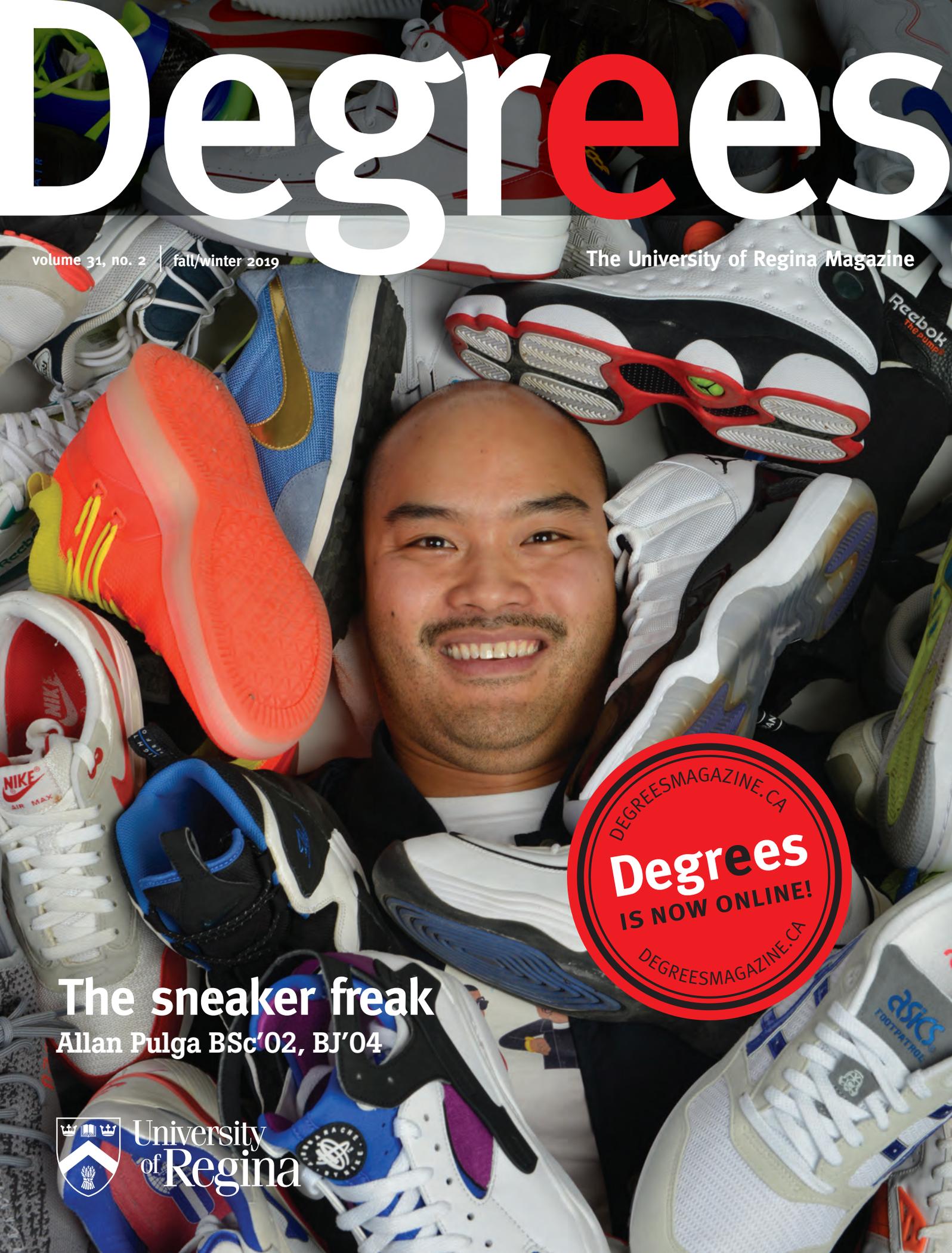


# Degrees

volume 31, no. 2 | fall/winter 2019

The University of Regina Magazine



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## The sneaker freak

Allan Pulga BSc'02, BJ'04



University  
of Regina





Trail runners dot the horizon of the Beaver Flat 50, a trail race held in the hills and coulees of Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park north of Swift Current. The race was established by University of Regina alumnus Jeff Dudar BA'02, MA'09 and his brother Warren four years ago. The competition is gaining a reputation for being one of the most challenging trail races in Western Canada. This year's competition drew 600 runners. Check out photos from this year's competition starting on page 16.

Photo by Alan Lam

Welcome to the Fall/Winter issue of *Degrees* magazine. I would like to start by fessing up to a mistake that I was responsible for in the past issue of the magazine. The inside cover of the Spring/Summer issue features a lovely photograph by University of Regina photographer, Trevor Hopkin. It was a late Spring photo taken just before sunrise of the First Nations University of Canada (FNUiv) campus with some glowing teepees in the foreground. The teepees were awash with light from an array of different coloured lights that had been placed inside them. Also included in the photo were two metal buffalo sculptures that sit on the federated college's grounds. I erroneously credited the sculptures to well known Saskatchewan artist Joe Fafard. You'll forgive me if it was Fafard who was on my mind. He passed away on March 19 and he and a number of other individuals associated with the U of R who also passed were featured in that same issue. Fafard was the subject of a *Degrees* cover story several years ago and I had the pleasure of hanging out at his Lumsden, Saskatchewan — area studio for an afternoon of photo taking and pleasant conversation. To my uneducated eye, the buffalo sculptures at FNUiv look similar to Fafard's sculpture *oskana k-asast ki*, on the Scarth Street Mall in Regina, for instance. The artwork in question was actually created by Lionel Peyachew, an associate professor of Fine Art at First Nations University of Canada.

While doing a little poking around the internet I discovered that Peyachew and Fafard have more than a few things in common. They were both board members of the Saskatchewan Arts Board at one time or another. Fafard's sculpture *Le*

*jardin de l'esprit* (Mind's Garden) sits on the University's northern grounds directly across from the Ad-Hum Building. Peyachew's sculpture, *The Four Directions*, is directly east of the Farfard sculpture, only a 3-wood away. Okay, who am I trying to kid, a 3-wood and an 8-iron away. Lastly, I went to Peyachew's LinkedIn page where there's a curriculum vitae and a photo of the FNUiv professor. And who should be in the photo with him? The aforementioned Joe Fafard. Thanks to Bettina Schneider from First Nations University of Canada for pointing out the oversight.

Hopefully we haven't made any boo boos like that in the current issue of *Degrees*. I trust you will find this edition of the magazine a pleasant read. We've got a great line up of stories to entertain and inform you.

Dale Eisler is the University's senior advisor to President Timmons on matters of Government. He's also a senior policy fellow at the Johnson Shoyama School of Public Policy. Eisler wrote a 2010 novel loosely based on a family event that happened 100 years ago. While living in Ukraine, his grandfather was murdered by marauding Bolsheviks after the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. Eisler wrote a screenplay based on his book and shopped it around Hollywood. Fast forward a couple of years and Eisler is screening a film version of the story. It was directed by an Academy Award and Golden Globe nominated director no less. The story starts on page 8.

In this issue we also introduce you to Danielle Major, a major student success story. Danielle does it all really — she's an exceptional student, volunteer, athlete, and human being. Danielle's story begins on page 20.

One University of Regina Recreation Therapy student had an idea that bringing music — that is playing music and listening to music — could be beneficial for some clients at a Regina senior's residence. Turns out she was right. Read how Kim Shalley struck a chord with residents of a Regina retirement home. It begins on page 12.

Four U of R graduates make up the executive team at YWCA Regina that is on the brink of opening a new \$45 million facility that will allow them to help even more women and youth at risk in the city. That story begins on page 32. If there's one voice in Canada that's loudest on the inequities of Indigenous health care it's Alika Lafontaine. The Ojibwe-Cree anesthesiologist at Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Grande Prairie, Alberta, is a multiple award-winning doctor. He's been recognized for his advocacy by such organizations as *Medical Post*, HealthCareCAN, Canadian Medical Association, and Public Policy Forum. For Lafontaine, it's not about the praise — what really drives him is the responsibility he feels to make a difference. Lafontaine's story starts on page 26.

You'll also find peppered throughout the issue our Alumni Crowning Achievement Award recipients.

You'll find those stories and so much more in this issue of *Degrees*. As always, if you have story ideas, feedback or just want to say hello, my contact information can be found on the facing page.

Greg Campbell BFA'85, BJ'95  
Editor

# Degrees

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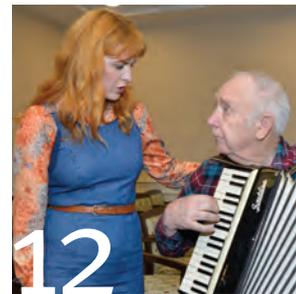
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On the cover: Allan Pulga BSc'02, BJ'04 photographed with a few of the 80 or 90 pairs of basketball shoes in his collection.

Photo by Trevor Hopkin.



## features

### Lights, camera, Anton 8

In 2010, the University's Senior Adviser (Government Relations) Dale Eisler BA'70, published his first novel, *Anton: A Young Boy, His Friend and the Russian Revolution*. Now, the story has been turned into a film directed by an Academy Award and Golden Globe nominated director.

### Music to their years 12

Graduates of the University's Therapeutic Recreation program have brought an innovative program to a Regina retirement residence. The program has residents singing enjoying the delights of music. It's fair to say that the program has struck a chord.

### Major leaguer 20

Meet Danielle Major, a Kinesiology and Health Studies student who is one of those rare and gifted students that does it all.

### A mighty voice for Indigenous health care equity 26

A University of Regina alumnus is leading the charge for Indigenous health care advocacy in Canada. Based on his many accomplishments, Alike Lafontaine BSc'02 is just the person for the job.

### Opening new doors 32

Meet four U of R graduates who are leading YWCA Regina into a new era. The quartet and their colleagues are empowering women, youth, and children helping them realize their full potential.

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## President's Note

In early October, I had the pleasure of participating in the 2019 Alumni Crowning Achievement Awards, where we honoured some of the most talented, compassionate, and inspiring of our University of Regina graduates. This was the 15th edition of the awards gala, and by all accounts it was one of the most successful in the event's history. It was the best-attended one yet, with 320 people present in the Grand Ballroom at the Queensbury Convention Centre in Regina, and it was easy to sense the pride everyone shared in our University and its alumni.

Unfortunately, there was a sadness hanging over the evening as one of our award recipients had passed away barely two weeks before the event. Trudy Stewart was a dedicated young Indigenous filmmaker who was inspiring a new generation of artists. She and her co-recipient, Janine Windolph, devoted a tremendous amount of time and effort in recent years, focused on the Regina Indian Industrial School and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The pair were recipients of the Distinguished Professional Achievement Award. On behalf of the entire University of Regina community, I wish to again offer my condolences to Trudy's family and friends on her untimely passing. Her contributions were many, and they continue to make a difference in the lives of others.

The recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award was Gary Drummond. Over the past few decades, Gary has raised millions of dollars for University of Regina Athletics and Regina minor football. At the event, I had the pleasure of joining Gary to announce his \$1 million donation to support the Paul J. Hill School of Business and Levene Graduate School of Business building, which is the University's top capital priority going forward. I am very grateful for his most generous gift.

Brianne Urzada received the Humanitarian and Community Service Award for her work with cancer patients and survivors. Former Board of Governors Chair Paul McLellan was the recipient of the Dr. Robert and Norma Ferguson Award for Service to the University, and Tylor Willox was named outstanding young alumnus. You can read more about the recipients in this issue of *Degrees* magazine.

It is always an honour for me to witness and acknowledge the achievements of our alumni. Not only do their accomplishments reflect the outstanding qualities of our graduates, but also enhance the reputation of the University of Regina.

Our graduates, now numbering nearly 76,000 proud, come from every walk of life and pursue countless callings and careers. It's always gratifying to see our alumni realize their potential in their professional and personal lives. It's equally satisfying to see how our

graduates are contributing in tangible ways to our communities and making the world a better place.

My hope is that each and every one of our graduates maintains a lifelong connection to the University of Regina. Those connections can come in a variety of forms. For some, it's a desire for ongoing learning that brings them back to the University. Others are connected by cultural and athletic events that draw individuals and families to our campuses. Some graduates chose to mentor our current students and, in this way, are truly giving back. Still others are connected through their ongoing support, be it financial and otherwise.

