GW

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2025

On a picture perfect Fountain Day GW community members gathered on the Mount Vernon campus for the annual celebration marking the beginning of spring.

LILY SPEREDELOZZI

GW MAGAZINE
SUMMER 2025

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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ON THE COVER: A vibrant exploration of museum exhibits by artist Abiyasa Adiguna Legawa.

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

GW MAGAZINE

Summer 2025 || **Volume 32, Issue 1**

Our staff was asked:

What's your favorite museum?

*I really like **Planet Word** in D.C., which is a bit of a hidden gem. Located in a former D.C. school that is a National Historic Landmark, the museum is the only one in the country dedicated to fostering a love of words and language.*

*The **Van Gogh Museum** in Amsterdam. Van Gogh is my favorite artist, so to be able to see some of his most famous works in person is truly awe-inspiring.*

*Two favorites: **The Wheels Through Time** motorcycle museum in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, and the **La Brea Tar Pits and Museum** in Los Angeles.*

*The **Harley-Davidson Museum** in Milwaukee. Nearly bought a motorcycle there!*

*The **Saint Louis Art Museum** - SLAM!- may not be the Louvre, but its hands-on exhibits are perfect for the 12-year-old in me who wants to swing a mace and touch a mummy.*

*My favorite museum is almost always the last one I went to. So lately it's the **Corcoran School of the Arts and Design**! The NEXT Extravaganza was loaded with good things, and the Brady Gallery show of prints of Indigenous people was great! Now they have a virtual exhibition of Warhol Polaroids.*

*I'll go with one in D.C.: the **Renwick Gallery**. Because the exhibits change often, I try to visit twice a year. Every time I go, I am surprised by its transformation and grateful for what I take away from the artists' work and inspiration.*

*The **Guinness Storehouse** in Dublin. It's a completely immersive experience where not only do you learn about the brand's fascinating history, you get to end the tour with a tasting overlooking the city.*

CORRECTIONS

In the winter issue story "Advancing the Narrative," we mistakenly referred to Marsha L. Fudge as a senator. She was secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. We regret the error.

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Prelude

NEWS AND INSIGHTS FROM CAMPUS AND BEYOND

WALK OF ART

The NEXT Extravaganza drew more than 1,000 attendees to the opening of the annual arts exhibition that showcases the theses of graduating students in the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design.

CARA TAYLOR

MILITARY MILESTONE

GW graduates in the Navy Reserve Officers' Training Corps are commissioned as officers at a ceremony at the U.S. Navy Memorial.

WILLIAM ATKINS

Julie Bauman

RICH RIGGINS

Fighting Cancer with Science and Service

Julie Bauman, the Dr. Cyrus Katzen Family Director of the GW Cancer Center, sees hope on the horizon for prevention, treatment and outcomes. By Rachel Muir

In 2018, Molly Cassidy was a new mother whose biggest looming challenge was taking the Arizona state bar. When she saw a doctor for what she thought was a persistent earache, the diagnosis turned her life upside down.

She had stage 4 oral squamous cell carcinoma, an aggressive form of head and neck cancer. After enduring a grueling treatment regimen of surgery, radiation and high-dose chemotherapy, she was declared in remission and rang the bell in celebration.

It didn't last. She soon discovered a tumor on her neck that quickly spread to her mouth, neck and lungs. The prognosis was grim. Cassidy started researching end-of-life care options and writing letters and cards for her son's future milestones.

One remaining option was a pioneering clinical trial led by Julie Bauman, a physician who specializes in head and neck cancer and is now the head of GW's Cancer Center. The trial involved creating a personalized mRNA vaccine designed to target the specific genetic mutations of her tumor. After nine rounds of immunotherapy, no signs of cancer remained. Four years later, she is still cancer free.

It's a story Bauman, who also has a master's in public health, shares to illustrate how breakthroughs in research and treatment are showing promise for even some of the most difficult-to-cure cancers.

GW Magazine talked to Bauman about her lifelong dedication to service, the greatest advances in cancer treatment and what she envisions for the future of the GW Cancer Center.

Q: Your parents were physicians who served in the Indian Health Service in Alaska and treated migrants in the Southwest, among other things. How did that influence your decision to go into medicine and public health?

A: Service to the underserved is a core value etched into my DNA. It was how I was raised. In particular, I watched my mother, a family practice physician, care for migrant workers, then focus on HIV/AIDS patients and later prisoners. Her unwavering commitment shaped how I view the world.

Q: How did you decide to specialize in head and neck cancer?

A: Head and neck cancer is largely a cancer of the poor and dispossessed. The risk factors for classic head and neck cancer—tobacco and alcohol use—are associated with social determinants of health such as poverty and mental health disorders. Other risk factors include environmental carcinogens, lack of access to nutritious food, air pollution and war.

Treating people with head and neck cancer requires knitting together multidisciplinary systems of care that include physicians and also navigators, social workers, dentists, nutritionists and research coordinators to achieve the best outcomes.

For the most part, though, it was the patients that drew me in. They're my North Star. Head and neck cancer affects parts of our body responsible for critical functions that make us human: facial expressions, eating, speaking, breathing, kissing. These are profoundly affected both by the cancer and its treatment. To overlay these hardships on some of the poorest and most dispossessed results in a profound individual and public health care challenge.

Julie Bauman calls her patients her "North Star."

Q: Can you talk about your research in green chemoprevention?

A: I study cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli, which have the capacity to detoxify environmental carcinogens, one of the drivers of head and neck cancer. I've been able to show that broccoli seed and sprout extract enhances detoxification of tobacco carcinogens that are also found, for example, in air pollution.

Q: What have you seen as the home runs in cancer treatment?

A: In the last 10 years, the most exciting developments are around cancer immunotherapy, which harnesses the body's immune system to fight cancer. There's often this sense of betrayal for patients that their own cells have become cancerous and threaten their lives. The idea that their innate immune system could play a major role in eradicating cancer really appeals to patients.

The first wave of immunotherapies—known as anti-PD-1 monoclonal antibodies—have FDA approval across a multitude of cancer types. It's bringing cancer treatment back together after the diaspora of precision oncology. While every cancer has a unique fingerprint due to underlying mutations, and targeted therapies remain important, now we've got a new way of activating the immune system that works across many different cancers. It's the dawn of understanding how to turn on the immune system in a selective, intelligent and effective way, so we can minimize autoimmune side effects where the immune system attacks normal tissues.

> **"Service to the underserved is a core value etched into my DNA. It was how I was raised."**

I've been focused on personalized cancer vaccines, which as with Molly Cassidy, sequence tumors and identify what is different from the normal cells in a patient's body. Then a vaccine is developed to teach the immune system to target that difference. We are at the beginning of understanding how to do things like this, learning how a cancer has put the immune system to sleep and then breaking down that immune shield and teaching T-cells what to attack.

Q: Can you talk about your goals for GW Cancer Center?

A: I would like to see the GW Cancer Center earn National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation. It's the highest federal designation for cancer centers, the gold standard. To earn that, we have to demonstrate our scientific impact in basic science, population science and clinical science. That, to me, would mean we have accomplished the twin goals of scientific excellence and cancer health equity.

I'm excited for the Cancer Center and our future. A cancer center cuts across traditional academic divides—engineering, public health, medicine, nursing, law and policy—forging a creative and fertile community that can advance discovery in both individual health and public health. I envision GW Cancer Center as a shining beacon of that kind of collaboration.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART

Scott Mory, B.A. '96, J.D. '99, finds it impossible to stay away from GW. By Greg Varner

Scott Mory stands in front of what used to be his room in Thurston, now a garden terrace in the renovated residence hall. Photo by President Ellen M. Granberg.

For **Scott Mory, B.A. '96, J.D. '99**, it was love at first sight. From the moment he set foot on the George Washington University's campus as a prospective student, Mory knew he was home.

"There was something particularly special about GW," Mory said, recalling that visit. "I wanted to go to a large university where I could meet a lot of different types of people. I wanted to be in a city. And I had an interest in politics and political science. I looked at a lot of different schools, but there was just something about the energy at GW. From minute one, I knew this was my place."

As an undergraduate, Mory majored in political science and criminal justice in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. After earning his bachelor's degree, he went right on to GW Law. Following a short career practicing law, he returned to GW to lead its alumni relations and annual giving programs from 2003 to 2007. Now he is back for his second stint. Since July 1, 2024, he has been senior vice president and chief of staff to GW President Ellen M. Granberg.

Mory is currently focused on a few key areas. "Multiple university planning processes are going on right now," he said. "That includes the university's strategic framework, the branding refresh, the budget model, the campus master plan and, ultimately, a plan for a comprehensive fundraising campaign. While I have colleagues responsible for each of those programs, one of the things I'm focused on is ensuring these plans are not just consistent with each other but complement and leverage each other."

He is also working on the development of university leadership, looking for opportunities to unify and nurture current leaders as well as identifying the next generation of leaders.

"I get to work with President Granberg and a great group of vice presidents and deans every day," he said, "thinking about how we can make GW better. That's what really excites me. We have a really engaged set of colleagues who want to be involved in leading GW into its third century."

As an undergraduate, Mory's favorite places included U Yard and the fourth floor of what is now the University Student Center, where student government was headquartered. Mory managed two successful student government presidential campaigns.

"Through those campaigns, I learned a lot about organizing people, about marketing, about thinking strategically," he said. "The experience of marshaling large groups of people to get something done has served me well throughout my career."

Another highlight of his time as a student was working with a group of faculty and other students to write GW's first code of academic integrity, which was passed by a referendum of the student body and then adopted by the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees.

"I think it lit an early flame in me wanting to work at a university," he said.

When the work was done, he fondly remembers going with friends to Mr. Henry's, a popular watering hole (located where North Italia is now on Pennsylvania Avenue).

In an "only-at-GW" moment, he was assigned in a political science class to interview someone about an executive agency. For reasons he no longer recalls, he chose to go to the Tennessee Valley Authority.

"I remember going to the TVA office and saying, 'Hi, I'm a GW student doing a political science project, and I want to learn about the TVA.' A few minutes later, I was talking to the director."

After graduating from GW Law and clerking for a federal judge in D.C., Mory's love of city life took him to New York, where he practiced law at a Wall Street firm. Growing up in suburban New Jersey, he had loved being taken into the city for sporting events or the theater, so New York seemed a logical place to settle.

He soon realized, however, that he would be happier working in higher education, and in 2003, when an opportunity arose to return to GW as executive director of alumni programs, "It was a no-brainer." He then became an assistant vice president for alumni relations and annual giving, and was also an adjunct professor at GW Law.

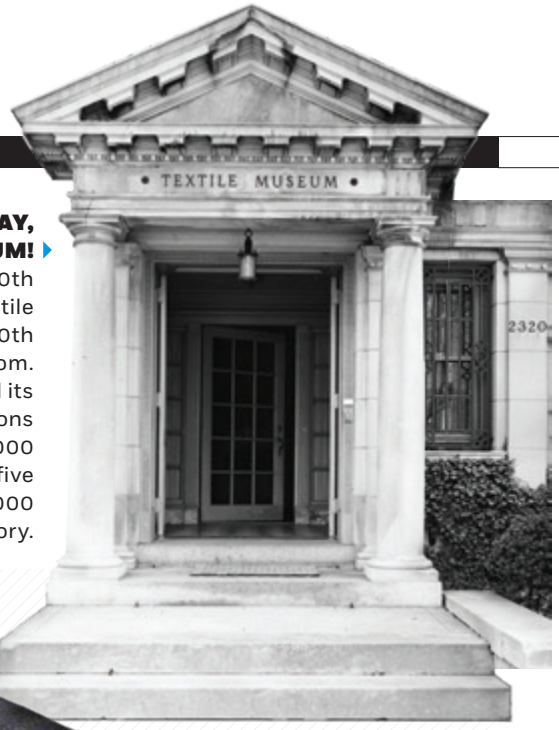
From 2007 to 2015, Mory worked at the University of Southern California, first as CEO of the USC Alumni Association and then as associate senior vice president and campaign director. In 2015, he moved to Pittsburgh to serve as Carnegie Mellon University's vice president for university advancement before boomeranging back to GW.

"GW today feels as familiar to me as it did when I went here as a student," Mory said. "It's still a place that runs hard and runs fast. It punches above its weight in a lot of ways. It creates a lot of impact, frankly, with not a lot of resources. I'm looking for opportunities to shine a spotlight on that impact, to generate some buzz for GW." GW

Briefly...

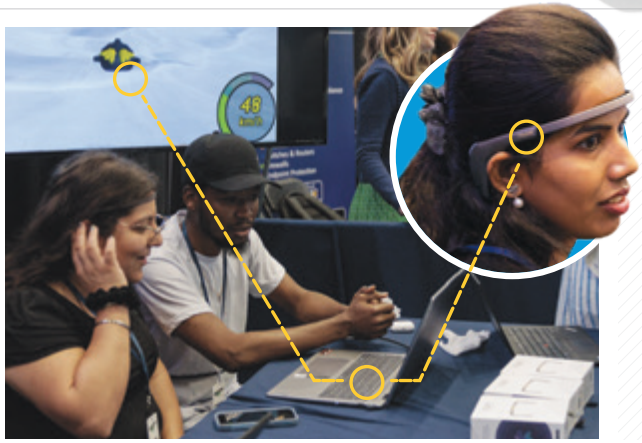
GW has appointed **SEVIN YELTEKIN,** an experienced administrator and renowned economics scholar, as the new dean of the School of Business and professor of finance, effective Aug. 1. Yeltekin joins GW from the University of Rochester.

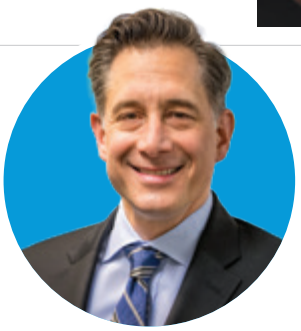
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TEXTILE MUSEUM! This year marks the 100th anniversary of The Textile Museum and its 10th year in Foggy Bottom. The museum and its affiliated collections hold more than 25,000 textiles, spanning five continents and 5,000 years of history.



A prestigious Keck Foundation grant is supporting a GW researcher's investigation into **HOW FISH EVOLVE OUT OF WATER.** Assistant Professor of Biology Sandy Kawano's research delves into the genetic and developmental changes behind this major evolutionary leap.

GW scientists are developing technology that allows users to **CONTROL VIDEO GAMES USING ONLY THEIR THOUGHTS**—an innovation that could revolutionize brain-computer interfaces.



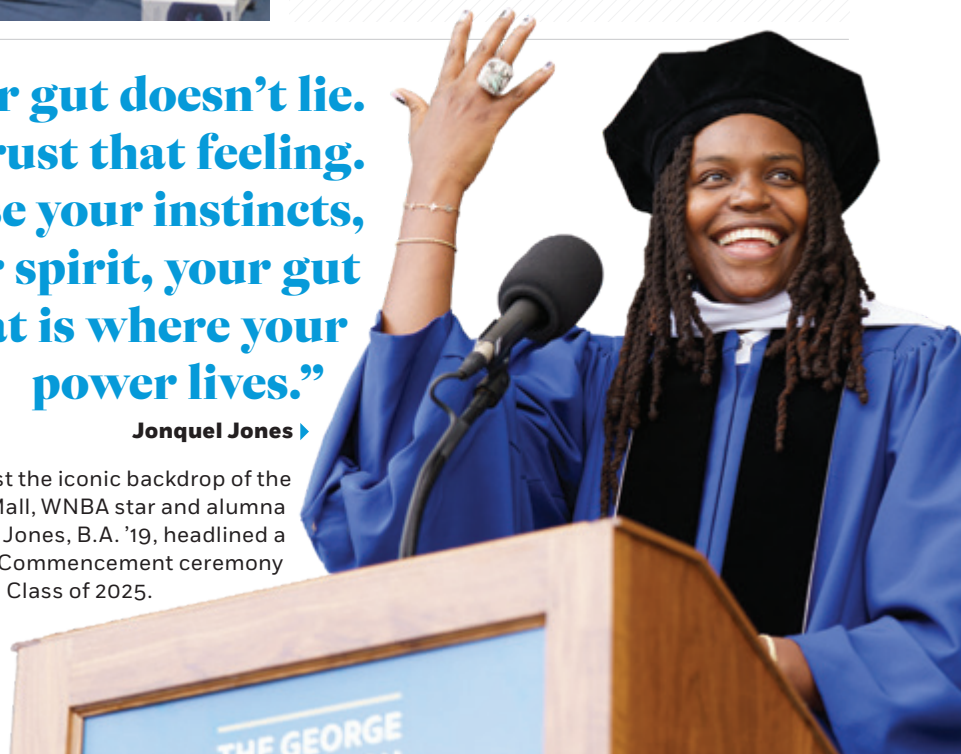


DAVID L. UNRUH will join GW as vice president for university advancement on Aug. 1. He comes with decades of experience in higher education, including at Drexel University, Temple University, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania and Carnegie Mellon.

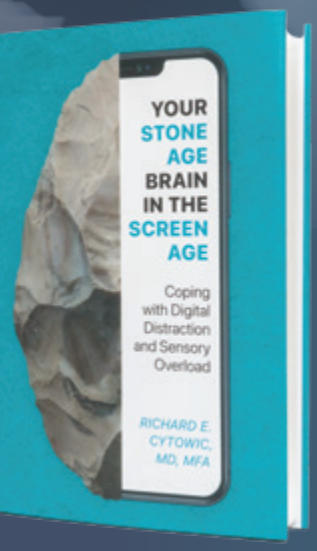
"Your gut doesn't lie. Trust that feeling. Because your instincts, your spirit, your gut—that is where your power lives."

Jonquel Jones

Against the iconic backdrop of the National Mall, WNBA star and alumna Jonquel Jones, B.A. '19, headlined a joyous Commencement ceremony for the Class of 2025.



JONES: FLORENCE SHEN / YELTEKIN: COURTESY OF YELTEKIN / VIDEO GAME INTERFACE: WILLIAM ATKINS



Managing in a World of Digital Overload

Professor Richard Cytowic tackles the overwhelming presence of screens in our lives. BY GREG VARNER

Is technology your friend? Is the omnipresence of digital screens eroding our quality of life? Richard Cytowic, clinical professor of neurology and rehabilitation medicine in the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, addresses these questions in his new book, "Your Stone Age Brain in the Screen Age: Coping with Digital Distraction and Sensory Overload" (MIT Press, 2024). In a conversation with GW Magazine, Cytowic talked about how our limited attention can survive the glut of distraction, and the wisdom of regularly powering down.

Q: In your book, you say that our brains are not equipped to handle all the distractions of contemporary life. How can we manage that problem?
A: *The best way would be to turn your phone off or put it face down. But most people can't or won't do that. In the book, I explain that people don't realize how their screens and devices are distracting them. I look at my email when I get up in the morning, and then I don't look at it again until 4 p.m. That's part of the solution—to not look at it.*

Q: Some writers have observed that the internet had the potential to make us smarter and more connected but has instead dumbed us down in our silos. Do you agree?
A: *Ha! It doesn't make us more connected. It makes us more isolated. "Social media" is an oxymoron. It's not making us more social at all. When the internet first came into being, I was thrilled that I could write a message to friends in England or in some other far-flung time zone and not worry about the time differences. But then the internet became just a flood of junk from everywhere, and our communications with friends got lost in the shuffle. We have no way to filter all that unwanted content out.*

Our attention spans have simply gone to hell. And people are so focused on their phones that they walk into telephone poles and step into traffic. Selfies kill more people than shark attacks. You can Google selfie deaths and read about people who take selfies in dangerous situations, trying to get something post-worthy, and then end up killing themselves. These devices have a way of sapping our attention spans until we are not aware of anything else going on around us.

