

# Taft

BULLETIN



WINTER 2021





WINTER 2021

# INSIDE

## 42 Rising Above: Creating Opportunities for Learning

The work of educators  
Derek Mitchell '84  
and Michael Humphreys '93



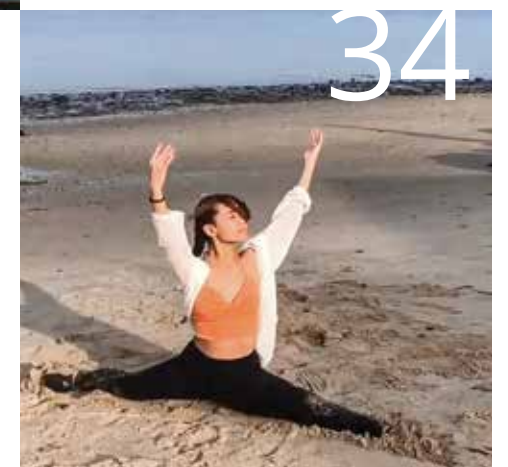
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Left: A portion of a larger art display on the Main Hall bulletin boards thanks to Fleeting Thoughts, Taft's Art Collective for student work (see more on page 38). One artist, Sophia Zogbi '22, said of her work (in middle, with hands and leaves), "It is part of a collection I created over the summer that focused on memories from my childhood summers in Lebanon (where my family is from)...The use of different colored lines and background shades reference colors I thought most embodied my experience in Lebanon, and the cedar branch is a nod to the cedar tree on the Lebanese flag." ROBERT FALCETTI



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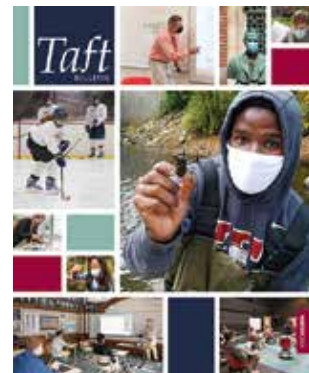
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## ON THE COVER

Taft's campus and classrooms continue to be active and engaged, with 455 students on campus and 137 studying remotely. The spring term is fully underway and busy!

ROBERT FALCETTI AND CARLY BORKEN

## Taft ONLINE

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## On MAIN HALL

A WORD FROM HEAD  
OF SCHOOL WILLY  
MACMULLEN '78



## Two Pandemics, a Resilient School, and How History Rhymes

We all know that if history does not repeat itself, it does rhyme, and I have been thinking of that truth as I look back on our fall term. I've been pretty confident in saying that never in our years was the school more challenged—by a dangerous and infectious global pandemic and a volatile moment in our political, racial, and cultural history—but now I'm not so sure. In fact, Taft has faced a moment like this a century ago, and what we saw this fall seemed to rhyme.

Over the past several months, as we lived on campus under COVID conditions and taught classes to students present and around the globe, I saw compassion, courage, and commitment in abundant measure,

in faculty, staff, and students—so much so that I found myself moved and inspired every day, often by small acts of the kind that wet your eyes and leave you briefly breathless. But perhaps this is not surprising. Perhaps the community today has been shaped by the legacy passed down across the years of a school that has always been resilient in crisis. We do well to remember that 100 years ago, the school faced similar conditions when the influenza epidemic swept the globe. Horace Taft's letters to his best friend and headmaster Sherman Thacher and a rare reference in his memoir take us back to those days.

His letter of April 24, 1916, offers a glimpse into Taft's heart and mind. The letter begins breezily and with some ironic humor—albeit of the whistling past the graveyard kind—but you cannot miss his fears and anxieties. Measles has swept through the schools of New England, and he wonders if boys on his campus will die.

*My dear Sherman,*

*Come on here and we will give you measles or scarlet fever or, if you don't like one of those, we can furnish a little pneumonia. I have always thought of measles as something to laugh at, but I have learned better. The miserable disease has been widespread this year in the East and has been meaner than we ever knew it to be. I understand that St. Paul's had a hundred cases and four deaths. Two of our cases resulted in pneumonia and a number of boys have developed ear trouble. I hope that they will pull through without either a fatality or a case of deafness, but I shall be comforted when the last special nurse departs. Affectionately yours, Horace*

As today, campus health and safety was not a vague abstraction. Six months later, the school year begins, and on September 16, he writes Thacher about opening.

*"I have postponed our opening for two weeks, that is, until October 3rd. Most of the schools will be open on that day unless there is some unforeseen event, and we are comforted by sharing responsibility...."*

It reads a lot like the letter many heads of school wrote this fall, all of us adjusting our calendars and sharing plans with each other.

His letters over the next two years are filled with the ordinary stuff—family updates, thoughts on education, opinions on politics—until we get to the fall (October) of 1918. Remember, the world is at war and the influenza pandemic is raging, with a third of the world infected and between 20 million to 50 million dead. It takes very little reading between the lines to imagine the conversation on campus: the emotional fatigue and terrible anxiety matched, as it surely had to be, by unyielding courage and unfathomable compassion. Recent graduates and faculty were being drafted—the first two Conscriptio Acts took place in June of 1917 and 1918—and boys were falling ill.

*The first ten days of the term were entirely taken up by activities connected with the draft law.*

*Since then, the influenza has been with us (nearly one-hundred cases). The consequence is that I never reached this point of the year with so little knowledge of the school or so little accomplished in the way of my regular duties.*





Student Richard Sheldon Sneath, who passed away during the 1918 influenza epidemic, and whose mother, Mrs. E. Hershey Sneath, volunteered to help at Taft's infirmary.



Faculty member Mr. Patrick Cawley, who also passed away in 1918.

Taft is worried he has lost touch with his own school. He sounds dispirited, tired. No wonder. And in his memoir, Taft wrote of those dark days. In a work marked by his wisdom, warmth, and humor, this memory stands out for its gravity and solemnity:

*That winter occurred the dreadful epidemic of influenza, and we went through the same struggle that came to all of the schools and colleges. The infirmary quickly overflowed, and two corridors in the main building were set aside for the sick. The school looked like a battlefield. Of course, we got all the nurses we could, competing in this with other schools, colleges, and private families.... One mother, who had been a trained nurse, came up from New York, donned her old nurse's uniform, and took charge of a corridor.... I shall never forget the courage of Mrs. E. Hershey Sneath, from New Haven. Her boy, Richard, was the only one who died. She saw that everything possible was being done for her boy and then reported to Ms. Lowrey [head nurse] saying, "I am not a trained nurse, but I am a good strong woman, and I can carry trays, clean the rooms, or do anything else that will help." Bravely she faced the inevitable.*

*Patrick Cawley, a courageous, cheery member of the faculty of whom we were all fond, was another victim, both of these contracting the "black pneumonia," a fatal result of the influenza from which there was no escape.*

There are so many elements in this reminiscence which all but beggar understanding: the image of the Main Hall filled with cots and feverish, coughing boys; a mother, years from her professional nursing days, risking her life to care for students she did not know; another mother with a dying boy volunteering to help others; the faculty learning that a colleague has died. I'm not sure what amazes me more: the details Taft chronicles, or the fact that he notes them with such a matter-of-fact tone.

I like to think that in some way, the courage, compassion, and commitment of these faculty, staff, and students have trickled down, like water through sand, to all of us on the campus of 2020–21. To be clear, I want to be careful that I not equate what this school experienced this fall with what it knew a century ago. There are very real differences, especially two tragic ones. But the historic rhyme cannot be missed.

We, too, opened a school during a pandemic. We, too, lived in a moment of great political and cultural challenge. We, too, carried fears of the unknown and felt a similar fatigue. And we, too, met our mission, showing that the school today, as the school then, was marked by faculty of inspiring strength, optimism, and adaptability; staff of great professionalism and loyalty; and students of incredible resilience, energy, and perseverance.

Perhaps a century from now in a moment of great challenge, Tafties will look back on 2020, wondering at our one-way halls, 6-foot spacing, regular COVID-19 testing, hybrid learning, dorm visiting limitations, canceled athletic seasons, and radio broadcast dramatic production, and think, "If they could manage, so can we."

As for Horace Taft? In March 1920, the influenza epidemic had essentially ended. But life at boarding school never is easy. Here's what he wrote Thatcher that month:

*My dear Sherman,*

*The winter term began badly, influenza attacking us very soon after the beginning, and pretty soon the infirmary was chock full. Then on top of it came three cases of diphtheria. Our nurses were working until they dropped and we could get no more, so we closed school and took a three-week vacation, getting back on March 11.*

He was back to work, as we know we will be.

William R. MacMullen '78

"We, too, met our mission, showing that the school today, as the school then, was marked by faculty of inspiring strength, optimism, and adaptability; staff of great professionalism and loyalty; and students of incredible resilience, energy, and perseverance."

SOCIAL SCENE

Follow @thetaftschool on Facebook, @taftschool on Instagram and Twitter for daily glimpses of Taft life.



The Red Rhino Fund is an endowed, charitable fund run by a nine-member student board with faculty advisors. At its core, the Fund's mission is an extension of the school motto: Not to be served, but to serve. The group works to create positive change for children in the Greater Waterbury community by awarding monetary grants and promoting local organizations in support of education, literacy, and the arts. Some of the local organizations receiving grants in the past few years: the United Way, Save Girls on FYRE, Inc., St. Vincent DePaul Mission, The Mattatuck Museum, and Reach out and Read, Inc. The Red Rhino Fund sponsors events throughout the year to help fund the grants, including their recent Fall Festival and Spring Fling. #lifeattaft #nonutsibilife #nonutsibi



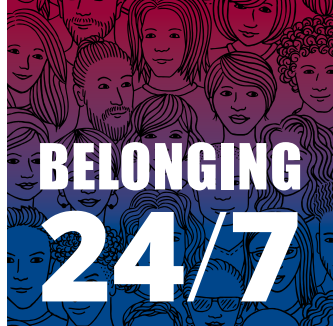
Students in Sarah Surber's Dance III and IV classes just wrapped up a unit on Afrobeat dance. Guest teacher Masem Enyong, a Connecticut-based teaching artist originally from Cameroon, created workshop videos specifically for Taft's dance students. After learning the essentials Afrobeat style, students added their own choreography to the work. They performed their culminating and impressive Afrobeat dance combos on campus this morning, which you can enjoy in full here: <https://vimeo.com/471033834>  
Video Performance 1: Chrissy Bertrand and Benjamin White  
Video Performance 2: Nicole Balbuena and Justin McLeod



Taft families, our informational Fall Family Program series starts tonight with a Zoom session for families of remote learners. Join Dean of Academic Affairs Jennifer Kenerson and Director of Teaching and Learning and Remote Learning Liaison Jon Willson '82 at 8 pm EDT. Check your email for a registration link, and to sign up for other sessions in our weeklong series. Or please check the parent portal on the Taft website or contact Amanda Pulawski, Director of Events, at [apulawski@taftschool.org](mailto:apulawski@taftschool.org) or 860-945-7933. #lifeattaft #taftacademics







BY ANDREW PRINCE, *dean of multicultural education*

# The Road to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

## Taft DEI Innovations in the Age of COVID

To say that the first semester of this school year has been uniquely difficult and challenging would be an understatement. In my decade-plus of educating in independent schools and nearly a lifetime of being in school, I cannot remember a semester like this. To conduct the business of educating students has required new ways of teaching, coaching, advising, dorm parenting, and simply being in community with each other. And while we all long for many elements of life pre-COVID, there have been some innovative and creative changes to the way we do our work at Taft that we will want to keep. This has been true for our DEI practice as we have created new avenues for and arenas in which to do this important work. In this article, I detail some of the changes that have occurred this past fall that have increased our opportunities to help students become the socially just and responsible global citizens this world so desperately needs.