An important upcoming opportunity for our alumni to connect to the University is through engagement in our strategic planning process. Our current strategic plan, *peyak aski kikawinaw: Together We Are Stronger*, was implemented in 2015 and has guided us well for nearly five years. Now it's time for a new plan. We have embarked on the development of that plan and are creating a path for the future. That's where you come in. While we're naturally including on-campus perspectives on the plan's development, we're also seeking feedback from alumni and other off-campus stakeholders.

If you wish to share your ideas, or you have some specific thoughts on the development of our new strategic plan, please let us know. You will find more



information about how to do so on our website at [www.uregina.ca/strategic-plan](http://www.uregina.ca/strategic-plan). We would love to hear from you.

As 2019 draws to a close, I want to thank you for all you do to help the University of Regina deliver on its academic mission of teaching and learning, research, and community service. We truly appreciate your continuing support of and commitment to our University and its students.

And as we move into the holiday season and a new year, I wish everyone — whether alumni, students, faculty members, staff, donors or friends of the University — all the very best for 2020 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Dr. Vianne Timmons  
President and Vice-Chancellor

**Left:** Pam Klein will serve as the U of R's new Chancellor until June 2022. **Centre:** Alumnae Elaine Bourassa was the recipient of the University's Distinguished Service Award. **Right:** University of Regina psychology professor R. Nicholas Carleton has been named a Member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists.



### Accolades

**Pam Klein BA'80** has been elected the ninth University of Regina Chancellor for a term concluding June 30, 2022. She is the president of Phoenix Group, one of Saskatchewan's leading advertising and communications firms. Klein has been associated with the University of Regina for many years, most recently serving as Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors. She also has a long history of community service with a number of organizations and agencies, including: the Paul J. Hill School of Business, Camp Circle O' Friends, Amakon Foundation, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Sask Film, Hospitals of Regina Foundation, North Central Family Centre, and Heritage Regina. She founded the Power of Pink, an event to benefit breast health, and has provided her communications expertise to many community events. Klein is an inductee in the Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame and recipient of the Canada 150 Medal for her philanthropic contributions. She is currently pursuing her doctoral studies at the University of Regina. Her research interest is in digital communication and neuroscience.

At the University's Fall Convocation, **Art Wakabayashi LLD(Honorary)'19**, former University of Regina Chancellor, received an honorary degree for his lifelong commitment to

public service and contributions to the province. He served as University of Regina Chancellor from 2001 to 2007. Following his retirement, he has continued to be a great contributor to the province, the Japanese-Canadian community, and the University of Regina. Wakabayashi attended the University of Saskatchewan where he earned a BA in Economics and a Bachelor of Commerce with Great Distinction. In 1960-61, he earned a Master of Public Administration from Harvard University School of Public Administration. He began his public service career with the Province of Saskatchewan, where he served in the departments of Social Welfare and Finance. After five years as Deputy Provincial Treasurer, he held several senior positions with the federal government in Ottawa. He returned to Saskatchewan in 1986 and served in various roles, including Saskatchewan Trade Negotiations Representative, Deputy Minister of Finance, Special Advisor to the Minister of Finance, and provincial negotiator for the Saskatchewan Treaty Land Entitlement Settlement agreement. (See Spot Light, page 24.)

The University of Regina's Board of Governors presented **Elaine Bourassa BAdmin'84 (Great Distinction)** with the University's Distinguished Service Award at a ceremony on October 6. Bourassa served as a member of the Senate from 2008 to 2017

and was a member of the University's Board of Governors as a Senate representative from 2011 until 2017, where she chaired the Audit and Risk Management Committee and served as a member of the Human Resources Committee. In 2010, Bourassa was a recipient of the University's Alumni Crowning Achievement Award for Distinguished Professional Achievement. She has also contributed to the College Avenue Campus Renewal Project and, along with her husband, established the Elaine and Paul Bourassa Bursary in Business Administration. The Distinguished Service Award is presented at the discretion of the Board of Governors to individuals who have been long-term contributors to the University.

University of Regina psychology professor **R. Nicholas Carleton BAdmin'01, BA'02, MA'05, PhD'10** has been named a Member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists. The Royal Society of Canada, founded in 1882, recognizes scholarly research and artistic excellence, advises governments and organizations, and promotes a culture of knowledge and innovation in Canada and with other national academies around the world.

For the last 18 years, Carleton's research has focused on understanding relationships between trauma, pain and

mental health. Now, Carleton's priority is to help Canada's public safety personnel by developing and integrating a comprehensive system of mental health research and treatment across the country. His research activities focus on the prevention of, and early intervention for, mental health injuries among public safety personnel. By creating and implementing innovative, technologically advanced, and potentially lifesaving mental health interventions, Carleton and his team are developing tools that could help protect and support the mental health of Canada's more than 300,000 public safety personnel.

Under Carleton's leadership, the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment was established in 2017 at the U of R. The federally funded institute is a multi-university, interdisciplinary team of researchers working with key stakeholders to identify the tools required to support the recognition, prevention, and treatment of mental health concerns facing public safety personnel.

As principal or co-principal investigator, Carleton has been awarded more than \$30 million in competitive provincial and federal grants and contracts, including the RCMP Longitudinal Study of Operational Stress Injuries. Designed as a nine-year study, this \$8.9 million project sees him leading an international team of interdisciplinary researchers.

**Merelda Fiddler-Potter BAJ'99, MA'10**, a University of Regina doctoral student in the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, has been awarded a prestigious Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship valued at \$150,000 over three years. Fiddler-Potter's research will explore the media's role in helping Canadians learn the truth of past and present colonial policies and the impact on Indigenous people. She will also gain insight on how the media can compel people into action in order to keep reconciliation high on the public agenda. In addition to her doctoral studies, Fiddler-Potter is a sessional lecturer at First Nations University of Canada. She was also the Dallas W. Smythe Chair in the School of Journalism at the University of Regina, where she developed a course on reconciliation and the role of the journalist. Prior to entering academia, Fiddler-Potter was a current affairs producer and reporter for CBC Saskatchewan, and was recognized nationally by the Radio Television Digital News Association of Canada for her work about Saskatchewan's murdered and missing Indigenous women. Fiddler-Potter has a Master of Arts in Canadian Plains Studies and a Bachelor in Journalism and Communications, both from the University of Regina.

**Robert Truszkowski**, an associate professor in Media, Art and Performance (MAP), received a Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan Heritage Award for his ongoing project, Letterpress Now. The project involves the rescue and rehabilitation of printing presses and type from around Saskatchewan. Truszkowski shares the award with his former student Elizabeth Elich. Also contributing to the project were MAP's Darcy Zink, Jesse Goddard, and Sean Whalley.

**Xiong Zhou and Zehua Chen**, two Chinese graduate students in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, received the Chinese Government Scholarship Award for Outstanding Self-Funding Students. Established in 2003, the scholarship is presented annually to Chinese graduate students studying abroad who do not receive funding from the Chinese government. Chinese students from around the world apply to The China Scholarship Council in Beijing. The council selects recipients based on their research and academic achievement. With only 500 scholarships awarded annually, it is considered to be one of the highest academic honours presented by the Chinese government to graduate students.

**Esam Hussein**, dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, recently received the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan (APEGS). APEGS, a self-governing professional licensing body, sets high standards for admission into the profession and ensures that the province maintains high quality engineering and geoscience practice and education in the province. Hussein, who is a registered professional engineer in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Ontario, says he has focused his research on developing techniques for the detection of contraband materials and on other peaceful uses of nuclear technology. Currently, Hussein is leading a team of researchers from both the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan who are exploring the regulatory challenges of licensing small nuclear reactors in Saskatchewan.

### Briefly

On November 5, the University of Regina hosted the first-ever **INSPIRE. Emerging Leaders Forum**. Some 1,600 Regina high school students along with a contingent of U of R students attended the high-energy event. The event was conceived by President and Vice-Chancellor Vianne Timmons and builds on the University of Regina's highly successful Inspiring Leadership Forum, the U of R's premier leadership development event that provides an opportunity for people around Saskatchewan and beyond to hear the inspirational stories of internationally renowned leaders. The inspirational speakers at the INSPIRE event included the Honourable Tina Beaudry-Mellor, Minister of Advanced Education; five-time Olympian Charmaine Crooks; 2018 Juno nominated and 2019 Indspire award winner Kelly Fraser; and, Parkland shooting survivor Jaclyn Corin. The speakers topics included seizing leadership opportunities when they present themselves, surrounding yourself with support, and never giving up.

On July 8, **William Ready LLD(Honorary)'89 S.O.M. Q.C.**, a long-time contributor to the University of Regina and honorary degree recipient, passed away. Ready served as the University's seventh Chancellor from 2007 to 2013. In 1989, he received an honorary degree from the University. In June, Ready was invested as a member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit in recognition of his lifetime of service to the province. He leaves to mourn his wife of more than 65 years, Fran, as well as five children, 11 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

Key findings of a recent Economic and Social Impact

Study conducted by Economic Development Regina found that the University of Regina's **Paul J. Hill School of Business and Kenneth Levene Graduate School of Business** are making a substantial economic and social impact on our communities. The study also identified significant social contributions to our city, region, and province. Our students, graduates, and faculty members are involved in their communities and are active as leaders, volunteers, and philanthropists in business, government and Indigenous organizations in Saskatchewan and across the country. Among the findings:

- The two schools generated \$211 million in economic activity and added \$140 million to the provincial GDP in 2018.
- 1 in 280 jobs in Regina depends directly or indirectly on the Hill and Levene Schools of Business. That adds up to 475 jobs in Regina and 868 jobs province-wide.
- 1,722 students spent \$10.1 million in Regina in 2018.
- 83% of Hill graduates in 2017-18 had employment before they graduated.
- 74% started work in their relevant fields of study.
- Since 2010, the Business Students' Society has raised more than \$300,000 for Carmichael Outreach through the 5 Days for the Homeless initiative.
- From 2017 to 2019, students involved in our JDC West case competition teams raised nearly \$75,000 for Hope's Home and logged more than 10,000 volunteer hours.

### Donations

On August 26, the University received a \$1 million gift from Ann Phillips and the **Ann and Roger Phillips**

**Foundation** to support the renewal of Darke Hall. Arts, culture, and performance have played important roles in the lives of the Phillips, and their connection to Darke Hall served as motivation to help realize its restoration. The foundation also gifted an additional \$500,000 that will be used to match any other donations toward the project. Constructed in 1929, Darke Hall was funded by benefactor Francis N. Darke to create a world-class performance space for Regina. Plans for the renewed Darke Hall include preservation of existing heritage elements, updates to mechanical, electrical and heating systems, lighting and sound, improved accessibility, and a new commons. A refurbished Darke Hall is slated for re-opening in mid-2021.

The family of **Kenneth Lochhead LLD(Honorary)'01** donated 70 paintings and sketches by the legendary Canadian artist to the President's Art Collection and Library Archives. The gift is valued at \$716,000. The University of Regina is now home to one of the largest collections of Lochhead's work — with nearly 100 pieces in its collection. In 1950, Ken Lochhead, a 24-year-old Ottawa-based painter, was invited by Dr. William Riddell, dean of Regina College (now the University of Regina), to interview for the role of Director of Art. Lochhead would spend 14 years with the University in this role working at College Avenue Campus, teaching hundreds of students, including the late Joe Fafard, and creating some of his most influential work. Ken Lochhead, an Officer of the Order of Canada, received an honorary degree from the U of R in 2001. He passed away in 2006. Joanne Lochhead, his wife, has re-mained close to the U of R for many years. She has coordinated several gifts of art

on her family's behalf and regularly attends U of R alumni events in her hometown of Ottawa. She was on hand for the gift announcement.

The University of Regina received a \$384,000 **EDI Institutional Capacity-Building Grant** to support the University's work to implement mainstreaming equity, diversity, and inclusion for the University of Regina. Mainstreaming is a strategic approach that directs attention to all inequalities and creates multi-level accountabilities, along with extensive engagement and consultation. Under the leadership of President and Vice-Chancellor Vianne Timmons, the University of Regina has been engaged in efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming environment free from bias or discrimination based on gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, age and religion, and is committed to being an institution where all groups are represented and respected. The U of R was one of 15 institutions selected to receive funding from among 94 submissions.

### Research

**Margot Hurlbert BAdmin'86** is the University of Regina's newest Canada Research Chair. Hurlbert is coordinating lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Climate Change and Land and a professor in the Centre for the Study of Science and Innovation Policy at the University's Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. Hurlbert was awarded a Tier 1 CRC in Climate Change, Energy, and Sustainability Policy. Her research focuses on addressing the gap between current policy and behaviour, and

understanding what is needed to address climate change. Hurlbert joins seven other Canada Research Chairs at the University of Regina. The Canada Research Chairs Program is part of the federal government's national strategy to make Canada one of the world's top countries in research and development.