Q: Hasn't every new technology sparked fears about a crisis of attention?
A: *Well, yes, that's true. Socrates said the invention of writing would kill our ability to remember anything. That's a very old complaint. Much more recently, people said TV and comic books were going to cause brain rot, and they didn't. But screen saturation, I think, is at such a level that we can't deny that it's doing something negative to us.*

Q: Does your worry about screens extend to the movies?
A: *I don't think movie screens are a problem, because we're looking at them in a certain context. When we're watching a film, we're not being distracted by other things. We watch a film for about 90 minutes, and we're focused on it, as long as we're not looking at something else on our laptop or iPad at the same time. We follow the story in a linear pattern, and we're not interrupted by all sorts of stuff. But when we're looking at our phones or other digital screens, we are constantly being distracted. The screen robs your attention from what you're actually trying to do. We're being distracted from our lives!*

Q: Some argue the human brain wasn't built to pay sustained attention.
A: *When our brain evolved in the Stone Age, you were dealing with your small peer group. Everybody knew one another. And things didn't change much unless there was some kind of external threat. There wasn't much out of the ordinary that happened. And when it did, it threw us into an alarm. Today, things are changing so rapidly, so quickly, every day, many times an hour, that our brain isn't prepared for it.*

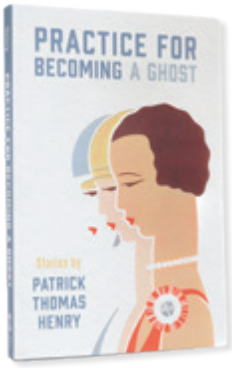
Our brains are change agents. We're alert to any change. So there we were, hunting, gathering, socializing, and all it took to put us on high alert was a strange noise, the snap of a twig, the growl of an animal, a smell of smoke. But that didn't happen very often.

The brain is not meant to be "on" 24/7, to be stimulated constantly. We need off periods, periods of silence. That's why taking a walk around the neighborhood and just looking at the trees is hugely beneficial—without your phone, of course—because you're shut off from this constant cacophony that accompanies our day. Just sitting outside under a tree is enough, because natural spaces are very restorative. Go outside, take a walk, look up at the buildings, the sky, the clouds, the trees. It only takes 30 seconds of doing nothing to throw the circuit breaker on this relentless busyness and hyperfocus on screens. It's like an instant meditation.

Q: You've said that the popular notion that we use only 10% of our brains is a canard. Why?
A: *If 90% of our brains went unused, then evolution should have discarded it long ago, because it's hugely energy intensive to maintain it if it's doing nothing. To be energy efficient, the brain uses 1 to 16% of its cells at any given moment. All of it's being active, but not all at the same time. We're using a small percentage in any given instance to take care of whatever needs to be handled. Our brain has a fixed bandwidth of attention and energy that is overwhelmed by modern life. No amount of diet, exercise, Sudoku puzzles and supplements can increase the amount of bandwidth that our brain has to work with. We have to learn to work with the bandwidth that we're given.*

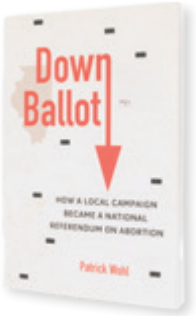
"Resilient: A Story of Group Home Survival" (Mascot Books, 2024)
by Jeremy Bracamontes, M.P.S. '18
Bracamontes gives a harrowing account of growing up in and out of shelter homes, foster care and orphanages in the Southern California of the '80s and '90s. After his father's early death from cancer and his mother's descent into heroin addiction, the 6-year-old Bracamontes is sent to his first orphanage in 1986. What follows is nearly a decade in the tumultuous world of the child welfare system where small acts of kindness helped fuel his survival and resiliency. "Any time life became hard to bear, I remembered what I survived," he writes, looking back at his experience. "That invisible mantle of strength became the steppingstone for a way of life that centered on never giving up."

"Interior Design Is Not Decoration and Other Ideas" (Laurence King Publishing, 2024)
by Professors Stephanie Travis and Catherine Anderson
In writing, color and images, the two Corcoran School of the Arts and Design professors showcase the breadth of interior design—that it encompasses books, lighting, color theory, space planning, furniture, sustainability and a lot more. "We want to share the complexities of this innovative, multi-faceted, dynamic discipline," they write. "It's important to understand that well-designed interiors have the power to make users feel, engage and thrive—a successful interior provides the backdrop to a happy, safe and productive life."



"Practice for Becoming a Ghost" (Susquehanna University Press, 2024)
by Patrick Thomas Henry, Ph.D.'17
In a series of short stories, Henry, an associate professor at the University of North Dakota, explores the blurry line between reality and fantasy, reflecting on grief and the inevitability of becoming a ghost. One story depicts a father speaking to his deceased wife while his daughters face danger; another follows a group of journalists watching people around them morph into birds; and the title story centers on the aftermath of a woman's request that her romantic partner pretend she is invisible to everyone but him. Throughout the stories, characters wrestle with memory, loss and transformation in settings ranging from Washington, D.C., to rural Pennsylvania to 19th-century Ireland.

"Gitel's Freedom" (She Writes Press, 2025)
by Iris Mitlin Lav, M.B.A. '72
Lav paints a picture of the challenges, opportunities and limitations for Jewish immigrants in early 20th-century America through the story of Gitel, who was brought to the U.S. from Belorussia as a girl. In 1911, Gitel's family joins her father in South Bend, Ind., where she grows up constrained by her religious parents' beliefs about the roles of girls and women. Not allowed to pursue her dream to go to college, she enters an early marriage that is tested by the Great Depression. When her husband has a massive stroke, she is forced to take on the roles of caretaker and breadwinner—a tremendous responsibility that also allows for the freedom she has craved her entire life.



"Down Ballot" (University of Illinois Press, 2024) by Patrick Wohl, B.A. '16
Wohl, a former campaign staffer, tells the story of a decades-old Illinois state primary contest that centered on abortion to make the case for the importance of down-ballot contests. In 1990, Rosemary Mulligan, a supporter of abortion rights, ran against anti-abortion advocate Penny Pullen for the Republican nomination for state representative. The contested election, which was won by 31 votes, and its legal aftermath ultimately became a basis for arguments in Bush v. Gore. "It was a state legislative campaign that found itself in the spotlight as a national proxy war on the issue of abortion," he writes. "It was a legal battle that would be eventually cited as precedent in the most important election case of our country's history. And it was a story that illustrates the behind-the-scenes machinations of state and local politics that is often overlooked."

ALL IMAGES: WILLIAM ATKINS


UNLOCKING
THE
PAST,
CAUGHT

ABIYASA ADIGUNA

MEET FIVE GW ALUMNI WHO ARE REVOLUTIONIZING THE MUSEUM WORLD.

Story: Lisa Conley-Kendzior

Illustrations: Abiyasa Adiguna Legawa

Michael Madeja, M.A.T. '15, starts his morning at the Independence Seaport Museum in Philadelphia checking on the historic Olympia, ensuring that the 19th-century cruiser is still afloat. By lunchtime, he's leading a hands-on knot-tying workshop for school kids and by the afternoon, he's brainstorming new ways to make maritime history exciting.

"There's really no such thing as a typical day," says Madeja, the museum's director of education.

This dynamic rhythm—a blend of preservation and innovation—echoes across the museum landscape, where George Washington University alumni are not merely displaying artifacts, but crafting immersive experiences. Many, like Madeja, are graduates of GW's Museum Studies program, which is part of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development and offers an M.A. and a Master of Arts in Teaching with a focus on museum education—preparing professionals to use museums as spaces for community engagement and storytelling.

From the iconic halls of the Met to the covert corridors of the International Spy Museum, these Revolutionaries are redefining the museum experience, proving that behind every display is a tale waiting to be lived, not just observed.

The USS Becuna, a World War II era submarine, and the USS Olympia, a Spanish American War era cruiser, are docked at Penn s Landing in Philadelphia.

NAVIGATING HISTORY AT THE INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM

Philadelphia

One summer day at the Philadelphia Zoo, **Michael Madeja** went beyond simply teaching kids about baby tortoises—he transformed himself into one. Crouched down, with a trash can lid as his makeshift shell, he animatedly detailed how young tortoises develop their protective armor. Hours later, as a group of YMCA campers left the zoo, they spotted him across the street, excitedly shouting tortoise facts and crowning him "the tortoise man."

That moment stuck with Madeja. "That's when it clicked—education could be fun, meaningful, and something I wanted to pursue," he says. "It was this perfect mix of being serious yet silly, rooted in human connection."

Initially pursuing a pre-med track as a biological anthropology major, Madeja's summer internship at the Philadelphia Zoo "changed everything." This realization led him to the museum education program at GW, where he arrived as "the zoo kid." However, an internship at Ford's Theatre broadened his perspective.

"I expected to go into natural history, but Ford's Theatre opened my eyes to working with history in a way I hadn't considered before," he explains. "It showed me that being interdisciplinary—combining science, history and hands-on engagement—was possible."

After graduation, Madeja spent eight years at the American Philosophical Society—the oldest learned society in the U.S., founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743 to promote scholarly research and knowledge in the sciences and humanities—before he was recruited for a leadership role at the Independence Seaport Museum. The opportunity felt like fate for the Philadelphia-area native—his GW application essay had been about the museum.

"They were looking to integrate education into every facet of the museum, from our boat shop to our historic ships to our on-water programs," he says. "That challenge, plus the ability to build my own team, made it the perfect fit."

Situated on Penn's Landing, the Independence Seaport Museum preserves and celebrates the Delaware River's maritime history, housing one of

"History isn't just about objects—it's about people. If we can make someone feel what it was like to be a sailor on the Delaware River, then we've done our job."

Michael Madeja

COURTESY OF THE INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM

ABOVE Students learn to tie knots during a workshop at the Independence Seaport Museum. BELOW The toy steamer Priscilla, produced around 1896 by the R. Bliss Manufacturing Company.

North America's most extensive collections of nautical artifacts. Since its official establishment in 1960, the museum has continuously expanded its reach, offering immersive experiences that aim to bring the region's narrative to life.

Madeja spearheads this endeavor. He embraces the challenge of making maritime history engaging by developing interactive programs for all ages. From teaching students to tie sailors' knots to incorporating sea shanties into field trips, Madeja ensures that every visitor leaves the museum with a personal connection to the past.

"History isn't just about objects—it's about people," he explains. "If we can make someone feel what it was like to be a sailor on the Delaware River, then we've done our job."

Madeja forges connections through storytelling, placing community at the heart of his museum education. His most resonant project: collaborating with Philadelphia's Filipino-American community to reclaim the legacy of the Olympia, which played a key role in the U.S. colonization of the Philippines.

In 1898, the cruiser served as Commodore George Dewey's flagship during the Battle of Manila Bay, where the U.S. defeated the Spanish fleet. This victory marked the start of American rule in the Philippines, transitioning the country from Spanish to U.S. colonial control. The Olympia thus symbolizes the beginning of a complex and often painful chapter in Philippine history—one of imperialism, resistance and cultural upheaval.

"My dad is Filipino-American, and he worked at the Navy Yard, so this project was personal for me," he says. "At the exhibit opening, seeing Filipino families on board, eating, celebrating and discussing history—it was powerful. It demonstrated that museums can be places of both joy and deep reflection."

For Madeja, this intersection of history, social consciousness and local identity defines the Independence Seaport Museum. He cites the "pineapple protest," when longshoremen tossed pineapples into the Delaware River to protest Del Monte's exploitation of workers and land in the Philippines, as a prime example.

"That event reminds me of how Philadelphia's revolutionary spirit is uniquely blended with its inherent quirks," he reflects, emphasizing the city's passion intertwined with its penchant for the absurd—much like Madeja himself.

Plan your visit to the Independence Seaport Museum today at *phillyseaport.org*

UNCOVERING SECRETS AT THE INTERNATIONAL SPY MUSEUM

Washington, D.C.

The rich, sweet scent of chocolate hangs heavy in the air, while the resonant sound of a trolley car rolls through the cobblestone streets. A teenage **Liz Mueller, M.A.T. '20**, a self-proclaimed "theater kid," stands at the front of the trolley, putting on a musical history tour of Hershey, Pa. At the time, she saw her gig at Hershey Trolley Works as just another performance, but in retrospect, it was her first true educational role.

Mueller's interest in education deepened during her undergraduate years at Cornell University, where she studied environmental science. A communications course required her to develop and teach an hour-long lesson on an environmental topic at local schools. That experience, combined with a guest lecture from a museum professional at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, opened her eyes to museum education.

"I had no idea museum studies was an actual career path until that moment," she says. "It was the perfect way to combine my love of science, performance and teaching."

GW's museum education program was a natural next step, introducing her to an invaluable professional network. "The number of GW connections in this field is wild," she says. A perfect example emerged during the interview when Madeja's name came up. "Oh, he was like a mentor to me during my time at GW!" Mueller remarked.

COURTESY OF THE INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM // COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SPY MUSEUM

And like Madeja, Mueller's career trajectory initially pointed toward zoos and aquariums—her internships included a Montessori classroom field trip to the National Museum of Natural History and a position with Friends of the National Zoo—but a part-time job leading birthday parties at the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., took her in an unexpected direction.

"I thought I'd only be there for a short time, but when the pandemic hit, I was lucky—the Spy Museum had already been running virtual programming for years, so I was able to continue teaching workshops remotely," she explains. "Eventually, they opened up a full-time position, and I realized I didn't want to leave."

The International Spy Museum is the only public museum in the United States dedicated to international espionage. It features a vast collection of spy gadgets, weapons and artifacts, and explores the history of espionage from ancient times to the present day. The museum also highlights the stories of famous spies and their missions, offering interactive exhibits and simulations that allow visitors to experience the world of espionage firsthand.

As a museum educator, Mueller builds upon this immersive experience. Her days are packed with interactive programs, school workshops and special events. She's the point person for educators bringing students to the museum, managing logistics and content development. In 2023 alone, she led over 200 workshops covering topics from the Revolutionary War to the Cuban Missile Crisis—both in person and virtually.

"I thought I'd only be there for a short time, but when the pandemic hit, I was lucky—the Spy Museum had already been running virtual programming for years, so I was able to continue teaching workshops remotely," she explains. "Eventually, they opened up a full-time position, and I realized I didn't want to leave."

Liz Mueller

She also helps organize large-scale events like Spy Fest, where intelligence agencies set up demonstrations and showcase real espionage technology.

But Mueller's enthusiasm extends beyond event planning; it's rooted in the fascinating artifacts and stories she shares daily. One of her favorite pieces is a World War I pigeon camera—an early precursor to drone surveillance.

"They didn't have modern technology for aerial reconnaissance, so they strapped tiny cameras to pigeons and let them fly over enemy territory," she says. "You can actually see parts of their wings in the photos."

The museum stands out not just for its gadgets and technology but also for its focus on human stories, particularly those that are often overlooked in traditional history. A notable example is Virginia Hall, a World War II spy who used a wooden leg named "Cuthbert." Hall's unconventional path to espionage resonates deeply with Mueller, who first researched her for a seventh-grade history project.

"She wasn't who you'd picture as a spy—she was underestimated at every turn. And yet, she was one of the most effective intelligence operatives of her time," Mueller says. "In a way, that mirrors what we do at the museum—we challenge expectations and uncover the hidden stories behind history."

Plan your visit to the International Spy Museum today at *spymuseum.org*

The International Spy Museum and a World War I pigeon camera.

CULTIVATING JOY AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TOYS AND MINIATURES

Kansas City, Mo.

The green roofs, the red chimneys, the yellow windows—**Faith Ordonio, M.A.T. '20**, can still picture the Lincoln Logs scattered across her childhood floor. For hours, she'd lose herself in constructing elaborate cabins and sprawling towns, transforming simple wooden beams into entire worlds. Back then, toys were just a source of joy and imagination. Now, they're the centerpiece of her career.

A high school aptitude test first sparked Ordonio's interest in museums, suggesting a future as a curator. Inspired by this idea, she studied history and geography at the University of Missouri.

However, an internship at the State Historical Society of Missouri helped her discover where she truly belonged—not in curation, but education. While helping prepare for the Missouri Bicentennial, she saw firsthand the impact of making history come alive.

"It was really cool prepping for that and seeing the kids get excited for the Bicentennial of Missouri statehood coming up," she recalls.

This experience ignited her passion for museum education and ultimately led her to GW, where she found a community that shared her vision.

"I felt like I found 'my people'—people who love museums as much as I do and want to make them more inviting and engaging for visitors."

Then, just weeks before Ordonio's graduation, the coronavirus pandemic hit.

"It was a great time to be in a lot of debt and look for a job that didn't exist," she quips, highlighting the challenging circumstances she faced upon entering the job market.

After a brief stint as a substitute teacher in Missouri, Ordonio spent three years as a school programs educator in upstate New York (a time she wryly refers to as "enduring three Adirondack winters"). This experience, she notes, provided her with

TOP: A miniature Girl Scout cookie booth. BOTTOM: Frank Lloyd Wright's son, John, invented Lincoln Logs in 1916.

Faith Ordonio

LINCOLN LOGS, 1928, J.L. WRIGHT, INC., 1928, UNITED STATES. PHOTO BY THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TOYS AND MINIATURES.

valuable classroom teaching experience, skills that ultimately helped her secure her position at the National Museum of Toys and Miniatures in Kansas City, Mo.

The National Museum of Toys and Miniatures, founded in 1982 by Barbara Hall Marshall and Mary Harris Francis, houses a collection of nearly 100,000 objects. It features both toys and fine-scale miniatures, two distinct categories, though both are typically small in size.

As the museum's K-12 and family programs educator, Ordonio orchestrates learning experiences that make history tangible and exciting for young visitors. Her days are a mix of high-energy sessions with students and careful planning, ensuring every activity fosters both learning and wonder.

One initiative Ordonio is especially proud of is helping local Girl Scouts earn their Miniaturist Badge. The badge was originally created as a "make-your-own" badge by a Girl Scout troop in the Chesapeake Bay area but hadn't been implemented widely outside that region. When Ordonio, a lifelong Girl Scout, learned about the badge, she recognized an opportunity.

"I thought, 'This is perfect for Kansas City—we're literally the National Museum of Toys and Miniatures!'" she recalls.

So she designed a workshop for the girls to create their own miniature cookie booths, crafted from real cookie boxes.

"There was a ton of prep involved—we spent days cutting out miniature cookie boxes, making tiny cookies out of clay and using X-Acto knives to pre-cut doors so they could complete their booths in just two hours," she explains. "But seeing their pride in their work made it all worth it."

A few weeks later, one of the Girl Scouts from the program recognized Ordonio at the museum and excitedly introduced her to her grandmother. That "full-circle moment" highlighted the impact of Ordonio's work—not only teaching children about history but also creating positive memories.

"My favorite thing is when kids walk out of the museum saying, 'This was the best day ever! I want to come here again!'"

Plan your visit to the National Museum of Toys and Miniatures today at *toyandminiaturemuseum.org*

PHOTO BY BRIDGIT BEYER. COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

SPARKING CONVERSATION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

New York City

Picture an artist, scrolling through Instagram, discovering a vibrant community connecting them to museums and art lovers across the globe. That's the vision **Karen Vidangos, M.A. '17**, is helping to realize. From recognizing the need for a centralized space for Latinx artists to shaping the social media strategy at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Vidangos is driven by a powerful goal: to break down barriers and amplify underrepresented voices in the art world.

Like many of her peers, Vidangos' path to museum work wasn't straightforward. As an undergraduate studying art history, she knew she loved museums but wasn't sure where she fit within them. It was a professor who recognized her potential and encouraged her to pursue GW's museum studies program—a decision that proved pivotal.

"It really shaped how I think about museums and my role in them," she says.

After earning her master's degree, Vidangos spent nearly a decade building expertise in digital engagement and audience development before landing her current position as the Met's senior manager of social media. "Now I realize this is what I have been working towards," she says. "This is the culmination of everything I have tried to build in the museum field."

Founded in 1870, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City is one of the world's largest and most prestigious museums, with a collection spanning over 5,000 years of art. Its vast galleries attract millions of visitors each year, but Vidangos is helping the museum reach even more people—far beyond its physical walls.

"Social media has been incredible for museums to share their collections with a much wider audience—some who may never be able to step foot in New York City and experience the Met," she says.

At the Met, Vidangos takes a big-picture approach to social media, crafting digital storytelling strategies that reflect the museum's diverse audience. Collaborating across departments, she ensures that exhibitions and collections resonate with both national and international audiences.

"I think about our audience and how we want to engage them—whether it's through exhibition previews, behind-the-scenes content or interactive campaigns that invite the public to share their own perspectives," she explains. Social media, in her view, isn't just

a marketing tool; it's a way to democratize access to art and amplify underrepresented voices.