### DEI in Co-Curricular Spaces

While we have always done work on DEI in our co-curricular spaces, that work has frequently been less formal than our efforts in other spaces. With the change in our afternoon program as a result of COVID, Co-Directors of Athletics Robert Madden '03 and Rachael Ryan had the wonderful idea to create time for Afternoon Program Community Days, where we would do important social and emotional health and DEI activities. In total, there were five of these days, and they were planned and executed by Community Wellness Coordinator Kerry Bracco-Mullane, Director of Student Activities Courtney Smyth, and me. The Community Days allocated to DEI work took up the concepts of

creating belonging and gender identity and norms, and specifically the experiences of people who identify as girls and women.

Our first Community Day centered on creating belonging, and allowed students time to do some individual reflection and to undertake paired and small group discussions. Students were asked to think about and discuss moments when they felt like they did and did not belong in certain groups, and to identify certain key conditions for both feelings. They then used these conversations to come up with norms for their co-curricular group—norms that would cultivate feelings of belonging, which are so key to individual and group success.

The second Community Day was designed to work on concepts of gender

identity, specifically looking at the experiences of people who identify as girls and women. Students watched a clip of the movie *Miss Representation* and took Implicit Association Tests from Harvard's Project Implicit. These tests are designed to identify unconscious biases that individuals might have toward people who identify in certain ways. That day, students took tests to determine their biases related to gender identity and careers and gender identity and the sciences. Students then had follow-up conversations in their dorms. Not surprisingly, both of these activities led to conversations and learning that were important for us as a community.

Time is the scarcest resource we have as a school, and taking time from our

co-curricular activities is significant. And while this change is a product of limitations brought about by COVID, the benefits that we reaped as a result make it clear that we must continue to reallocate this time in the future.

### Are “Diversity,” “Equity,” and “Inclusion” What We Really Mean?

Since my time at Taft, I have used the words Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the acronym DEI to define so much of the work we do at Taft. We want to have a community with a wide array of identifiers and experiences, where people have what they need in order to succeed and are made to feel as though they belong in our community. I was forced to reconsider this approach and acronym after attending the virtual offerings at the People of Color Conference. (Read more on page 28.) As stated on the NAIS website, PoCC is “the flagship of the National Association of Independent Schools’ commitment to equity and justice in teaching, learning, and organizational development. The mission of the conference is to provide a safe space for leadership, professional development, and networking for people of color and allies of all backgrounds in independent schools.” I was joined at this conference by three students and 14 school employees, including Mr. MacMullen.

In one of these workshops, a presenter made the very important point that the status quo, the “baseline” in the United States, is injustice. Structures in the U.S. have been built to benefit folks of privileged groups; white people, people who identify as men, Christians, and so forth—this despite perceptions and proclamations that the status quo, the rule of law, government, schools, just about any system in the U.S. is neutral and fair. Consequently, we must actively work to combat the injustices that exist in most facets of our daily lives. That is, advocating for social justice is a necessary part of any diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts we take up. Thus, can we and should we do DEI without the J, Justice? And do the terms “Diversity,” “Equity,” and “Inclusion”

most accurately describe the work we hope to do? In a talk he gave at the start of the school year, Mr. Mac made a compelling argument that rather than “Inclusion”, we should aim for “Belonging.” With this in mind, we will review the words we use to describe our aims and practices in this space. A common understanding of these important principles and what they look like in the Taft community is essential to our success.

### Recursive DEI

Jon Willson '82, director of teaching and learning, speaks often about the importance of recursive learning. People learn best when they can interact with and make sense of a concept repeatedly. This is true of DEI work. One area in which we have had tremendous

and even a compliment. It is also somehow incredibly taboo while also being ubiquitous in so many of the cultural spaces our students exist. It is with this reality in mind that Mr. Mac asserted that we need to take this word up annually to help students understand it and to make clear our communal rules regarding the word.

Students watched the recording of the N-Word Talk video and filled out a reflection form during the Community Time slot. Advisors were given access to these reflections and used them to have conversations with their advisees about the things they learned, the lingering questions they had, and how they were going to make sense of this word moving forward. Thus students were asked to engage with

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opportunity for growth and learning and have not always used recursive practice is with our Morning Meeting speakers. After Morning Meeting presentations, students typically have the opportunity to go to a Q&A in the Faculty Room. These Q&As are typically insightful for students that attend, but there are any number of time pressures that cause many to miss these opportunities. With this in mind, we decided to make use of our new advisor period to facilitate conversations about DEI presentations.

We first tried this model with a presentation about the N-word that I gave last year. The N-word is perhaps one of the most unique words in the English language. On the one hand, it can be one of the most harmful words in existence, frequently weaponized to hurt Black people. On the other hand, it can be so many other things, including a greeting

this content multiple times and in ways that really seemed to stick. I have had a number of students bring up their learning from this set of activities weeks and months after it happened. This kind of recursive learning is a must in our DEI practice, and we will continue to create these kinds of opportunities in future.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we have made some changes to our DEI practices that likely would not have come into being absent COVID. These changes have materially improved our work and we must hold onto them even on that glorious day when COVID will have been mitigated enough for us to gather together again. ■

To learn more about Taft's ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work, visit [www.taftschool.org/dei](http://www.taftschool.org/dei)

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANZI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



# Water, Water— Not Everywhere



**WHILE THE REST OF THE WORLD** focuses on ending the worst public health crisis in more than a century, Matt Rice '94 is resolved to mitigate the next global catastrophe coming rapidly around the bend. Climate change is already affecting millions of people in the watershed of the Colorado River, one of the fastest-heating regions in the world. The 1,450-mile river and its tributaries flow through seven western states, sustaining 40 million people and more than five million acres of agriculture,

Left: Rafting on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.

Above: Matt Rice '94 at Warm Springs Rapid, Yampa River, Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado.

Below: Rice at North Fork, Poudre River, Colorado  
RUSS SCHNITZER





Right: Upper Colorado River (Grand County, Colorado)  
RUSS SCHNITZER

Below: Rice and his family on a rafting trip through  
Desolation Canyon, Green River, Utah. RUSS SCHNITZER



and fueling a \$1.4 trillion annual economy. But the region recently concluded its 20th consecutive year of drought, enough to suggest that this warming trend isn't going away.

"It's the new normal," Rice says. "It's the aridification of the entire basin."

As the director of the Colorado River Basin for American Rivers, an advocacy group based in Washington, Rice's work is aimed at getting people in the region to recognize the urgency of the unfolding environmental disaster caused by global warming—and then hopefully to adapt before it's too late.

"The projections are terrifying," Rice

says. "We're looking at a 20 to 40 percent reduction in water availability in the Colorado River basin by 2050. That crashes a whole region of the country."

There are already glimpses of a much drier future. This summer in Colorado, when more people than ever burst out of COVID-19-related lockdowns to go rafting, fishing, tubing, and otherwise enjoy the outdoor splendor, several rivers had to be shut down to all recreation due to low flow. The mass closures weren't unique to 2020; they happened the year before, as well, and two years before that, and two years before that.

What scientists have realized, Rice says, is that the melting snowpack from the Rockies every year no longer is enough to regenerate healthy supplies downstream, as it had been in the past. Droughts have a way of compounding problems—the warming climate dries out the earth, which absorbs more and more water from the hills each year. The downstream effect is hotter temperatures, requiring more frequent irrigation in areas like Yuma, Arizona, which grows 90 percent of the country's winter vegetables.

Today, the Colorado is one of the few

major rivers in the world that doesn't empty into the sea. "It's supposed to," Rice says. "But we use all that water"—five trillion gallons—"before it gets to the delta" in eastern Mexico.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Rice's job is tailoring solutions to replenish the rivers without antagonizing the region's ranchers and farmers, many of whom hold so-called "water rights" passed down for generations. Water users in many western states must file with their state water resources agency for a water right, which turns into a property right of sorts that is tied to the land or a specific use; in fact, farmers can lose their rights if they *don't* put all their allotted water into beneficial use.

This, you can imagine, poses some difficulty for conservationists like Rice.

"The status quo is a very powerful thing in the West when it comes to water," Rice says. "I'm not vilifying agriculture at all. But in order to get where we need to go, there's a huge cultural shift we need to make."

Rice's passion for the environment grew



out of his lifelong "obsession" with the rivers and fishing. He grew up in Boulder, Colorado, and has been fly-fishing for "as long I can remember." While at Taft, he'd often hitch a ride off campus to go fishing

with Rico Brogna, the former Major League Baseball player and son of Taft's longtime baseball and football coach Joe Brogna.

After college at Montana State in Bozeman—a pilgrimage spot for anglers—he joined the Peace Corps and spent four years in Zambia, where he met his wife, Gwyn. He introduced rural subsistence farmers to fish farming, teaching them ways to divert water, build irrigation ditches, grow ponds, and sell fish. He experienced firsthand the importance of having access

can seem like squeezing water out of the Washington Monument. But there are reasons to feel encouraged. On November 3, for instance, American Rivers helped bring a ballot measure before voters in 15 counties in western Colorado to provide much-needed funds for water preservation. Even though it meant taxes would go up, the measure passed with 72 percent of the vote.

Another motivating factor for Rice is taking his wife and their three boys, Curran, 9, Mac, 7, and Walker, 5, on fishing trips on

Above: At Nankoweap, Grand Canyon

Left: Rice at a secret spot for some winter fly-fishing.  
RUSS SCHNITZER

the rivers he loves so much. Sustaining that tradition long into the future will require that more people not "take that water for granted when they turn on the tap."

