the far ends of the Earth. She bequeathed more than $100,000 to fund AHCC annual scholarships. In 2016, the AHCC sent two Pitt students—Ruba Idris, an undergraduate in the College of General Studies, and Hannah Eko, a graduate student in the Writing Program—to Nigeria.

Friends say they are not surprised that Williams’ devotion to travel and education continues to live on at Pitt. “If she made a commitment to do something, she did it,” remembers longtime friend Martina Corbin. “She was just that kind of person.”

By Susan Wiedel

Tuition and fees account for only about 30 percent of the University’s operating budget—the remaining funds come from other sources, including individual donations. Thank a Giver (TAG) Day helped draw attention to the impact of contributions made to the University with gold tags hung around the Oakland campus to highlight gifts made by alumni donors. Students were encouraged to show their gratitude by sharing photos of themselves with the tags on social media using #PittTagDay.

The University held its first-ever Pitt Day of Giving on Founders’ Day, Feb. 28, 2017. The result? $5.7 million! to support scholarship funds, research endeavors, Pitt athletics, and much more. See story on page 5.

Pitt Tag Day

Global technology company Siemens Industry, Inc. pledged $40,000 to create a scholarship fund with the Swanson School of Engineering to help support diversity in the field. The fund was established to celebrate the 20th anniversary of visionary engineer Peter Hammond’s invention of the medium-volt, variable frequency drive, which revolutionized the engineering of motors.

Inspired to help young writers excel, William D. Andrews (A&S ’66) gifted $10,000 to the Department of English in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences to support the writing instruction of undergraduates. Andrews is the former president of Westbrook College in Maine and the author of two mystery novels.

Giveto.pitt.edu
1957

Cecelia Trower Epperson EDUC ’57, ’62G and her family received the 2017 Nellie Leadership Award. Given by Three Rivers Youth, a Pittsburgh not-for-profit child welfare agency, the accolade honors exemplars of family empowerment.

1964

James Gindelsperger ENGR ’64 published Arlington: A Color Guide to America’s Most Famous Cemetery (John F. Blair, Publisher), which tells the stories of 250 people buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Gindelsperger resides in Johnstown, Pa.

1968

Douglas M. Kleine A&S ’68 was named 2016 Author of the Year by the National Association of Housing Cooperatives for his volunteer work as manager of the editorial board for the Cooperative Housing Quarterly and the annual Cooperative Housing Journal. He is president of Professional Association Services in Alexandria, Va.

1970

Earl M. Blecher GSPIA ’70 published The Mind and the Meaning of its Cultural Imperatives (CreateSpace), which covers the author’s interdisciplinary, intellectual journey toward an understanding of consciousness and its evolution.

1971

Khong Kim Hoong GSPIA ’71, A&S ’75G is the deputy vice chancellor for HELP International School, an institute integrating Eastern and Western educational philosophies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Richard McDonough A&S ’71 is the author of two books and dozens of internationally refereed journal articles and book reviews, in addition to serving as a guest editor for the philosophy journal Idealistic Studies. He’s lived and taught in Singapore for the past 35 years.

1972

Nasarío García A&S ’72 is the subject of the documentary, Nasario Remembers the Río Puerco. A folklorist, García’s memoir, Hoe, Heaven, and Hell: My Boyhood in Rural New Mexico (University of New Mexico Press) was named 2016 Best Autobiography by the International Latino Book Awards.

1973

Dennis Palumbo A&S ’73 was interviewed by Barry Kibrick on Between the Lines about his book, Phantom Limb (Poisoned Pen Press). Palumbo is a licensed psychotherapist, Oscar-nominated screenwriter, and author living in Los Angeles, Calif.

1975

Annette Stemhagen GSPH ’75, ’82, a pharmacoepidemiologist and senior vice president of safety, epidemiology, registries, and risk management at United BioSource Corporation in Blue Bell, Pa., has been nominated to PharmaVoice’s 2017 “100 Most Inspiring People in the Life Sciences Industry.”

1976

Marc Rudov ENGR ’76 published his second book, Brand Is Destiny: The Ultimate Bottom Line (MHR Enterprises), which explains how and why a brand establishes a company’s purpose and direction. Rudov is a speaker, media commentator, and branding advisor to CEOs.

1980

Daniel C. McGrogan LAW ’80 was elected to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System’s board of directors. He is the owner of McGrogan Consulting, which provides strategic planning to families. He lives in Mt. Lebanon, Pa.