Historically, museums have been exclusive spaces, and Vidangos is determined to change that. By fostering online conversations and highlighting diverse narratives, she's ensuring the Met isn't just preserving history—it's evolving to be more inclusive.

"Social media allows for multiple perspectives," she says. "It doesn't just come from a curatorial level. Now, people can engage with our collection on their own terms, bringing their own experiences and interpretations to the conversation."

Beyond her role at the Met, Vidangos has taken personal action to address the lack of representation in the art world. She founded the Latinx Art Collective, a digital platform dedicated to increasing visibility for Latinx artists. Through virtual exhibitions, artist talks and social media campaigns, the collective has become a vital hub for connection, engagement and advocacy.

"I realized there was no centralized space for Latinx artists," she says. "So I created one."

Navigating the museum world as a Latinx professional hasn't always been easy. Vidangos has encountered the industry's inherent elitism and moments of feeling like an outsider. "You feel like you're stepping into a world where you do not belong, where you are marginalized or feel marginalized," she admits. But instead of retreating, she has leaned into her identity, using it as a source of strength. "I have been unapologetic about who I am and what I stand for," she says. "I want to make changes. I want to elevate and amplify Black and Brown voices."

Her work is already making an impact. She's seen museums—including the Met—engage more deeply with local communities and independent creators. She champions social media as a bridge between these institutions and the dynamic cultural spaces where art is discussed, created and redefined. "Museums can no longer exist as isolated entities," she says. "We have to meet people where they are."

And as for where she is, Vidangos hopes she's found a place to stay for the long haul.

"I didn't think that already I would find an institution that I truly felt at home with," she says with a smile, "but I think the Met might be that place."

Plan your visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art today at *metmuseum.org*

LEADING A VISION AT THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Richmond, Va.

As a boy, **Alex Nyerges, B.A. '79, M.A. '82**, spent countless weekends riding the bus to the Rochester Museum & Science Center, captivated by the magic of its vast collections. Little did he know that those childhood immersions—among ancient artifacts and artistic wonders—were laying the foundation for his future.

But the museum offered only half of his artistic education. The other half unfolded at home, where creativity flourished. His mother, a tuberculosis survivor, painted daily, transforming their house into a living gallery, while his father, an immigrant factory worker from Hungary, meticulously crafted frames, proudly displaying his wife's work.

"My mom was just enamored with art," Nyerges recalls. "She spent the last 30 years of her life painting every day, and my dad made the frames and cut the mats for her."

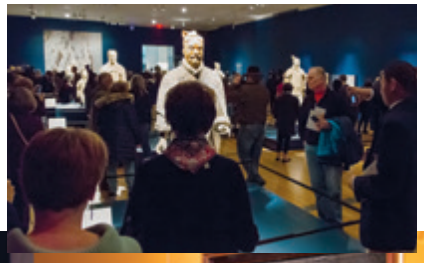
Surrounded by both institutional collections and intimate, hands-on artistry, Nyerges developed a deep appreciation for the arts. Yet, his first love wasn't painting—it was archeology. He arrived at GW as an archaeology major, envisioning a career unearthing the past. But that dream changed after a summer dig in eastern Colorado.

"I decided I hated dirt and wanted to work inside a museum, not out in the field," he recounts with a laugh. "I also decided I hated archeology; I was more interested in the objects themselves."

That revelation led him to GW's museum studies program, where he set his sights on museum leadership. Fresh out of school, he landed his first directorship at Florida's DeLand Museum of Art.

"I was it—the curator, PR director, development officer, even the guy helping with maintenance," he says. "It was the best learning experience I could have asked for."

Nyerges thrived, gaining hands-on expertise in every facet of museum operations. From DeLand, he moved to the Mississippi Museum of Art, where he pioneered the nation's first statewide branch museum system, bringing fine art to underserved communities. He then spent 14 years at the Dayton Art Institute, expanding programming, fundraising and community engagement.



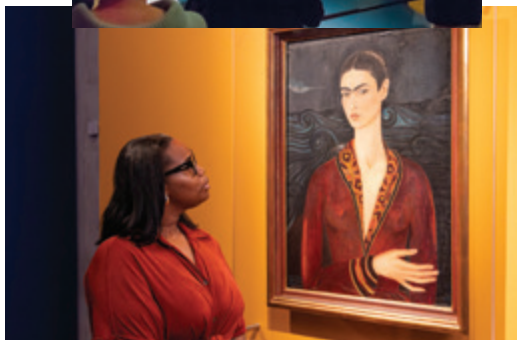


PHOTO BY SANDRA SELLARS. COURTESY OF THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Visitors explore "Terracotta Army: Legacy of the First Emperor of China" [ABOVE] and "Frida: Beyond the Myth".

PHOTO BY DAVID STOVER

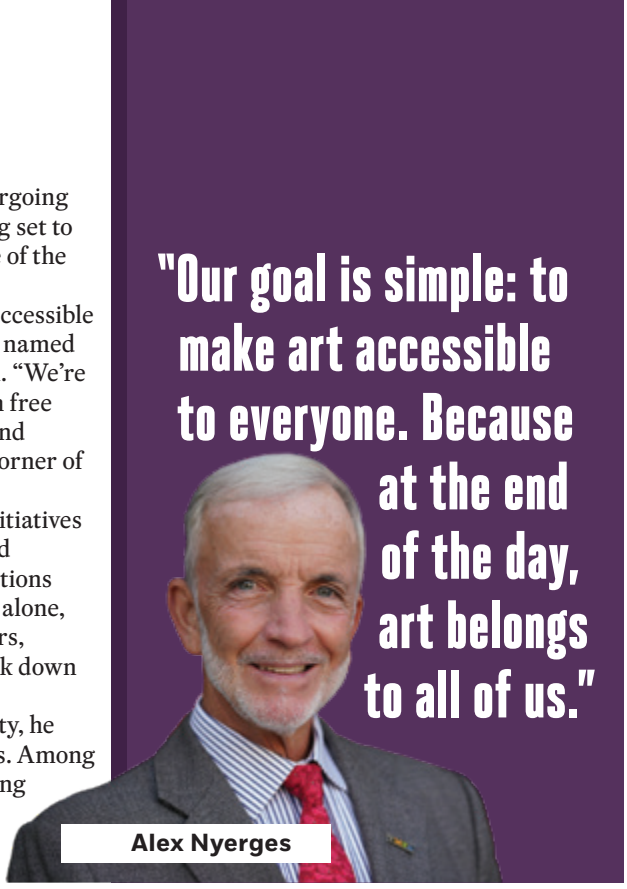
His success in Dayton caught the attention of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), which recruited him in 2006 to lead the Richmond-based institution into a new era. Today, as director and CEO, Nyerges oversees a $60 million budget, a staff of 700 and a museum that welcomes more than two million visitors annually.

Under his leadership, VMFA is undergoing a historic expansion, with a new wing set to open in 2028—poised to make it one of the nation's largest art museums.

"Our goal is simple: to make art accessible to everyone," says Nyerges, who was named a GW Monumental Alumnus in 2021. "We're the only major U.S. art museum with free general admission 365 days a year, and we're committed to reaching every corner of Virginia."

One of VMFA's most impactful initiatives is the Artmobile, a climate-controlled traveling museum that brings exhibitions to communities statewide. Last year alone, the program reached 375,000 visitors, reinforcing Nyerges' mission to break down barriers to art.

Beyond expansion and accessibility, he has strengthened VMFA's collections. Among his proudest achievements is acquiring the world's largest collection of traditional Tanzanian artwork, surpassing even Tanzania's national museum. Another deeply personal milestone was curating an exhibition on Hungarian-American photographers, inspired by his father's passion for photography.



Alex Nyerges

"I worked on that exhibition for over a decade," he says. "Seeing it come to life at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, then at VMFA, and soon at the George Eastman Museum—it's been a dream come true."

With Nyerges at the helm, VMFA has embraced both tradition and innovation, cementing its role as a cultural hub for generations to come. His vision extends beyond exhibitions and acquisitions—he sees museums as essential community spaces that educate, inspire and bring people together.

"In 30 years, I see VMFA reaching even more Virginians, making art a part of their everyday lives," he says. "Because at the end of the day, art belongs to all of us."

Plan your visit to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts today at *vmfa.museum*

PHOTO BY JAY PAUL, COURTESY OF THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

In the KITCHEN with DEB

The alumna behind Smitten Kitchen, Deb Perelman, talks about her somewhat dizzying rise to fame, her undying dedication to home cooking, her favorite recipes and more.

RACHEL MUIR, STORY
WILLIAM ATKINS, PHOTOS

It started with a Thai smoky eggplant salad, followed by a strawberry sorbet and then an onion pizza. It was 2006, and Deb Perelman, B.A. '98, M.A. '00, was documenting her culinary exploits on her freshly minted blog. (The verdict on the salad: "not going to pretend I'm in love with it.")

Nearly 20 years and more than a thousand recipes later, Perelman's Smitten Kitchen blog is one of the most popular cooking sites on the internet. She has a following on social media that numbers 2 million on Instagram. And she has authored three New York Times-bestselling cookbooks.

It's been a busy couple of decades.

Browse through her site and you'll find salted caramel peach crisp, strawberry lemonade, brisket with braised onions, potato leek soup, chicken with zucchini and pesto, and the list goes on and on and on. You can click on a "surprise me" link to get a randomly generated recipe like gazpacho or steak sandwiches or dreamy cream scones. She has more than 150 videos to illustrate how to make her recipes.

Like its creator, Smitten Kitchen is unfussy, funny, kind and unpretentious. Since day one, the blog has candidly charted Perelman's successes and failures in her now famously tiny Manhattan kitchen. And a fair amount of that cooking was done with her two small children (now ages 15 and nine) underfoot. She still answers emails and takes all the photos herself.

Perelman says the site's popularity and longevity has been somewhat flabbergasting. "Honestly, I fully expected Smitten Kitchen to last six months," she says. Perelman earned an undergrad degree at GW in psychology and fine arts and then a master's in art therapy. But after five years as a therapist, "it was clear to me that it was not the thing I wanted to be doing."

Perelman had no formal training or restaurant experience, but cooking was something she'd always liked to do. "I was then and am still obsessed with the idea of your one recipe, your go-to for a certain thing, like tomato sauce or fried chicken," she says. "It's about the recipe I want to make forever." Plus, she adds, creating a blog was what you did in the early 2000s. (Perelman had a prior blog called Smitten, which she met her husband through. So blogs can pay off in multiple ways.)

"I don't think I've ever had a full picture of why it took off," she says. "Maybe it was the right time and the right place or maybe it was just a way of talking about cooking without authority that I think people responded to.

"I really wanted it to be a conversation. I wanted it to be fun and chatty. I mean, I didn't really know how else to do it," she says. "I wasn't going to insult your intelligence by explaining to you what a blood orange was, nor was I going to tell you were doing something wrong if you were doing it in a way that works for you. I still feel that way."

It's an approach that resonates not only with home cooks but also with classically trained chefs.

David Lebovitz, the bestselling author and world-renowned chef, says Perelman "has been able to tap into the thrill, angst and joy of baking and cooking.

"When she came on the scene, many of us finally found someone who we could relate to, who was curious and inquisitive in the kitchen, who was happy to try new things and to perfect recipes," he says. "She put her neuroses about cooking in plain sight, which made her disarmingly popular amongst anyone who struggled with the question: What should I make?"

The Process

Perelman says recipe development is still her favorite part—even though her process is, shall we say, unorthodox. "Oh boy," she says when asked to describe it, "it's totally insane."

Perelman contrasts hers with that of Serious Eats, the award-winning food and drink website that takes a scientific and meticulous approach to recipe development that can entail making a dish 40 or 50 times. "You will never see me working on a mac and cheese recipe even 25 times in a month," Perelman says. "I don't want to eat mac and cheese 25 times in a month."

At any given time Perelman has a couple hundred recipes she is working on all at different stages of development. Her strategy is to take very thorough notes and then come back to recipes when she's craving them again.

Perelman says she particularly likes revisiting her earliest recipes. "I know so much more about cooking now than I did in 2006 in terms of how I'd write a recipe, why I would never use a certain method and, in general, this is how I would make this now."

These days Perelman typically posts 25 or 30 new recipes a year. In the beginning, though, she posted a couple recipes a week, which she calls "wild" in hindsight.

Blog to Bestseller

Her first book, "The Smitten Kitchen Cookbook," was published in 2012. She describes it as a "love letter to approachable, uncompromised home cooking." But it almost didn't happen.

"I was so resistant to writing a cookbook," Perelman says. "I loved having the site and having the freedom to write about whatever I wanted to cook that day." She had also heard horror stories of food bloggers being pushed into impossible turnaround times or having to cede control of content and design.

Perelman's longtime agent, Alison Fargis recognized Smitten Kitchen's appeal right away. "Deb Perelman is a one-woman culinary powerhouse who doesn't just write and develop all her recipes—she lives them, tests them to perfection and answers your

panicked pie crust questions herself," Fargis says. "In a world of outsourced content, Deb is Smitten Kitchen, start to finish. That's why everything she makes works, and why we trust her with dinner, dessert and everything in between."

Fargis reached out to Perelman in 2008, and that email sat in Perelman's inbox for a year. Perelman only started to revisit her decision when her first child was born. She asked herself: What does a legacy look like? Is it a URL? Perelman wanted something more tangible than a website.

The accolades came swiftly both in news outlets and from home cooks. The LA Times called "The Smitten Kitchen Cookbook" "a joy to read." Amazon picked it as one of its top 10 cookbooks of the year. A reviewer on Amazon (where it has close to five stars and more than 2,000 reviews) wrote that the cookbook "is comfort food refined and perfected" and "by far one of my favorite cookbooks and certainly one that I keep referring to all the time."

Her first book was followed up by two other bestsellers, "Smitten Kitchen Every Day: Triumphant and Unfussy New Favorites," which focuses on simple and delicious meals for real people, and "Smitten Kitchen Keepers: A Kitchen Counter Conversation," which hearkens back to her obsession with creating that one perfect recipe you keep coming back to. Bon Appetit said of "Keepers," which came out in 2022, "This book feels like an old friend who shows up to the party with the eggs you've run out of—plus a perfect carrot cake." All three books were "New York Times" bestsellers.

(At first Perelman wasn't sure what to make of the bestseller status. "Truly, I didn't know anything about publishing," she says. "When I was on my book tour, and they called me to say I was on the New York Times-bestseller list, I was like, cool, that's good, right?")

Playing Favorites

Is picking a favorite recipe like picking a favorite child? Not exactly. "I'm that person that my favorite thing is always the last thing I made or the next thing I make," she says, "like my favorite dress is always the newest one."

Recently, Perelman has been into ziti chickpeas with sausage and kale, a recipe posted earlier this year on her site that she describes as "meaty, greeny, cheesy, beany and spicy."

Other current favorites include ones from her latest book, "Smitten Kitchen Keepers," including a recipe for fettuccine with white ragu— "the coziness, the deliciousness of it is unparalleled"—and the green spaghetti on the book's cover. It's a simple-to-make pasta, roast

IMAGE AND RECIPE COURTESY: SMITTEN KITCHEN

Ziti Chickpeas with Sausage and Kale

SERVINGS: *6* | TIME: *45 MINUTES*

INGREDIENTS

Glug of olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped small

3 garlic cloves, minced

12 ounces sweet or spicy Italian sausage, casings removed

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes, or less to taste

1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes

2 15-ounce cans chickpeas, drained and rinsed

1 6-8-ounce bundle kale, stemmed, or 4 to 5 ounces kale leaves, cut into thin ribbons

3/4 pound mozzarella, coarsely grated (see Note)

2/3 cup finely grated pecorino cheese

Garlic bread, for serving, if you wish

INSTRUCTIONS

Make the meaty chickpeas: Heat a large sauté pan — if yours is ovenproof, you can even use it as your final baking vessel — over medium-high heat. Coat with a couple tablespoons of olive oil, and heat oil. Add onion and garlic and cook until they begin to soften, about 4 minutes. Add ground sausage, 1 teaspoon of kosher salt, lots of freshly ground black pepper, oregano and red pepper flakes and cook, breaking up the sausage with your spoon into bite-sized pieces and browning them, about 6 to 8 minutes. Add tomatoes (beware the splatter) and chickpeas and bring mixture to a boil, then lower the heat to keep it at a simmer. Taste for seasoning; I usually add another 1 teaspoon kosher salt (Diamond brand) and more black pepper here.

Simmer the chickpeas in the sauce for 10 minutes, or if you have more time, simmer them for 20 to 25 minutes, which softens them in a lovely way. If the mixture looks too thick, add 1/2 cup water, 1/4 cup at a time, until you get a thick but saucy consistency. Add kale and let it cook until wilted, 2 to 3 minutes. If you're preparing the dish for later, or skipping the cheese on top, this is a great place to pause the recipe. You could even freeze it at this point.

To finish: Heat your oven's broiler. If your pan isn't ovenproof, transfer chickpea mixture to a baking dish. Scatter the top with both cheeses and broil until the cheese is melted and browned in spots. Eat right away.

Do ahead: See notes within the recipe about where to pause. You can reheat the chickpeas in a 350-degree oven for 15 minutes; I usually keep the lid on.

Note: *If your mozzarella seems wet or comes in water, drain it on paper towels for a while before grating it so the final dish doesn't become too watery. Gluten-free: This dish is (of course) only gluten-free if you exclude the garlic bread or make garlic bread with gf bread.*

"You need that drive to get it right," Perelman says. "You have to be in a place where you think matzo ball soup doesn't ever taste the way it should, or you think pancakes in diners are terrible."

garlic and spinach dish, which is apparently a favorite with toddlers. "A number of people have sent me pictures of their kids with green spaghetti all over their face," Perelman says. "I think they like it because it looks like Play-Doh."

For novice cooks, she recommends starting with "things that never taste right when somebody else makes it.

"You need that drive to get it right," Perelman says. "You have to be in a place where you think matzo ball soup doesn't ever taste the way it should, or you think pancakes in diners are terrible." She advises picking a recipe that has reviews, so you aren't going in in the dark and "have a solid chance that it's going to work."

There is one thing Perelman can't live without in the kitchen: a brasier pan from the French company Staub. She likes it so much she now has a collaboration with Staub, but emphasizes she bought her original one for full price. "I have the receipt from 2014," she says.

The pan is a four-quart Dutch oven that also doubles as a sauté pan, casserole dish and soup pot. She likes the lower profile and smaller size. "A few years after I bought it, they stopped selling it. I went to them, and I begged them to bring it back." Hence, the collaboration.

When asked to choose a favorite cookbook, Perelman hesitates then cites Marion Cunningham's "The Breakfast Book." "It's such a classic," she says. The book, which came out in 1987, has nearly 300 recipes spanning pancakes, scones, all kinds of eggs, coffee cake, muffins and more. "I like it so much that it's one of my favorites to give as a gift," she says.

Fame and the Future

"It took me a lot of years to be aware of Smitten Kitchen outside of my apartment," says Perelman, citing the insular nature of cooking and blogging from home.

Perelman still feels somewhat uncomfortable with the fame—albeit grateful for it. "The first time I was recognized I was on the crosstown bus with my kid, and this woman turned to me and said, 'Hi, are you Deb? I love Smitten Kitchen,'" she says. "I didn't know what to do. I had just finished an apple cider caramel recipe, and I had a few in my purse so I offered her a caramel.

"I'm like an old lady with candies in her purse," she says. "I have the social skills of somebody who sits in front of a laptop all day by themselves." (She does not.)

The cookbooks aren't her only venture beyond the blog. Perelman also has a newish podcast, the Recipe, on which she and Kenji López-Alt, the acclaimed Serious Eats chef, "nerd out" on cooking.

"We pick something each week that we both have recipes for and opinions on," Perelman says. "Sometimes it's kind of niche, like broccoli cheddar soup, but we've also done things like mac and cheese and pancakes that we've both made a lot of in different ways."

The episodes are back-and-forth conversations that end with a few regular wrap-up questions, including whether the recipe can be waffled (tomato soup: not recommended) and whether it can be fried in butter (meatloaf: "amazing"; Caesar salad: "don't even want to think about it").

What's next? Perelman is starting to work on a new cookbook focused on parties and entertaining. "The goal is not to be sweating in the kitchen while everybody has fun without you," she says, "so the cooking will be stress free or be done before people get there."