"The health and future of the Colorado River is not a partisan issue," Rice says. "The math just isn't there. We see how much water we're using, we see our water availability diminish, and it really is kind of an 'all-hands-on-deck,' 'we're all in this together' situation." ■

—Zach Schonbrun '05



# News Sense for Uncertain Times

IF EVER THERE WAS A CRUCIBLE FOR journalism, Susie Banikarim '93 met this one head-on: a year consumed by a pandemic, protests, and a presidential election.

It was one that an ever-evolving and challenged industry—or anyone, for that matter—could not have foreseen or prepared for.

Two months after Banikarim joined Vice News as its head of global newsgathering and as an executive vice president, the World Health Organization declared the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The public health crisis sent top media executives like Banikarim, a recipient of the Edward R. Murrow Award for feature reporting and a five-time Emmy nominee, scrambling to reimagine the newsroom, coverage, and the work-life balance.

“It was definitely very jarring,” Banikarim says. “We’re not working from home. We’re working from home during a pandemic, and that’s fundamentally a different thing.”

Banikarim oversees a staff of about 200 reporters who are based at Vice’s headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, and bureaus in Washington, Los Angeles, and London. She is also in charge of the outlet’s flagship television program, Vice News Tonight, which airs on its Vice TV channel.

The dynamic of directing news coverage remotely suddenly had a major human component to it, from journalists having to juggle childcare responsibilities with Zoom calls and bearing witness to so much suffering.

“There’s a sort of underlying difficulty in everyday life now that didn’t exist before,” she says. “We’re covering painful stories. That can take a toll.”

Vice’s team of reporters found themselves reporting from COVID-19 hospital wards and on the ground of widespread protests over police brutality and racial

injustice. Banikarim notes that there are many journalists of color that work for Vice.

“We have Black reporters covering Black deaths over and over again,” she says.

Before joining Vice News, Banikarim served as an executive vice president and editorial director for Gizmodo Media Group, where she oversaw the edgy and opinion-filled websites of Deadspin, Gizmodo, Jalopnik, Jezebel, Kotaku, Lifehacker, Splinter, and The Root. The parent company was sold to the private-equity-backed G/O Media, a fate becoming all-too-familiar in the media landscape.

“I really loved running those sites,” she says. “There’s a place in the news ecosystem for strong opinion-based writing.”

Banikarim, who was born in Iran and moved with her family to Paris, twice to California, and to London, did not start off as a journalist. She became a management consultant after graduating from Barnard College and deferred her law school enrollment. That’s when she applied and was accepted to Columbia University’s prestigious journalism school.

She began her journalism career at ABC News, where she eventually worked as a producer for George Stephanopoulos and Diane Sawyer. In 2007, she earned a Murrow Award for an ABC feature about a blind trumpet virtuoso.

Banikarim later helped Katie Couric launch her syndicated talk show and conducted some of the first interviews with the families of the first-graders who were killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012.

“That work is incredibly emotional,” she says. “You’re human. I feel like Newtown was the first time that I realized what a significant amount of disinformation was emerging on online platforms.”

The vitriol online and the demise of



local news coverage have only made it harder for journalists, who Banikarim says learned difficult but valuable lessons from the 2016 presidential election. That dynamic was the focus of *Enemies of the People*, a widely watched documentary that Banikarim produced and directed.

Banikarim began the project while she was the Shorenstein Center’s very first filmmaker-in-residence at the Harvard Kennedy School. The documentary featured top journalists, including Jeff Zucker, the CNN president; Maggie Haberman, the White House correspondent for *The New York Times*; and David Fahrenthold, the Pulitzer Prize winner from *The Washington Post*. It aired in October 2020.

Banikarim says the shortcomings of 2016 and the gravity of the pandemic changed the way the media approached the 2020 election.

“The machinery of government can feel distant and remote, but COVID has made that impossible,” she says. ■

—Neil Vigdor '95

*Ed. note: Banikarim recently left Vice News to pursue other opportunities.*

Above: Susie Banikarim '93 is the head of global newsgathering and executive vice president for Vice News.

Right: Banikarim at a town hall she produced for the Katie Couric show in Newtown, Connecticut, in March 2013, a few months after the Sandy Hook shootings. ABC/IDA MAE ASTUTE

“I feel like Newtown was the first time that I realized what a significant amount of disinformation was emerging on online platforms.”







# By Design

THROUGHOUT HIS FOUR-DECADE career as one of Connecticut's most sought-after architects, few things have contributed more to Rick Wies's success than his ability to stay open and adaptable to each project that comes across his drawing board.

At any given time, he might be designing a new apartment complex, overseeing the renovations of a major commuter rail station, or helping reinvent a former local Sicilian puppet theater—sometimes simultaneously. “Our team has developed expertise in a few core areas, which gives us a lot of variety. Things never get boring or routine,” says Wies, Class of ’71.

Already interested in design while at Taft, Wies eventually earned a master's degree in architecture from North Carolina State University. From there, he worked for a handful of prominent firms, including with preeminent classical architect Allan Greenberg, and in 1986, he established his own private practice. With the addition of two partners, he ultimately grew the firm into Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects in the early 1990s.

Starting out, Wies focused largely on renovations of historic buildings. “The language and discipline of historic preservation benefits from having a firm grounding in traditional architecture,”

he explains. “And because my roots revolved around classical architecture, that's where I started my career.”

But far from sidetracking him from new design, this early experience further developed his architectural education. “It's a very good learning lab to be in that vein of architectural discipline. It's a nice challenge working on buildings that are really well built and finding clever, architecturally compatible ways to extend their life,” says Wies, who serves on the board of Preservation Connecticut. “You have to get familiar with the building practices used a hundred years ago while also applying today's technology.”

“Of course, we like creating new things too, and our work slowly morphed to be more balanced between renovation and new construction,” he adds. “But we would be less technically competent if all we had to do was build new buildings from the beginning.”

“It's a very good learning lab to be in that vein of architectural discipline. It's a nice challenge working on buildings that are really well built and finding clever, architecturally compatible ways to extend their life.”

Above: Architect Rick Wies '71 in his office.

Right: Wies's firm designed New Haven's Canal Dock Boathouse, a mixed-use structure housing a community boathouse for rowing and small sailing craft and offices and classrooms for cultural/history organizations. IAN CHRISTMANN PHOTOGRAPHY







One recently completed project gave Wies a perfect opportunity to integrate new construction with historic preservation. When the construction of the new Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge required demolition of New Haven's Adee Boathouse (originally built by Yale University in 1911), the city called on Gregg Wies & Gardner to develop possible replacement plans. "At first, they asked us to do two feasibility studies," he says. "One, to replicate the building in a new location, and one to come up with a new design." It took another six years of logistical hurdles before the firm was officially selected to design the new Canal Dock Boathouse.

Left and below: Wies's firm was tasked with a comprehensive renovation project of New Haven's renowned Long Wharf Theatre, both interior and exterior. GREGG WIES & GARDNER ARCHITECTS LLC



And even then, it was far from smooth sailing. "It was a very long process in the design because it was a complicated building," Wies points out. "At its core, it's a harborside community house that supports sliding-seat rowing, small-boat sailing, and paddling. But it also required facilities for special events and a museum." Not to mention the added complication of having to build atop the Quinnipiac River: "We had no land to put it on, so we designed a platform out of the shallows."

In all, the project took 16 years to complete, but it remains one of Wies's proudest accomplishments. "I really had to immerse myself in that world. I traveled around the Northeast visiting boathouses, and we hired an Olympic gold medalist rower to help advise us. In the end, we developed a very interesting building program." The team was even able to salvage the original

Adee Boathouse's entry portal and stair tower, preserving its elaborate terra-cotta, masonry, and soaring windows.

Wies is equally passionate about smaller projects, too. Recently, he leapt at the chance to volunteer with Heart 9/11, an organization founded by 9/11 first responders to support individuals recovering from trauma. For Heart 9/11, Wies helped remodel the home of an Iraq War veteran suffering from PTSD. "That was one of the most amazing projects I've ever done," he recalls. "We basically doubled the size of her house and gutted the rest

of it. Within just the first week, they demolished the interior, cut off the roof, framed up the second floor and the roof, and totally enclosed it. And 100 percent of the materials and labor were donated."

Whether he's designing a boathouse, a library, a municipal building, or a home for a veteran and her family, Wies always has the greater community in mind. "We always strive to create something that fits into the community and has a positive impact—that's always the goal."

—Christopher Browner '12

Above: A Connecticut home designed by Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects. GREGG WIES & GARDNER ARCHITECTS LLC

Right: As volunteer work, Wies helped remodel the home of an Iraq War veteran, pictured far right, with Heart 9/11, an organization founded by 9/11 first responders to support individuals recovering from trauma.





# The Art of Layering and Texturing

**ELIZA GEDDES' ARTISTIC PASSION** began at a very young age. She remembers falling in love with everything from papier-mâché to sculpting with something as simple as a pipe cleaner.

"I dove into every art and craft medium I could, both at school and at home," Geddes '97 recalls. "In my free time I would teach myself how to marleize paper, decoupage, and create a multitude of mixed-media collages."

It was a passion that persisted, and art

remained Geddes' primary focus at Taft. She has fond memories studying under the guidance of Gail Wynne, and she received the Thomas Sabin Chase Award in art her senior year. Geddes went on to get her B.A. in art history from Trinity College in 2001.

"Having that strong foundation of the history of art is an important building block for any contemporary artist," she emphasizes. "While pursuing my major, I became completely captivated with abstract expressionist art developed in



Left: Artist Eliza Geddes '97  
 Right: One of Geddes' paintings in a home.  
 Below: *Ink Series #1*, 2018, collage of ink on assembled raw canvases, 42 in. x 70 in.





with a focus on color combinations, and she chooses to work with house paint over oils or acrylics.

“There is an endless selection of colors available with traditional house paint,” she explains. “I love the juxtaposition of combining safe colors with more shocking tones.”

Her technique involves an extensive process of layering and texturing the canvas with markings and patterns using a foam brush, blue painter’s tape, and a putty knife—materials she calls somewhat unconventional. She draws inspiration from artists such as Cy Twombly, Lee

Right: *Medley #8*, 2019, ink and house paint on a series of assembled canvases, 4 ft. x 3 ft.



Krasner, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Presiding themes in her paintings include surface, shape, texture, movement, and balance. The interaction and repetition of shape and texture provide entry points with which to navigate her work.

“I love to paint what I like to look at,” Geddes says. “It seems simple, but it’s satisfying to choose the content, color, and scale of an artwork and create something that resonates with me.”

Conversely, the toughest part of being an artist for Geddes is wrestling with her inner critic. “A painting can be a complete disaster up until it’s a complete success,” she admits. “Knowing when that switch is flipped is vital.”