Sparked by Learning

BY EMILY O’DONNELL

Randie Viggiano-Veri loved to share the world with her students. As part of a curriculum on international culture, the seasoned educator once created a cookbook of global cuisine from which she would prepare weekly dishes, bringing far-away tastes, customs, and languages to life for her pupils. Learning to embrace new experiences wasn’t just a lesson Viggiano-Veri taught others—it was a practice she lived by, even after retiring from teaching in 2015 after 41 years in the classroom.

Viggiano-Veri’s curiosity started early, when her family immigrated to Western Pennsylvania from Italy. Her new neighbors came from countries around the world, and she soon taught herself to speak their native tongues, awakening a lifelong love of foreign languages and cultures. After high school, the young woman wanted to pursue college, but her father discouraged it. So, she attending beauty school and opened her own salon in Wilmerding, Pa.

After years of running the salon and raising a family, Viggiano-Veri was drawn again to the prospect of college and a teaching career. She enrolled at Pitt and earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education. She then embarked on a career in special education, which included 36 years teaching at Allegheny Intermediate Unit, a school in Homestead, Pa. There, she connected students to the world, empowering their independence as she had her own.

Even after retirement, Viggiano-Veri (EDUC ’74, ’76G) owned her beauty salon, traveled, and even considered pursuing a PhD in education from Pitt, where she got the training that helped expand her horizons. After all, she said, “You’re never too old to learn new things.”

At press time, the magazine staff learned of Randie Viggiano-Veri’s passing; her shining example endures—the power of education, teaching, and service to others.
1981
Joseph A. Gardella Jr. A&S ’81G has been appointed to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Science Advisory Board. He is a professor of chemistry at the University of Buffalo in New York, and an expert in environmental analytical chemistry.

1984
Ivan Dzombak ENGR ’84, ENGR ’94 was promoted to technical fellow at HARMAN International, a leading manufacturer of automotive electronics and audio equipment for consumer and professional use. He resides in the Ann Arbor, Mich., area.

1986
Randy Sultzer ENGR ’86 authored his first e-book of historic, biographical nonfiction, Generating History: Profiles of an Early American Family (Smashwords), which chronicles a family’s journey through some of the nation’s most formative years.

1987
Dwayne Pinkney GSPIA ’87 has been named chief financial officer and senior associate vice chancellor for finance and administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He most recently served as the university’s vice provost for finance and academic planning.

1988
Christopher Mager BUS ’88G is leading BNY Mellon’s newly created Global Innovation Group in the company’s Treasury Services business.

1993
Ted A. Schroeder A&S ’93, LAW ’97 was promoted to office managing shareholder of Littler’s Pittsburgh and Morgantown, W.Va., offices. As an attorney, he represents management clients in all aspects of employment and labor law.

1995
Dean Julian CGS ’95, EDUC ’97G, ’01G was appointed director of enrollment management at Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus, in Lemont Furnace, Pa. He manages the administrative operations for admissions, student financial aid, marketing, and public relations.

1997
Ron Schirato UPJ ’97 is the vice president of the civil engineering division of Larson Design Group, based in Williamsport, Pa. He’s an experienced civil engineer, project manager, and author of Civil Structural Design for Dummies.
manager, and operations manager for both small and large engineering firms.

1998
Daniel Bensimhon MED ‘98G is the medical director of Cone Health’s Advanced Heart Failure and Cardio-Oncology Programs, and a cardiologist at Cone Health Medical Group HeartCare in Greensboro, N.C.

2001
Kimberly S. Tague A&S ’01 was promoted to shareholder at Strassburger McKenna Gutnick & Gefsky. She is co-chair of the Pittsburgh-based firm’s real estate group.

2002
Andrew Schaeffer A&S ’02 is producer of the firm’s Pittsburgh office, and serves as co-chair of the firm’s real estate group.

2003
Levi K. Logan A&S ’03, LAW ’07 was named partner at Meyer, Unkovic & Scott. He is a member of the Pittsburgh-based firm’s real estate group.