She wants to talk about the real reasons people shy away from entertaining—and find ways to take the pressure off, she says.

It's that frank, funny and friendly approach that has made her a trusted friend and mentor in millions of kitchens.

"She was able to show us that anyone—even a mom of two cooking in a minuscule New York kitchen—could make scrumptious meals and desserts with relative ease," says Lebovitz. "Deb tapped into our consciousness with her 'can-do' attitude, one that we could all relate (or at least aspire) to." GW

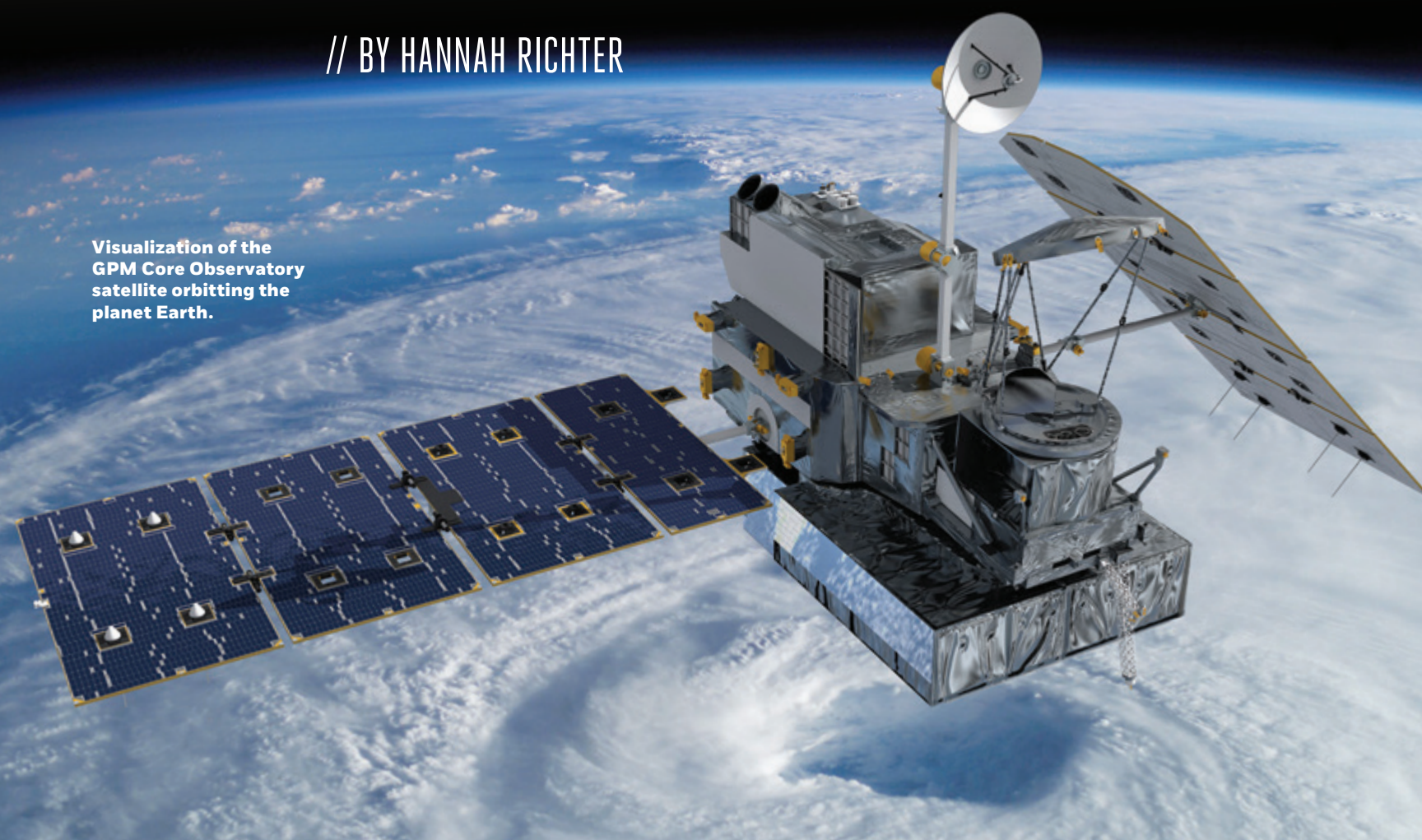
(FROM LEFT) JIUQUAN SATELLITE LIFTOFF: XINHUA, ALAMY STOCK PHOTO / SOYUZ MS-04 LIFTOFF: MULDERPHOTO, ADOBE STOCK

SPACE RACE

(FROM LEFT) STARLINK MISSION LIFTOFF: COURTESY OFFICIAL SPACEX PHOTOS / ARIANE 6 VA263 LIFTOFF: ESA-S. CORVAJA

Space exploration has evolved from a two-nation race into a dynamic, global enterprise. In this new era, experts at GW's Space Policy Institute are shaping the next generation of policymakers, industry leaders and scholars.

// BY HANNAH RICHTER



Visualization of the GPM Core Observatory satellite orbitting the planet Earth.

In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first human-made object to breach the vast expanse of space. It supercharged the American space program, landing humans on the moon just over a decade later.

But once boots touched the powdery lunar surface, U.S. space progress was more like a "long, slow cook," says Scott Pace, the director of the George Washington University's Space Policy Institute (SPI).

At first, only the government had a significant role in America's space activities, with NASA—a civilian agency—and the military designing and operating nearly everything from lunar landers and planetary probes to spy satellites. Then, the civil space industry took off in the '60s and '70s with the launch of commercial communications satellites and private companies manufacturing hardware for NASA and the national security community. Within a few decades, companies like SpaceX, Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic radically reimagined what commercial space could offer, with new pursuits like space tourism and reusable rockets.

As America found its space legs, so too did other countries. China, India, Canada, Japan and European nations developed into spacefarers with scientific, civil and military capabilities. Others, like the U.S.'s first space competitor, Russia, faltered due to political and financial instabilities.

Now space has "grown up," says Henry Hertzfeld, a research professor of space policy and international affairs at SPI. "It's really not the same type of space race that we had in the 1960s."

Today's space-based systems have become essential to everyday civilian life. The more than 10,000 satellites in orbit support everything from cell phone service and weather forecasting to the GPS in smartphones and cars.

Asking someone to imagine their life without space today is "almost like saying imagine your life without electricity," says Deganit Paikowsky, an Israel-based nonresident scholar at the SPI who specializes in international relations, politics and national security around space. Preserving its free and fair use has made the geopolitics in the space domain more complex than ever.

A POLICY PIONEER

At the George Washington University, a small group of experts has spent nearly 40 years training generations of space leaders. Housed in GW's Elliott School of International Affairs, SPI is a "bridge between pure academia and policy work," says Pace, who has held leadership positions at NASA and the White House across three administrations.

"It's our ambition to ensure that we are aware of, and ideally part of, any major movement in U.S. space policy," he says. A primary goal is to get students and researchers to "think about governance and regimes that are very, very different from what we have here [on Earth]."

The institute was born out of GW's Program of Policy Studies in Science and Technology, established in 1966 with NASA grants. Designed from its start with a policy focus, the university hired John Logsdon, an expert in space politics and policy, in 1968. By 1973, Logsdon was running space-related courses and research for a small group of master's students. But it wasn't until the 1986 Challenger disaster that an official Space Policy Institute took shape.

"There got to be a lot of talk in the Washington space community about the need for an independent think tank on space issues," recalls Logsdon. "I woke up one morning and realized we were already doing that, and so [we] just put a new sign on the door."

Today's SPI operates with a few veteran experts, like Pace, Logsdon and Hertzfeld, plus around 10 other full-time, part-time

"THERE GOT TO BE A LOT OF TALK IN THE WASHINGTON SPACE COMMUNITY ABOUT THE NEED FOR AN INDEPENDENT THINK TANK ON SPACE ISSUES. I WOKE UP ONE MORNING AND REALIZED WE WERE ALREADY DOING THAT, AND SO [WE] JUST PUT A NEW SIGN ON THE DOOR."

John Logsdon
EXPERT IN SPACE POLITICS AND POLICY

OPPOSITE: BRITT GRISWOLD FOR NASA GODDARD SPACE FLIGHT CENTER / LOGSDON: SPACE POLICY INSTITUTE

ABOVE Scott Pace teaches classes at GW on topics such as space power and global affairs, and tools and scenarios in U.S. space policy. He has testified before the House Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics about the Artemis Program and NASA's path to human exploration of the moon, Mars and beyond.

and associated faculty. (Logsdon became a professor emeritus and retired as institute director in 2008.) It also welcomes short-term visiting and nonresident scholars from around the world with expertise across space politics and industry who conduct research, publish papers and lead seminars for students.

Few master's degree programs offer space policy concentrations, enabling GW to carve out a niche. "The best place to study policy is where policy is made," says Logsdon, who served on the Columbia Accident Investigation Board that examined the causes of the 2003 Columbia space shuttle disaster. "We are one of the very few places you could enroll and have the reasonable opportunity to rub shoulders with the people that are doing what you came to study." The institute often invites such experts into classrooms and to join panels—from policymakers, to NASA administrators like Michael Griffin and Charles Bolden to international space agency leaders like Josef Aschbacher, the European Space Agency's director general.

SPI aims to prepare graduates to enter public service, industry and think tanks, rather than retain them in academia. With customizable courses and frontline research, the institute teaches students the languages of law, policy and economics in a nonpartisan environment—a good fit for individuals trying to switch or advance in their existing careers, says Pace. Some of its faculty also advise doctoral students pursuing dissertations on space politics, policy and engineering management.

The formula works well: SPI graduates have gone on to serve in leadership roles in government agencies, Congress, private companies and think tanks, from a deputy administrator at NASA to C-suite executives at SpaceX.

SPI is "a powerhouse in space policy," says Bhavya Lal, Ph.D. '12, former NASA associate administrator for technology, policy and strategy, and an alumna of GW's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration. "It's a go-to place for serious discussions that actually move space policy forward."

THE NEW SPACE ECONOMY

One of the most significant changes SPI has tracked in space is the shift from government monopoly to private sector engagement. A few decades ago, Earth's economy only went

PACE: WILLIAM ATKINS / CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY: COURTESY SPACE POLICY INSTITUTE

"100 kilometers up—as far as an airplane," says Lal.

But today there are more than 12,000 space-focused companies, more than half of which are American. In 2024, SpaceX launched into space 138 times—more than half of all worldwide launches, government or otherwise. And in March, Texas-based Firefly Aerospace became the first company in history to successfully land a private spacecraft on the moon.

Still, all this commercial activity was not the "big bang" it may seem, says Paikowsky. In fact, commercialization has been steadily growing for over 50 years and began as a solution to a financial pickle. As U.S.-U.S.S.R. tensions eased in the '70s and '80s, "the initial strategic incentives that ignited the whole space age decreased," Paikowsky explains. The U.S. government had less Cold War cash to spend on space, yet satellites were increasingly important for civil functions like communications, Earth observation and navigation. "Kicking off a commercial environment was a solution to that question [of] how to use space in an affordable way," she says. Regulation changes and government incentives then helped the space industry grow.

According to Lal, NASA has mostly moved "from owner to customer, consumer and partner" of space infrastructure. For example, in lieu of a government space shuttle, SpaceX has transported astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) since 2020 in a sort of space taxi agreement. NASA also partners with industry to advance science through its Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) mission. Over the next few years, 14 private companies will attempt to deliver science instruments to the moon to study everything from lunar dust to radiation exposure to potential water sources. Firefly Aerospace's lunar landing was the first CLPS success.

At the SPI, courses and research have evolved "from almost totally [about] government to government-private sector relationships" that reflect developments in the real world, says Logsdon.

There's a wide range in how nations balance their government interests and commercial enterprises in space. Russia's private space sector, for example, never flourished due to political barriers and funding challenges, says Pace. According to Lal, China's commercial sector is "coming up fast" because of high levels of entrepreneurship and government and private investment. Japan and Europe are trying to grow their commercial space sectors, though they have access to far less venture capital and private equity funding than the United States and China, according to Pace and Lal.

The private sector is not a panacea, however. In the United States, there are a number of critical functions still spearheaded by NASA, particularly those that are especially advanced, risky or unlikely to have a business purpose, says Pam Melroy, an astronaut, former NASA deputy administrator and recurring guest of the SPI. For example, NASA's aeronautics work includes engineering aircraft to avoid supersonic booms and developing planes that fly without human pilots. The government is also more advanced at forecasting weather and tracking space objects at scale to avoid collisions.

> **"IF A NATION IS NOT GOOD AT SPACE, THEY'RE GOING TO BE FALLING BEHIND IN ALL OF THEIR INDUSTRIES."**
>
> **Pam Melroy**
>
> ASTRONAUT AND FORMER NASA DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

COURTESY OF PAM MELROY

"If a nation is not good at space, they're going to be falling behind in all of their industries," says Melroy.

On the military side, the U.S. Department of Defense spends more money on space than NASA does.

"Any war we fight, we need space," says Dean Cheng, a nonresident scholar at the SPI and an expert on China's space program. While nuclear weapons in space are banned, and destroying or interfering with another nation's satellites is internationally discouraged, high-resolution imaging satellites have been used in war since the 1990s to analyze terrain, find targets and track how adversaries are mobilizing. Communication satellites are vital for commanders and forces to relay information quickly across long distances, and navigation satellites like GPS ensure that vehicles, drones and missiles reach their intended destinations.

"There is a recognition that space is the ultimate strategic high ground," says Cheng.

Much of modern space infrastructure is deemed "dual use," meaning the same satellite can serve a combination of national security, civil and scientific purposes. For example, a satellite designed to help image natural resources on Earth may also share its data with military intelligence. On the one hand, this strategy uses satellites more efficiently. On the other hand, it muddles geopolitics, since even seemingly peaceful science efforts might have unseen military functions.

FRIENDS AND FOES

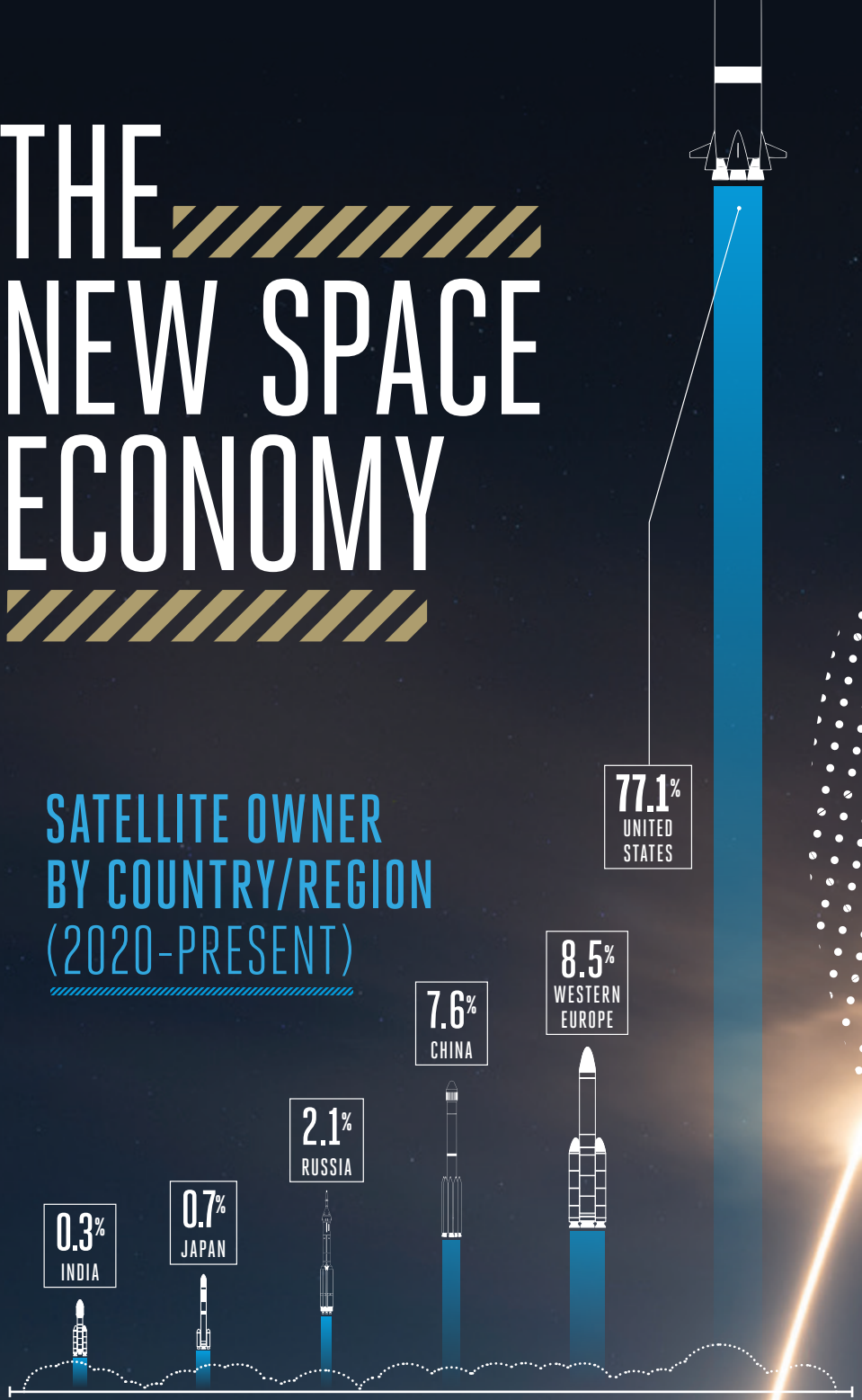
Humanity's presence in space has always been political. Even President John F. Kennedy's decision to send humans to the moon was not for exploration, but to make the United States look more powerful than the U.S.S.R on the world stage, says Pace. Today, developing the most robust anti-missile capabilities, the most powerful rockets and the most fine-resolution remote sensing satellites are all geopolitical goals.

"There's a very different pool of people who are using space today," says Cheng. China, India, Japan, Canada and Europe, among others, have joined the United States and Russia in having developed national space programs. As more countries gain advanced space capabilities, there will also be more allies—and competitors—for the United States.

Smaller and newer spacefaring

THE NEW SPACE ECONOMY

SATELLITE OWNER BY COUNTRY/REGION (2020-PRESENT)

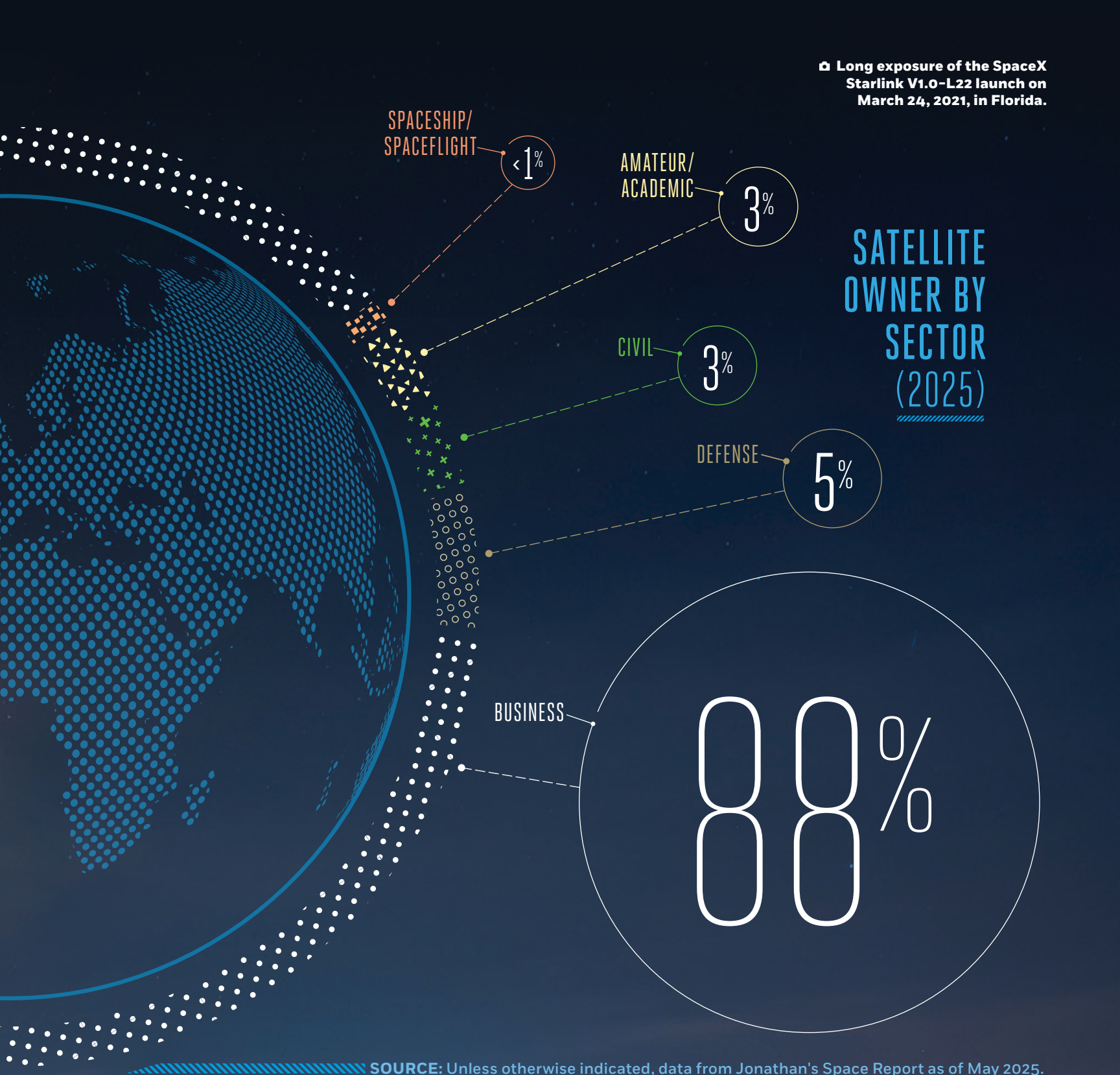


All other countries and regions combined own 3.6% of remaining satellites.