Geddes also shares important wisdom about the nature of being an artist in general. Specifically, she warns of becoming too preoccupied with the financial part.

“It’s hard to predict what will sell, but creating with only sales in mind will leave you nowhere,” she says. “In the end, authenticity is more appealing and more rewarding. It’s a fine line, and I feel lucky that I am able to sell what I love creating.”

Geddes’ work has been displayed at numerous exhibitions across the U.S. and in London, and is currently installed in

three permanent collections in New York. Her studio is located on Long Island, where she lives with her husband and two sons. Her younger son, Thor, is battling a rare genetic disease called Duchenne muscular dystrophy. “Thor’s spirit remains my biggest inspiration,” Geddes says.

Geddes is excited to keep creating and sending her art out into the world while always staying true to her own vision.

“That I haven’t changed course to have my work fit into a particular place or trend with the times...that is something I’m most proud of,” she says.

You can view many of her paintings on her website, [elizageddes.com](http://elizageddes.com), and on Instagram, [@elizageddes](https://www.instagram.com/elizageddes).

—Carola Lovering Crane '07

Left: Two from Geddes’ portrait series: at left, *Twiggy*, 2020, house paint and ink on canvas, 5 ft. x 4 ft., and on right, *Bardot*, 2020, house paint and ink on canvas, 5 ft. x 4 ft.

Above: One of Geddes’ paintings in a home.

Right: *Gaia Rising*, 2020, house paint on canvas, 4 ft. x 4ft.







Songwriter and musician Tim Ely '67 in his home studio.

“MANY TIMES, OUT OF FRUSTRATION, I tried not to pursue music, but it just kept nagging me. Every time I put it down or took a break, the music started to reveal itself to me again.” A lifelong musician and amateur songwriter, Tim Ely ’67 will finally see one of his songs make its way into a major motion picture later this year. It’s hard for Ely to recall a time when he wasn’t interested in music—though sometimes his own natural talent stood in the way of success. “I studied piano when I was young, but never got very far. Instead of learning how to read music, I would just memorize everything,” he says. “So I wasn’t really progressing along the lines of proper classical piano training.” Still, when a schoolmate taught him some basic chords on the guitar, Ely picked it up quickly. “That summer, I was listening to a Rolling Stones song, and the entire verse was just one chord. I realized you don’t need a whole bunch of chords

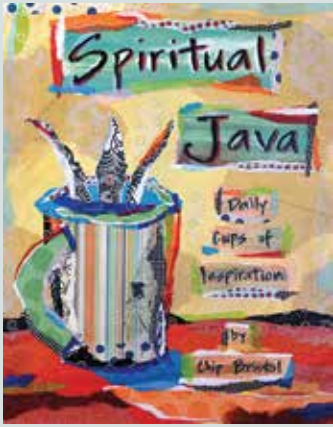
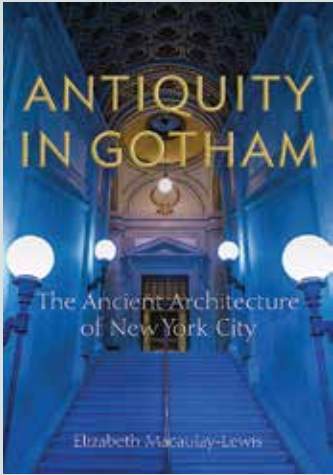
to write a song, so I wrote a song with just those three chords that I knew.” It would mark the first of many periods of inspiration for the budding songwriter. After graduating from Allegheny College, Ely recalls, “I went to Nashville and was trying to make some headway, but I was really a songwriter without a clue. I didn’t really have the craft or the experience to make it happen.” But when he moved back to Pennsylvania, he got his first real break. “I ran into some friends who had their own small advertising agency, and they wondered if I could write a jingle for one of their clients, who was an exterminator,” he continues. “‘*Buenas Noches*, Roaches!’ It was quite the sensation actually. It did wonders for his business, and it won me an advertising club award for radio.” Ely continued in advertising for a few more years—mainly producing jingles, rather than writing them—before embarking on a successful career in the corporate world. “I

was pretty consumed with actual work, so I didn’t have a whole lot of time to devote to the crafting of songs,” he says. “But music always caught up with me, especially after I had two children and life took on a different meaning. When I have things that I want to say, songs just happen to me. It’s like they just drop in my head, sometimes full-blown or sometimes just as pieces that go together.” He continued to compose in his free time, even attending a songwriting workshop in Nashville and working one-on-one with a writing teacher for a year. “I did get some demos produced, and a few people in the industry listened to them, but nobody ended up taking them,” Ely says. Things really took off when he learned about the music community website Broadjam. “It’s basically an online clearing-house for people who are looking for songs and people who have songs to be found,” he explains. “They put out a brief description of what they’re looking for, and you send something that you think will fit.” Through Broadjam, Ely connected with a producer looking for songs for film and television. “I sent him some songs, and he liked them. Nothing happened for about half a year, but then he got back in touch saying that he found a place for one of my songs in a major Hollywood motion picture.” The song is “The Long Haul,” and the film is *The Comeback Trail*, starring Robert De Niro, Tommy Lee Jones, and Morgan Freeman. “It’s not small potatoes,” he smiles, “or at least that’s what my daughters keep telling me!” The movie’s original premiere date was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but a few extra months are nothing compared to Ely’s years-long journey to songwriting success. For as the chorus of “The Long Haul” declares, “I ain’t on a fast track, it’s more like a slow train, but I ain’t gonna turn back on account of a little rain. I’m in it for the long haul.” ■

—Christopher Browner '12

See the trailer to the movie and hear part of Ely’s song “The Long Haul” by searching on YouTube for *The Comeback Trail*.

## In PRINT



***Antiquity in Gotham: The Ancient Architecture of New York City***  
FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS  
**Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis '98**

Since the city’s inception, New Yorkers have deliberately and purposefully engaged with ancient architecture to design and erect many of its most iconic buildings and monuments, including Grand Central Terminal and the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial Arch in Brooklyn, as well as forgotten gems such as Snug Harbor on Staten Island and the Gould Memorial Library in the Bronx. *Antiquity in Gotham* interprets the various ways ancient architecture was reconceived in New York City from the 18th century to the early 21st century. Contextualizing New York’s Neo-Antique architecture within larger American architectural trends, author Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis applies an archeological lens to the study of the buildings that incorporated these various models in their design, bringing together these diverse sources of inspiration into a single continuum. This book explores how ancient architecture communicated the political ideals of the new Republic through the adaptation of Greek and Roman architecture, how Egyptian temples conveyed the city’s new technological achievements, and how the ancient Near East served many artistic masters, decorating the interiors of glitzy Gilded Age restaurants and the tops of skyscrapers. Rather than classifying neoclassical (and Greek Revival), Egyptianizing, and architecture inspired by the ancient Near East into distinct categories, the Neo-Antique framework considers the similarities and differences amongst the reception of these different architectural traditions. This interdisciplinary project draws upon archival materials—such as the letters and memos of architects and their patrons, and the commentary in contemporary newspapers and magazines—to provide a multidimensional analysis that examines not only the city’s ancient buildings and rooms, but also how New Yorkers envisaged them, lived in them, and talked about them. Macaulay-Lewis is associate professor of Liberal Studies and Middle Eastern Studies, and the executive officer of the M.A Program in Liberal Studies at the Graduate Center, the City University of New York. She is the editor or author of five books, including *Classical New York: Discovering Greece and Rome in Gotham* and *Housing the New Romans: Architectural Reception and Classical Style in the Modern World*, and the author of over a dozen articles on ancient Roman and Islamic gardens and architecture.

***Spiritual Java: Daily Cups of Inspiration***  
**Chip Bristol '78**

Chip Bristol ’78 has recently published a collection of daily spiritual meditations sure to stir even the most spiritually reluctant among us. Taken from his sermons as a school chaplain and his weekly blog, *Spiritual Java* uses the everyday things of life to point beyond. Each meditation comes with three follow-up questions to help readers explore the topic more fully. Bristol is a writer and lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, with his wife, Louise, and their blended family of seven children. He is a graduate of Hamilton College (B.A., creative writing), the Virginia Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and the New Hampshire Institute of Art (M.F.A., creative writing). Read more on his website: [www.withoutacollar.com](http://www.withoutacollar.com).

***Too Good to Be True***  
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  
**Carola Lovering '07**

One love story, two marriages, and three versions of the truth form an obsessive, addictive love story from the author of *Tell Me Lies*. Skye Starling is overjoyed when her boyfriend, Burke Michaels, proposes after a whirlwind courtship. Though Skye is smart, beautiful, and from a well-off family, she has also battled crippling OCD ever since her mother’s death when she was 11, and her romantic relationships have suffered as a result. But then she meets Burke—handsome, older, and emotionally mature, and who says he wants to be with her forever. Except Burke isn’t who he claims to be. Interspersed letters to his therapist reveal the truth—he’s happily married and using Skye for his own deceptive ends. In a third perspective, set 30 years earlier, a scrappy 17-year-old named Heather is determined to end things with Burke, a local bad boy, and make a better life for herself in New York City. But can her adolescent love stay firmly in her past—or will he find his way into her future? On a collision course she doesn’t see coming, Skye throws herself into wedding planning as Burke’s scheme grows more twisted. But of course, even the best laid plans can go astray. Just when readers think they know where this story is going, they will discover that there’s more than one way to spin the truth. Carola Lovering is the author of *Tell Me Lies*, and her work has appeared in *W Magazine*, *National Geographic*, *Outside*, and *Yoga Journal*, among other publications. In addition to writing, she teaches yoga. She graduated from Colorado College and lives in Connecticut.