2004
Marie Bertrand BUS ’04 was named partner at Day Pitney. She is a member of the firm’s transactional department, and works out of the Hartford, Conn., office. Joseph Gordon LAW ’04 joined the Philadelphia office of Pietragallo Gordon Alfano Bosick & Raspanti. He is a senior associate in the law firm’s employment and labor, commercial litigation, and health care practice groups. Erica Laughlin LAW ’04 was promoted to shareholder at Strassburger McKenna Gutnick & Gefsky. She is chair of the firm’s business development committee, and works out of the Pittsburgh and Greensburg, Pa., offices. Jill Weimer A&S ’04, LAW ’07 was promoted to shareholder at Little. She is an employment attorney at the firm’s Pittsburgh office, and serves as pro bono counsel for a local nonprofit.

2005
Michael G. Monyok LAW ’05 was named partner at Meyer, Unkovic & Scott. He is a member of the Pittsburgh-based firm’s intellectual property, corporate and business law, and new ventures and entrepreneurs groups.

2006
Laura Poko UPG ’06 traveled to Kasaali, Uganda, to help create a curriculum in sales and marketing at The Glow Effect Centre for Women & Girls, which provides training in leadership, women’s health, social issues, and vocational skills. Poko is the director of marketing and communications at Global Cold Chain Alliance in Alexandria, Va. Tony J. Thompson LAW ’06 was named partner at Meyer, Unkovic & Scott. He

Uncommon Expert
BY KRISTIN BUNDY
A
nchoring their boat on a hot, August day, Jennifer Cope’s family and friends ready themselves for a swim. Before jumping in, the kids don life preservers and nose plugs, both of which Cope believes could be lifesavers. “When it comes to lakes,” she says, “I do think a little bit more carefully.”

An abundance of caution comes with her job. Cope (MED ’04) is an epidemiologist for the Waterborne Disease Prevention Branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and one of the world’s leading experts on ameba-caused waterborne illness. Amebae—single-cell, blob-like organisms—live in soil and fresh and salt water. Most aren’t harmful to humans, but there’s one species that can be fatal, Naegleria fowleri, commonly known as the “brain-eating ameba.” Found in warm bodies of fresh water, it’s known to enter the body through the nose and can lead to a lethal brain infection.

Such cases are highly unusual, Cope is quick to emphasize. The rate nationwide is one to eight infections a year, which, the specialist says, is still too many.

With her CDC colleagues, Cope is working to better understand and control the rare amebic disease. The team fields calls from physicians all over the United States who suspect their patients might be infected. As a department spokesperson, Cope keeps the public apprised of confirmed infections.

Her efforts and expertise are helping to keep more people safe to enjoy waterside fun in the sun.

S C E N E
IN NEW ORLEANS
Even at the New Orleans Jazz Fest, Pitt alumni find one another. Thanks to the Pitt cap, Nadine Rosenbaum Tolvin EDUC ’70, (left) Diane Goodman Silverhardt and Steve Silverhardt both A&S ’70 introduced themselves to, (top center and right) Thomas Shepherd A&S ’82, LAW ’85 and Karla Milton Shepherd A&S ’82, EDUC ’83. H2P!
is a member of the firm’s litigation and dispute resolution, new ventures and entrepreneurs, intellectual property, employment law and employee benefits, and construction groups.

2007
Anna Quider A&S ’07 was elected vice president of The Science Coalition, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of leading public and private research universities. She was also appointed the government affairs liaison for the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities’ Council on Research. Quider is Northern Illinois University’s federal relations director in DeKalb, Ill.

2009
Whitney Grespin GSPIA ’09 followed in the footsteps of notable female geographers including Amelia Earhart when she carried the Society of Woman Geographers’ flag to Bala Hissar, an ancient fortress in Kabul, Afghanistan.

2010
Kevin McGrath A&S ’10 was elected to the board of directors of the Literacy Council of Norristown, a Pennsylvania nonprofit. McGrath is an attorney in Hamburg, Rubin, Mullin, Maxwell & Lupin’s litigation and trusts and estates departments.

2013
Alexis Fitzgerald A&S ’13 participated in Miami University’s Earth Expeditions global field course in Namibia. She is a humane and wildlife education manager at Animal Rescue League Shelter and Wildlife Center in Pittsburgh.

Dena Haritos Tsamitis SIS ’95, director of the College of Engineering’s Information Networking Institute at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, was recently named the Barbara Lazarus Professor in Information Networking.

Julie Kline LAW ’97 was promoted to shareholder at Strassburger McKenna Gutnick & Gefsky. She is co-chair of the firm’s business services group in the Pittsburgh office.