$1.8T Estimated worth of the global space economy by 2035. (McKinsey & Company)

~11,000 Active payloads in orbit. (ESA Space Environment Report 2025)

DANIEL HULL, ADOBE STOCK



Long exposure of the SpaceX Starlink V1.0-L22 launch on March 24, 2021, in Florida.

SATELLITE OWNER BY SECTOR (2025)

SOURCE: Unless otherwise indicated, data from Jonathan's Space Report as of May 2025.

~40,000 Objects in space tracked by space surveillance networks. (ESA Space Environment Report 2025)

1.2M Estimated number of space debris objects in orbit larger than 1 cm in size. (ESA Space Environment Report 2025)

countries tend to focus on niches that will make themselves desirable partners for space powerhouses like the United States. For example, Paikowsky's homeland of Israel has worked specifically on developing small and light satellites for Earth observation that could also be used for national security.

For more dominant space nations, being active in space is about "setting the agenda...the values, the rules [and] the identities," says Paikowsky. In a space race, the leading countries exercise soft power by setting the rubrics and etiquette of the game—for example, by stating their intentions to colonize Mars, developing capabilities to mine lunar resources or pledging to clean up space junk.

By nature of its financial and engineering requirements, space exploration fosters significant international collaboration. The ISS, a partnership between the United States, Russia, Japan, Canada and Europe, is the best-known example. The James Webb Space Telescope involved contributions from Canada and 12 European countries. The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar mission (NISAR), likely the most advanced and expensive Earth-observing radar satellite yet, is set to launch in 2025 as a collaboration between the United States' and India's national space agencies.

"Sometimes space people think we should cooperate in space, and it could prove we can cooperate on Earth," says Pace. But "it's the other way around—you cooperate with your friends." Pace calls space a "lagging indicator of the state of geopolitics."

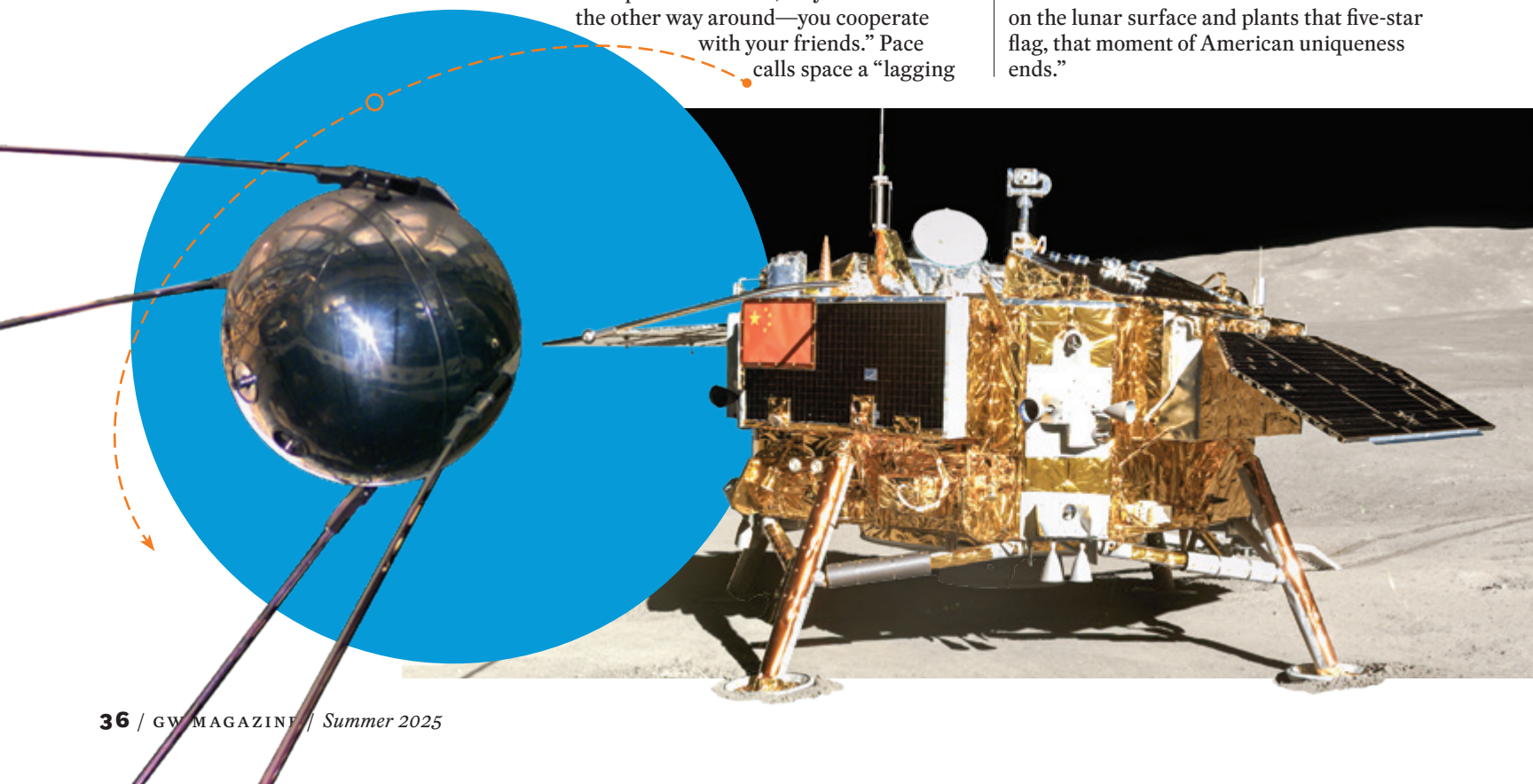
No relationship better highlights that dynamic than the United States and China. In 2011, Congress passed the Wolf Amendment, a law that prohibits NASA from using federal funds to work directly with the Chinese government without specific congressional approval. Its reach often extends to forbidding Chinese nationals from attending NASA conferences or visiting NASA facilities.

While the amendment was intended to protect American intelligence and technology while taking an official stance against Chinese human rights violations, some experts believe it has propelled China toward an independent and increasingly successful space program. China has its own weather satellites, GPS equivalent, lunar sample returns and Mars rovers. Its permanently crewed space station, Tiangong, has the potential to foster powerful alliances with other spacefaring nations like Russia as the ISS nears retirement. China has also helped countries like Nigeria, Venezuela, Ethiopia and Pakistan launch satellites, and it boasts a growing commercial space sector.

There is a "general recognition that China is posing a greater and greater threat to America's space preeminence," says Cheng. China and the United States are eyeing two major goals: taking humans back to the moon and bringing home Mars rocks. Though scientists are eager to see rock samples from another planet, being the only country to put astronauts on the moon has been "a key part of American exceptionalism," says Cheng. "When the first Chinese astronaut bounces on the lunar surface and plants that five-star flag, that moment of American uniqueness ends."

"WHEN THE FIRST CHINESE ASTRONAUT BOUNCES ON THE LUNAR SURFACE AND PLANTS THAT FIVE-STAR FLAG, THAT MOMENT OF AMERICAN UNIQUENESS ENDS."

Dean Cheng
SPI SCHOLAR



BELOW LEFT Replica of Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite to reach outer space. BELOW RIGHT The Chang'e 4 robotic lander on the moon's surface. It was the first spacecraft to land on the far side of the moon.

RIGHT Hertzfeld has testified before the House Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics on commercial space policy, as well as presented to the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. BELOW Books published by Space Policy Institute Scholars Dean Cheng, Aaron Bateman and John Logsdon.

SPI research, classes and symposiums highlight the cruciality of well-considered international space policy. While the United States cannot control other nations' advances, it can make strategic partnerships to further shared goals, like having a larger human presence on the moon. Logsdon and Melroy point to the Antarctic Treaty—which designates the continent a peaceful zone to foster scientific cooperation—as a model that could be replicated in space.

To show leadership, the United States must prioritize convening other nations, says Melroy. In 2020, NASA created the Artemis Accords, in which 53 nations to date have pledged to limit orbital debris, share science data and regulate lunar resource extraction. While China and Russia are not signatories, the Accords help demonstrate strength through numbers and guarantee the United States a seat at the table in space negotiations.

"For years, U.S. philosophy [about space] collaboration was 'my way or the highway,'" says Paikowsky. With the Artemis Accords, she says, the United States acknowledges that leading the modern space era requires allies and cooperation, not just expert engineering or national strength.

Today as in the past, "great powers don't just...race each other" in space, she says. "They compete for the attention and support of the international community."

STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

SPI is well-equipped at "making sense of a fast-changing space world," says Lal. No matter the future, the institute will "help make sure space policy keeps up."

SPI frequently hosts panels, book discussions and symposiums on topics from artificial intelligence in space to China's space development. SPI scholars also publish academic papers, resources aimed at government officials, and popular articles and books to explain the history of space to the general public and inform current conversations. For example, Logsdon edited seven volumes of documents on the history and evolution of U.S. involvement in space, while Cheng recently published a book, "China and the New Moon Race," on the country's lunar ambitions.

Another key role of SPI experts is to engage in domestic and international policy discussions. Pace and Hertzfeld have both provided congressional testimony, including before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense and the House Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics. Pace also participates in annual meetings of the UN Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and he has crafted national space policy on GPS, human space exploration and cybersecurity during his years in government.

SPI will also continue to teach students and advise policymakers on developing a space economy that preserves national interests, such as whether nations should mine the moon or asteroids for resources such as metals and water, or build space-based depots for propellant—in essence, space gas stations—to extend the life of spacecraft, Lal says.

On the national security side, Cheng is keeping an eye on lowered launch costs thanks to contributions from commercial companies that may render a space-based missile defense system feasible in the near future—a prospect he says would have bankrupted the government 40 years ago.

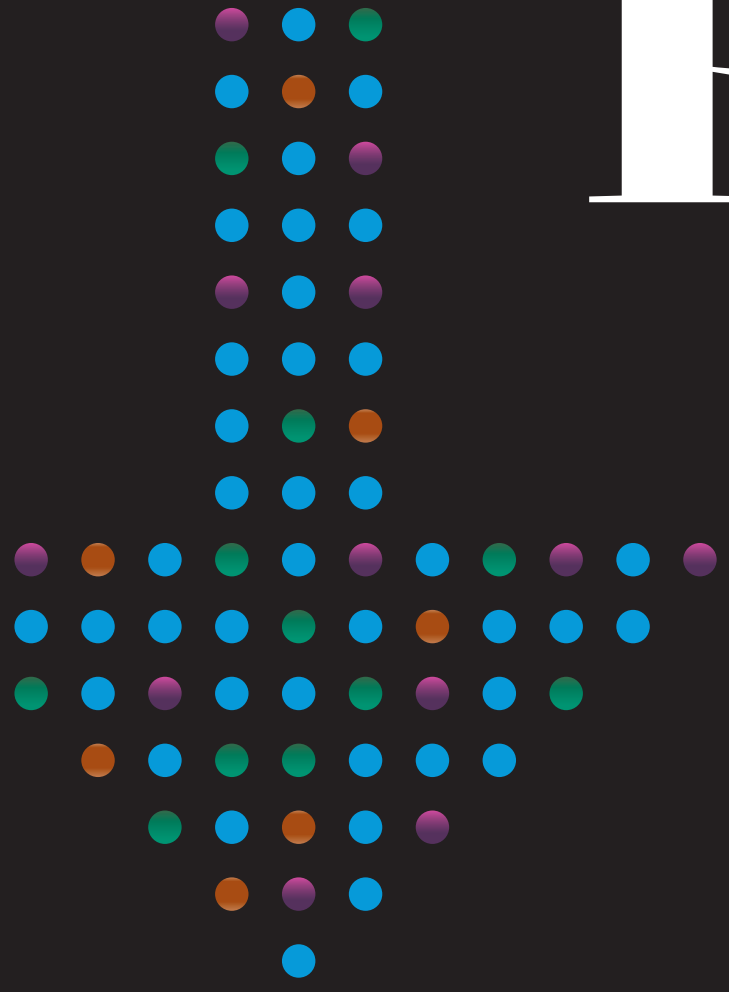
But while industry plays a large role in shaping the U.S. space economy and military, the government, its largest customer, ultimately gets to direct its priorities and regulation. "There's a growing realization that rules are needed," says Logsdon, and the SPI is training students to write them.

Amid all their research and policy priorities, one of the SPI's key tasks is explaining the significance of America's space future to everyone, not just policymakers. "The problem that we've always had," says Hertzfeld, "is that space is one step removed from our routine use; it's abstract." Though space plays a larger role in our economy and geopolitics than ever before, it's largely hidden miles above our heads.

Space is "not so much about flags and boots anymore, although that is certainly a piece of it," says Melroy. Advancing science, growing public services, preserving national security and inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers are all direct returns from strong space policy, she says. At the end of the day, "it's really important to understand that we go to space to benefit life on Earth." GW

OPPOSITE: SPUTNIK: NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM / CHANG E-4 LANDER: SIYU ZHANGAND KEVIN M. GILL, CSNA / HERTZFELD: RICK REINHARD

Alumni Profiles



Our alumni are leaders driving change from the boardroom to the basketball court. Here are some of their stories.

KEEPING THE PENCIL SHARP

ALUMNUS **MARK R. SHENKMAN** *HAS BUILT ONE OF THE LEADING PRIVATELY-OWNED HIGH-YIELD CREDIT FIRMS IN THE WORLD, ALL WHILE MAINTAINING A FAMILY CULTURE.*

by **NICK ERICKSON**

ABBY GREENAWALT

SHENKMAN M.B.A. '67, HON '25

LEFT TO RIGHT **Ted Bernhard, M.B.A. '98; David Lerner, B.A. '90; Mark R. Shenkman, M.B.A. '67, HON '25; and James Larsen, B.A. '07**

It wasn't the $80 million trade he had just made that ultimately pushed **Mark R. Shenkman, M.B.A. '67, HON '25**, to entrepreneurial independence. It was a $10 pencil sharpener.

In the summer of 1985, Shenkman, who had already logged 16 years in the financial industry, was the president/CIO at an asset management firm, the final one he would work for that did not bear his name. At this firm, the common practice was for the two principals to hold their weekly meeting with him at 3:30 p.m. on Thursdays. However, he was summoned for a special meeting on a Tuesday at 11 a.m. He expected to discuss the $80 million trade, but was instead asked to reimburse the firm for the pencil sharpener that his assistant had ordered.

"That $10 sharpener was management company money; the $80 million was client money, and that could wait until Thursday's afternoon meeting," Shenkman recalled.

That incident illustrated a difference in priorities that would prove to be the final straw. He handed over $10 in cash, took the pencil sharpener and immediately resigned.

A month later—July 22, 1985—he formed Shenkman Capital with no clients, no employees, but with a dream.

"It was a big risk," said Shenkman, who at the time had two young boys and a mortgage in an expensive Connecticut town. "But I had conviction in what I was doing."

He won. Big.

This July, Shenkman Capital will celebrate its 40th anniversary and over the years the firm has become an industry leader in the leveraged finance market. The firm has grown from a single employee—Shenkman himself—to a team of approximately 150 with offices located in New York City, Stamford, Conn., Boca Raton, Fla., and London. As one of the largest privately owned high-yield credit firms in the world, Shenkman Capital manages approximately $35 billion in assets. "I built the company on a bootstrap basis: more clients, more team members, more capabilities—step by step," Shenkman said.

As a pioneer in the leveraged finance market, he was inducted into the Fixed Income Analyst Society Hall of Fame in 2018 and was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Museum of American Finance in 2023.

Earlier this spring, Shenkman, a Monumental Alumnus of the George Washington University, added an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to his long list of achievements when he was recognized at Commencement on the National Mall. His influence is spread far and wide as a financier, collector and philanthropist, all of which have been felt at GW.

"Mark Shenkman exemplifies how perseverance and purpose can change lives," said President Ellen M. Granberg. "His drive, vision and generosity have propelled him to remarkable heights, and from there, he has opened doors for generations of GW students to dream bigger, raise higher and lead with impact. We are incredibly proud of Mark's success as a GW alumnus and profoundly grateful for all that he has done to strengthen and support his alma mater."

Abraham Lincoln once said that the best way to predict the future is to create it. Shenkman, a connoisseur and collector of American history, has lived by those words. He was rewarded when he took a big risk in 1985 and now has achieved professional and personal success.

Perched on a middle bookshelf in the firm's state-of-the-art, 29th-floor office overlooking the Times Square Ball in Midtown Manhattan? The $10 pencil sharpener that sparked the creation of his future dream.

Shenkman's Journey

While other kids read comics, Shenkman devoured the pages of Forbes. His father, a second-generation entrepreneur, had provided him with subscriptions to such business publications as The Wall Street Journal, Businessweek and Barron's.

"My dad would tear out articles, hand them to me and then asked me questions," said Shenkman, who grew up in Pawtucket, R.I. "I was basically pre-programmed for Wall Street."

Shenkman earned his undergraduate degree in political science at the University

ABBY GREENAWALT

of Connecticut. Already commissioned as an Army officer, he chose to pursue an M.B.A. at GW because of its proximity to the epicenter of American history and politics that he long admired.

During his second year at GW, he took a course called Case Studies in Business Management. Part of the course required writing a career plan—its purpose was for the student to chart their own post-graduation career plan. Shenkman laid out short-, medium- and long-term goals: first, become a securities analyst at a Wall Street firm and then become a managing director at a major firm. He, of course, would do one better by creating his own firm.

This career planning forever stuck with Shenkman, who believes preparedness allows a person to create their own opportunities, as he has achieved throughout his storied career.

"MARK SHENKMAN EXEMPLIFIES HOW PERSEVERANCE AND PURPOSE CAN CHANGE LIVES...HIS DRIVE, VISION AND GENEROSITY HAVE PROPELLED HIM TO REMARKABLE HEIGHTS, AND FROM THERE, HE HAS OPENED DOORS FOR GENERATIONS OF GW STUDENTS TO DREAM BIGGER, RAISE HIGHER AND LEAD WITH IMPACT. WE ARE INCREDIBLY PROUD OF MARK'S SUCCESS AS A GW ALUMNUS AND PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL FOR ALL THAT HE HAS DONE TO STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT HIS ALMA MATER."

—PRESIDENT ELLEN M. GRANBERG

"Having a plan is essential," said Shenkman, who served as a first lieutenant with the U.S. Army Computer Systems Committee at Fort Lee, Va., for two years following his GW graduation. "You may not stick to the plan, but at least you are moving in a direction."