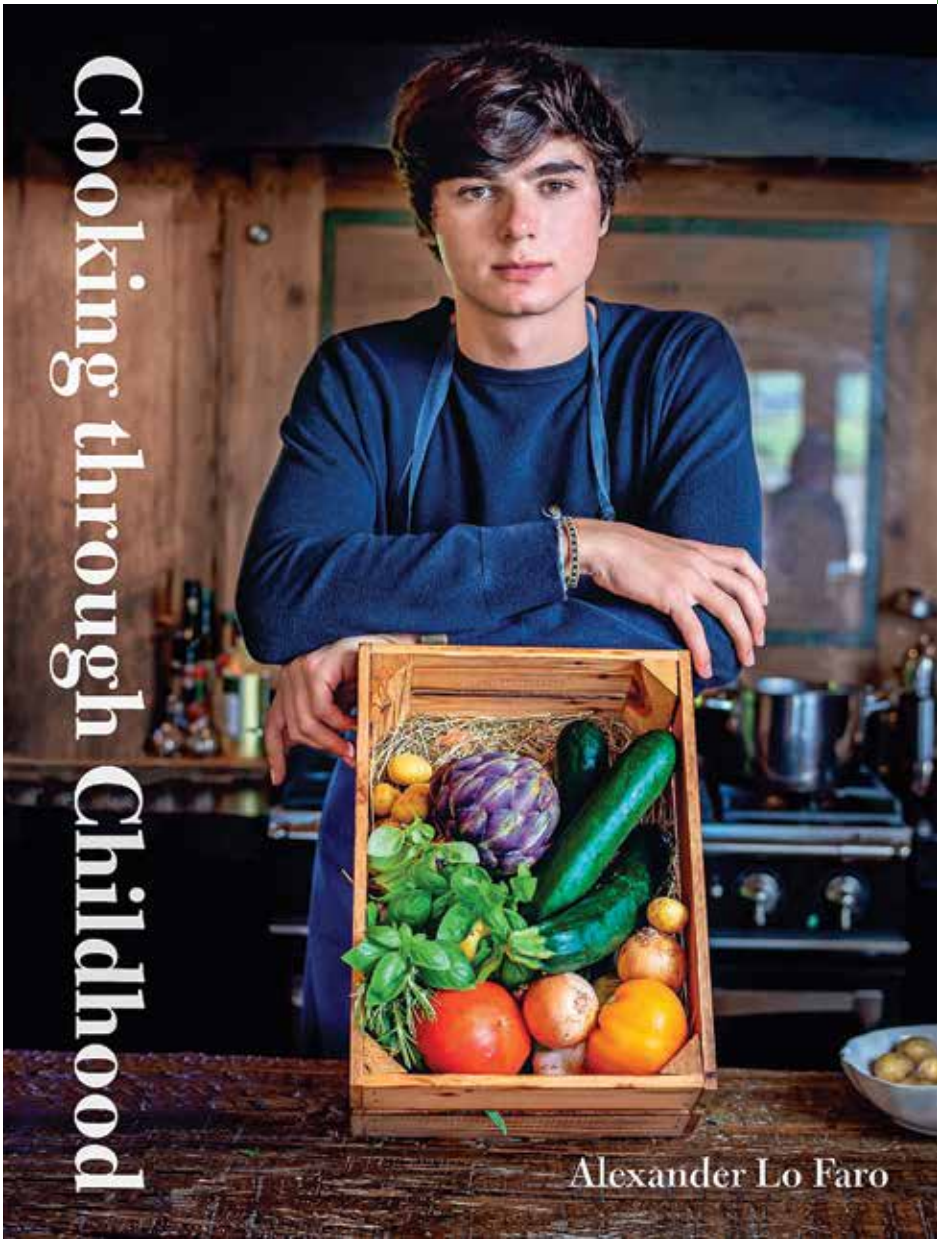






BY DEBRA MEYERS  
For more information, visit [www.taftschool.org/news](http://www.taftschool.org/news)

# Cooking Through Childhood



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AND COPYRIGHT ALEX LO FARO.

## student SPOTLIGHT

**AFTER SPENDING MOST OF HIS LIFE** living abroad, Alex Lo Faro '21 moved to the United States when he was 12. There were a lot of things about life in the U.S. that he wasn't expecting.

"Walking through the supermarket, I was surprised to discover that a large bag of chips was cheaper than an apple," Alex recalls.

The idea that socioeconomic status could drive food choices and overall health not only perplexed Alex, but made him want to dig deeper. Taft's Independent Study Program gave him the opportunity to do just that.

"I started my ISP during my upper mid year by exploring food insecurity and heightened obesity rates in America," says Alex. "I immediately noticed that people of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and communities of color are disproportionately served by the fast-food industry."

To better understand this correlation, Alex interviewed a nutritionist and an executive at Wholesome Wave, a nonprofit organization fighting nutrition insecurity by building infrastructure and systems to increase access to healthy food. He also visited local farms to learn about sustainable farming. Then he took action.

"After combing through the menus of many fast-food chains, my price analysis showed that a meal at a fast-food restaurant averages \$3.04 per person," explains Alex. "I created five cost-effective recipes, each

Left: Alex Lo Faro '21 on the cover of his recently published cookbook.

packed with macronutrients and containing only healthy fats. Those healthy meals cost less than \$3 per person to prepare."

Alex planned to share his research and recipes with families in need in the greater Waterbury area. When COVID-19 shut down Taft's campus last spring, he lost his opportunity to work with those families directly but came up with a creative solution: He built a website highlighting his research, recipes, and recommendations. Alex's website was well received—so much so, in fact, that it sparked a new idea: a cookbook.

"Writing those simple, cost-effective recipes reminded me that cooking is something you share with those you love," Alex says. "I'd always wanted to share my passion with friends, and it was time."

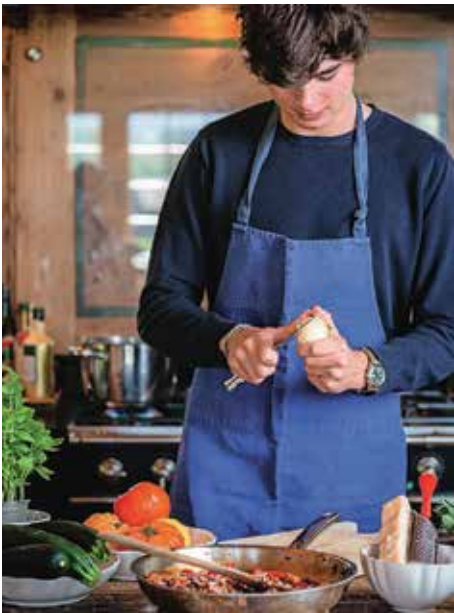
Alex spent last summer choosing recipes for his cookbook. During the process, he prepared more than 200 dishes.

"I cooked them at my house, at friends' homes—anywhere there was a stove and a hungry audience."

Alex's cookbook, *Cooking through*

*Childhood*, contains 87 recipes inspired by his life. It begins when he was 3 years old, sitting on the kitchen counter in New York City, "begging Paola to let me taste the minestrone," and traces his Italian roots. In addition to writing the book and testing the recipes, Alex shot all of the photos and researched and negotiated publishing options. The first print run sold out in a matter of days; Alex donated a large portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book to Wholesome Wave.

"The book grew out of my ISP and the website I shared with families in the greater Waterbury community. Working with those families was incredibly enriching; the opportunity to give back to the community is what was most meaningful about the project," says Alex. "And while I hope the research I did provided some help, I realize the problems of food and nutrition insecurity are substantial. This realization has inspired me to commit to donating a large percentage of the proceeds from the cookbook to Wholesome Wave." ■



Above: In the kitchen with cookbook author Alex Lo Faro '21.

Below: Alex shot all of the mouthwatering images featured with his recipes. Many of recipes also feature a personal note about the dish.



## Fried Zucchini Flowers

INGREDIENTS  
Makes 12 flowers

12 zucchini flowers  
6 oz lager beer  
1 ball bufala mozzarella  
½ cup all purpose flour  
4 basil leaves, sliced  
Salt & pepper  
1 L vegetable oil

This is one of my favorite dishes to eat, but it is hard to make because the flowers have to be super fresh! This recipe makes sure that the delicate flavor of the zucchini flower is prominent and not lost in large amounts of cheese or spices. Enjoy!

### PROCESS

1. Prepare the zucchini flowers by delicately removing the pistil, the hard part in the interior of the flower.
2. In a bowl whisk the beer and flour together until a smooth and fairly fluid batter forms. If the batter is too thick add more beer until it is runny. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Using your hands rip the mozzarella into small pieces. Fill the zucchini flowers with the mozzarella. Do not overfill the flowers though, because you must leave enough room to be able to twirl the petals and seal the flower.
4. Now you must twirl the tips of the flowers lightly so that the filling does not spill out. Next dip the flowers into the batter. After dipping each flower, let it drip over the bowl for 10 seconds in order to get rid of any extra batter.
5. Heat around a ¼ in (1 cm) of sunflower oil in a pan until it is hot. Carefully add the zucchini flowers to the pan. I would recommend doing batches of 3 or 4 flowers so that you don't crowd the pan. Let fry for around one minute on the first side so that the edges are crispy and lacy. Flip and fry the other side for another minute.
6. Drain onto a paper towel. Repeat for the remaining batches.
7. Eat immediately when warm with a sprinkle of flakey sea salt and a small basil leaf.



# Strengthening Our Community

## 2020 NAIS People of Color Conference

FOURTEEN MEMBERS OF THE TAFT School faculty returned to the classroom during the first week of December—this time as students—to attend the 2020 online People of Color Conference.

For more than 30 years, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has hosted the conference, designed to equip educators at every level with knowledge, skills, and experiences to improve and enhance the interracial, interethnic, and intercultural climate in their schools, as well as the attending academic, social-emotional, and workplace performance outcomes for all members of the community. Typically a dozen or so Taft faculty members have attended the People of Color Conference (PoCC) each year for the past 10 years.

The 2020 conference included seminars, a master class, and more than 100 workshops built around the theme New Decade, New Destinies: Challenging Self, Changing Systems, and Choosing Justice. Speakers included award-winning author and chair of Princeton’s Department of African American Studies (and Taft Morning Meeting speaker) Eddie S. Glaude Jr.; esteemed educational researcher, award-winning author, and University of Georgia Professor Dr. Bettina L. Love; and Social Justice Summit keynote speaker Lezley