Inspiring Science
BY ADAM REGER
A group of middle-schoolers in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood inspected an outline of the human form made of felt, debating just where to position the body’s breathing apparatus, also in felt.

Undergrad Matt Schaff looked on, smiling as he led the rousing round of “Science Feud,” a fun, educational spin on a popular gameshow. As a member of Pitt Science Outreach, a program in which Pitt students take science education into the greater Pittsburgh community, Schaff relished the opportunity to get kids excited about learning.

“Working with Pitt Science Outreach filled me with the hope that science education can be cool, it can be fun, and that we could go into the community and make a difference,” he says. Today, he’s still building on what he learned while teaching others.

After earning two degrees—one in neuroscience and another in economics—Schaff (A&S ’13) created Sci-Inspire, a nonprofit dedicated to making science outreach easier. A social network focused on science education, it uses the power of “near peer” mentoring, connecting undergraduates passionate about science with younger students in their communities. In 2016, Sci-Inspire helped form 85 partnerships between undergraduate volunteers and teachers in 23 K–12 schools in New York City and the Washington, D.C. metro area. Schaff, a true self-starter, even built the organization’s Web site from scratch after teaching himself web coding.

“I don’t think I’d have the confidence I do without the support I received at Pitt,” says Schaff, who now runs Sci-Inspire while working toward a PhD in neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania. “Any idea that I had was supported by Pitt and by my mentors. That’s incredibly empowering.”
Albert J. Borelli Sr. BUS '65G, '71G, November 2016, age 96, of Hilton Head, S.C. A World War II veteran, he earned both an MBA and PhD from Pitt. He played tennis until he was 90, was a radio buff, and a jazz audiophile. Django Reinhardt was always at the top of his playlist.

John “Jack” Emerson Frey ENGR '58, April 2017, age 82, of Richmond, Va. He served two years in the U.S. Army, then began a career with Page Communications. He was a third-degree Knight and an honorary life member of the Knights of Columbus. His greatest love was his family, and he enjoyed researching his genealogy.

Ruth P. Jordon EDUC '67, '68G, January 2017, age 71, of Braddock Hills, Pa. She was an English teacher for East Allegheny School District from 1968 to 1999, had served as president of the East Allegheny Education Association, and was a member of several professional organizations. She enjoyed traveling, and visited many European countries.

Ralph Marion Kniseley A&S '42, MED '43G, March 2017, age 96, of Oak Ridge, Tenn. He was a director for the Life Sciences Division of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Austria before cofounding a private medical practice. He authored or co-authored more than 35 scientific papers and co-edited three books. A painter, 45 of his compositions are displayed in Pitt’s Falk Library.

Jeffrey J. Kovatch A&S '95, November 2016, age 43, of Huntington, W.Va. An associate professor of biological sciences at Marshall University, he specialized in aquatic ecology. He was an avid outdoorsman and sports fan, known for his community outreach, humor, and outsized personality. He loved being a father to two daughters and a husband to wife Paige Muellerleile.

David R. Lindberg Jr. EDUC '63, August 2016, of Dillsburg, Pa. He served with the U.S. Navy during the Korean War and was employed by the federal government for more than 35 years as a computer systems analyst. His last employment was at the Naval Depot in Mechanicsburg, Pa. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Pitt’s Athletic Department.

Tom Olofson BUS ’63, April 2017, age 75, of Kansas City, Mo. He served as the chairman and CEO at Epiq Systems Acquisition; held management positions with Xerox Corporation; was a senior vice president of Marion Laboratories; and was a director of Saztec International. He was also a member of the Board of Visitors of the Katz Graduate School of Business.

Patrick O’Malia LAW ’81, September 2015, age 63, of Wilkes-Barre, Pa. He practiced law in Pittsburgh for many years. A lifelong cyclist, he completed 30 200-mile-long Tours of the Scioto River Valley in Ohio. A certified Allegheny County Master Gardener, he developed an irrigation system for his garden and loved sharing his knowledge with fellow gardeners.

James Parmley ENGR ’50, April 2017, age 91, of Mt. Lebanon, Pa. He served in the 4th and 8th Armored Divisions in the European theater during World War II. In Pittsburgh, he worked at Heyl & Patterson, Mesta Machine Company, Voss, and U.S. Steel. An avid Pitt football fan, he loved sports, music, reading, and family.