Shenkman spent the first few years of his post-military career searching for a specific direction as he navigated the financial industry.

During this period, he met the financier Michael Milken, HON '23, who later would contribute $50 million to endow the Milken Institute School of Public Health at GW. Milken encouraged Shenkman to find his niche in high-yield bonds, a recommendation that Shenkman immediately pursued.

"You can't be a generalist in this complex world," he said, which is advice he bestows upon students today.

Values and Legacy

Shenkman hired his first employee after meeting the man in the back of a taxi. One was looking for a job, the other fulfilling his dream. In the four decades since, during which Shenkman Capital has turned from a dream into a powerhouse, his foundational business philosophy has remained.

Shenkman seeks team members who are goal oriented, transparent and authentic—values that have helped him build his firm. Over the years, GW graduates with those traits have found their way to Shenkman Capital.

When Ted Bernhard, M.B.A. '98, interviewed for a job with Shenkman Capital in 1998, the firm was well established, but entrepreneurial. Shenkman asked him a simple question: "Are you willing to change light bulbs?"

"It wasn't a trick question —it spoke to the collaborative, all-hands-on-deck culture here," said Bernhard, now a senior vice president and a 27-year veteran of Shenkman Capital. "I would meet CFOs and CEOs during the day and change light bulbs when needed. That spirit of shared responsibility still defines the firm."

At its heart, the firm is a family business that Shenkman treats with a sense of care that fellow GW alumnus James Larsen, B.A. '07, says defines the culture.

"Even as we have grown more complex, the foundational values remain, which require being good stewards of capital, hiring smart and kind people and fostering a collegial environment," said Larsen, Shenkman Capital's deputy general counsel. "It's a rare culture, especially in the credit industry, which can be a sharp-elbowed business."

Alumnus David Lerner, B.B.A. '90, said Wall Street rarely sees family-owned firms like Shenkman Capital. The firm understands every aspect of the credit process, from loan closing to client service, which creates a tight value chain that benefits clients and employees alike.

"He's deeply passionate—not just about markets, but about fairness. He genuinely cares," said Lerner, the firm's head of structured credit. "Even as ownership has been distributed more widely, that culture hasn't changed."

Shenkman also believes in service, giving back and bestowing knowledge and resources that can be passed down. He has co-authored two textbooks on the high-yield market, with GW alumnus Bill Maxwell, Ph.D. '98.

He and his wife, Rosalind, have been deeply involved philanthropically through nonprofits, museums, Jewish causes and at his alma maters: UConn, GW and Wilbraham & Monson Academy.

At GW, Shenkman supported the F. David Fowler Career Center and GW Career Services Enhancement Initiative, as well as several programs at the School of Business. Shenkman also funded the relocation and expansion of GW's Veterans Memorial Park and The Shenkman Initiative: Applying Big Data for Political Success at the Graduate School of Political Management. In 2014, Shenkman Hall was named in his honor, and he takes great pride in having his name attached with a building that houses so many GW students beginning their own journeys.

"I believe education is the cornerstone of a civil society," said Shenkman, who served on the GW Board of Trustees from 2004 to 2016 and is now an emeritus member. "GW was a great experience for me—the location, the professors, the academic programs. Giving back felt natural."

Shenkman's success has been made possible because he established a plan, found his niche and was willing to take a risk and seize the opportunity. Shenkman has retained the $10 pencil sharpener as a cautionary symbol of the consequences of misaligned priorities.

"If you don't plan your life," he said, "fate will decide for you."

M.P.S. '12

GOPALRATNAM

GAME CHANGER

A LIFELONG FAN OF THE BUCKS, ARVIND GOPALRATNAM OVERSEES THE TEAM'S SOCIAL IMPACT AND PHILANTHROPY EFFORTS.

by **TOM KERTSCHER**

COURTESY OF ARVIND GOPALRATNAM

The son of immigrants from India, **Arvind Gopalratnam, M.P.S. '12**, was the first in his family born in the United States. He grew up in Mequon, Wis., a predominantly white Milwaukee suburb with only a handful of classmates who looked like him.

That experience helped prepare him for his current position in the National Basketball Association as vice president of corporate social responsibility for the Milwaukee Bucks and executive director of the Milwaukee Bucks Foundation. In those roles, he leads philanthropic community programs and advocacy efforts for the team he's been a fan of since elementary school.

"Growing up with people that don't all look like you can be a challenge, but it can also be an opportunity to mold you into a special type of communicator," said Gopalratnam (pronounced go-paul-rut-num).

Early on, he learned to make connections with others from different backgrounds—a skill set he still draws on today. Playing sports helped him "embrace American culture while being raised by immigrant parents."

It was a breakthrough when the high school junior varsity baseball coach made him team captain. The recognition was "a validating moment" for him. "Culture doesn't matter, background doesn't matter. It's about who can be the best at what they're doing," he said.

Gopalratnam is now the only Indian American corporate social responsibility leader in the 30-team NBA, a status he calls "empowering and motivating.

"I feel a personal responsibility to further connect my Indian community to the Bucks, professional basketball and careers in sports," he said.

Earlier career work helped Gopalratnam prepare for the Bucks and fulfill a dream to work in sports.

Gopalratnam had been a communications executive at GE HealthCare—where he led the company's sponsorship of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver—when the Bucks hired him in 2016.

In his new job, Gopalratnam was tasked with developing "a strong culture of community impact.

"My mission is to constantly have a good pulse of the community and to figure out different ways that my organization, my colleagues, our philanthropy can impact the people of Wisconsin," Gopalratnam said.

"We have a platform, we have a voice. We're going to use it, especially to be a voice for the voiceless," he said.

"GROWING UP WITH PEOPLE THAT DON'T ALL LOOK LIKE YOU CAN BE A CHALLENGE, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOLD YOU INTO A SPECIAL TYPE OF COMMUNICATOR."

The Bucks' social responsibility efforts focus on justice reform, civic engagement, health and wellness, and youth education and mentoring. Similarly, its foundation gives grants and leads other efforts in education, health and wellness, and civic engagement.

Over the years, donations have supported youth development, mental health, justice reform and civic engagement, benefiting groups such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Running Rebels youth mentoring group, the Wisconsin Equal Justice Fund and Wisconsin Conservation Voices.

Under his leadership, the Bucks have been part of programs to increase voter turnout and help formerly incarcerated people return to the community. The team has also advocated for criminal justice reform.

The team's outreach was boosted in 2021 after the Bucks won the NBA championship for the first time in 50 years. The championship "brought more companies wanting to sponsor the team and that subsequently led to more collaborative impact work in the community," Gopalratnam said. "Winning helped us fundraise in new and bigger ways."

In 2023-24, the foundation made $1.6 million in grants and charitable donations, offered 50 youth basketball camps, and provided its Math Hoops program to nearly 11,000 students. In Math Hoops, students use a board game and an app to build mathematical skills while tracking statistics of players in the NBA and WNBA.

The team also hosted a two-week STEM camp for kids, welcomed 200 students in programs to learn how the Bucks' front office works, and offered a free one-year weight loss and fitness program for low-income residents.

In recognition of the team's efforts, the NBA gave the Bucks its Inclusion Leadership Award earlier this year, citing several of the team's community initiatives, including work training for incarcerated individuals.

"We're here to represent all communities, and be as inclusive as possible," Gopalratnam said. "It's not just words. We always use the phrase, 'let's walk the walk before we talk the talk.'"

GEISMAR B.A. '24

SCREEN PROTECTOR

ARIELLE GEISMAR, A 2025 FORBES' 30 UNDER 30 HONOREE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA, IS LEADING THE CHARGE FOR A SAFER DIGITAL WORLD FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

by **NICK ERICKSON**

It was February 2024, and the Maryland Senate Finance Committee had convened to discuss Senate Bill 571, an act concerning consumer protection of online products and services but especially regarding children's data—better known as the Maryland Kids Code.

Inside the dimly lit hearing room of an old brick building on Annapolis' government row, state senator Pamela Beidle yielded the floor to a black-blazer-wearing senior from the George Washington University.

For the afternoon, that student replaced her hat as GW's Student Government Association (SGA) president with co-chair of a youth-led coalition, Design It For Us, advocating for safer online platforms and social media. After thanking Beidle and committee members for the opportunity to speak, she leaned forward in her chair and delivered a succinct and sobering opening sentence.

"My name is Arielle Geismar. I'm with Design It For Us. And I'm terrified."

Terrified because of the harmful, often intentionally designed features of the digital world that can lead to more social isolation and higher rates of subsequent anxiety, depression and substance abuse.

But even more inspired to be a change agent.

Geismar, B.A. '24, is helping to lead the charge for a safer digital world for young people by holding technology companies and social media platforms accountable for their behaviors fueling addictive and isolating behavior.

Her work hasn't gone unnoticed. Not only did Maryland Gov. Wes Moore sign SB 571 into law a few months after Geismar's testimony, but she and Design It For Us co-chair Zamaan Qureshi were named to the prestigious Forbes "30 Under 30 Social Media 2025: The Creators Pioneering The Future of the Internet Through Content, Research and Advocacy."

Geismar is part of the first generation that grew up entirely in the social media and smartphone era, and as she told the Maryland lawmakers in Annapolis that day, apps—like it or not—have become the new playgrounds for young people. Recently, the "Atlantic" magazine concluded that American kids and teenagers spend on average about four and a half hours on weekdays and more than six hours on weekends staring into their screens. By this account, screens occupy more than 30 percent of their waking life. (The typical person is awake for 15 hours

WILLIAM ATKINS

a day.)

Recent scholarship has argued that tech giants have exploited personal data for their own pocketbooks by mining information to predict and shape behavior and that young users are especially susceptible to this undermining of personal autonomy. As a full-time co-chair for Design It For Us, Geismar's role is to raise awareness and advocate for more ethical and responsible technology, not against technology itself. Social media can be a great tool, she said, but she wants it to be used in a way that prioritizes health and wellness.

"Technology rarely ends up being used for the purpose it was originally designed for," said Geismar, borrowing the phrase she first learned from School of Media and Public Affairs Professor Kerric Harvey. "We need to stay vigilant in making sure that new tech aligns with our values and ethics."

Design It For Us, which started as a campaign for the passage of California's Age-Appropriate Design Code Act before becoming a coalition of its own, creates social campaigns and works on legislation that addresses these issues. Geismar and her advisory board, composed completely of college students or recently graduated young people, engage lawmakers in D.C. as well as across 35 states and 17 countries, pushing for responsible tech legislation that benefits youth well-being.

"At Design It For Us, we always say that our lived experiences are our expertise," said Qureshi, who co-founded the campaign turned coalition in March 2023.

Advocacy has long been in Geismar's DNA, and Qureshi said that her organizing background and work across various issues affecting young people has brought a great deal to the work of Design It For Us.

Growing up on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Geismar credits exposure to a diverse group of people in building her empathy. Her grandmother is a Holocaust survivor, which her family never shielded her from and spoke openly about the horrors of that period when her grandmother's grandparents died in Auschwitz.

"I slowly realized it was teaching me an important lesson: Difficult conversations should be had openly and often," said Geismar, saying that it was ingrained in her early to advocate against injustice and unfairness.

At age 16, she organized a walkout in schools across New York City in a rally against gun violence, a response to the shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla. The more she learned about gun violence prevention, the more she became aware that it intersects with so many other issues—mental health, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights. That connection led her recently to launch a hub called Option Repro to analyze the relationship between reproductive rights and technology.

That activist mentality is something she brought to GW, where she was elected Residence Hall Association president before representing the student body as head of SGA her senior year. She is most proud of initiatives such as starting Pride Day at GW, distributing recently banned books to highlight the importance of free expression and organizing a GW club sports banquet—she was and still is an avid ultimate frisbee player after all.

Her passion for advocacy is unsurprising to those who know her. During her senior year at GW, a time she was balancing Design It For Us, the SGA presidency and her coursework, Geismar wrote her thesis under Harvey's supervision on ethical programming in military autonomous vehicles. The big question was who—or what—decides who these machines target in armed conflict. Geismar argued that these types of life-and-death decisions should be scrutinized with a moral lens whether they remain in human hands or artificial intelligence.

Not only did Harvey recognize Geismar's tenacious approach to the project, but she also lauded her presentation skills at the honors program and Elliott School research days. It was clear working with her that Geismar has that "it" factor to pull a lot of people with her in her effort to better society.

"I wish we could clone her, but how do you clone a one-of-a-kind? We need more people like her going forward," Harvey said. "She is alarmingly smart, fiercely committed and incredibly vigorous, robust, lively and energetic in her follow through."

As Harvey noted, Geismar puts in the work when nobody is watching, an approach evident in her leadership tactics. Sometimes, Geismar said, the best leaders know when to step back and create space for others to step into power. One of the most meaningful parts of her advocacy work, she said, is helping other young people find their voice and lead on issues that are important to them.

Geismar believes young people are often excluded from the decision-making conversations that affect them between policymakers, business leaders, firms and other entities. She is passionate about and committed to knocking down those barriers.

"We have the hindsight and foresight to recognize the issues that need to be addressed, whether it's climate change, technological ethics or social justice," Geismar said. "But to tackle these problems, we need to be given the chance to speak up and take action.

"And we need to be empowered to do so—not just given a seat at the table but be a part of building the table itself."

"WE HAVE THE HINDSIGHT AND FORESIGHT TO RECOGNIZE THE ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED, WHETHER IT'S CLIMATE CHANGE, TECHNOLOGICAL ETHICS OR SOCIAL JUSTICE."

B.A./B.S. '99

BERKOWITZ

MUSIC, MEDICINE AND MIND

A DOUBLE MAJOR IN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES AND MUSIC AT GW LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR AARON BERKOWITZ TO PURSUE A CAREER TO IMPROVE NEUROLOGICAL CARE IN UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS.

by **STEVE NEUMANN**

Neurologist **Aaron Berkowitz, B.A./B.S. '99**, grew up with a love of classical music, especially Romantic composers like Chopin and Rachmaninoff. He also played the piano with dreams of one day dabbling in composition. At the same time, Berkowitz imagined a career in medicine. So when he came to GW as an undergrad in 1996, he pursued a double major in music and biology.

The disciplines of music and medicine don't seem to overlap in any Venn diagram of possible careers, but Berkowitz has been able to combine the improvisation inherent in some types of music with his work as a physician serving marginalized communities and contributing to global health equity.

But like the meandering melody of a Chopin nocturne, Berkowitz's path from collegiate neophyte to the seasoned physician he is nearly 30 years later has been a winding one.

After graduating from GW in 1999, Berkowitz took a year off to live in Paris before enrolling in medical school at Johns Hopkins University. By his third year, however, the high pressure, long

hours and little sleep began to wear him down. So he decided to turn back to his love of music and attend Harvard for a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology, the anthropological study of music focused on the cultural and social contexts of the people who create it.

After earning his doctorate in 2009, Berkowitz returned to Johns Hopkins to finish his medical degree and then completed his residency in neurology at Harvard Medical School's Brigham and Women's Hospital in 2014.

Then Berkowitz was finally able to create his own career Venn diagram of the two, something he says wouldn't have been possible without his experience at GW.

Berkowitz cites two GW professors as being particularly formative for him, the late biology professor David Atkins and the late music professor Robert Parris.

"The opportunity to pursue biological sciences and music planted the seeds for those parallel medical and creative pursuits," Berkowitz said. "Both were incredibly generous with their time, mentorship and encouragement both in their respective fields and in supporting me to pursue my other interests in medicine and music."

The best documentation of Berkowitz's ability to combine what he learned from both disciplines is his 2020 book, "One by One: Making a Small Difference Amid a Billion Problems," in which he reflects on life as a young physician working with the non-governmental organization Partners In Health in Haiti from 2010 to 2017 during his neurology residency.

Berkowitz traveled from Boston to the Caribbean nation—one of the poorest in the world—where, he was told, there was only one other doctor in his field.

"At the time, there was one neurologist for Haiti's population of 11 million," Berkowitz said. "That would be like having one neurologist for all of Manhattan or Los Angeles County."

Almost immediately, the conditions on the ground in Haiti offered Berkowitz the chance to put his powers of improvisation to the test. In the book, Berkowitz includes an email from a doctor, Martineau Louine, describing a 23-year-old patient named Janel who he had evaluated for headaches and attacks of vertigo, as well as trembling movements of his right arm and right leg that affected his walking.

Berkowitz describes his reaction to the CT scan of Janel's brain.

"I'd looked at thousands of CT scans during the 80-hour weeks of my residency. But this CT scan was unlike anything I'd ever seen," he said. "The ventricles—hollow cavities deep within the brain—were filled with a mass of abnormal tissue...It was complex, its contour bulging out wildly in all directions, compressing and distorting the surrounding brain structures."

It was the largest brain tumor he had ever seen.

With no neurosurgeons in Haiti trained to perform complex brain surgery, Berkowitz had Janel flown to Brigham and Women's Hospital. Janel was young, and there was hope he might respond well to treatment, perhaps even recovering and returning to school.

Ultimately, Janel needed five surgeries at Brigham and Women's, multiple hospitalizations and long-term rehabilitation, but was walking, talking, eating and even singing by the time Berkowitz left Haiti.

"My understanding is that Janel is still doing as he was at the end of the book," said Berkowitz, who has not been able to travel to Haiti due to the civil unrest that has gripped the country since 2021. "It's not the huge save we were hoping for [he did not recover in full], but he's still alive after what was likely to have been a deadly condition."

But even if the treatment of Janel had resulted in the "huge save" Berkowitz and his colleagues hoped for, it couldn't have been replicated on a larger scale. So improvising once more, Berkowitz—working with Partners in Health—began teaching neurology courses for internal and family medicine practitioners and trainees, followed by a four-week neurology rotation for five internal medicine residents at Haiti's Hôpital Universitaire de Mirebalais.

The success of those courses inspired Berkowitz and his colleagues to launch Haiti's first neurology fellowship, expanding access to neurological care.

In addition to his neurological training, Berkowitz says drawing on his ethnomusicology education helped him succeed by enabling him to understand Haitian culture and communicate across cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic boundaries.

"That anthropological framework is the foundation of ethnomusicology, and I think it gave me the perspective to be able to be a good collaborator and colleague there, and to navigate working in an environment as a foreigner from a high-income country," Berkowitz said.

"IN ADDITION TO HIS NEUROLOGICAL TRAINING, BERKOWITZ SAYS DRAWING ON HIS ETHNOMUSICOLOGY EDUCATION HELPED HIM BE SUCCESSFUL BY ENABLING HIM TO UNDERSTAND HAITIAN CULTURE AND COMMUNICATE ACROSS CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC BOUNDARIES."

Today, Berkowitz continues to compose a successful career from the building blocks of his education and early experiences, maintaining his commitment to advancing neurologic knowledge while serving patients as a professor at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF). His varied but interconnected roles range from being a neurohospitalist and general neurologist to a clinician-educator at the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center and San Francisco General Hospital.

While at UCSF, Berkowitz continues to serve underserved populations—military veterans and urban residents of San Francisco. But Berkowitz's influence extends beyond the classroom and the hospital hallways, engaging with the wider neurology community through his role on the editorial board of the journal Continuum: Lifelong Learning in Neurology.

Though these days Berkowitz is as busy as he's ever been, there has been no coda to his love of music—at least not yet. He admits there are times he'll hear a piece on the classical radio station during his commute and later pull out the score to play it.

"Every time I walk past the piano," Berkowitz said, "I say just like there was a period of intense piano and then a period of intense medicine, maybe there'll be a period of intense music again someday." GW

COURTESY OF ALAN BERKOWITZ

IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPY

Student speakers Amy Fehr and Peyton Gallant with GW President Ellen M. Granberg at the 2025 Celebration of Scholarships and Fellowships.

LIZ LYNCH

Celebration Illustrates the Power of Giving

STUDENTS AND DONORS CONNECT AT ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS DINNER.

Amy Fehr, B.S. '24, M.S. '25, grew up watching her mother struggle with a rare autoimmune condition, shuffled between specialists without clarity or relief. It was at the GW Hospital that Fehr's mother first found treatments that worked for her—and Fehr started to see her own future take shape.

"Our first dose of hope came from right here on this campus, and I remember thinking that this was the kind of environment that I wanted to learn from," Fehr said.