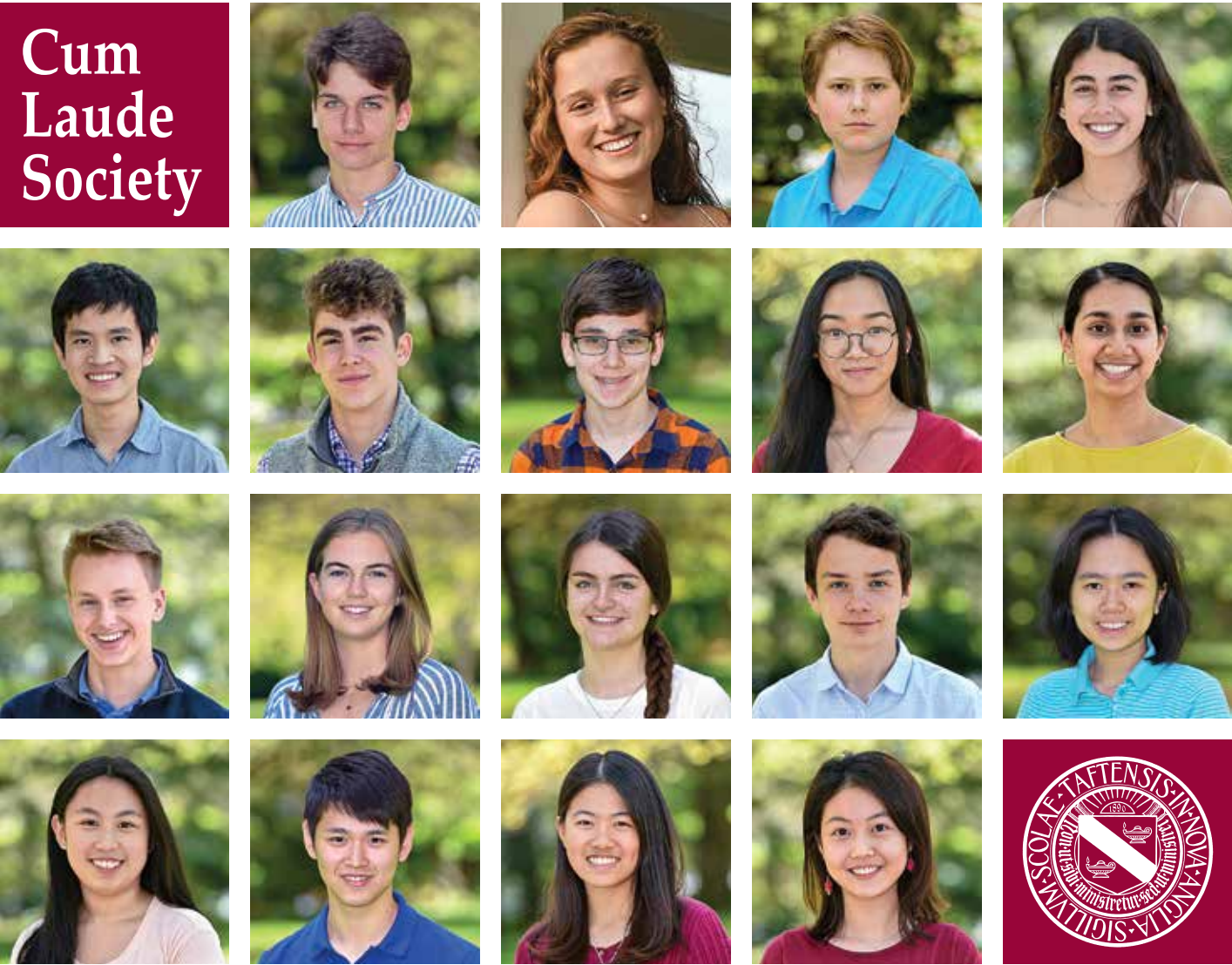
McSpadden-Head, mother of Ferguson, Missouri, shooting victim Michael Brown.

“Attending the NAIS PoCC Conference is a deeply impactful professional development experience where, as a white-identifying, cisgender individual, I can engage in training to become a more effective co-conspirator for racial and social justice,” Dean of Faculty Edie Traina explains. “PoCC’s fusion of urgency, scholarship, affinity spaces, and innovative strategic thinking serves as a model for the Taft community’s reflection on our school’s history as we confront our communal shortcomings.”

Following the conference, the Taft attendees engaged in group reflection, discussing takeaways and potential applications within our community. They also identified topics around which Taft would benefit from further inquiry and intervention.

“This year’s reflection highlighted the importance of examining curriculum with a critical lens focused on decolonization, spiritual identities, and acknowledgment of indigenous peoples/First Nations, as well as the essential nature of inclusivity in onboarding training for both students and faculty,” says Traina.

Three Taft students also attended the concurrent NAIS Online Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC). The annual event is a multiracial, multicultural gathering of upper-school student leaders from across the globe. SDLC focuses on self-reflecting, forming allies, and building community. Participants develop cross-cultural communication skills, design effective strategies for social justice practice through dialogue and the arts, and learn the foundations of allyship and networking principles. ■



# Cum Laude Society

## Celebrating Academic Excellence

“WE CELEBRATE SCHOLARSHIP ON this campus all the time,” says Head of School Willy MacMullen ’78, “but this celebration is one of the most important ones.” And not just because Taft’s annual fall celebration of academic excellence honors the deep commitment to learning and exceptional achievement of Taft students, but, notes MacMullen, because it is tangible proof that “hunger for learning endures, even under the most challenging circumstances. Never in the school’s history has the learning process been so challenged, but never has the durability of learning been more affirmed.”

Congratulations to the 18 students who were inducted into the Cum Laude Society—the national scholarship society in secondary schools—in October: (from top left) Benas Babenskaskas, Clara Baurmeister, Alexander Janssen, Sarah Katz, Benjamin Chinh Quang Le, Darren McNerney, Simon Messineo, Pishya Muangman, Sheina Patrick, Wesley Rising, Paton Roberts, Anna Serbina, Andrii Torchlylo, Phuong Linh Vu, Felicia Xingyue Wang, Harry Hongtao Wang, Coco Yixin Zhang, and Ivy RunPeng Zhuang. ■

To read more about other academic honorees this fall or to watch the awards ceremony, visit <https://bit.ly/20CLTaft>





FIZES/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

# Welcome Home, Tamara!

## New Annual Fund Leadership Structure

IN LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE, Taft turns to those in leadership roles to build on a 130-year tradition of excellence to advance the school. That forward thinking brings new ideas and initiatives that incorporate what Taft does best with timely, creative, and meaningful responses to the ever-changing needs and demands of the global community. It is in that vein that the Annual Fund team has announced a new alumni leadership structure.

In the past, the Annual Fund has been led by an alumna/us chair. As of November,

the Fund is now led by two co-chairs: new appointee Tamara Sinclair '05 and long-serving Fund leader Dylan Simonds '89.

"Tamara Sinclair's deep connection to Taft and her dedication to helping lead the school toward the future bring great energy, fresh ideas, and optimism to our community," notes Annual Fund Director Kelsey Kerr P'07. "Dylan Simonds has done so much for the school and the Annual Fund through the years. He is thrilled to welcome Tamara to our team."

After graduating from Taft, new Alumni Annual Fund Co-Chair Sinclair earned a degree in the biological basis of behavior from the University of Pennsylvania. Following graduation, she moved to Tokyo, where she worked with elementary and junior high school students. Time teaching adults in Thailand followed, then a return to Taft as the director of multicultural recruitment. In that position, she traveled with the Ten Schools Admission Organization, building valuable professional and personal knowledge and relationships along the way. All of that served her well in founding her current business, Choice Boarding Education Consultants.

"Taft has always been my first home away from home, and since my final days as a student, these brick buildings have beckoned me back," says Sinclair. "My



first homecoming came when I joined the admission team traveling to further Taft's global connections and working with students to channel the lessons learned from my *own* transformational mentors here. Now I find that I am home again—this time with the opportunity to help Taft respond to its new call to action, and rise to the financial challenge that real institutional change demands."

As Alumni Annual Fund co-chairs, Sinclair and Simonds will work closely with the Alumni and Development Office as well as class agents to steward Taft's Annual Fund by building strong relationships with alumni and increasing philanthropic revenue and participation. During their voluntary terms, they will also serve as ex-officio trustees, participate in all trustee meetings, and sit on the board's Development Committee. Moving forward, the positions will always be filled by one individual who identifies as female and one identifying as male; they will also adhere to three-year term limits. ■

**STUDENTS IN CARLY BORKEN'S** Advanced Ecology class partnered with the scientific staff of the White Memorial Conservation Center's research program throughout the fall semester. The collaborative projects were broad in range and included work on species mapping to locate native and invasive crayfish; a look at disturbances in nature; the scientific study of bats; and consideration of pollinators. The semester culminated with a virtual student presentation, hosted by the White Memorial Conservation Center in December.



# Veterans Day 2020

## A Visit from Jack Cannata '15, USAF

**TAFT'S ANNUAL VETERANS DAY** observation always includes a Community Time/Morning Meeting speaker. This year, Taft welcomed Air Force officer and member of Taft's Class of 2015, Jack Cannata.

"Officers make up about 10 percent of the U.S. military," Jack told the Taft community. "The enlisted corps is the heart and soul of the military function. Officers have the humble opportunity and responsibility to lead these men and women."

Jack shared information about the military academy experience starting with basic training.

"The goal of basic training is to acclimate you to a new lifestyle," Jack said. "Those six weeks were one of the best experiences of my life. Everything you do—every obstacle you have to tackle—has to be done as a team. Because of that, you make some of the most amazing

connections you will ever make with people of all different backgrounds."

During his time at the Academy, Jack had the privilege of learning about and operating advanced military equipment, attending classified briefings, and being part of audiences for speakers that included two U.S. presidents, a vice president, and a secretary of defense.

"The one thing I am most grateful for, however, is that every day I was given the opportunity to lead others," Jack noted.

As an active member of the military, Jack also shared his perspective on Veterans Day, in an effort, he said, to help Tafties consider the ways they think about "service before self," by recalling stories of a young pilot, fresh out of the Academy; a mother and career military officer dedicated to her mission; and the well-known *Lone Survivor* story of a team

of brave Navy SEALs who lost their lives in Afghanistan after days under siege.

"Just like every other day, these men and women woke up to do their jobs. They knew, but didn't necessarily expect, that they could be asked to answer the call that day and make the ultimate sacrifice. We hear about survivors, we hear about Medal of Honor winners—sometimes. But Veterans Day is about remembering everyone who has put on a uniform with an American flag on their left arm. Veterans, men and women who have served, are all around you. No matter the capacity of their service, they truly believed in putting that service before themselves. Thank them. I promise you, it will mean the world to them: They have made the ultimate commitment to making the world a better place for all of us." ■

Jack Cannata '15 attended the United States Air Force Academy, where he majored in business with a minor in Spanish, and played Division I soccer on the winningest team in Academy history, making two NCAA tournament appearances. After graduation, Jack was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force. He later began his pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base in Columbus, Mississippi. Next year he will continue survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training (SERE) in Washington state. Watch Jack's virtual talk here: <https://bit.ly/Cannata15>





# Committing to Change

**MANY TAFT COMMUNITY MEMBERS** gathered during a peaceful walkout on campus in October to bring awareness to ongoing police brutality across the nation and to shine a light on the decision not to indict any of the officers involved in Breonna Taylor's death in Kentucky. Some participants dressed in black as a show of solidarity, then walked together

through Centen arch to the soccer field, where a number of speakers, including Susannah Brown '22, shared their thoughts with the Taft community.

"We must actively work on breaking down systemic racism and implicit biases," Susannah said. "We must fight for what's right, draw strength in one another, and lift each other during this political

climate and desperate time of need."