Judy Diethorn Petrich A&S '64, '66G, '68G, August 2016, age 74, of Mt. Lebanon, Pa. An assistant professor in Pitt’s Psychology Department, she was a devotee of Thomas Merton and a loyal Pitt football season ticket holder. She had a tremendous laugh and sense of humor, and was committed to serving Catholic causes.


Deborah Walker CGS ’01, GSPIA ’03, February 2017, age 62, of Pittsburgh, Pa. She served as manager of the City of Pittsburgh’s Office of Municipal Investigations and was promoted to become deputy chief of human resources in the city’s department of personnel and civil service commission. Previously, she was chair of the city’s Citizens Police Review Board, and a University of Pittsburgh police and judicial officer. She was also a Pitt adjunct faculty member and received the Chancellor’s Distinguished Public Service Award.

Raymond A. Yourd A&S '47, MED '49, December 2016, age 92, of Pine Township, Pa. He maintained a private medical practice in the Grove City, Pa., area from 1956 until 1987. He was an avid fisherman, member of Tower Presbyterian Church, where he served as an elder, and a long-time member and past president of Grove City Rotary Club.
Good Timing
BY ADAM REGER

A technology-industry veteran and senior business leader, Phalgun Raju initially focused her career on the mobile technology industry. Then, for more than a decade, she helped to advance future-shaping companies like Google and InMobi, leveraging her engineering degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MBA from Harvard Business School.

But mid-career, Raju faced a dilemma shared by many professionals. When would she have time to pursue her own altruistic aspirations?

“A lot of people say, ‘Let me finish my career, and then I’ll give back and do some social good,’” Raju says. “But by the time my husband and I are 65, I don’t know if we’ll have the energy.”

That impatience to give back ultimately spurred Raju and her husband, Nick Nash, to found Morph.org in 2015. The charitable organization nurtures socially conscious start-up projects and ventures. “Our idea was to be a philanthropy that would incubate ideas and execute with leaders who want to bring those ideas to fruition,” says Raju.

The big picture objective: To create solutions for some of the world’s largest problems.

Morph.org’s first endeavor, the Ramanujan Project, was named after the famous Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. He was born into poverty but, in time, his genius was recognized by the world’s top mathematicians. He made significant and lasting contributions to the discipline.

“The Ramanujan Project came out of the idea that, if you look at any emerging market on a probability basis, there are genius-caliber kids who most likely don’t have the educational opportunities afforded the rest of us,” Raju says. The project identifies top-level math students in schools across India and gives them access to academic possibilities they would never otherwise experience through a fellowship to the most prestigious and rigorous pre-university math programs in the United States.

Morph.org’s second project, DonorFind, is a free smartphone app that allows blood and bone marrow donors to connect with those in need, and vice versa. While DonorFind is available globally, Raju explains that its biggest impact is in emerging markets, where the infrastructure for blood donations is not as strong as in the United States.

For her work with DonorFind, Raju (ENGR ’97) was honored with the Global Mobile Internet Conference’s 2015 Social Innovation Award. In 2016 she was selected by the Asia Society as an Asia 21 Young Leader, which recognizes social impact and business leaders throughout Asia.

When Raju, who is currently based in Singapore, isn’t facilitating positive social change, she’s serving as founder and CEO of expertDB, a global online marketplace for consulting and expertise. It’s the most recent chapter in a tech and entrepreneurial career that began in her hometown of Pittsburgh, where she studied mechanical engineering at the Swanson School of Engineering.

Thanks to her passion for helping others—and a great deal of energy—her work is transforming lives for the better.

“My education at Pitt—and the fantastic faculty in the School of Engineering—was a great stepping stone for my life and the work I’ve done in the rest of my career.”

—Phalgun Raju

alumni.pitt.edu
Face to Face

BY KRISTINA MARUSIC

A nervous smile. A happy tear. What people project through their facial expressions may not always match what they feel inside.

As a Pitt medical student studying psychiatry, Bryan Stevens learned that reading the secret truths conveyed by people’s features is an invaluable professional skill. He found the study of faces so fascinating, it sparked a unique hobby that stretched throughout his career.

On a break from his studies one weekend in 1970, Stevens visited an exhibition at Carnegie Museum of Art featuring African masks. The expressive creations piqued his interest. He learned that the masks—and their associated dances—hold hidden information, much like human faces do.