But she worried that her dream might be unrealistic: "Going to college is a dream with a steep price tag." So when she found that she'd not only been accepted to GW but would also receive aid through the Clark Engineering Scholars Program, Fehr was so overwhelmed that she asked her parents to reread the letter and confirm the news.

Fehr earned her B.S. and M.S. in biomedical engineering from the School of Engineering and Applied Science. Her graduate research involved building flexible medical devices using a new nanomaterial that moves with cardiac tissue.

That work was made possible by donor-based financial aid, she told over 200 attendees at the 2025 Celebration of Scholarships and Fellowships dinner in March.

"It's a line that's repeated ad nauseam, but that does not diminish its truth: We would not be here without you, and this university would not be what it is without you," Fehr said.

GW donors gave $33.4 million for scholarships and fellowships last year, and the university saw a 36% increase in the number of new endowed scholarships and fellowships from the year before, Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations Donna Arbide said.

That passion was soon on full display.

Less than half an hour after announcing that GW's Third Century Scholarship Endowment Match, launched in 2022 with a $12 million commitment by the university, was only $150,000 away from reaching its goal, Arbide retook the stage. In that brief time, a donor stepped in to close the gap. The match, which provides funds solely dedicated to need-based undergraduate scholarships, was complete.

Fehr, who spoke right after Arbide's announcement, had to mark the moment. "This is not part of my speech, but how amazing is it to see real scholarships being made in real time?"

GW President Ellen M. Granberg attended the celebration not only as a GW leader but also as a donor herself. She and her wife, Sonya Rankin, established the Granberg-Rankin Endowed Undergraduate Scholarship last year, and this year's recipient joined Granberg's table for the dinner.

"A single act of giving, a scholarship, a fellowship, an endowment, plants a seed for future generations of GW students to thrive," Granberg said. "I'm so proud to join you in support of GW students...How lucky we are that they chose GW, and how lucky the world is that they will build a future with the help of a GW education."

Peyton Gallant, a junior majoring in political communication in the School of Media and Public Affairs, made GW his top choice after a campus visit. He'd always been interested in politics; as a child, he was nicknamed "the deputy mayor" for tagging along to meetings with his local politician father. Arriving in Foggy Bottom brought home just how close GW is to the heart of American political life. This, Gallant realized, was where he

Students Robert Reasoner, Amanda Krantz, Maren E. Nicolaysen, Ashley Alessandra and Brianna Gist with Wolcott Foundation Chair Michael Clark (center), whose foundation assists master's students seeking a career in government service.

wanted to be. Like Fehr, he was overwhelmed when financial aid made GW possible—he had to pull over after reading the email.

"Financial aid didn't just help me attend college, it empowered me to thrive here," Gallant said.

Now Gallant works in GW's Office of Undergraduate Admissions, leading tour groups and assisting prospective students. When students confide their concerns about affordability, he shares his own story. At an Inside GW event for admitted students, he recognized a student he'd led on a tour months before—someone who had told him she didn't think she could afford to come to GW but who had listened with interest as he took her through his own financial aid journey.

"She rushed over and said, 'You're the reason I'm here—you made me believe it was possible,'" Gallant remembered.

The annual dinner unites scholarship donors and recipients to share stories and build connections—often in ways neither party expected.

> ***"A single act of giving, a scholarship, a fellowship, an endowment, plants a seed for future generations of GW students to thrive."***
>
> **Ellen M. Granberg**
> *President*

Elizabeth Marino joined the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design's Museum Studies Program thanks in part to a scholarship from the District of Columbia Daughters of the American Revolution (DCDAR). As she chatted with DCDAR representative Debbie Wheeler, Marino revealed that she'd written her undergraduate thesis on two key female figures in post-Revolutionary America: Martha Washington and Abigail Adams. That very day an exhibition that she'd worked on opened at the Library of Congress, exploring the lives behind the legends of George Washington and King George III.

Wheeler, who traces her own ancestry back to fourth U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, was delighted: "You are the perfect candidate! We're so glad you got our scholarship."

"It really does feel written in the stars," Marino said, laughing. GW

From Battlefield to Bedside

TRANSITIONING WARRIOR SCHOLARS INITIATIVE HELPS VETERANS PURSUE CAREERS IN NURSING.

As a kid in rural Arkansas, Justin Williams, B.S.N. '23, grew up hearing stories about his grandfather's service in the U.S. Navy. Those stories stayed with him, so after graduating from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff with a degree in biology, he joined the U.S. Navy Reserve.

While deployed to the Middle East in 2021–22, Williams witnessed firsthand the disparities in global health care systems. Later, as a volunteer firefighter in rural Arkansas, he responded to emergencies in under-resourced areas—experiences that solidified his commitment to pursuing a career in nursing.

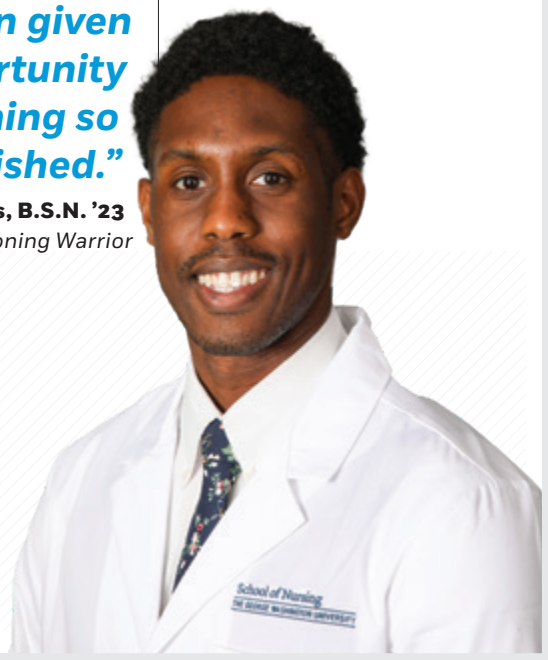
> ***"It truly felt like a blessing and an honor in itself because I had never been given an opportunity for something so distinguished."***
>
> **Justin Williams, B.S.N. '23**
> *Conway Transitioning Warrior*

"Being from a rural area, I understand the difficulties of not always having access to accurate medical information and resources," he explained. "Being able to help empower communities with basic medical knowledge could potentially reduce the rate of individuals being hospitalized."

When it came time for him to choose a nursing program, GW stood out for its support of military-affiliated students. "Everyone I have met here has been outstanding," he said. "The GW team shines brightly."

Receiving the Conway Transitioning Warriors Scholarship was a pivotal moment. "It truly felt like a blessing and an honor in itself because I had never been given an opportunity for something so distinguished," Williams said.

Noted philanthropists Bill Conway Jr. and the late Joanne Barkett Conway established The William and Joanne Conway Transitioning Warriors Scholarship Initiative with a $2.5 million gift in 2020 from their



Bedford Falls Foundation. Nearly 40 veterans have received support to pursue Bachelor of Science in Nursing (B.S.N.) degrees, easing their financial burden and allowing them to focus on school.

Conway recently made a new $3.75 million gift to GW Nursing—$3 million to expand financial assistance to more veterans and $750,000 dedicated to scholarships for students in GW's new B.S.N. Degree Completion Program.

The Conways' catalyst for supporting nursing education came after Bill Conway famously asked The Washington Post readers to send him suggestions for giving away $1 billion during his lifetime. He received more than 2,500 responses.

"The best of these ideas was investing in the ability of people to become nurses—and that's what I chose," Conway said. "My wife, Joanne, really had a lot to do with that. She said people who have nursing degrees are needed and can get jobs. It was that simple.

"These individuals have already demonstrated a deep commitment to serving our country, and their skills and dedication are invaluable in the health care field," Conway said.

Williams points out that those in the Reserves often don't receive full GI Bill benefits. "The scholarship allowed me to not worry about the cost of rent and basic necessities such as food, gas and any other additional costs that arise," he said.

Williams plans to pursue a master's degree in nursing, aiming to become a pediatric or acute care nurse practitioner. He attributes this educational opportunity to the Conway scholarship, noting that without it, he likely would have had to deploy again to secure GI benefits for his education.

"I feel a great sense of gratitude and elation for being one of the few scholars selected for this scholarship." GW

Investing in Innovation: A Q&A with Engineering Professor Hermann J. Helgert on His Endowed Fellowship

MERIT-BASED AWARDS SUPPORT DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN ELECTRICAL AND COMPUTER ENGINEERING. // By Lisa Conley-Kendzior

For nearly five decades, Professor Hermann J. Helgert has been a cornerstone of the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at the George Washington University. His dedication to teaching, research and the university itself is undeniable, marked by his instrumental role in advocating for the Science and Engineering Hall and establishing the Virginia Science and Technology Campus. Now, as he approaches retirement, Helgert's commitment to GW takes a new and profound form: the establishment of the Helgert Family Endowed Fellowship, a generous $3 million fund designed to support doctoral research in his field.

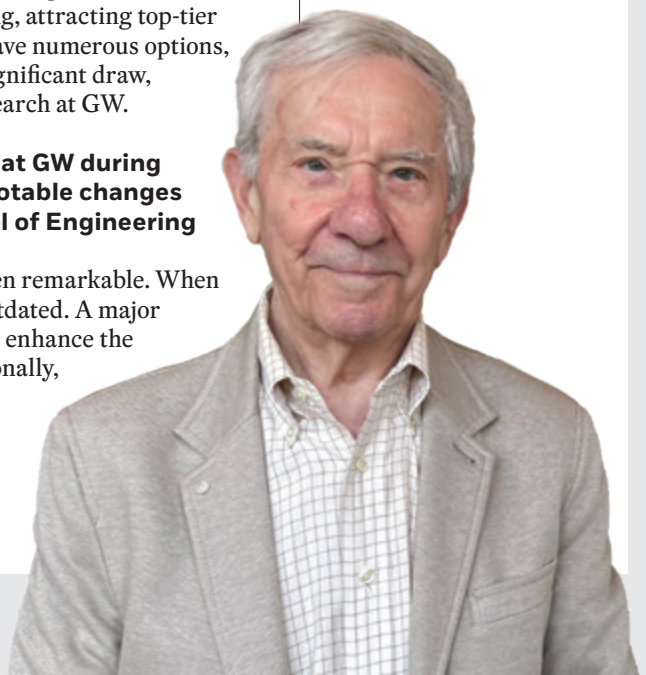
GW Magazine sat down with Helgert to delve into the motivations behind this significant gift, his reflections on his remarkable tenure at GW and his aspirations for the future of engineering education at the university.

Q: What inspired you to establish the Helgert Family Endowed Fellowship?
A: There were really two primary reasons. First, my family has a deep and lasting connection to GW. My wife and daughter both earned master's degrees here, and one of my sons received two undergraduate degrees, while another son also studied here. We truly feel like part of the GW family. Second, GW's generous retirement plan for faculty allowed my contributions, and the university's matching funds, to grow substantially over my many years of service. I saw this as a meaningful way to reinvest those resources back into GW by funding this fellowship.

Q: Why did you specifically choose to support doctoral students in electrical and computer engineering?
A: Electrical and computer engineering is my academic discipline, so it was a natural choice. Over my time here, I've observed a consistent need to attract more high-caliber doctoral students to our department. While our undergraduate and master's programs are strong, attracting top-tier doctoral candidates is crucial. These students have numerous options, and I believe a prestigious fellowship can be a significant draw, encouraging them to pursue their advanced research at GW.

Q: You've witnessed significant evolution at GW during your tenure. What are some of the most notable changes you've seen, particularly within the School of Engineering and Applied Science?
A: The transformation in infrastructure has been remarkable. When I first joined GW, our laboratories were quite outdated. A major focus was placed on upgrading these facilities to enhance the educational experience for our students. Additionally, the university's physical buildings have been significantly improved, with more modern office spaces replacing older, shared facilities. These enhancements have been instrumental in attracting higher-quality students and faculty, especially in electrical and computer

"My family has a deep and lasting connection to GW. My wife and daughter both earned master's degrees here, and one of my sons received two undergraduate degrees, while another son also studied here. We truly feel like part of the GW family."
Hermann J. Helgert



engineering. Consequently, GW's overall academic standing, particularly in engineering, has risen considerably during my time here.

Q: What advice do you offer to students pursuing a Ph.D. in electrical and computer engineering, given your extensive experience?
A: I typically offer two key pieces of advice. Firstly, I emphasize the rigorous academic demands of a doctoral program, requiring significant focus and dedication. Secondly, I underscore the vital role these graduates play in driving technological innovation, which is crucial for our economy. Fields like software engineering, artificial intelligence and related areas within electrical engineering are rapidly evolving and have a tremendous impact. I encourage students to concentrate on these forward-looking areas during their studies.

Q: As a researcher, educator and now a philanthropist, what do you hope your legacy at GW will be?
A: My primary hope is that the Helgert Family Endowed Fellowship effectively supports and enhances the doctoral program in electrical and computer engineering by attracting talented students. Ultimately, my goal is to contribute to the continued growth and excellence of our department.

Q: Finally, what has been a particularly memorable "only-at-GW" moment for you during your many years here?
A: Reflecting on my time here, my interactions with the various university presidents through the shared governance system stand out as particularly meaningful. These relationships and the opportunity to contribute to the university's direction have been highlights of my non-teaching career. Of course, the rewarding experience of teaching bright and motivated students who have gone on to achieve significant success has also been incredibly memorable. GW has been the experience of my lifetime, and I will forever cherish having been part of it.

Interested in supporting talented students who wish to pursue a GW education? Please consider contributing to Open Doors: The Centuries Initiative for Scholarships & Fellowships.

GIVING DAY SETS A NEW RECORD

The university's fifth annual Giving Day in April brought together thousands to support students, programs and initiatives across campus.

"We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of our GW community," said Daniel J. Burgner, assistant vice president of annual giving. "The success of this year's Giving Day reflects the powerful commitment of our community to moving GW forward together. Every gift, no matter the size, plays a vital role in shaping the GW experience for our students."

Giving Day *by the Numbers*

$2 million+
RAISED

3,596
DONORS

22
COUNTRIES

All 50
STATES

356
DONOR-SUPPORTED UNIVERSITY AREAS

"Every gift, no matter the size, plays a vital role in shaping the GW experience for our students."

Daniel J. Burgner
Assistant Vice President of Annual Giving

CLASS NOTES

// '40s

Dorothy Rosenberg, B.A. '41, recently celebrated her 106th birthday.

// '60s

Ricky (Bradley) Gibbons, B.A. '68, taught German for the Army and translated for the London and Paris Air Shows. She retired in Winchester, Va., after living in Europe for 34 years.

Lawrence Levine, B.A. '63, is proud that his granddaughter is a sophomore at GW.

Glen Simmons, B.A. '69, continues to sell real estate with VIP Realty Group Sales on Sanibel Island, Fla., at age 86.

Virginia Spivey, B.A. '69, has worked in education in Covelo, Calif., since 1982. Living off the grid since 1978, she serves a high school where 55% of students are Native American and 35% are immigrants, a role she finds deeply rewarding.

John Norville, M.S. '68, recently retired from Westinghouse, where he served as department manager of quality assurance.

Ron Wohl, B.A. '65, was an applied psychological anthropologist specializing in government and Fortune 500 communication strategies through his consulting firm, In Plain English. Now retired, he is an award-winning poet.

// '70s

Dennis Carroll, B.A. '78, retired as chief editor at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2008. He now splits time between Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Manhattan with his husband.

Hazel Weiser, B.A. '70, is working to enact the Democracy During Detention bill after completing a statewide survey on voting access for detainees in New York.

// '80s

Steven Anderson, J.D. '82, has joined Becker as a shareholder. With over 35 years of experience, he represents cooperatives, condominiums and homeowners' associations across New York City and surrounding areas.

David Campbell, M.B.A. '87, was promoted to CEO of Chernoff Newman, an integrated marketing and communications agency with offices in Orlando, Charlotte, Charleston, S.C., and Columbia, S.C. He previously served as COO.

Robert M. Greenbaum, B.B.A. '84, an attorney at Karalis P.C., was recognized as a Pennsylvania "super lawyer" for 2025 by Thomson Reuters for his work in bankruptcy and creditors' rights, insolvency and reorganization law, and litigation-bankruptcy.

Gillian Marcelle, M.B.A. '87, founder of Resilience Capital Ventures LLC, was named to Forbes' list of 50 Over 50: Investment, which highlights the women shaping the way money flows in the United States and beyond. She was named to the list for her influential work in blended finance and advancing diversity, inclusion and alignment with the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals.

Christopher Myers, B.A. '84, published his 13th book and fifth academic book on marketing, "Brand Marketing" (Cognella Academic Publishing, 2025), available on Amazon and Cognella Academic Publishing.

Bob Rendine, B.A. '84, was appointed interim chief communications officer for Acrisure, a global fintech leader with $5 billion in revenue.

John Roberts, B.B.A. '89, partner and senior portfolio manager at Corient, delivered a guest lecture in Professor Christine Song's Applied Financial Securities Analysis class, sharing insights on market trends and key financial data points.

Michael Toledo, B.A. '88, retired as a registered nurse from Columbia University Medical Center and lives in the Hudson Valley of New York.

Douglas Vander Wal, B.A. '84, M.A. '89, worked in accounting in the aerospace field and played for the George Washington basketball team from 1981–84. He now lives in New Jersey.

Glenn Wood, LL.M. '85, chair of Rubin and Rudman's environmental and land use group, was named to the 2025 Lawdragon 500 Leading Environmental Lawyers list, recognizing top talent in the field.

// '90s

Adele L. Abrams, J.D. '95, was named senior counsel at Littler.

Vian Shamounki Borchert, B.A. '96, became the art lead and curator of "Oxford Public Philosophy Journal" at Oxford University. She has exhibited at Perseus Gallery in Soho, New York City, and Medinaceli DeArte Museum Contemporaneo in Spain.

Ann Coffin, J.D. '93, has joined Baker Botts LLP as a partner in its global projects practice in Austin. A renowned energy law expert, she focuses on electric, gas and water utilities.

Tod Cohen, J.D. '92, has joined Manatt, Phelps & Phillips LLP as a partner in the firm's digital and technology group. He specializes in AI, data protection, antitrust and intellectual property law.

Dean Conway, J.D. '92, has joined Carlton Fields as a shareholder in its securities litigation and enforcement practice after leaving his position at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Brenna Gottier Fastiggi, B.A. '90, was elected to the board of directors of The Hartford Saengerbund.

Pamela Howard, B.A. '96, has supported mothers in finding joy in parenthood through her podcast, book, counseling and coaching for over two decades.

Katayun Jaffari, J.D. '95, was installed as chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, the oldest bar association in the United States. She is chair of the Corporate Governance and ESG Practices and co-chair of the Capital Markets & Securities Practice at Cozen O'Connor.

Max Klau, B.A. '94, will publish his second book, "Developing Servant Leaders at Scale: How to Do It and Why It Matters" (Emerald Publishing Limited), in August 2025. The book includes a foreword by Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter.

Charles W. Chapman, B.A. '51, M.A. '59, in uniform in the 1940s and at his 100th birthday celebration with family in 2024.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLES W. CHAPMAN'S FAMILY

// '50s

100 Years of Learning

Charles W. Chapman, B.A. '51, M.A. '59, recently celebrated his 100th birthday. A Virginia native, Chapman balanced full-time work at the D.C. Parole Board with night classes at GW, earning degrees in accounting and public administration. He later built a career at the Office of Naval Research, eventually serving as budget officer.

Though his time on campus was limited, Chapman remembers the spirit of "Hail to the Buff—Hail to the Blue." His advice after a century of life: "Learning doesn't stop with graduation—keep abreast of new things and ideas." GW

Evan Koster, J.D. '90, has joined Baker Botts LLP as a partner in its corporate practice and head of its derivatives practice in New York. He has over 20 years of experience in derivatives, commodities and energy trading.

Marlo Lyons, B.A. '92, authored "Wanted -> My First Career: The Definitive Playbook for Landing Your First Job in a Fulfilling Career" (Future Forward Publishing LLC, 2024), which received a recommendation from the U.S. Review of Books.

Greggor Mattson, B.A. '97, released an expanded paperback version of his book "Who Needs Gay Bars?" (Redwood Press, 2023), and is professor and chair of sociology at Oberlin College & Conservatory.