An August announcement by the Honourable Kirsty Duncan, Minister of Science and Sport, is providing more than \$61 million to fund state-of-the-art research labs and equipment through the Canada Foundation for Innovation's (CFI) John R. Evans Leaders Fund. The investment will support 261 projects at 40 universities across Canada. Part of the federal funding will help two University faculty members conduct their research. **Julia Totosy de Zepetnek**, assistant professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies, is one of the researchers who will benefit from the funding. Totosy de Zepetnek's research focuses on identifying effective strategies to improve cardiometabolic health and food intake regulation in individuals with type 2 diabetes. Through monetary and in-kind support from CFI, Innovation Saskatchewan, the University of Regina, and biotech lab supply companies, Totosy de Zepetnek received \$213,540. **Gwen Grinyer**, assistant professor in the University's Faculty of Science, received \$130,918. Her research seeks to answer some of the most fundamental questions, such as, how did the heaviest elements end up on Earth? The funding will help to build the Regina Cube for Multiple Particles, which will be a compact and highly efficient array to detect delayed charged particles emitted from exotic decays of nuclei.

Earlier this year, the federal government announced

\$4,404,750 in funding for 32 of the University's science and engineering researchers to support 33 research projects through the Canadian Government's **Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council**. The funding supports science and engineering researchers in many different areas, including engineering, natural sciences, psychology, geology, mathematics, and computer science. The award recipients include both faculty and students. The funding is part of an unprecedented nationwide investment of more than \$588 million.

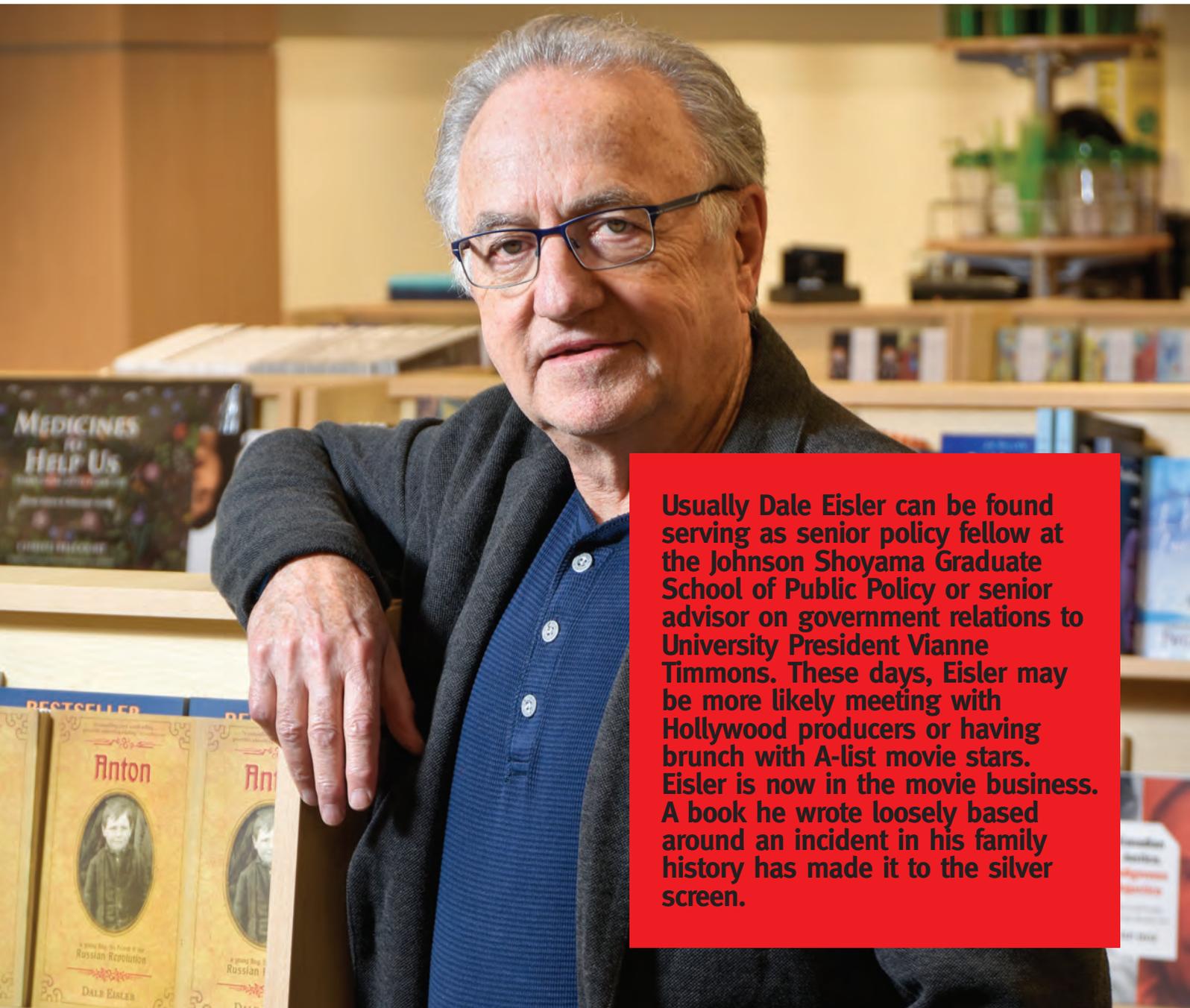
**A University of Regina-led research team** has made a major discovery that will bring them one step closer to understanding human mitochondrial respiratory chain deficiency, a rare metabolic disorder. The team includes University of Regina postdoctoral fellows and graduate students, associates from the University of Saskatchewan, and Japanese and Italian collaborators. The research team sequenced close to 300 samples from Japanese patients with respiratory chain deficiencies. In 16 of the 300 patients, researchers discovered a very rare variant — or mutation — in a gene that previously had an unknown function.

A unique partnership between the University of Regina, the Government of Saskatchewan, and Statistics Canada has resulted in the opening of the **Regina Research Data Centre (RRDC)**. The RRDC, located in a secure facility at the University of Regina, allows approved researchers to access confidential data sources on issues such as population, household services, and health. Having access to the data will enable researchers and analysts to identify common factors, gaps, and overlaps in service.

By Bill Armstrong

Photos by Trevor Hopkin and courtesy of Dale Eisler

# Lights, came



Usually Dale Eisler can be found serving as senior policy fellow at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy or senior advisor on government relations to University President Vianne Timmons. These days, Eisler may be more likely meeting with Hollywood producers or having brunch with A-list movie stars. Eisler is now in the movie business. A book he wrote loosely based around an incident in his family history has made it to the silver screen.

Dale Eisler BA'70, the University's Senior Adviser (Government Relations), poses with his 2010 novel *Anton: A Young Boy, His Friend and the Russian Revolution*. The book is loosely based on a tragic event in Eisler's family — the 1919 murder of his grandfather at the hands of the Bolsheviks.

# ra, Anton

**T**wo young boys squeal with delight as they hurtle down a hill on a wooden cart. Later, they lie on their backs interpreting what they see in passing clouds, and pledge their everlasting friendship in their secret hideaway. These are scenes from the movie *Anton*, which was inspired by an incident in the family history of Regina author Dale Eisler BA'70. Another scene in the movie shows Anton's father — Eisler's grandfather — being murdered by a band of horse-mounted Bolsheviks during the turmoil that followed the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Eisler, who is a senior policy fellow at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy and senior advisor on government relations to U of R president Vianne Timmons, had known about the incident since he was a boy. A history book in his childhood home contained a mention of the village in Ukraine where the family lived in 1919. A footnote at the bottom of a page listed the names of 12 men who were killed on that day, including Eisler's grandfather. His grandmother and the family's nine children witnessed the murder.

Eisler, who has written two books on Saskatchewan's political history, decided to write the story as a book of historical fiction. Gathering additional information from family members proved to be difficult, however, because they would become very emotional. "My mother was only four years old," Eisler says, "but she still had a vivid memory of that moment when she saw her father murdered. She had great difficulty talking about her childhood."

Eisler turned to other sources, researching various books and documents on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Ukraine. He was living in the U.S. at the time, and joined the Germans From Russia Heritage Society, which had members all over the country doing genealogical research of that period. He also attended some of the Society's conventions.

Drawing on these sources, Eisler wrote *Anton: A Young Boy, His Friend and the Russian Revolution*, which was published in 2010. The story focuses on the childhood experiences of Anton and Jacob, who create an imaginary world to shield themselves from the violence and hatred taking place around them. Although Anton is Catholic and Jacob is Jewish, the two forge a lifelong bond through their shared imaginations and exploration of spiritual questions.

"One of the things I wanted to do," Eisler explains, "was to explore the universal experience of childhood friendships, because we all go through that. You go through life and have

all sorts of acquaintances — people you know — but others are friends. What does that mean?"

Eisler's answer was to show that the friendship between Anton and Jacob was greater than the forces of division swirling around them. Another theme he wanted to explore was the yearning for a new life, which he sees as being at the core of the Canadian and North American immigrant experience. This was the case for Eisler's grandmother, who settled with some of her children in Saskatchewan in 1925. The book and the movie mirror this family history. Anton and Jacob are separated, but their friendship endures, influencing their lives until they reconnect decades later as Anton is dying.

Ironically, it was the desire for a new life that brought Eisler's grandparents to Ukraine. During her reign as Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great had expanded the country's borders to the Black Sea. She welcomed immigrants — particularly from Germany — to settle on the newly acquired rich agricultural land near Odessa. Her promises of land ownership, no military service, and low taxes, along with assurances that they could keep their own language, religion and culture, attracted many farmers and tradespeople from Germany. This included villages populated by German immigrants that began to flourish in Ukraine in the late 18th Century.

The success of these German colonies bred envy and resentment among Russia's landless serfs, who became a powerful force as the Tsarist government collapsed. Coupled with rampant antisemitism and unease within the Orthodox Church over the growing Catholic presence in the country, the stage was set for an outburst of economic, ethnic and sectarian score-settling after the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Following its release, Eisler's book received some good reviews and was "modestly well received." A number of people told him the book would make a great movie. "I thought, yeah, well, that is a nice compliment," Eisler recalls. "I appreciated it, but didn't think more of it than that. I agree. It is a good story; a unique story, and a story that's never really been told."

Eisler later decided he would write a script. He read a number of scripts and screenplays, and, writing on and off over a two-month period, completed his own. It was a different kind of writing process, he explains. While in a novel the story is primarily carried by the narration, in a screenplay the story moves forward through dialogue and the interaction of the characters.



Left: Dale Eisler with the young stars of *Anton* near Odessa, Ukraine where the film was shot. Nikita Shlanchak (left) who plays Anton, and Mykyta Dziad who plays Jacob. Right: Eisler on the set of *Anton*, the film is based on Eisler's book *Anton: A Young Boy, His Friend and the Russian Revolution* published in 2010.

The next step was to find a producer. Eisler, who was Canada's Consul General in Denver, reached out to his counterpart in Los Angeles to help find a producer. He connected with Mirza Davitaia, who had worked in film and television production, and also served as a government minister in his home country, the Republic of Georgia, before establishing a production company in Los Angeles. Eisler sent him the script and the two met in Los Angeles. Davitaia very much liked the storyline and the concept.

"I saw it as a clash of two worlds," says Davitaia. "The clash between the world of simple childhood and the brutal world of adults. The cave where Anton and Jacob meet is their small, childish, wonderful world, while the larger world outside is going through a transformation."

As the producer, Davitaia explains, it was his job to assemble everything around the idea. In the world of movie production, the most important step is to attract a director who is willing to take on the project. As in many other businesses, networking plays a major role in this process. Davitaia reached out to Zaza Urushadze, who was also from his hometown of Tbilisi, Georgia. Urushadze had recently had a film nominated for an Academy Award and a Golden Globe Award as best foreign-language film. They had talked in the past about several projects, Davitaia says, and Urushadze agreed this would be a good one to work on together.

"Having a director attached to a script — a director who is pretty well known, particularly in Europe — that gives you credibility," Eisler explains. "It's much tougher pitching a script in isolation. Having a producer who is interested is important, but having a director is the critical component."

With Urushadze on board, Davitaia was able to arrange financing with government partners in Ukraine and Georgia to support the production. Finding bilingual actors was a challenge, since the film was shot using German and Russian dialogue, with English subtitles.