Later, as his professional practice flourished in York, Pa., the psychiatrist traveled to Mexico and began obtaining and cataloging masks. Stevens (MED ’71), now retired, built an impressive collection and published a book on Mexican masks, with a second in the works. Stevens hopes his research will serve as an encyclopedia of the preserved histories they carry.

“The masks and the dances were carriers of secret cultural information that had survived since before the Spanish conquests,” says Stevens. The mask makers were secretly preserving their ancient gods—and even making hidden jokes—when doing so was forbidden.

“As a psychiatrist, I’m always looking for the hidden story,” says Stevens. With his art collection, he’s ensuring that what may appear hidden does not get lost to history.

Action!

BY KRISTIN BUNDY

What would Pittsburgh look like as the setting for an exciting, action-adventure film, complete with fiery blasts, highway shootouts, and a hero charged with saving the city?

Filmmaker Tom Getty imagined just that with his 2016 independent release, Rising Fear. Getty’s newest action film relies on carefully collected footage, computerized effects, and a lot of good old-fashioned gumption. A Johnstown, Pa., native, Getty has been making films since he was 8 years old. His previous release, Emulation, filmed while he was a student on the University’s Pittsburgh campus, was met with encouragement, he says, by film-industry notable Arnold Kopelson, producer of many Hollywood big-screen flicks, including Platoon, The Fugitive, and Se7en.

Getty’s initial experience at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown transformed his creative ambitions. Supportive faculty encouraged him to explore the world to grow as a writer. The young filmmaker transferred to the Pittsburgh campus, where his worldview broadened. “Hillman Library is like the United Nations—the diversity is incredible!” he recalls.

Since earning a bachelor’s degree in communications, Getty (A&S ’10) established his own production company, Acrolight Pictures LLC, and wrote, directed, and played the lead in Rising Fear. With a budget of just $6,000, Getty achieved laudable results. The film, for instance, won the award for “Best Action Feature” from the GI Film Fest, as well as nominations for “Best Editing” and “Best Special Effects” from the Action On Film Festival. With such a strong start in film, Getty is ready for more action and adventure.
When Therese Rocco joined the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police in 1948, women had different roles than their male counterparts. The Pittsburgh native spent her first 10 years with the bureau working in the typing pool and acting as a decoy in vice operations. But she was drawn to the energy and challenges of police work, motivated by an earlier lesson imparted by the nuns at her grade school: “Acquire a purpose in life, and work at it!”

That’s just what Rocco did.

In 1960, the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police began to train women as officers, yet, according to Rocco, they still weren’t issued service weapons or permitted to drive patrol cars. She didn’t need to do either of those things, though, to pursue her budding aptitude for finding missing persons. Rocco easily gained the trust of witnesses and others, and proved herself to be a top-notch sleuth, working doggedly to unravel the truth behind mysterious disappearances. By 1962, she was transferred to the missing persons squad full time; by the end of the decade, she was named the squad’s commander.

Then, in the 1970s, with decades of experience in policing, Rocco decided to pursue a college degree from the University of Pittsburgh.

“There is nothing that can enhance your life like knowledge!” she says now, recalling her decision to earn a bachelor’s degree in administrative justice.

With a degree under her belt, Rocco (A&S ’78) rose to the rank of assistant chief of police, the first woman in that role in the city’s history. She retired from the bureau in 1997. Today, she is busy telling the story of her life in an autobiography that was published this March. It’s a trailblazing tale of hard work and rewarding purpose.

Want to hear how Pitt alumni have turned good ideas into great enterprises?

Last fall’s Pitt Innovation Week included a panel discussion among five entrepreneurial alumni who have started their own businesses. Watch the conversation online: tinyurl.com/innovationpanel.

Above, from left: Graduation Central: Olivia Block enjoys some fun with a friend during Graduation Central—“all things graduation”—held at the Connolly Ballroom, April 11 and 12. Pitt Panthers meet and greet around the country: Jeff Gleim (center) with Boston Pitt Club leader Annie Sullivan and club volunteer Sekou Dilday during the Pitt is It in Boston event. Dhiran reception: Alumni, students, family, and friends gathered at a reception hosted by the Pitt Alumni Association after Pitt’s annual Indian classical dance competition, with all proceeds benefiting the Birmingham Free Clinic of Pittsburgh. See more photos from these events on our Web site.
BY KRISTIN BUNDY

For weeks, it has been scrub, wash, repeat. If this stain remover doesn’t work, she thinks, nothing will. As she pulls her favorite blouse from the wash, she sees it—the yellow underarm sweat stain remains. That’s it! She throws the shirt in the trash and heads to the computer, determined to find a solution to her problem.