Holly Rymon, B.A. '90, has worked in film and television for 30 years. As a producer on HBO's "The Gilded Age," she is proud that the show was nominated for an Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series.

Lori Schlenker, M.A. '95, was promoted to associate director for collections and facilities at the KU Biodiversity Institute and Natural History Museum in Lawrence, Kan.

Brian Shively, B.A. '93, works at Beavercreek Schools in Ohio. His son, William, is a first-year Clark Scholar at GW studying civil engineering.

Luis Torres, J.D. '98, joined Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo PC as a member of its energy and sustainability practice. He was previously a partner at Dentons.

// '00s

Ian Barlow, J.D. '09, has joined Wiley Rein LLP as counsel. A former Federal Trade Commission official, he brings nearly a decade of experience, including serving as a deputy director in the Office of Policy Planning.

Taria Barron, J.D. '06, joined the American Public Transportation Association as general counsel after serving as attorney-adviser in the general law and ethics division of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp.

Lesley Bryant, B.A. '03, is the owner of Lady Clipper Barber Shop in Washington, D.C., a business entirely run by women of color.

Jason Buchsbaum, B.A. '02, was recently elected as the Connecticut state representative for the 69th House District, representing Bridgewater, Roxbury, Southbury and New Milford. In the current legislative session, he serves on the Commerce Committee, the Energy and Technology Committee, and the Public Safety and Security Committee.

Tessa Campbell, B.A. '07, is a manager at Deloitte in the digital and analytics team, supporting talent innovation and solutions.

Dohm Chankong, J.D. '09, was elected director at Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox. A member of the electronics practice group, he specializes in intellectual property management for electronics and communication technologies.

Teresa Diaz, M.A. '00, opened Red Dot Art Gallery in Oaxaca City, specializing in contemporary Oaxacan artists and hosting multidisciplinary events, including artist talks, tours, workshops and performances.

Kyle Hepner, B.S.'05, J.D. '08, was elected partner at Robinson Cole. He is a member of the firm's intellectual property and technology group and artificial intelligence team.

Felix Kushnir, J.D. '06, has joined Fox Rothschild as a partner in the corporate department in Washington, D.C. He represents corporate and private equity clients in major transactions, mergers and acquisitions, and securities matters.

Seth Locke, J.D. '08, has joined WilmerHale's defense, national security and government contracts group.

William Malone, M.B.A. '05, was named the vice president and head of agency at the insurance company Hippo.

Christina Mauricio, B.A. '08, is an assistant principal at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, N.Y., and supervises the world languages and English departments.

Shawnte Mitchell, J.D. '04, was appointed chief legal officer and corporate secretary of Olema Pharmaceuticals Inc., a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company.

Amy Moses, J.D. '04, was appointed U.S. magistrate judge for the District of Rhode Island. She previously served as director of the Conservation Law Foundation Rhode Island.

Nicky (Evry) Norkin, B.A. '05, is a therapist in private practice in New York City.

Lisa Porter, M.A. '07, is a program function manager of volunteer systems for FIRST, a global robotics community. She lives in Germantown, Md., with her husband, son and two cats.

Alison Pruchansky, M.A. '07, is the exhibition and curation manager at Artists for Humanity in Boston, Mass. She continues to create art and shares her work on Instagram as @ample.art.

Rudy Rodas, B.B.A. '08, was named managing director of policy, research and government affairs for the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

Robert P. Vacchiano, B.A. '08, was elevated to partner at Riker Danzig. Vacchiano represents insurers and reinsurers in a broad range of complex insurance matters. He also assists businesses with legal issues relating to cyber insurance, cyberattacks, ransomware, data breaches and other privacy- and security-related matters.

Russell Vought, J.D. '04, was confirmed by the Senate as the director of the Office of Management and Budget in President Trump's administration.

Michael Williams, J.D. '09, is now the solicitor general for the state of West Virginia. He represents the state in strategic litigation and appeals, including cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Patrick (Drew) Woodward, B.A. '08, is the development director for the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, empowering local climate action through a network of local governments and partners.

// '10s

Gil Ben-Ezra, J.D. '15, was elevated to partner at Meland Budwick, P.A. Since joining in 2020, he has contributed significantly to the firm's commercial litigation and financial fraud practice groups.

Sarah Bradley, M.A. '15, is an independent consultant based in Vienna, Austria, working at the intersection of philanthropy and activism to shift funding flows toward grassroots power-building efforts.

Alexander Callo, J.D. '16, was promoted to counsel at Saul Ewing LLP. He represents clients in high-stakes intellectual property disputes, including pharmaceutical patent litigation under the Hatch-Waxman Act.

Kristopher Dane, D.Eng. '18, now leads Thornton Tomasetti's global crowd dynamics capability and protective design practice from the firm's Seattle office.

Matthew DeGioia, B.A. '13, J.D. '20, owns and operates DeGioia Law, PLLC, specializing in estate planning and disability benefits in Virginia, Maryland and D.C. He also serves as a staff attorney with Christian Legal Aid of D.C.

Kristin Elia, J.D. '17, was promoted to counsel at Venable LLP. She focuses on commercial real estate matters, guiding clients through sales, acquisitions, financing, leasing and development.

Elizabeth Enright, M.A. '14, lives in Richmond, Va., with her husband, Evan, and their three-year-old daughter, Eva. She underwent a lung transplant in June and is now pursuing her passion for abstract painting.

John Formella, J.D. '12, was elected president of the National Association of Attorneys General during its annual Capital Forum meeting in December. As New Hampshire's attorney general, he emphasized the importance of bipartisan collaboration in addressing major issues such as the opioid crisis and drug trafficking.

Nichol Gabor, M.A. '19, is a fashion historian and the Nathalie L. Klaus Curator of Costume and Textiles at The Valentine museum in Richmond, Va.

Courtney Hawkins, M.A. '19, began a new role as a museum curator with the National Park Service, overseeing a four-year ▸

project to refine the George Washington Memorial Parkway's historic collection.

Jacqueline Hazlett, M.A. '17, is a senior analyst at FINRA and the founder of a local animal outreach program dedicated to wildlife rescue.

Bryan Hilley, M.A. '15, is the associate registrar at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.

Hannibal Hopson, B.A. '18, is an artist, producer and fashion designer working between Houston, Mérida, Mexico, and Southern Africa.

Sacred B. Huff, J.D. '19, was promoted to senior associate at Kalijarvi, Chuzi, Newman & Fitch in Washington, D.C. Her practice focuses on employment discrimination, retaliation, wage and hour violations, and claims under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Molly Kunselman, M.A. '13, launched MKD Interiors, a full-service design studio, after more than a decade working for prestigious firms in Washington, D.C., and teaching interior design.

AnnaBeth Lawless, B.A. '15, has joined the staff at the Institute for Defense Analyses, contributing her expertise to the organization's research and analysis efforts.

Zoerina Ledwidge, B.A. '18, is an RN and doula experience specialist at Mae, a healthcare startup.

Daniel Lippman, B.A. '12, is a White House and Washington reporter for Politico, where he has spent over a decade covering the political landscape. A former co-author of the outlet's flagship "Playbook" newsletter, Lippman is recognized as one of Washington, D.C.'s top scoop reporters, breaking major stories on presidential administrations, K Street and beyond. He is also a frequent guest on CNN, Fox News and the BBC.

Samantha Malone, B.A. '13, earned her law degree from Georgetown in 2019 and now practices real estate and land use law in East Hampton, N.Y. She also serves on the Southampton Town Landmarks and Historic Districts Board.

Lisa Mays, J.D. '15, was promoted to partner at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP. She advises on international trade compliance and investigations as part of the governmental practice group.

Monica Parks, M.F.A. '11, is in her third season with the Shaw Festival in Ontario, Canada, appearing in "The House That Will Not Stand" and "Witness for the Prosecution."

Anthony Patrone, J.D. '19, was appointed legal advisor in the Office of FCC Chairman Brendan Carr. He previously served as an attorney advisor in the Office of the Chief Counsel at the Commerce Department's NTIA.

Jane Pierce, B.A. '13, lives in New York City and works as a project manager in the modern and contemporary art department at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. She and her husband, Reid, welcomed their first child, Vivian, in July.

Arthur Prystowsky, J.D. '12, was elevated to partner at Simmons Hanly Conroy LLC. He focuses on assisting individuals and families affected by mesothelioma and has represented more than 5,000 powerhouse mechanics, electricians, sheet metal workers and insulators.

Aleksandra Rybicki, J.D. '16, was promoted to partner at Hollingsworth LLP. She represents clients in complex commercial litigation, antitrust, employment and professional liability matters.

Kevin Sayles, J.D. '17, was elected as a partner at Bousquet Holstein PLLC. Since joining the firm's Tax Practice Group in 2018, he has focused on tax incentives related to New York State's Brownfield Cleanup Program and the federal Inflation Reduction Act.

Kelly J. Shefferly, M.B.A. '14, joined Plunkett Cooney's business law practice group.

Leah Socash, J.D. '13, was elected partner at Milbank LLP. She is a member of the firm's trusts, estates and exempt organizations group.

Ivan Soto-Wright, B.S. '12, co-founder and CEO of MoonPay, spoke in Professor William Collier's Foundations of Venture Capital class about incremental learning, a growth mindset and leveraging networks for success.

Daniel Sutter, J.D. '16, was promoted to partner at Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll. A member of the employee benefits/ERISA practice, he represents retirement and health plan participants in fiduciary breach cases.

Paul Seidu Tanye-Kulono, LL.M. '17, was appointed acting director-general of the Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority by President John Dramani Mahama. A distinguished military officer and legal professional, he brings extensive leadership and legal expertise to the role.

Riley Tejcek, B.A. '19, capped off her 2024–25 bobsled season with a gold medal win in the North American Cup. In addition to her athletic success, she recently published her first children's book, "If You Can Dream It, Be It!" (End Game Press, 2025).

Michael Timmons, M.B.A. '17, is the founder and CEO of GoodFences, an AI-powered SaaS platform transforming HOA management. He is also an active community leader, shaping Loudoun County's future as a youth football coach, foster parent, and recently recognized by the Loudoun County Department of Economic Development.

Wayan Vota, M.B.A. '14, was featured in Fortune for launching Career Pivot, a job search platform that helps federal employees affected by agency funding cuts transition into new career opportunities.

Erica Wible, J.D. '17, was elected as a member at McNees Malamut Law. She joined the firm in 2017

Skiing a Backcountry Kingdom: Julie McGuire, B.A. '01, Earns Her Crown as Catskills "Queen"

BY ALAN WECHSLER


McGuire

The path for **Julie McGuire, B.A. '01**, to becoming known as the "Queen of the Catskills" began after a personal low point. On April 18, 2018, she returned home from her job as a New York City English teacher to find her wife waiting. They had been planning to start a family, but her partner ended their five-year relationship, devastating McGuire. She found solace in hiking the nearby Catskills, then joined a women's backcountry skiing clinic in Chile and made a new goal: to be the first woman to ski all 33 Catskill peaks over 3,500 feet. Last December, she completed the feat after four winters. "I felt like the universe wants me to ski," she said.

Backcountry skiing in the Catskills is no easy task. Skiers "earn their turns" with "skins" that stick onto a ski base for the ascent and are removed for downhill. Unlike Western ranges with open bowls, the Catskills have thick woods, cliffs, rocks and little snow—last year, she skied just one day. McGuire started cautiously, keeping skins on or bouncing from tree to tree—what she called "survival skiing." She eventually gained confidence, straight-lining narrow trails and jumping off cliffs. In one grueling trip with the first man to ski these peaks, her guide vomited from exertion.

Her hardest trip came on Sugarloaf Mountain. Solo on a weekday after a storm, she spent hours after dark with no cell service, navigating a buried trail by headlamp.

The nickname "Queen" began with a pink Catskills T-shirt she bought at a gift shop, often worn in photos and during virtual teaching sessions. While skiing helped her heal, she said, "It's kind of like a hero's journey."

Now, she's aiming even higher: skiing the 100 highest peaks. "They're really obscure," she said. "A lot of them I can't even find on a map." GW

and currently serves as president of the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Association of Bond Lawyers.

Sara (Mostafa) Wolf, B.S. '12, M.P.H. '14, coaches athletes in Annapolis, Md., as an area representative with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

// '20s

Ruth Dinma Akor, M.A. '20, Cert '20, is a senior manager in fraud risk analytics at American Express and is pursuing a doctorate in AI and machine learning at GW.

Amjad Altuwayjiri, M.S. '24, landed her dream job at Deloitte after graduating.

Laura Arzola, B.S. '22, is completing her master's degree in translational medicine at the Universitat de Barcelona.

Ethan Baron, B.S. '22, an associate at Goldman Sachs, spoke to Professor Rodney Lake's Quantitative Investing class about transitioning from GW to finance, the importance of networking and seizing industry opportunities.

Nena Beecham, M.S. '25, moved cross-country from D.C. to Seattle, hiking in national parks along the way. Her research, conducted in collaboration with NASA, was published in the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

Daqian Dang, M.S. '24, started a new position as a data scientist.

John Darby, J.D. '24, joined Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP's Birmingham office as a member of the Corporate & Securities Practice Group.

Alexandra Donaldson, B.A. '21, earned her J.D. from the University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law in May 2024 and currently serves as a judge advocate in the U.S. Coast Guard.

Ethan Goldblatt, B.A. '23, served as a special assistant at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, applying lessons from GW's Peace Studies program to critical Security Council decisions during a turbulent time in global affairs.

Briana Imran, J.D. '20, has joined Washington, D.C.-based Kalijarvi, Chuzi, Newman & Fitch, P.C. as an employment and civil rights attorney.

Eric Lee, M.A. '20, joined The New York Times as a photo fellow covering Capitol Hill and the White House.

Emma Myers, B.A. '25, is the morning and noon news anchor and producer at WTAP in Parkersburg, W.Va.

Tim Neumann, B.S. '24, is pursuing a master's degree in quantum information science and technology at TU Delft in the Netherlands.

Dave Nitkiewicz, M.T.A. '22, has assumed the role of senior manager of global owner communications at Marriott International. In this role, he will craft and execute messaging strategies for the CEO and senior leadership team in collaboration with owners and franchisees worldwide.

Visit the GW Magazine Class Notes section to see the complete issue:

magazine.gwu.edu

Submit your own class note:

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IN MEMORIAM

Gisela Bialik Huberman, B.A. '64, M.A. '65, Ph.D. '70
(Dec. 10, 2024, 82)
was a linguist, lawyer, entrepreneur and philanthropist whose career spanned academia, law and the radio industry. After earning a Ph.D. in linguistics from GW, she became chair of the languages department at American University before pivoting to law, ultimately co-founding HVS Partners and owning 13 radio stations. Later, she served as president of the James Renwick Alliance in Washington, D.C., and was active with the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Fla. A lover of classical music, contemporary art and baseball, she is survived by her husband, Benjamin; sons, Jon and Martin; and five grandchildren

Caroline Ann Zaino McCall, B.A. '17
(Nov. 30, 2024, 29)
worked as a paralegal at Fross, Zelnick, Lehrman & Zissu, where she was admired by colleagues for her professionalism and warmth. She passed away after an 11-month battle with cancer. She is remembered for her strength, kindness and deep love for her family. She is survived by her husband, Peter McCall, and their daughter, Mary.

Peter Nintcheff, M.D. '64
(March 21, 2024, 66)
was a dedicated public servant who served for more than three decades as assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Ohio. A proud Cleveland native, he was known for his deep commitment to justice, mentorship and community service. Nintcheff worked in private practice and as a Cuyahoga County assistant prosecutor before joining the U.S. Attorney's Office. He was an active member of the Greek Orthodox Church and cherished spending time with his family. He is survived by his wife, Kathy; children, Maria and Nicholas; sister, Nikki; and many beloved extended family members.

Theodore G. Pedas, J.D. '57
(March 21, 2025, 93)
was a film industry executive and philanthropist who played a key role in bringing foreign and independent films to American audiences. Alongside his brother, Jim, he co-founded Circle Theatres and Circle Films, the latter of which helped launch the careers of the Coen brothers by producing "Blood Simple." He later served as president of Warner Bros. International Theatres. A devoted supporter of the arts and education, he contributed to numerous cultural and academic institutions. He is survived by his wife, Lea; children, George, Billy, Michele and their families; his brother, Jim; and many loving nieces and nephews.

Bernard Reich
(Feb. 23, 2025, 83)
was a distinguished scholar of Middle Eastern politics and a professor at GW for over 50 years. As an expert on U.S.-Israel relations, he authored numerous books and articles that shaped the field. He served as chair of GW's political science department and was a sought-after commentator on Middle Eastern affairs. He is survived by his wife, Madelyn; his children, Barry, Norman, Michael and Jennifer; and his grandchildren Andy, Benjamin, John, Sidney, Evan, Katie and Morgan.

Larry Yip, M.D. '71
(July 12, 2024, 79)
was a longtime anesthesiologist who practiced for four decades in Orange County, Calif. Before medical school, he earned a zoology degree on a Latin scholarship from the University of Washington. He served in both the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy, attaining the rank of commander during the Vietnam War. He completed his residency at Massachusetts General Hospital. He enjoyed cooking, gardening, skiing and ballroom dancing. He is survived by his wife, Linda Shuck Yip; son, Benjamin; two sisters; and several nieces and nephews. GW

Myrtle Katzen and her late husband, Cyrus Katzen, supported a range of cancer initiatives at SMHS.

Myrtle Katzen

(Jan. 28, 2025, 97)

Katzen played a pivotal role in advancing cancer research and treatment at the George Washington University. Katzen and her late husband, Cyrus Katzen, who passed away in 2009, generously supported a wide range of cancer initiatives at GW's School of Medicine and Health Sciences (SMHS). They established the Dr. Cyrus and Myrtle Katzen Cancer Research Center and later endowed the Dr. Cyrus Katzen Director of the GW Cancer Center, now held by Dr. Julie Bauman. These investments further GW's ability to recruit top scholars in the field and facilitate the development of new methods of treating cancer.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Myrtle Katzen, whose generosity and vision have left an indelible mark on the GW Cancer Center," said Dr. Bauman. "The Katzen family's unwavering commitment to advancing cancer research and patient care has transformed countless lives, and Myrtle and Cyrus's legacy will continue to inspire our mission. We are profoundly grateful for their support and extend our heartfelt condolences to her family and loved ones."

With cancer placing a high burden on citizens in the District, the Katzen family's generosity has widely affected our community, said Barbara Lee Bass, GW vice president for health affairs, dean of SMHS and the Walter A. Bloedorn Chair of Administrative Medicine. "The Katzens' support makes it possible for patients to receive improved care and furthers knowledge in the search for cures," said Bass. "Their funding supports Cancer Center initiatives, including pilot programs, which advance the scientific initiatives of the Population Sciences and Policy program, clinical research and patient support services."

The Katzen family has close ties to GW. Six members have attended the university, four of them earning medical degrees. Dr. Cyrus Katzen's son, Jay, B.A. '67, M.D. '72, is a former member of the GW Board of Trustees.

A talented artist who started painting as a girl in Washington, D.C., where she was born and raised, Myrtle Katzen was still working in her studio until two years ago. She studied art at the Abbott Art School, the Corcoran School (now part of GW's Columbian College of Arts and Sciences) and American University. She worked as a fashion illustrator for Sears and the Hecht Co., and taught art at the Maret School. Many of her paintings are hanging on the walls in several area homes. She was a member of an artists' organization, Group 93, most of whom studied at American University, where they also exhibited their works.

Through the Dr. Cyrus Katzen Foundation, Inc., the Katzen family has supported a wide range of causes related to the arts, health and social services.

"I've had the pleasure of getting to know many members of this extraordinary family," said Donna Arbide, vice president for development and alumni relations. "Through their meaningful work and their exceptional generosity, they have improved the lives of so many of our neighbors in D.C. and beyond." GW

From the Archives

Artifacts from GW's collections

A First for the GI Bill

Eighty years ago, World War II U.S. Army veteran **Don Balfour, B.A. '45**, was credited as the first individual to utilize the GI Bill of Rights. He earned an associate's degree from the George Washington University in 1944 and completed his bachelor's degree the following year. While not definitively verified, this photograph is believed to depict Balfour during his time at GW, marking a pivotal moment in the university's history and in the broader national effort to expand educational access for veterans.

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