Production took place over six weeks in a village not far from where the events of 1919 unfolded. Eisler observed the production work for about a week, describing some of the scenery as breathtaking and praising the work of cinematographer Mikhail Petrenko. "He (Petrenko) has an eye for these sorts of things," Eisler says.

*Anton* began screening in art cinemas in various cities in the United States in October. Davitaia explains that was the logical place to debut the movie. Even though movies with subtitles are limited in their commercial possibilities, there are American audiences that support movies as an art form. At the end of its U.S. run, the movie will screen for a week in Los Angeles, after which Davitaia has plans to enter it into competition for an Oscar, but not in the foreign-language category.

An Academy Award nomination would give the film instant credibility in the marketplace, Eisler says. "Having said that, given the hundreds of submissions in each category, realistically the odds of nomination are long indeed."

Might *Anton* someday be screened in Saskatchewan? Speaking just as the film was to premiere in the United States, Eisler said that would depend on how it is received there. If *Anton* does draw audiences in the U.S., that could mean screenings in Canada — including Saskatchewan — in 2020. **D**

*Bill Armstrong is a Regina freelance writer and amateur photographer with a strong interest in Saskatchewan history.*

You can find the movie trailer on YouTube. Simply enter the movie title into YouTube's search feature. *Anton: A Young Boy, His Friend and the Russian Revolution* can be purchased on Amazon.ca or at fine books stores near you.



  
**ACAA** ALUMNI  
CROWNING  
ACHIEVEMENT  
AWARDS

# **GARY** **DRUMMOND** **BA'72**

## **Lifetime Achievement Award**

Queen's Counsel-turned-business-leader, Gary founded and led Direct Energy, and was involved with many successful real estate projects over the years. His entrepreneurial spirit and love of sports led him to be part of a group to purchase and lead the Arizona Coyotes and to become a founding partner of the CFL's upcoming franchise, the Atlantic Schooners. He is also the creator of "Hawg-a-Rama," which has raised \$1 million for University of Regina Athletics and \$1.5 million for Regina Minor Football.

For the full biographies of this year's ACAA recipients, visit the *Degrees* website at [www.degreesmagazine.ca](http://www.degreesmagazine.ca).

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by Bill Armstrong

Photos by Don Hall

# Music to their years

**D**ale Hulston cradles an accordion on his lap, running his fingers over the instrument's buttons and keys. Tentatively at first, then with growing assurance, playing without a songbook, he launches into *The Blue Skirt Waltz*. "It makes me feel good to play again," he says, adding a few extra notes for good measure. "I've got a lot of practising to do, but I like to practise," he adds, before following up with a rollicking version of the *Beer Barrel Polka*, his legs bouncing to the beat.

"I used to play with Walter Ostanek," Hulston offers, referring to Canada's Polka King, and one of the best-known accordion players. "Oh, yes, we played all over southern Alberta. He played by ear and so do I."

Hulston is one of about 200 residents of College Park II, a retirement residence in Regina. As a young boy, his parents bought him an accordion to keep him busy. And it did — he played on bandstands and in dance halls across North America throughout his life. He put down the accordion about five years ago when he was diagnosed with dementia, but now he is playing again, with help from two graduates of the Therapeutic Recreation (TR) program at

the University of Regina and a volunteer from the community.

The therapeutic use of music is one of the approaches taught in the TR program with the University of Regina's Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies. The program focuses on leisure activities that bring about positive changes in peoples' well-being and quality of life. Some of the benefits of music include practising fine motor skills, learning a new skill, exercising memory, reducing anxiety and improving social interaction, communication, and self-expression.

Research probing how music affects the brain — including the effects on people with dementia — confirms what caregivers observe in their day-to-day contacts with residents in care homes. Neuroscientists across Canada have focused on music as one of the few characteristics, along with language, that make us unique as human beings.

In his article, "How music affects the brain," Jacob Berkowitz highlights the important finding that there is no music centre in the brain; that music is about much more than sound, also tapping into areas of the brain that represent movement, emotion, language, and vision. Using a CT

scanner, two researchers at the Montreal Neurological Institute, in a landmark study published in the journal *Science* in 2013, reported that when favourite pieces of music were played for participants, their brains released the pleasure-related neurotransmitter dopamine several seconds before the emotional crescendo of the music, establishing clear links among music, emotion, and neurotransmitters.

Much of the current research being conducted by neuroscientists involves using recorded music. Alynn Skalicky BSRS'16 is a certified therapeutic recreation specialist at College Park II in Regina. She points out that the seniors residence has an accredited music therapist who works with residents one-on-one, or in small group sessions, using recorded music. The individualized program that Kim Shalley BSRS'19, a recent graduate in the Therapeutic Recreation program at the U of R, proposed and developed for residents of College Park II was different: a one-on-one music recreation program geared to residents' specific musical interests, encouraging them to play instruments as partners with volunteers from the community. The idea was a natural outgrowth of the



**Graduates of the University's Therapeutic Recreation program have brought music to a Regina retirement residence. The program has struck a chord with residents who are coming together and discovering the benefits that music brings to their lives.**

Dale Hulston, a resident at Regina's College Park II retirement residence, is just one of the seniors whose life has benefited from the introduction of a music program by Therapeutic Recreation students from the University of Regina.

Photo by Don Hall



**Alynn Skalicky BSRS'16, a certified therapeutic recreation specialist at College Park II, says the music program has instilled a larger sense of community because of the coming and goings of the volunteer music instructors.**

large role music played in Shalley's own family life. She cherishes her memories of being with her grandparents and watching them dance at weddings and family celebrations. "I think music really does bring people together, and I saw that there were some residents who weren't involved in many programs," she explains.

Shalley completed a student placement at College Park II as part of her 560 hours of fieldwork, a requirement of all of the Kinesiology and Health Studies degree programs, including Therapeutic Recreation. Her placement enabled her to apply what she had learned in the classroom about assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. She played a leading role in developing and implementing a special project; in her case, the community music recreation program.

Putting those classroom skills into practice is one of the objectives of the fieldwork, explains Brandy West-McMaster, an instructor and the experiential learning coordinator in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies. She helps guide the students through their fieldwork in their third and fourth years. As far as she is aware, the 560-hour requirement is greater than other similar programs in Canada, ensuring that U of R graduates are well prepared to begin their careers. It often also helps them determine what

direction they would like to take within their chosen profession.

"It takes time for students to develop relationships where they take their placements and to understand the processes in those places," adds West-McMaster. "From the feedback we receive from the students and the consenting supervisors where they do their placements, the extra time helps."

According to West-McMaster, Shalley did a good job of using that extra time to apply what she learned in the TR program. "She embodied that special project and made it her own."

Skalicky was Shalley's supervisor during her placement. When she began working at College Park II, she found that some residents were isolating themselves, as Shalley also observed. "Finding some recreation that was meaningful for them meant digging into residents' histories and needs to find something that would entice them to come out and participate in a program," Skalicky says. Student placements are a godsend for her and other staff members, she notes, since they often don't have "the time or the hands" to plan and facilitate all of the programs they might like. She also values them because they help her maintain her own personal and professional connections with the U of R.

After Shalley began her placement, the pair began asking questions. They discovered Dale Hulston's lifelong connections to music and launched a pilot music recreation program to find a

way to incorporate music back into his life. They also found there were other residents who had played instruments in the past, creating possibilities to expand the program. The next step was to connect with community volunteers who would be willing to come in and play their instruments with residents and, as Shalley says, help make those memories again.

Shalley prepared and distributed posters asking for volunteers. A couple of volunteers came to play with Hulston, but could not commit to regular visits. "Dale couldn't quite remember songs on his own," Shalley says, "but it was great to see the volunteers play a song, and Dale would join in playing with them."

Natalia Osypenko saw a post in a musicians' group on Facebook and signed up right away. She had earned a degree in Music in Ukraine before immigrating to Regina, and like Hulston, she learned to play the accordion when she was young. During their first meeting, she recalls, he played The Blue Skirt Waltz for her. "I went home and found the music and now I play it with him. Playing with Dale reminds me of my grandparents' love of music; we are having fun, but playing and listening to music also empowers these people." She and Hulston have since become regular musical partners.

The program began slowly, Shalley says, but gained momentum as more volunteers began to visit residents who wanted to take up their instrument again. It was something of a surprise and a bonus, Skalicky adds, when some residents who had never played an instrument approached her, saying they wanted to learn.

"We set up the pilot project in a public space because we knew that would pique the curiosity of other residents, seeing the volunteers coming and going with their instruments and music, and hearing them working one-on-one with residents," Skalicky explains. "The program sort of grew through word-of-mouth and from seeing others participating in it."

While Hulston entertains a circle of listeners in one room, down the hall in another room, Claude Crozon and Mandy Ebel are seated at a piano singing *Amazing Grace*. Crozon was one of the first residents to join the program. His family grew up "really poor" on a farm



Left: Kim Shalley BSRS'19, a recent graduate in the Therapeutic Recreation program at the U of R, proposed and developed the music program for residents of College Park II. Right: Mandy Ebel, a singer-songwriter, vocal coach, and music producer is one of the program volunteers. She regularly visits College Park II to help Claude Crozon learn and re-learn songs after a stroke and two mild heart attacks left him without memories.

near Gravelbourg, where singing was one of their forms of entertainment. He sang in church choirs throughout his life, while teaching in various communities around Saskatchewan. However, a stroke and two mild heart attacks left him without any memory. Now he is working with Ebel on learning, or relearning, several songs.

Ebel is a singer-songwriter, vocal coach, music producer and the lead singer of a band called Opal Stone. She

**I started piano lessons when I was five,” she says, “but singing became my biggest passion. There were a few years where I had to give my voice a rest, but I’m back singing, and Claude is fun to teach.**

signed on after hearing about the program at the music store where she gives lessons. “I started piano lessons when I was five,” she says, “but singing became my biggest passion. There were a few years where I had to give my voice a rest, but I’m back singing, and Claude is fun to teach.”

Another resident, Winnifred Miller, a retired teacher, had never played an

instrument, but wanted to participate in the program as soon as she heard about it. She can use only one hand because of a stroke, so she wondered what instrument she could play. “I thought of the triangle, but when I talked to Kim, she suggested drums,” Miller says. “So, I’ve been working with a young man (Curtis Hinks) who teaches drumming as a profession. He sits on one side of the drum; I on the other.”

In their first lesson, Hinks, who is also a member of the Saskatchewan Roughriders Drumline, showed Miller two ways to hold the drumstick and how to make a single drum note. During their four lessons together, they have explored rhythms, sometimes playing to the beat of the music and then leaving out a beat.

“The drum is the timekeeper in the music,” Miller states as a smile lights up her face. “The drum beat is like the bass note on a piano; it just reaches out and grabs me.” She looks forward to her lessons, she adds, describing working with youth in this way as a role reversal from her earlier life as a teacher.

Shalley and Skalicky observe that the one-on-one sessions have helped the participants with their fine motor skills and their cognitive abilities; they are interacting more with staff members, other residents and the volunteers. Beyond that, they note that the other residents are seeing another side of the participants that they had never seen before, to the benefit of all of the residents.

“The even larger effect,” Skalicky says, “is the sense of community that

was brought in; having those volunteers coming and going, not only for the residents they were working with, but for the staff and the other residents. I think that sense of community in Regina is still strong, and the growth of the music recreation program shows that.”

Four volunteers are meeting regularly with their musical partners, with another six coming in on an on-call basis. Six residents are interested in participating, so Skalicky is looking for bagpipers, and banjo and saxophone players to join the program.

Shalley took her National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification exam in November 2019. She is working part-time at the William Booth Special Care Home in Regina and hopes to achieve a full-time position as a recreational therapist at a seniors’ home in another province in 2020. Her work with the music recreation program gave her a greater sense of direction, she says. “I learned that I have strong organizational and planning skills. Those skills, along with my musical background in playing the piano and the clarinet will help me in creating meaningful programs for seniors in particular.” **D**

*Bill Armstrong is a Regina freelance writer and amateur photographer with a strong interest in Saskatchewan history.*



In 2016, brothers Warren and Jeff Dudar BA'02, MA'09 established one of the most unique, popular and nasty trail runs in Canada. The Beaver Flat 50 drew 600 runners in September 2019, the highest number of runners in its four-year history. The event consists of four courses that wind their way through Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park: the Fletcher 5 kilometre; 10K Trail Blitz; Dam Hard 20; and, the kick-assiest race in the province — the Beaver Flat 50 that routinely crushes even the most experienced and fit trail runners. The courses criss-cross the park's coulees and hills, some as high as 2,300 metres. The majority of the race happens on game trails that are narrow, sandy, rocky, cactus-ridden, wet, and strewn with roots and juniper shrubs. A competitor (read: sucker) that takes on the Beaver Flat 50 will have to navigate 8,000 feet of elevation gain — that's more than many mountain trail runs. The men's record for the 50 is held by Mike Sidic from Vancouver, who did it in an incredible 4:37:21. The women's record is 6:10:20 by Brittany Steele from Fort Macleod, Alberta. For more information, visit the Beaver Flat 50 website at [www.pskyrunning.com](http://www.pskyrunning.com).