In his opening of school address, Head of School Willy MacMullen '78 also spoke to the "complex and potent social, political, cultural moment," we are facing. He noted that there is work to be done on our own campus: "We commit to it, and we commit to the change that follows," Mr. MacMullen said. ■

"We must fight for what's right, draw strength in one another, and lift each other during this political climate and desperate time of need."

—Head of School Willy MacMullen '78



## Taft Welcomes New Trustee

**THE TAFT SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES** recently welcomed new trustee Supriya Balsekar Booth '04. Born and raised in Mumbai, Booth joined Taft as a new mid-dler. She was a dorm monitor and a school monitor, played JV field hockey, and was captain of the varsity girls' squash team. She had an undefeated 48–0 squash career and was a three-time New England squash champion. She graduated with cum laude honors.

After Taft, Booth went on to Harvard College, where she received an A.B. with cum laude honors in economics and a Chinese language citation, and was also named a Harvard College Scholar. She was the captain of the Harvard varsity women's squash team and a three-time All American. She later received an M.B.A. and M.A. in education from Stanford University, where she was an Arjay Miller Scholar.

She began her career working for CitySquash, a nonprofit urban squash program in the Bronx that helps talented young people from disadvantaged households fulfill their potential. She was overjoyed to see a number of her CitySquash students get accepted to and become wonderful additions to the Taft community.

Booth has spent the past 10 years living in the San Francisco Bay Area and

working in tech. She was vice president of business development in the Strategic Partnerships Group at Flextronics, where she led multibillion-dollar mobile deals in emerging markets including India, China, and Brazil. More recently, she was the general manager for the Americas region at Ouster, a lidar technology company, partnering with customers on their autonomous vehicles, robotics, drone, industrial, and smart-city applications. She is taking a career break this year to homeschool her daughter during the pandemic.

Booth's family includes her husband, Garnett, who was also a squash player at Harvard; children Sienna (3½ years old) and Shaun (2 years old); and two puggles, Dosa and Idli. Her family loves the sunny outdoors in California and spends a lot of time hiking and biking. She has been a longtime board member at Khelshala, a sports and education NGO serving underprivileged children in India.

"Taft was my first home in the U.S., and what an amazing home it was," Booth says. "The education I received and relationships I made at Taft have been lifelong gifts. It's such an honor for me to join the board and to give back to the school that has given me so much." ■



Around **THE POND**

# Fall Dance Showcase

Taft's annual Fall Dance Showcase highlights the incredible body of work dance students develop over the course of the fall semester. This year, that work took place not only on campus in the Paley Dance Studio, but in unique and creative spaces across the globe. The 2020 Showcase features dancers in classes at every level, from Dance for Everyone to Dance III and IV. Some work was choreographed by students, some by Dance Director Sarah Surber, and some with Zoom coaching by a variety of guest artists, including Carolyn Dorfman, Jacquie Dumas-Albert, Masem Enyong, Sylvia Kinal-Davidowitz, Sibley Morosco, and Kaitlyn Waldo.

Watch the entire Showcase at <http://bit.ly/DanceTaft21>.







# It's a Wonderful Life! and a Wonderful Show

THEY SAY THE SHOW MUST GO ON, AND INDEED, IT DID. Taft theater students staged a fall play in Bingham Auditorium in front of a live (but limited) audience, while family, fans, and friends tuned in via Zoom from across the globe. *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* offered a safe, socially distanced, and creative twist on the classic Frank Capra holiday film. In this telling, it is Christmas Eve 1946 and a group of actors have gathered in a radio studio for a live performance, re-creating Bedford Falls, George Bailey, and the life-affirming story that is *It's a Wonderful Life*. ■







**FLEETING THOUGHTS—**  
**TAFT'S ART COLLECTIVE**  
 for student work—has taken over  
 the Main Hall bulletin boards.  
 Fleeting Thoughts publishes an  
 all-school newsletter and posts  
 student submissions on Instagram  
 @fleetingthoughtss (yep, two s's).  
 They welcome any artform, from  
 original digital art, paintings, and  
 sculpture to poetry, ceramics,  
 embroidery, and photography.



**TAFTIES WERE INVITED TO ENGAGE IN A VARIETY OF OPTIONAL AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES** between the end of the fall  
 afternoon program season and the start of winter offerings. In addition to some more traditional options, including lacrosse  
 and ergometer workouts, students learned to knit, played handball, competed in a golf tournament, and enjoyed a screening of  
*McFarland, USA*, a true, against-all-odds story of a high school cross-country team.



**FOR TWO WEEKS THIS FALL,**  
**TAFT'S BOYS' LACROSSE PLAYERS**  
 joined other colleges and prep schools  
 in taking on the CityLax "Virtual 5K,  
 So NYC Kids Can Play!" team challenge.  
 The culminating 5K run raised awareness  
 of the CityLax mission to grow urban  
 lacrosse and empower student-athletes  
 in some of New York City's underserved  
 communities, while the parallel  
 fundraising efforts will help make that  
 mission happen. The team's efforts raised  
 just over \$14,000 for the cause.





# Fall Scrimmage Day

Unseasonably warm weather and beautiful sunshine were the perfect combination for a memorable day on Taft's athletic fields. The fall athletic season culminated in a Scrimmage Day in November; it was also a Senior Day of sorts, where athletes in the Class of 2021 were recognized. The full day of back-to-back intra-squad scrimmages was not only a day for athletes to compete, but for the community to come together. It was a time, said Head of School Willy MacMullen '78 in a message to parents, "to recognize that these amazing athletes did not get the season they deserved, but how deeply we celebrate them as a community."





# RISING ABOVE

## Creating Opportunities for Learning

The work of educators Derek Mitchell '84  
and Michael Humphreys '93

*By Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow '84*

Our feature highlights Michael M. Humphreys and Derek S. Mitchell, who are both on a mission to improve the options for those enrolled in public education today. Both have risen within the field of education, where they feel compelled to improve teaching and to see schools work better systemically, and fairly. Their perspectives and work are looking from the “outside”—listening and advising and from the “inside”—in the daily work, class to class, one to one with students.





MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



# DEREK S. MITCHELL '84

## Success by Design

Left: Dr. Derek Mitchell '84, CEO of Partners in School Innovation

“They show up every day in incredible and even now life-risking circumstances, to teach and inspire other people’s kids every day. And our job is to show up for them.”

Derek Mitchell, who spent time teaching in classrooms across the country early in his career, now looks at the classroom from the outside, considering global, data-driven solutions to problems that many urban schools face, particularly those with low-income students of color.

Since 2009, he has served as CEO of Partners in School Innovation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit educational consulting service. Mitchell and his team currently work with 11 school districts across the country, comprising more than 30,000 students. They provide innovative solutions by using data and working alongside teachers and administrators, rather than imposing cookie-cutter mandates.

“I had tried in a number of ways...to infuse data,” Mitchell says of the school systems he had worked in prior to joining Partners in School Innovation (PSI). “So finding out that this organization was good at actually getting folks to use the data was a real interest to me.”

society rather than uplift it. Disinvestment in schools with large numbers of Black and brown students, yet still expecting those underfunded schools to meet the same standards as those with ample funding, leads to a cycle of perceived futility.

“I learned that getting the educational system to do anything but what it is designed to do was going to be really, really hard,” he says. “I wanted to support places like the place Taft ‘rescued’ me from.”

Mitchell grew up on the South Side of Chicago, where he attended public schools that didn’t have the resources or skills to serve those ready for more rigor. A science fair at a well-appointed school in a Chicago suburb opened his eyes to

PSI was developed as an AmeriCorps project in 1993 to find innovative ways to help schools with struggling students. It’s about using data, such as test scores and student grades—“data the students produce themselves,” Mitchell says.

“These data are much more robust and much more powerful to help teachers know what it was about their instruction that helped or hindered students’ acquisition of knowledge and skill. It’s about the instruction, not the child,” Mitchell says.

While earning his Ph.D. in educational psychology at UCLA, Mitchell saw the ways in which the nation’s educational system is designed to stratify

the systemic class stratification and racism that permeates the American educational system.

Mitchell and his mother took buses and trains to get there. When he saw how much equipment was available to the mostly white students of that school, he wondered why schools for children like him were so underfunded. The suburban school had an array of science and lab equipment that his own public school could only dream of having. “My school barely had chalk,” he adds. “We had Xerox copies of book chapters, not books.”

“There’s a set of expectations for kids who look like me that basically says that investment would





Above: Partners in School Innovation annual launch event; Mitchell in front row, third from left. BRIAN EDWARDS

Below: Mitchell presenting at the National Education Conference.

Right: Mitchell expressing gratitude for all those who serve young people on National Teacher Appreciation Day.



Right top: Mitchell with colleagues for a team-building exercise.

Right bottom: Partner in School Innovation CEO Derek Mitchell and CSI founder Julien Phillips presenting 1,000 award-winning children's books written for and by African Americans to Prescott Elementary School in Oakland, California..

be wasted," he says. Reduced investment in schools with many students of color perpetuates the class system, and working with schools that are struggling takes leadership, he says—leadership that works collaboratively with those being led.

"The idea of leadership is not just forcing people to follow your will. It's not sustainable, and it won't get results," Mitchell says.

When PSI is contracted to help a struggling school, Mitchell said his staff members make sure that teachers and administrators know that improving schools is a team effort. The group works with schools that have 75 percent students of color and 75 percent living in poverty, and with at least five years of underperforming test scores.

"We come in and we say, 'Listen, you didn't create this problem. This is not your fault. These problems long predate you, Mr. Superintendent, Mr. Principal, Mr. Teacher, but here you are,'" he says. "And you've got 28 little ones or a school full of them showing up today. What have you got for them?"

PSI also works with schools and districts to prepare them to better support teachers. "That involves a full host of things, from helping the principal articulate a vision or creatively collaborate with their teachers to develop one," he says. "They show up every day in incredible and even now life-risking circumstances, to teach and inspire other people's



Mitchell says he knows about the lives of the schoolchildren in the schools they help because "I was that kid. I know that kid. I know his possibilities. And I was lucky. I don't want luck to be the way most kids excel anymore. It needs to be success by design."

kids every day. And our job is to show up for them."

Mitchell's organization will spend time in classrooms, observing how the teachers work with their students, then suggest ways to support the teachers with new learning techniques. It's hard for districts to look at problems globally, he says, which makes it hard to implement meaningful changes.

"It's hard to look right and left, it's hard to look up and get a broader perspective on a problem because you're essentially in the midst

of churn all the time," he says. "We bring our opportunities to kind of look up and out to ask the broader questions and learn from what others, either in their own system or across systems, are doing that could help them be effective."