That pesky stain would soon put Jess Edelstein on a prosperous entrepreneurial quest. At the time, the Pitt grad, who earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology, was working as a realtor. She never imagined where that Google search would take her.

After the blouse incident, Edelstein was drawn to the science behind the stain. She found that a chemical reaction between sweat, laundry detergent, and aluminum—which is in most conventional deodorants—causes the yellow stain to appear in clothing. She tried aluminum-free, non-antiperspirant deodorants, but they made her smell, sweat, or itch.

So she decided to whip up her own product. “It was a lot of trial-and-error in the kitchen,” Edelstein remembers.

But she found the right recipe—one that keeps users dry and stain-free through a mix of activated charcoal and essential oils. Sarah Ribner, her lifelong friend and a business school student, quickly signed on as a business partner.

The two women worked together, naming their deodorant PiperWai and selling it in a number of stores. Then, in late 2015 they appeared on the ABC television show Shark Tank, where entrepreneurs pitch their business ideas to venture capitalists. The investors were impressed, and one pledged $50,000 to help the company grow.

Since appearing on the show, Edelstein (A&S ’11) says profits have grown immensely. “We had $110,000 in gross revenue when we pitched to the Sharks, and now we’re up to $6 million.” Today, PiperWai can be found in large retail shops, including GNC and Whole Foods.

“Hard work pays off,” says Edelstein, whose passion project transformed into the sweet smell of success.

Hello, Boston!

BY JOE MIKSCH

In February, Pitt senior leaders, staff, and faculty traveled to Boston to connect with alumni, meet prospective students and their parents, gather with high school guidance counselors, deepen research partnerships, and spotlight Pitt innovations for audiences at MIT and the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council. The trip—which featured a Pitt vs. Boston College basketball matchup—prominently showcased the University of Pittsburgh as the #1 public university in the Northeast, according to a Wall Street Journal ranking.

The Pitt in Boston awareness campaign reached subscribers of The Boston Globe and the Boston Herald, 1.5 million listeners of National Public Radio affiliate WBUR, and more than 3 million airline passengers moving through Logan International Airport. Activity on social media resulted in 1.3 million impressions around the event.

Pitt’s presence in Boston—home to about 4,000 alumni in the area (and another 3,000 in New England)—further raised Pitt’s profile as a leading national university and a choice destination for education, research, partnership, and innovation.

Alumni: Info

Pitt’s ongoing alumni engagement program invites alumni to share career advice with Pitt students in many ways, including networking events and mentoring programs. Interested in becoming a career link for the next generation of Pitt grads? Please contact Alyssa Ferguson, alyssa.ferguson@pitt.edu.

“Pitt Day in Harrisburg is a fantastic opportunity for our alumni to support Pitt and foster Pitt’s presence in Pennsylvania and the Northeast. It is an opportunity for alumni to share their Pitt stories with their parents, friends, and family. And it is an opportunity to highlight Pitt’s contributions and impact on our region.”

—Kathy Humphrey
Senior Vice Chancellor for Engagement and Chief of Staff
Enjoy the season and this timeless scene from 30 years ago—summertime reading beside the 1918 campus landmark, "A Song to Nature," also known as the Mary Schenley Memorial Fountain, near the Frick Fine Arts Building.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OWL, 1987
Hey, North Carolina,
You’re not far from the Best Public University in the Northeast.*
And, we’re coming your way.

*The Wall Street Journal

Top 5 nationally in NIH research,¹ a Kiplinger’s best-value U.S. public college, and top 5 percent of global universities.²

Pitt is taking its story on the road. Join us!

PITT IN CAROLINA
Oct. 18—Charlotte
Oct. 19-20—Raleigh-Durham
Oct. 21—Pitt Panthers vs. Duke Blue Devils

University of Pittsburgh

2. U.S. News & World Report, Best Global Universities
JOIN US
For Pitt Homecoming, Oct. 9–Oct. 14

The Alumni Association will be hosting events all week. For a complete listing, visit alumni.pitt.edu/homecoming

Join us for these and other special events:
Friday, Oct. 13
Welcome Back Reception
Fireworks
Late Night Cabaret

Saturday, Oct. 14
Academic Showcase
Pregame Tent and Tailgate
Pitt vs. North Carolina State