Photos by Alan Lam







By Lynette Piper

Photos by Trevor Hopkin and courtesy of Danielle Major.

# Major leaguer



**Danielle Major is one of those rare and gifted all-around students who defied the odds from an early age. She is an exceptional academic all-star athlete, and student coach. In short, she excels in, well, everything.**

**T**he sun peeks through an ever-changing fall sky as the last of October's leaves hold on to their branches, waiting for the next gust of wind to take flight.

While many of her University of Regina Kinesiology peers have gone home to rest and recharge for the Thanksgiving weekend, 22-year-old Danielle Major has her hands full on her parent's first-generation cattle farm, located just outside of St. Brieux in central Saskatchewan.

Danielle calmly reassures a nervous Black Angus calf, temporarily immobilized in a steel headgate, that the ear tagging, vaccinations and humane castration procedure that are about to occur will be over soon.

The calf settles under her gentle coaxing.

"Danielle has always had an affinity for the farm and for the animals," mom Lisa says proudly. "When she was a little girl, she'd rush home from school if we had an orphaned calf and bottle feed it until it was able to fend for itself. That's just Danielle. Out of all of my four girls, she takes after her dad the most. She drives the skid steer, moves the bales, and does whatever she can to help out with the herd."

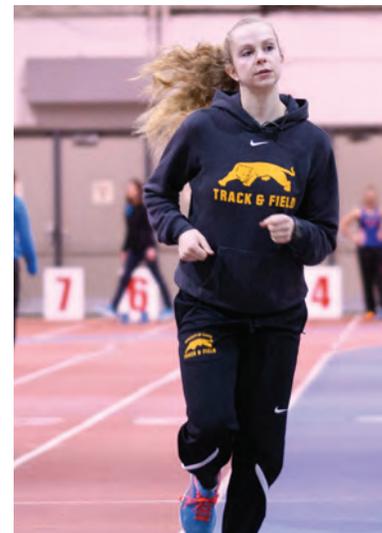
With 200 head of cattle this year, half of which are calves, the annual calf roundup is a huge event on the Major farm. It's all-hands-on-deck for Danielle and her next oldest sister Katelyn, BA'15, 26, a U of R honours history grad who

works as a student recruiter. The two sisters live together in a Regina condo that once belonged to their grandmother and drove home together for the long weekend. So has their eldest sister Larissa, BEd'16, 32, a U of R education grad, teacher and former nurse, who has come from Coronach with her husband Brandon and their little boy, Bennett — the first grandchild, *and* the first boy in the family. The only sister missing from the family gathering is 29-year-old Ashley, BEd'16, a U of R human justice grad and international lawyer in Toronto, who was unable to get away for the weekend.

"My sisters and I were not exactly excited to have to deal with the cows, but Danielle was always in her element," Larissa recalls. "She's the one who loved to spend time with Dad hunting for and tending to the cattle. We always thought she was going to be a vet and we called her Dr. Danielle."

Danielle is one of those rare and gifted all-around students who defied the odds even from an early age. She was an all-star high school athlete and student coach, excelling in everything, including basketball, volleyball, track and field, and softball. She volunteered in a long-term care home and vet clinic, was a group leader at vacation Bible camp and graduated high-school with an almost unheard of 99.2 per cent entrance average.

Danielle is now in her fifth year of Kinesiology, having extended her



**Left:** Major was affectionately known as Curly Sue growing up with her mass of blonde curls. Her sisters say you weren't to be fooled by all of that cuteness because Danielle meant business, with an independent streak all her own. **Centre:** Major helps out with cattle chores on a visit to the family farm this past Thanksgiving weekend. **Right:** Major competed for the University's Cougars Track and Field team while maintaining an 80 plus academic average percentage.

undergraduate degree by a year so she could excel at hurdles on the U of R track team, which involved training five days per week, lifting weights, and all the while keeping an 80-plus per cent average in all of her core science classes and labs. She currently works at the University gym, serves as a teacher assistant and lab instructor, volunteers at the Dr. Paul Schwann Fitness and Lifestyle Centre assisting at-risk cardiac and stroke patients and those with diabetic complications, is an active member of the Kinesiology and Health Studies Students Society, and volunteers at a student-run health clinic in Regina's North Central neighbourhood.

"It can be quite a culture shock when you see people who are the poorest of the poor, struggling with life's many challenges. It makes you appreciate everything you have and it makes you want to serve," she says thoughtfully. "I love making a difference, and spending time at SEARCH (Student Energies in Action for Regina Community Health), which allows me to give back in such a meaningful way. I always count my blessings when I leave."

Danielle has her sights set on medical school, but also sees a future for herself as a physiotherapist, understanding first-hand the struggles that elite athletes face in pursuit of athletic perfection. She is just as passionate about women's rights, and the fact that many women feel uncomfortable speaking up about what they need from their physicians and OB-GYNs. "I want to educate women and normalize health care for women," she

says passionately. "I want to use whatever platform I have to be a champion of women."

As Danielle's mom Lisa explains, the four Major daughters grew up in a remodelled 1913 one-room school house on the farm, with a ladder leading to the sleeping quarters and one tiny bathroom upstairs. "It was pretty tight quarters as you can imagine," laughs Lisa, a city girl herself who became a nurse and fell in love with a quiet farm boy with big dreams of his own. "We had an old wood stove for heat and all of the girls learned how to split wood and do their part to keep the house warm and the farm operational."

Danielle's dad Charlie knew from a young age that he wanted to set off and establish a farm of his own, since his parent's half section wasn't large enough for the next generation to subdivide and earn a living.

"My folks weren't wealthy and I had to secure financing for the first quarter of land," he begins. "When the high interest rates of the '80s hit, I had to work the oil patch to bring in enough money to keep things afloat. In the mid '90s, I bought eight head of cattle and grew it to what it is today. But it wasn't easy. When BSE (bovine spongiform encephalitis — a serious cattle infection) hit in 2003, I knew we were in trouble. An infected animal was found in Alberta, but all of a sudden the borders were closed and we couldn't sell our cows to anyone."

The family struggled financially and emotionally. Lisa worked full time as a

nurse manager to support the family while Charlie tended to the farm, teaching his young daughters how to tie their shoes, feed the animals, and excel in school. In spite of Charlie's and Lisa's best efforts to stay positive, that pivotal event left an indelible imprint on all of the girls. Ashley says BSE taught them that nothing in life can be taken for granted.

"It was a very stressful time to think that we might be one of those families that could lose their farm," Ashley recalls. "But it taught us to be prepared and to make our own way in the world. It imparted in us a maturity and a resiliency that I don't think we would have received if we'd grown up in the city. The farm is in our soul. It's a really important part of our personalities."

Lisa says all of the girls worked hard and were exceptional students, but Danielle was the most serious of them all. "I never had to remind her to do her homework as a youngster. She was so self-motivated that when a Saskatchewan snowstorm would blow in causing the school bus to shut down, Danielle would beg her dad to get the truck out and blaze a trail to get to school. She never wanted to miss class — *ever* — even though the girls easily could have taken a snow day," Lisa recalls with a smile.

"I just knew, even at a very young age, that if I worked extremely hard, I could obtain scholarships and support myself through school. I've been incredibly fortunate and have received scholarships. It's allowed me to have a



Major volunteers at the Dr. Paul Schwann Fitness and Lifestyle Centre at the University of Regina assisting at-risk cardiac and stroke patients and those with diabetic complications. Shown here with Schwann Centre client Chris Brenner.

wholly enriched academic experience,” Danielle says proudly.

While Danielle is never without her textbooks, her focus at this moment is with the calves and the job at hand. She takes a much-deserved break and gathers for some family photos on nearby bales of hay. She sits with her dad, overlooking the animals and a job well done. Their interplay is quiet, each intuitively understanding the other.

“I always told my girls, ‘Don’t count on a man to make your way in life. Things can go wrong. Be your own boss and find your own way,’” says Charlie. Each of his daughters have heeded those words, all accomplished university graduates with Danielle set to graduate next Spring. They have all built independent futures away from the farm — at least for now. Charlie reminds them that this land that they love so dearly will always be there for them to enjoy.

“It’s peaceful here and I can relax without the intrusion of cars and people. It’s a place of solitude and privacy for me,” Danielle says contentedly. “I definitely see an acreage in my future.”

As for her future career, it’s anybody’s guess. Doctor? Physiotherapist? Animal whisperer? Danielle knows her eventual career will soon take flight, just like the last remnants of Fall leaves that begin to swirl and scatter with the latest gust of wind.



The Majors enjoy a weekend together on the family farm. (clockwise from top left): Tucker, the yellow lab, Dad Charlie, sister Katelyn, Danielle, sister Larissa, Mom Lisa, nephew Bennett, and Larissa’s husband Brandon.

*Lynette Piper is an award-winning writer and former government communicator and journalist who is now pursuing her BFA in Film Production at the U of R. Outside of school, she’s involved with several production companies utilizing her creative writing, producing, and voiceover talents. Her passions include mental health*

*advocacy and documenting the lives of prairie pioneers.*

To read the complete story visit the Degrees website at [www.degreesmagazine.ca](http://www.degreesmagazine.ca).



**ACAA** ALUMNI  
CROWNING  
ACHIEVEMENT  
AWARDS

**TRUDY  
STEWART  
BFA'08**

(AWARDED POSTHUMOUSLY)

**JANINE  
WINDOLPH  
BFA'06,  
MFA'11**

## Award for Distinguished Professional Achievement

Trudy and Janine met during University, cemented their creative relationship while working at the Indigenous Filmmaking festival, *mispon*, and went on to create award-winning documentaries featured at festivals around the world. Out of their work as statement gatherers for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they created the RIIS Media Project and a documentary that explores the shared colonial legacy of the Regina Indian Industrial School—having achieved more working together as independent filmmakers and storytellers than they could have on their own.

For the full biographies of this year's ACAA recipients, visit the *Degrees* website at [www.degreesmagazine.ca](http://www.degreesmagazine.ca).

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**Art Wakabayashi LLB(Honorary)'19** is no stranger to the Convocation stage. After all, from 2001 until 2007, he presided over it as Chancellor of the University of Regina, conferring an estimated 13,500 degrees, diplomas, and certificates on U of R graduates. At this year's Fall Convocation, it was someone else's turn to do the heavy lifting. Wakabayashi was awarded an honorary doctor of laws from President and Vice-Chancellor Vianne Timmons. We caught up with him just before one of his twice-weekly curling matches and asked him a few questions.



**D** You have contributed so much to the University of Regina and yet your alma mater is the University of Saskatchewan. What would you tell people who think the province should support just one university?

*Current enrolment of some 25,000 at the U of S and some 16,000 at the U of R indicate viability of two universities in the province. The U of R is more accessible and more affordable to anyone living in Regina and area.*

**D** What do you think is the biggest benefit of a university education?

*I think the biggest benefit of a university education is that it broadens your career opportunities.*

**D** What was your most satisfying professional achievement?

*I was the youngest person, at the age of 23, to be appointed director of Administrative Services (budget and accounting) in the Department of Social Services and Rehabilitation. I have fond memories of the satisfying relationships I developed with the fine, dedicated, management team in the department.*

**D** You and your wife Marjorie have been married for 60 years. What's the secret to a long and successful marriage?

*We share the same Christian values and we have been able to agree on practically all the decisions we needed to make since the day we were married.*

*One continual area of disagreement is that Marj is a very tidy person who can't stand clutter and is always after me to put things away.*

**D** What advice would the 87-year-old Arthur Wakabayashi give to the 27-year-old Arthur Wakabayashi?

*Your life is a lifelong learning journey. Take any educational development opportunities that are available.*

**D** Which aspect of today's technology have you most embraced?

*I now use WordPerfect to compose all my reports and correspondence. It's much faster than when I used to laboriously hand write all my memos and reports and then give it to someone to type.*

**D** Besides your University of Regina honorary degree, which of your awards and honours are you most proud?

*I am most proud of being appointed a member of the Order of Canada.*

**D** How long have you been curling?

*I've been curling for over 50 years. I enjoy curling in the Callie Seniors Curling Club. It's a great social and physical Winter activity.*



**BRIANNE**  
**URZADA**  
**BED' 12** (with distinction)  
**BA' 14** (with distinction)

**Humanitarian and  
Community Service  
Award**

Life threw Brianne a curveball when, at 23, she was diagnosed with cancer. While undergoing chemotherapy, the arts educator was inspired to give back to the community through her art. Her *Five Stages* art exhibit raised \$47,000 for cancer care through the Hospitals of Regina Foundation and \$16,000 for the Allan Blair Cancer Centre. With the cancer in remission, she launched Arthouse, where she facilitates arts-based programs and free art classes for cancer patients and survivors.

For the full biographies of this year's ACAA recipients, visit the *Degrees* website at [www.degreesmagazine.ca](http://www.degreesmagazine.ca).

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# A mighty voice for Indigenous health care equity

By David Olinger

Alika Lafontaine BSc'02 is a **tireless advocate for Indigenous health care equality** in Canada. He has been recognized with the **Canadian Medical Association's Award for Young Leaders** and the Sir Charles Tupper Award for Political Action, among many other honours. While he might admit the recognition is flattering, what really **drives him is the responsibility** he feels to make a difference.



U of R alumnus Alika Lafontaine BSc'02 accepts Public Policy Forum's award for emerging leaders from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at an April 2017 event. Photo courtesy of Public Policy Forum



**Left:** Ted Quewezance, a former chief of Keeseekoose First Nation, near Kamsack, Saskatchewan has seen his community plunge into the depths of despair because of a health crisis. In 2016, there were 100 drug-related deaths. On February 27, 2016, there were four deaths on Cote First Nation alone. Photo by Don Hall **Right:** In summer 2018, Ian Musqua (left) and his friend Adrian Severight wait for a methadone clinic to open in Kamsack, Saskatchewan. As early as 2013, patients claimed a Kamsack doctor was over-prescribing opioids. The same doctor operated the methadone program, an opioid addiction treatment. In 2018, the doctor was charged with unprofessional conduct by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan. He retired later that year. Photo by Mark Taylor

**T**ed Quewezance can tell you first-hand about the plight his people have faced when it comes to engaging with Canada’s health care-system. The former chief of the Keeseekoose First Nation and Residential School survivor has been a vocal critic of Canada’s health care system and how it favours non-Indigenous Canadians over Indigenous Canadians.

In early 2016, Quewezance was one of the leaders of the Saulteaux Pelly Agency Chiefs Health Alliance (consisting of Keeseekoose, Cote and Key First Nations) that declared their communities in a major state of crisis. Located some 20 kilometres north of Kamsack, Saskatchewan, the three First Nations have been plagued by hundreds of deaths attributed to addictions, violence and health problems. In the year surrounding the crisis declaration, Quewezance said he was attending three or four funerals each week, one of which was his son’s.

“My concern is the human suffering and harm,” Quewezance says. “I see it

every day in the deaths and the perpetual crisis in our communities.”

There are many across the country who are diligently working to right the health care inequities. One of Canada’s strongest Indigenous health advocates is University of Regina alumnus Alika Lafontaine BSc’02. Lafontaine, an Ojibwe-Cree anesthesiologist at Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Grande Prairie, Alberta, says progress has occurred for Indigenous health care patients, but much more work remains to be done to achieve equality.

“A lot of the issues in Indigenous health actually aren’t unique, they are just magnified,” he explains. “The system is multi-level and fragmented. In general, stakeholders aren’t directly accountable to each other. This is much worse for Indigenous health.” Lafontaine works relentlessly with medical professionals, health care organizations, and Indigenous communities to drive change in funding and practices at the provincial and federal levels. Improvement, he says, is dependent on four pillars —

clear communication, strong engagement, targeted intervention, and cultural transformation.

In 2013, Lafontaine found himself helping Saskatchewan First Nations figure out why their community members were so sick. He recognized the gap in safety, quality improvement and patient-centred care between Indigenous and non-Indigenous patients.

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action for health, the Indigenous Health Alliance was formed with a mission to eliminate the differences in quality of care between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. As project chair, Lafontaine drafted and helped lead a national strategy representing more than 150 First Nations organizations and several national health agencies. The strategy was submitted to the federal government on behalf of First Nations to advance health

*Story continued on page 29*



**ACAA** ALUMNI  
CROWNING  
ACHIEVEMENT  
AWARDS

# PAUL MCLELLAN BADMIN'81 MBA'09

## Dr. Robert & Norma Ferguson Award for Service to the University

Serving on the University's Board of Governors from 2008 to 2015, Paul's tenure included the launch of the *College Avenue Campus Renewal Project*, record-breaking undergraduate student enrolment, and increased opportunities for Indigenous students. During Paul's final year as Board Chair, the University began developing a new strategic plan, *peyak aski kikawinaw—Together We Are Stronger*, demonstrating the University's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action.

For the full biographies of this year's ACAA recipients, visit the *Degrees* website at [www.degreesmagazine.ca](http://www.degreesmagazine.ca).

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**Mike Walter MED'06 was Lafontaine's home room and physics teacher at Regina's Winston Knoll Collegiate. Walter has been delighted to watch Lafontaine's career flourish, but he is not surprised by his former student's accomplishments.** Photo by Trevor Hopkin

transformation. Last fall, the federal government committed \$68 million to the project and, with that money in place, Lafontaine proudly stepped back to ensure that implementation was led by First Nations.

"There is hope in the system. There is room to be optimistic," he says.

In addition to working together in the Indigenous Health Alliance, Lafontaine and Quewezance are long-time family friends. The young doctor has helped shape a new vision of health care for Quewezance.

"Alika introduced an insider perspective when he told us Indigenous health problems are based on health system design," says Quewezance. "Most of my life, I bought into the warped belief that it was our fault. As I worked with him in the Indigenous Health Alliance, I learned that what we need is transformation of the health system."

Through story-telling, real patient encounters, and his own experience, Lafontaine lectures across Canada on how bias, discrimination, and racism affect patient care and why addressing these issues lies at the core of improving the health of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

In addition to a busy anesthesia practice in Northern Alberta, Lafontaine serves leadership roles with the Alberta Health Services Indigenous health program and North Zone. He is also an associate clinical professor at the University of Alberta in the Department of Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. He is past-president of the Indigenous Physicians

Association of Canada, chair of the governance council of the Canadian Medical Association Journal and a council member of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

Earlier this year, Lafontaine received the Sir Charles Tupper Award for Political Action for demonstrating leadership, commitment, and dedication in advancing Canadian Medical Association goals and policies through grassroots advocacy. He was the recipient of the 2017 Emerging Leader Award at the 2017 Public Policy Forum Testimonial Dinner and Awards, an award presented by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

He is the first Indigenous physician listed by *Medical Post* as one of Canada's 50 Most Powerful Doctors. In 2016, he won the Great Canadian Healthcare Debate at the National Health Leadership Conference organized by HealthCareCAN. In 2015, he was selected a recipient of the Canadian Medical Association's Award for Young Leaders.

In 2008, during his anesthesia fellowship, Lafontaine became CBC's "Canada's Next Great Prime Minister." He won the competition with a platform focused on reconciling the Treaty relationship between Canada's Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians.

"The advocacy has been a natural evolution of growing up the way that I did and having the opportunities that I was given," Lafontaine says. "Any Indigenous person who gets involved in the health field has the opportunity to have some sort of impact, partially because there are not a lot of us out there, partially because the need is so

deep. It is very fulfilling. I'm working with patients, colleagues, and other professionals who are also trying to make a difference."

Recognizing the importance of patients telling their stories, Lafontaine is developing a virtual platform for physicians, health systems, and Indigenous patients to understand each other's perspectives and to openly tackle issues like discrimination and racism. The platform, SafeSpaces, was used in the Indigenous Health Alliance to capture patient experiences across Saskatchewan, Northern Manitoba, and Northern Ontario.

Lafontaine's list of awards and accomplishments is anything but short. Not bad for someone who, in grade school, was labelled as developmentally delayed and consequently homeschooled.

Mike Walter MED'06 was Lafontaine's home room and physics teacher. Walter has been delighted to watch Lafontaine's career flourish, but he is not surprised by his student's accomplishments.

"It really was a unique story. Alika was two years younger than his classmates, yet he was more mature. He was strong academically and worked hard."

Walter recalls young Lafontaine as being a well-rounded student — in his school work, music and sports.

"I'm incredibly proud to see how Alika has pursued his medical career and that he advocates for Indigenous health care in our country. He deeply cares about society. He's positive, caring and dedicated to what he believes in."



**Alika Lafontaine at the 2017 Public Policy Forum Testimonial Dinner and Awards.**  
Photo courtesy of Public Policy Forum

Walter, now deputy director, Instruction and School Operations at the Prairie Valley School Division, taught all five Lafontaine children. He credits Alika's parents with giving their children a global perspective and strongly supporting their educational pursuits.

"Alika's story is one of having a number of assets and pushing forward to make a difference," Walter says.

At age 16, while studying at the University of Regina, Lafontaine became one of the youngest recipients of a prestigious undergraduate Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) research grant. He is also the youngest recipient of an Indspire award, which celebrates and encourages excellence in the Indigenous community.

Lafontaine is quick to credit the University of Regina for its role in helping to launch his career. "It was the right place for me to find myself academically," he says. "Professionally, the building blocks were put in place at the University of Regina."

Lafontaine recalls vividly the moment that forged his career path into medicine. "There was a professor, Nazih Noureldin — on the first quiz in chemistry, I received a 70. I was sitting at the back of the class. He came to me and said, 'Is this the best that you can do?' I asked why? He said, 'You can do a lot better.'"

He recalls Noureldin "volun-telling" him to sit at the front of the class and

credits him for providing motivation and increasing his confidence. They would develop a friendship and Lafontaine considers his former professor a lifelong mentor. He says he also thrived with the smaller classes where students got to know each other and professors showed a genuine interest.

Lafontaine says his parents, Chris and Manusu, had a significant impact on his career path as well. His upbringing combined his father's Saulteaux-Cree culture and traditions with his mother's Pacific Islander heritage.

"My mother was an immigrant and she understood the struggles of trying to make a living without higher education," Lafontaine says. "She instilled the value of hard work and how school would take us places. She looked at what our family would need in the future and what each of us should do."

Lafontaine's father was a management consultant, while his mother managed their family musical group, a time he affectionately refers to as being part of a "boy band." Growing up, he and his siblings formed a boy band, The 5th Generation. They performed pop, R&B covers, and original music. The family also facilitated workshops in areas such as strengthening family relationships and physical health.

One of Lafontaine's brothers became a lawyer, another is a dentist

and a third is an administrator in a health authority, while his sister completed a bachelor's of science degree. Four of the five Lafontaine siblings are University of Regina alumni.

"Our mom was definitely a driving force. She gave us a push, put wind in our sails to give us direction. Our parents raised us to believe in traditional ways, so culture is a central part of who we are."

Lafontaine originally had thoughts of pursuing cardiology or becoming a neurosurgeon. His wife dissuaded him from a career that would inhibit family life. His decision to become an anesthesiologist resulted from an opportunity to shadow a friend one night when a "code blue" occurred.

"He was able to take a room that was in chaos and calmly directed people what to do. I watched him help people sort through a very stressful situation and redirect their attention to what the patient needed. That was the kind of doctor I wanted to become."

Lafontaine and his wife, Thu Uyen, a dentist, have four children — Meilea, 11, Tiger, 9, Melina, 7, and Kenji, 5. All four children are homeschooled and he takes an active role in their learning.

Despite his boy-band pedigree, these days his musical engagement doesn't go beyond singing and playing the piano with his kids. Family time also includes biking, hiking, and being a "dance dad."

Quewezance, who spoke publicly about the legacy of Residential Schools at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceeding, and served as executive director of the National Residential School Survivors' Society, has high praise for Lafontaine.

"I have learned a lot from working with Alika and I am impressed with his commitment to educate and the patience to work towards changing the system. He is a good listener who is able to see two worlds. What makes him a great leader is how he creates space for our voice in his work."

"Creating change in systems means changing mindsets," Lafontaine adds. "Patients, especially Indigenous patients, are feeling more and more that they have a voice, and that they can come out and talk and decision-makers will actually listen." **D**

*David Olinger is principal of Write Stuff Communications, a full-service communications agency based in Grande Prairie, Alberta.*



# TYLER WILLOX BBA'11

## Outstanding Young Alumni Award

As a student, Tyler founded the Regina chapter of 5 Days for the Homeless, served as URSU Vice-President, and as a member of the University's Senate. Still early in his career, Tyler has created impact in his role with Information Services Corporation, served as the youngest Chair of the Board for the Regina & District Chamber of Commerce, represented Canada at the 2017 G20 Young Entrepreneur's Alliance Summit in Berlin, and was named to the CBC SK's Future 40.

For the full biographies of this year's ACAA recipients, visit the *Degrees* website at [www.degreesmagazine.ca](http://www.degreesmagazine.ca).

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By Sabrina Cataldo, BA'97, BJ'99, Cert. PR'04

Photos by Trevor Hopkin

# Opening r



Nathalie Desjarlais has gone from discovering YWCA programs and putting her addictions behind her, to serving as a role model for women accessing YWCA services today. In the process she likely saved her life. Photo by Trevor Hopkin

Part of the **inspiration for YWCA Regina's new \$45 million Centre for Women and Families** opening in 2022 in Regina are six simple leather **chairs in the organization's current lobby**. They are always occupied because they **offer safe refuge for anyone who needs it**. No one is ever asked to leave. Meet four U of R graduates who are **leading YWCA Regina** into a new era.

# new doors

**L**ike many people, Nathalie Desjarlais had always thought of the YWCA as a place with a gym and a pool. She had no idea of the kinds of services it offered to women and families, until she, herself, had nowhere else to turn. “I came here straight from detox. My counsellor made a phone call and the YWCA had a room. I was nervous at first when I got here, about living among a bunch of other women,” she says.

It wasn't long before the residence began to feel like home. “I loved it. I had a key to my own room. I didn't care if that room was small. I had my own bed. When you don't have anywhere to go, these things are important.”

Desjarlais says living at the Regina YWCA for four years helped her stay sober. “It helped me find myself again. I don't need to be drunk or high to enjoy my day.”

Integrating herself into the community there was key. She volunteered at the clothing store, cleaned common areas, participated in communal cooking, and took various classes. “It helped me feel proud, like you're actually somebody now and not just someone who is hiding in a room.”

She also became a mentor to other women who were struggling with addictions. “Once you talk about it more and talk with other women, you can relate to them. You share each other's stories and it takes it off your shoulders

after so many years of keeping it inside,” she says.

Desjarlais has since moved into her own place, which she shares with her adult daughter. She continues to spend time at the YWCA, serving as a role model for other women accessing its services. “Now, I'm actually looking after me. It took a long time. If it wasn't for this place, I don't know where I'd be right now. I'm so grateful and thankful that I got to stay here.”

The YWCA is a lifeline for many, currently helping more than 7,000 women and families each year with services that address family homelessness, gender-based violence, housing support, wellness and childcare. It has grown to the point where its current facility, located in downtown Regina, can no longer meet the needs of its staff and clients. “Last year, we turned away 3,000 women and children from our shelters due to lack of capacity,” says Melissa Coomber-Bendtsen BEd'02, YWCA Regina chief executive officer.

The YWCA has also had to make do with less-than-ideal spaces for its programming. For example, the daycare is in a former cafeteria, and the children's craft room is in an old gym change room in the basement. Meeting rooms are often not only double-booked, but also quadruple-booked, with internal and external groups jockeying for spots.

The solution? The new YWCA Regina Centre for Women and Families, a \$45 million facility to be located in Regina's Cathedral neighbourhood, at the site of the former Victoria School and Lucy Eley Park. In addition to the YWCA, the centre will serve as a hub for community services, housing Regina Mobile Crisis Services, All Nations Hope Network, Regina Sexual Assault Centre, a commercial kitchen, traditional Indigenous healing and medicine spaces, and various pop-up services, such as immunization clinics and grocery stores. It will also have a café, two childcare centres, a used clothing store, multipurpose spaces that can be rented by the public, and additional housing units.

The premise for the new centre was inspired by six simple leather chairs in the lobby of the current building. “Those chairs are always full of people who live here and people who are coming off the street and just need a safe place to rest. If people are coming in, whether they've been drinking all night, are on drugs or escaping an abusive partner, they're comfortable walking into our space and know they won't be asked to leave,” says Coomber-Bendtsen. As she watched people in the chairs, she started wondering, “What if we had services for them while they're here? What does that look like? How can we prevent people from going into total crisis? That's how the concept of



Architectural rendering of the north elevation of the new YWCA Regina Centre for Women and Families, a \$45 million facility to be located in Regina's Cathedral neighbourhood, at the site of the former Victoria School and Lucy Eley Park. It's slated for opening in 2022. Rendering courtesy of YWCA Regina Below: All Nations Hope Network CEO Margaret Kisikaw Piyesis is looking forward to the opening of the YWCA Regina Centre for Women and Families. It means she won't have to store traditional medicines in her garage anymore. Photo by Carina Gartner, Details Photography Studio



Margaret Kisikaw Piyesis, CEO, All Nations Hope Network.

the Centre for Women and Families started: How many more leather chairs do we need? If we had all the space in the world, what could we do?"

The centre will allow the YWCA to fulfil its goal of providing trauma-informed care (practices that promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing) for the people it serves. This means every woman, child, and family member who comes into the space is treated based on their specific traumas and experiences. The staff at the reception desk assess the immediate needs of people walking in — do they need food, water, a private space to “chill out”? — as well as whether they need to access longer-term services.

All Nations Hope Network is looking forward to moving into the centre once it opens in 2022. Grounded in Indigenous spirituality and cultural practices, the network serves people who are dealing with HIV/AIDS and

Hepatitis C, and who may also be struggling with addictions, homelessness, and poverty. As with the YWCA's current location, the facilities for All Nations Hope Network are far from ideal. Its administrative offices are located in Fort Qu'Appelle, its outreach programs are run out of a building in North Central Regina, with a ceremonial site and sweat lodge located several blocks away, and traditional medicines are processed and stored in CEO Margaret Kisikaw Piyesis' garage.

“We need a sacred space where we can process and harvest our medicines and take care of them in a good way. We need a space where we can hold our ceremonies indoors and outdoors. We need a place that is more accessible. We need more staff to be navigating in the community, working with people who walk through our doors,” says Kisikaw Piyesis.

All Nations Hope Network will be moving its sacred site into the Centre for Women and Families, creating the city's first indoor sweat lodge, where people can participate in ceremonies regardless of the season. Kisikaw Piyesis, a traditional medicine practitioner, stresses the importance of ceremony for Indigenous people. “At All Nations Hope Network, we are smudging and praying every day for the people. We are pleading consistently for the health and wellness of our families and children. We believe Indigenous people have solutions for what we face as we move through this place. We need to

understand where we're at and how we can bring solutions to life. We do all these things through ceremony.”

Coomber-Bendtsen believes that giving the sweat lodge a prominent place in the city is part of a process of reconciliation for the YWCA, a colonial institution that has been around for more than 150 years. “We recognized that it's our duty to ensure this space is there and is protected as a healing lodge and sacred space past our time. It's about giving that land back,” she says.

Kisikaw Piyesis appreciates the partnership with the YWCA. She says, “People are not coming in to save us or control us. They can sit beside us as allies.”

Although it's only two blocks from the current YWCA, the change of location brings the Centre for Women and Families away from the downtown core and brings it into a residential neighbourhood. “That's very deliberate,” Coomber-Bendtsen says. “Part of creating a sense of something greater than the crisis you're involved in is about being authentically in a community. It's about saying, ‘Everyone deserves to be part of a neighbourhood.’”

She notes that the facility will benefit people living in the community as well. “We've become isolated as community members in how we navigate neighbours and neighbourhoods. A healthy, vibrant community needs to have opportunities to give back and opportunities to participate, not just at Christmas, but on



Left: Melissa Coomber-Bendtsen BE'd'02 is YWCA Regina's chief executive officer. Centre: Lindsay Dell BAdmin'02, senior director of Finance. Right: Alexis Losie BA'09 is the YWCA's senior director of operations and Tara Molson CCE'09 is senior director of community programs. Photos by Trevor Hopkin

an ongoing basis, to exist outside of their fences and their worldviews.” She adds that reducing homelessness and instances where people have no place to go also reduces crime and creates a more vibrant neighbourhood. “The intent is to bring something rather than to take something away. The empty field is being taken away, but our intentions are to bring something even better.”

The YWCA is consulting with members of the neighbourhood on features of the centre that can serve them, such as the playground and park that will be located on site.

Creating the Centre for Women and Families is no small undertaking, but fortunately Coomber-Bendtsen has a strong team behind her: Tara Molson CCE'09 is the senior director of community programs; Alexis Losie BA'09 is the senior director of operations; and Lindsay Dell BAdmin'02 is the senior director of finance. Each of them is looking forward to the new centre for different reasons.

Molson, who is also responsible for childcare programs, says, “It will have a great impact on our childcare and families coming in. It's going to open up space for them to stay a bit longer. Right now, people come drop off kids and leave right away. Having a café, more open space, more reason for them to stick around in the building will be positive.”

She is also excited about having a multipurpose space for kids' activities that isn't in an old shower. “Having the space to have proper teaching moments is hard to do in a basement with tons of different community groups coming in and out. Having moments with kids to help them heal and move forward in their lives will be a lot easier in a space like the hub.”

Losie is looking forward to seeing how a properly designed building can contribute to the well-being of the neighbourhood. “Six chairs have created a community in this lobby, such a strong community that I can't wait to see what

a building that is purpose-built can do for people we serve.” She is eager for a loading dock and storage areas to be able to accept larger donations from the public. Her vision for the building is to have “spaces to store things, spaces for people to volunteer on a regular basis, and a community that's so magnetic and appealing that we have more volunteers than we know what to do with.”

Dell is the most recent member of

**The YWCA is a lifeline for many, currently helping more than 7,000 women and families each year with services that address family homelessness, gender-based violence, housing support, wellness, and childcare. Last year, we turned away 3,000 women and children from our shelters due to lack of capacity.**

the team, having only been on the job for a few months. She mentions that the new building will bring in diversified revenue for the organization, through leases from community partners and fee-for-service programming, which means the YWCA will be less reliant on government funding. “The sustainability is really what we want. It's an exciting project to be a part of. I'm still on the high of being in a new job. For me, it was about coming to an organization that's very empowering for women,” says Dell.

Molson, Losie, Dell and Coomber-Bendtsen are all University of Regina graduates. Each feel that their time at the U of R helped prepare them for their

current roles and reflects the work they're doing at the YWCA.

“The only other building I can think of to have residences and offices — people living there, working there, food services, renting places for special events — is the University of Regina. Not a lot of places offer those services on one property,” says Losie.

She sees the sense of community at the YWCA and the University in the same way. “If you were someone at University who went to classes and left campus, you had a different experience than people who immersed themselves in the culture and gave back. That's how I met people — by getting involved in events going on there. You see that with the women here — there are new-found friendships because they took a sewing class together or took part in some of our events here. Those are bonds that I can liken to student groups. That's where you develop social circles.”

Coomber-Bendtsen agrees and says that the U of R helps to build both individuals and communities by encouraging students to go beyond their comfort zones. “There's a vulnerability to the age I was when I went to university. There's a risk — you're always asked to put yourself in situations that felt uncomfortable. That's where my greatest amount of growth came from, when I reflect back. Every time I did that, there was success inherent in that. That's reflective in tackling something like this. I learned through my University of Regina experiences that great things happen when you put yourself in uncomfortable situations, where you're asked to learn something completely different than your skill set. You learn that taking that risk is important.” **D**

*Sabrina Cataldo is an award-winning writer and communications strategist in Regina.*

## Upcoming Alumni Events:

### SLAM DUNK OF AN EVENING

University of Regina  
KHS Gym 1

Friday, January 10, 2020

**Save the date** for an evening of family fun followed by back-to-back Cougar basketball games!

For more information about upcoming alumni events, please visit the alumni events selection at [www.uregina.ca](http://www.uregina.ca)

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## 1980-1990

**Wes Pearce BA'88, BFA'92** entered his 22nd year as a faculty member in the Theatre Department at the University of Regina. It's Pearce's second year as Associate Dean, Interdisciplinary Programs and Special Projects in Media, Art, and Performance (after eight years as Associate Dean Undergraduate). Pearce was recently elected to the Board of Directors of Regina's Globe Theatre.

## 1990-2000

**Brett Scott MMU'96** is a professor of Ensembles and Conducting (Choral) at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. He recently published a biography of Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer.

## 2000-2010

**Tina Beaudry-Mellor MA'02** is the Saskatchewan Minister of Advanced Education, the Minister of Innovation Saskatchewan and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women for the Province of Saskatchewan. She is also the Vice-Chair of the Canadian Ministers of Education Canada and will serve on the FinnTech Advisory Board, Canada in 2020.

**Amy Moats BKin'06** moved back to Regina this year to take on a leadership role at the Regina Exhibition Association after 13 year working in sports organizations, including Western Hockey League, Hockey Canada, Edmonton Eskimos, and her sport consulting business called The Sport of Business Ltd.

## Michael Carpente MA'09

is a sessional instructor in Political Science at the University of Victoria and a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Global Studies. His PhD thesis explored the theory and practice of civic struggle, also known as nonviolent direct action, especially in the context of the Middle East.

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### ARE YOU A UNIVERSITY OF REGINA GRADUATE?

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Send us a nomination form signed by three graduates and endorsed by a nominee. Nominees must live in the district for which they are nominated and must provide biographical information and a photograph.

The University Secretariat office will accept nominations until **4:00 p.m. on Monday, April 15, 2020**.

### Nominations will be called for the following:

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*Incumbent is eligible for re-election*

**District 8 (Dundurn-Delisle)**  
*Vacant*

**District 9 (North Battleford-Prince Albert)**  
*Incumbent is eligible for re-election*

**District 11 (Regina)**  
*2 members*  
*Incumbents are eligible for re-election*

For more information, and to access the nomination/biographical forms, visit our website at [www.uregina.ca/president/governance/senate/elections.html](http://www.uregina.ca/president/governance/senate/elections.html) or call the University Secretariat at 306-585-4436.



# My life as a Sneakerhead: a memoir

By Allan Pulga BSc'02, BJ'04

Photos by Trevor Hopkin



**O**n a recent Sunday afternoon, before the first snowfall, my wife Karli and I were driving with our two daughters on Lewvan Drive in Regina. We approached a red light where a 1970s muscle car was already stopped in front of us: a blue Chevelle SS. It was in mint condition, the tires a glossy black, and the chrome polished. I could see the man driving it had grey hair. He looked about my dad's age, in his early 60s. I couldn't yet see his face, but I turned to my wife and said, "The way that guy feels right now, sitting in his car is how I feel when I go in the basement, pull out one of my favourite pairs of Jordans, and put them on my feet." Karli laughed.

She understood immediately. This is what it means to be a sneakerhead.

It's not just that I have a lot of sneakers — Air Jordans, tennis shoes, running shoes, cross-trainers and the like — it's that collecting them, and taking good care of them and lacing up a given pair for a cruise around town

By his own account Allan Pulga has 80 or 90 pairs of basketball shoes. Some of them, he admits, he's never even worn.

makes me feel a certain way. I feel good. I feel blessed. I get to flex.<sup>1</sup> But where did this desire to flex come from? How long have I felt this way?

As long as I can remember, to be honest.

Excuse me if this sounds familiar. It's back to school time and you're excited to head to class, see your friends again, and to tell them about your summer vacation. You're also excited to buy new school supplies with your parents (or maybe just your mom — it was always mom who shopped for school supplies with me). You got new Laurentien pencil crayons, UHU glue sticks, Hilroy notebooks, Staedtler white erasers. Did you care about which brand of school supplies you got? Maybe you didn't. But I sure did.

And I cared about what brand of gym shoes I got every fall. When I was six or seven, I didn't care what brand of T-shirt, jacket or sweatpants I was wearing. Ok, I should confess: I did care what brand of sweatpants I was wearing. I wanted Converse. And my mom bought me "Converted" ones, with a diamond where the Converse pants had a star — they were knockoffs, and I was ashamed of them.

Frankly, I would wear generic sweatpants. Those were fine. I wouldn't care about brand name apparel until I was in Grade 6 — which is when I started caring about what girls thought about me and how I looked. Before that, I only cared about sports.

And if you were into sports in the late '80s and early '90s, you were likely into shoes. I wanted cool ones. I wanted the ones the pro athletes wore. In 1987, going into Grade 2, I wanted the O.G.<sup>2</sup> Nike Air Trainers, the ones Bo Jackson wore. But my mom said, "No, you're seven years old. Those are too expensive." And she bought me the Lynx-brand knockoffs of the Air Trainers.

"One day," I thought to my 7-year-old self, "I'll buy those Air Trainers."

Fast-forward to Grade 6. It was my first year of caring about my appearance and, coincidentally, of playing organized basketball. I was all about Nike. My favourite player was



**Pulga's sharing his basketball shoe obsession with his daughter Estelle.** Photo courtesy of Allan Pulga

David Robinson. My dad, also a basketball player, wore David Robinson Nike pumps (inflatable basketball shoes) to play men's league. I begged and pleaded with him for a pair just like his. To my surprise and delight, he capitulated.

Thus, a new ritual was born: instead of new gym shoes every fall, it was new basketball shoes every fall. It was also a golden age for getting new basketball shoes. The reigning NBA MVP in 1992 was a player named Michael Jordan. All the kids and I wanted to be like Mike. Well, I wanted to be like David Robinson and Mike. But you get the picture.

Jordan and Nike were beginning to change the way sneakers were marketed. The shoes weren't just shoes. They were an embodiment of Jordan's personality and his performance on the court — he was the most electrifying and dominant player of his generation, and arguably of all time. His shoes were an "image" and they still are to this day.

The ritual of getting the coolest basketball shoes my parents could afford repeated itself each year until I got my first full-time summer job, the summer after graduating high school. Because I still lived at home, I had more disposable cash than ever. What do you think I spent my money on? Sneakers, yes. But what else?

I was very much into music and, bear in mind this was 1998, and the first iPod wouldn't hit the market until 2001. I bought a lot of sneakers and CDs ... and beer.

During this period of the late '90s/early 2000s, a couple of things coincided with my Summer cash windfall. One, sneaker manufacturers were reissuing classic shoes. They had done this for some time, particularly with popular Air Jordan models from years past. But I can think of two pairs I went out of my way to buy: the 2001 retro<sup>3</sup> of the "Black Cement" Air Jordan 3 and the 2003 retro of the black Converse Weapon worn by Larry Bird in the early '80s. I didn't have to line up to buy these shoes; I just walked into the store and bought them. It was amazing to me.

Secondly, I reached an inflection point in my sneaker collection, which was now numbering in the teens. I had enough pairs of shoes that I could rotate them and keep them looking fresh and new. If you accumulate enough shoes that you never wear them into the ground, then you've become a collector. Sort of like that Chevelle driver on the Lewvan — he doesn't need that car to get around. He just takes it out of storage and polishes it every once in a while when he wants to enjoy it.

In spite of working over the summers, I had to get my first student loan in the fall of 2002 to pay for University tuition and books. Prior to that, I'd been fortunate to use a scholarship trust fund my parents had saved up for me. My dad accompanied me to the bank to co-sign my student loan. At the start of that meeting, our loan officer asked me if I had any assets to declare.

"Assets?" I asked.

"Yes, like a car, or perhaps some property you own, which we can use as collateral on this student loan," she replied.

"Oh...no I don't have anything like that."

My dad quickly interjected, "Ask him if he has any shoes or CDs..." The loan

officer blushed. The meeting continued and went well. I was approved for the loan. As we were leaving, she pulled us aside and said, “I’ve never heard about shoes or CDs as an asset! Thanks for the funniest loan meeting I’ve ever had.” We all laughed. My dad has a natural sense of humour.

A lot has changed in the sneaker game since the golden age of the ’80s and ’90s. The internet and social media have, in my opinion, been both a blessing and a curse to sneakerheads like me.

On one hand, major sneaker drops<sup>4</sup> are more accessible to buyers in smaller markets (like Regina) via online storefronts and drop info posted to social media. On the other hand, demand for rare sneakers from hypebeasts<sup>5</sup> the world over has reached unseen levels, amplifying product scarcity, introducing the use of bots<sup>6</sup> and creating a reseller market that inflates the price of a sneaker several hundred dollars, or in some cases, even into the thousands.

Sneaker reselling has become so lucrative that websites like StockX, Flight Club and GOAT were created just to connect buyers with resellers on a broad scale — private sales that used to take place in a section of eBay, Craigslist and Varage Sale are front and centre on sneaker-only websites.

Sneaker culture and streetwear have also climbed the ranks of society and high fashion. Whereas athletic footwear was mostly worn by jocks, skateboarders and rappers 35 years ago, nowadays rappers and DJs like Kanye West and Virgil Abloh are among the most influential fashion designers and tastemakers in Paris and Milan.

This convergence of style and comfort has raised the profile of the once-humble sneaker, and as a result, the sneaker market is larger than ever. Because reselling has become such big business — many resellers do it full-time and make a good living — the ability for an old sneakerhead like me to casually walk into a Foot Locker and buy a pair of Black Cement Air Jordan 3’s (like I did back in 2001) has gone extinct. A re-release of a coveted shoe like this one sells out online and in stores (where sneakerheads line up, in some cases overnight) in minutes. So much of one’s ability to cop<sup>7</sup> a pair for its retail price online depends on pure luck. Millions are content with paying

high resale prices for sneakers like these, but I am stubborn and have yet to do so. I say “yet” because sometimes it feels like it’s only a matter of time. Still, my passion for sneakers burns as strong as ever.

One of the biggest reasons I don’t shell out several hundred dollars for a pair of rare sneakers is because I’m a dad. I recently told a fellow sneakerhead buddy of mine that I couldn’t buy a pair of \$260 (retail price) shoes because I need to put my two girls through college. I was only half joking. (It’s also a bit ironic to think back on my student loans and the role sneakers had on my need to get these loans.)

That doesn’t mean that I haven’t spent \$260 on shoes since having kids. I have. But I pick my spots. It has to be the right pair. It has to be something I’ve always wanted, something nostalgic. Or if it’s a modern design, it

## **A lot has changed in the sneaker game since the Golden Age of the ’80s and ’90s. The internet and social media have, in my opinion, been both a blessing and a curse to sneakerheads like me.**

has to add something to my collection, which is currently somewhere between 80 and 90 pairs. I don’t want to buy too many shoes that look alike, for example. And I definitely want to keep up with the latest shoe technology.

And like everyone else, I have a mortgage, bills to pay, and I need to save up for my retirement. Once in a while, I’ll treat myself to a new pair of shoes.

A few weeks ago, for instance, I bought the latest Air Jordans: the Air Jordan 34. Nike called them a new standard in performance and design. I still play pick-up basketball once a week with my friends and I was excited to try these new shoes out on the court. This excitement was always what drew me to sneakers, even from a young age

— the excitement for better performance technology and an original look.

The latter implies that sneakers are more than sports equipment. They are a form of self-expression. As a dad, the sneakers you buy your kids reflect your taste as well. I don’t go out of my way to match my daughters’ sneakers, but I’ve done it once. And I gotta admit, I underestimated the delight I would feel the first time my eldest daughter and I wore matching sneakers. It was the look on her face that made it. She was so proud to dress like daddy.

As I reflect on what I appreciate about sneakers, it’s mostly about emotional connections. It’s how they make me feel. I can tell you a story about every pair in my collection. The places I’ve travelled. The experiences I’ve had. Whether it was the pair I brought back from the Philippines, or the pair I wore on a family trip to Disneyland, or the pair I bought on our honeymoon in France, each pair takes me back to a time and a place.

This is my life...and sneakers are a big part of it. **D**

### **Sneakerhead lingo:**

- <sup>1</sup> Flex: To display or stand tall with pride. It’s not always ostentatious; sometimes a flex is subtle, or a “low-key flex.”
- <sup>2</sup> O.G.: Original Gangsta — the first edition of a given sneaker.
- <sup>3</sup> Retro: A reissued pair of classic sneakers, marketed years later as a tribute to the O.G.
- <sup>4</sup> Drop: A much-anticipated release of a given sneaker, either of a retro or a heavily hyped new model.
- <sup>5</sup> Hypebeast: A sneakerhead who follows all the hottest trends and product releases; one who buys into all the “hype.”
- <sup>6</sup> Bots: Software designed to buy up multiple pairs of a rare sneaker model and circumvent a website’s maximum one-pair-per-customer policy.
- <sup>7</sup> Cop: To purchase or obtain a pair of sneakers.

*Allan Pulga is Regina-based PR and communications consultant with a healthy appetite — for sneakers and food. He currently expresses his passion for eating as a regular food columnist for CBC Saskatchewan.*

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