Mitchell says he knows about the lives of the schoolchildren in the schools they help because "I was that kid. I know that kid. I know his possibilities. And I was lucky. I don't want luck to be the way most kids excel anymore. It needs to be success by design."





# MICHAEL M. HUMPHREYS '93

## The Art of Teaching and Learning

A standout artist, athlete, and school monitor at Taft, Michael Humphreys now works as a master teacher and chair of the history department at the College Academy High School in Washington Heights, New York. He enjoys mentoring new teachers, developing innovative teaching protocols, and advising the School Leadership Team on ways to move the school forward. He also serves on the Taft Board of Trustees.

"I see in young people an opportunity to, without sounding clichéd, make the world a better place," Humphreys says. "Regardless of racial background or country of origin, many parents and grandparents have instilled principles which we would all be proud of: equity, selflessness, compassion, competition, and of course, ambition. Educating students is a continuation of these traditional and enduring truths of humanity through the lens of different subject matter," he notes. "My preference is the study of humankind or the social sciences. The goal is to encourage reflection, self-worth, and value as a world citizen and the moxie to become a force of good for more than just oneself."

As a master teacher, Humphreys works to help younger colleagues develop their teaching styles.

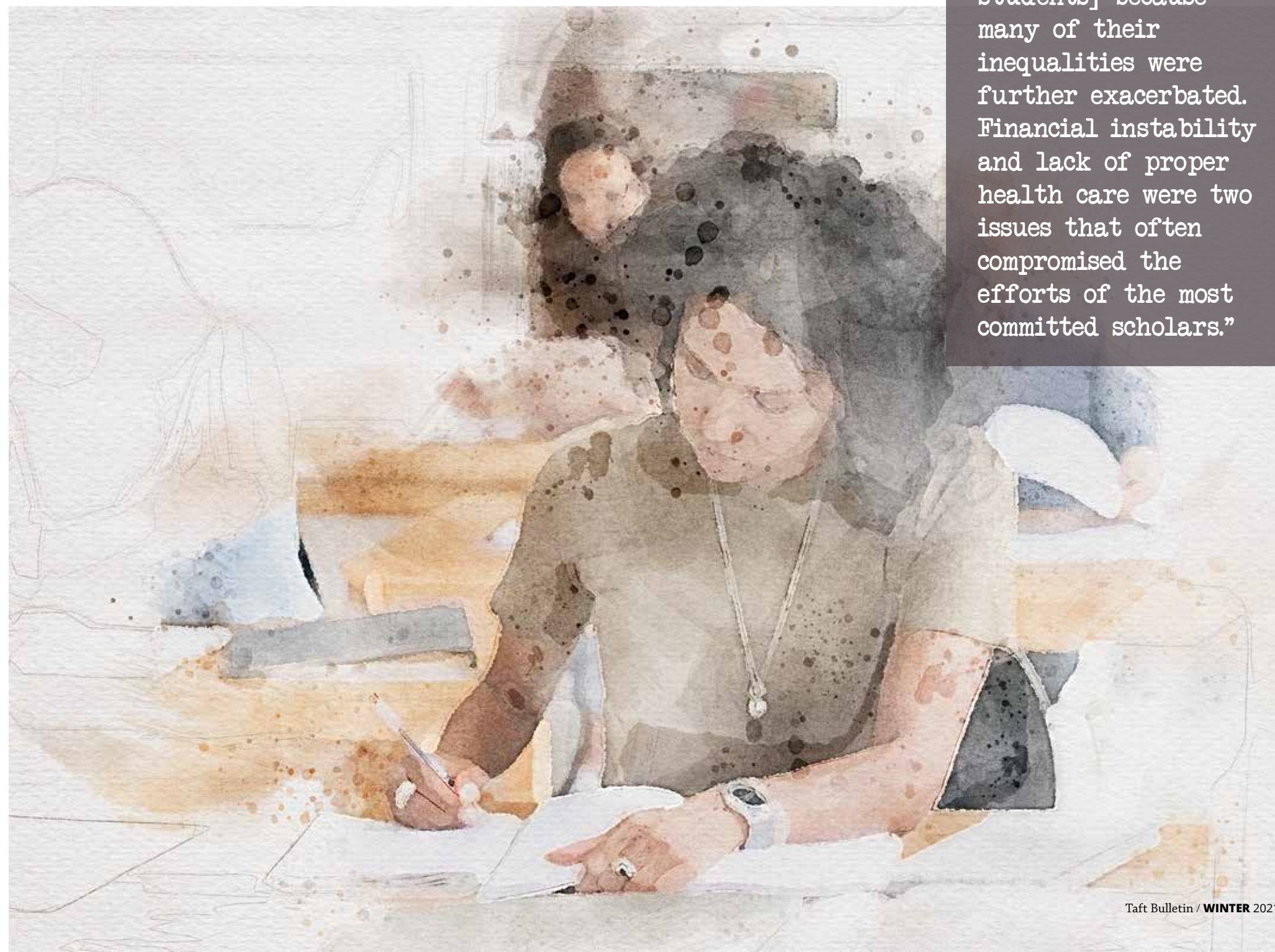
"An early mentor of mine used to remind me that teaching is an art. A teacher's style is inextricably related to their personalities and interest. As an artist and athlete, I have continually reflected upon my style, taking both positive and negative feedback from peers, school administrators, parents, and most importantly, my students. I am a lifelong learner who still finds joy in continually learning," he says.

As an energetic young man from the Bronx, Humphreys applied to Taft as a second thought. New York Prep, his junior high school in Harlem, was one of the city's new experimental public schools, focused on finding creative methods to keep troubled youth in school. Fortunately, one of his teachers there was a Choate graduate who, on a hunch, introduced Michael's family to the idea of boarding school. Now, Humphreys works to instill a love of learning in his students, many of whom face similar challenges Humphreys did as a young man.

"I have, over the course of my career, taught global studies, American history, economics, and AP government and politics. Though most students are intimidated by their misconceptions about the content, they quickly realize that studying the social sciences is study of human survival that they are so entirely a part of," he says. "This reflection and shift of purpose opens their eyes to recognizing differences and embracing the many more similarities they share with people in their country and abroad."

Regarding courses on government and economics, Humphreys believes they serve as an invaluable stop along a student's academic journey because

Left: Michael Humphreys '93 and his wife, Ana.



"I believe that learning during the pandemic has been especially challenging for [our students] because many of their inequalities were further exacerbated. Financial instability and lack of proper health care were two issues that often compromised the efforts of the most committed scholars."



those classes are where they learn the tools for understanding and thriving in a democratic republic that has chosen a capitalist economic system.

“This understanding is needed more than ever for students, many of whom come from families who have not figured out how to actively participate and influence their political representation and financial understanding that allows for economic upward mobility,” Humphreys says.

One challenge they are all learning about together is the COVID-19 pandemic, which sent his students to distanced learning.

“This year has been incredibly difficult for students across the planet who were fortunate enough to be privy to a professionally organized

and publicly funded education,” says Humphreys. Though his students have always dealt with racism and inequality, he says doing so in a global pandemic has been an added challenge.

“I believe that learning during the pandemic has been especially challenging for them because many of their inequalities were further exacerbated. Financial instability and lack of proper health care were two issues that often compromised the efforts of the most committed scholars. Lastly, though public school teachers are at times maligned by many, our stabilizing academic focus, self-esteem building, and unyielding love for our perfectly imperfect students on a daily basis was missed,” he adds.

Humphreys says that as a community, his school

Below: Humphreys with two of his four sons, Elijah (standing) and Jacob.



SIRTRAVELA/OTSHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Below: The Humphreys family at a dinner event: center, Ana and Michael; front, seated, Matthew, 9, and Aaron, 11; standing, Elijah, 17, and Jacob, 15.

“Though public school teachers are at times maligned by many, our stabilizing academic focus, self-esteem building, and unyielding love for our perfectly imperfect students on a daily basis was missed.”

has tried its best to replicate its students’ experience online; however, it is exponentially more challenging. “Nothing replaces a genuine ‘Good morning,’ a high five in the hallway, or a serious after-school conversation about college and adulthood,” he says.

Humphreys says the greatest change in education has come in the ways in which schools are operated and the expectations stakeholders have for children’s futures. “Unfortunately, certain schools and personnel who work there never connect with their students. As a result, this lack of trust limits a student’s potential as time quickly passes. Fortunately, those who are naturally willing and a few who have come along continue to show promise as tomorrow’s leaders,” he says. ■

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow ’84 is a freelance writer living in Fort Wayne, Indiana.







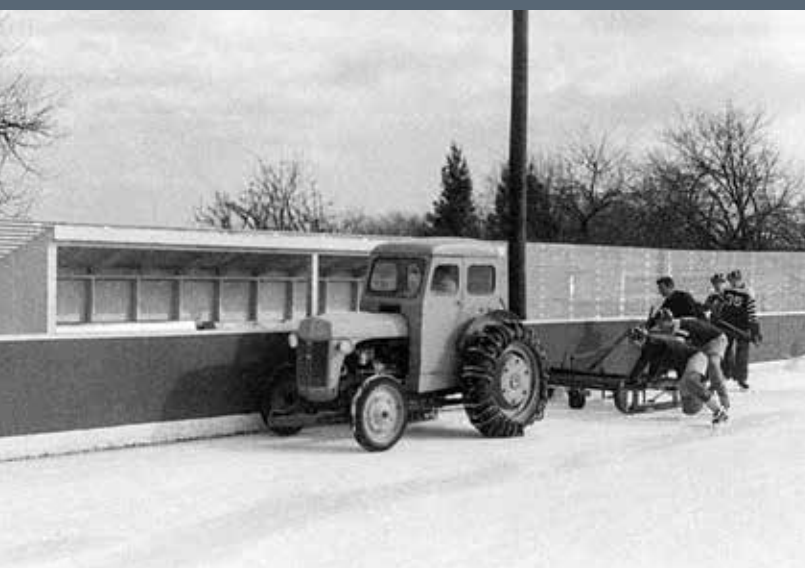
*Left:* Can you imagine the time and patience it took snowblow an entire rink in the 1950s?

*Below left:* This truly was a different pregame ritual in the 1950s. This tractor and attachment took six people to smooth and pull the snow away from the boards.

# Making Ice

Members of the 1898 Polo Team depended on the weather to play—now our students have a facility with two rinks with their own Olympia machines to keep the ice playable. Making and keeping ice has come a long way in 120 years. These photos are from the 1950s, during the construction of Mays Rink and Angier House, and before the installation of the roof that kept the ice colder and free of snow. Angier House still holds the refrigeration equipment for Mays, along with the changing room with a fireplace.

—Beth Nolan Lovallo '93, *The Leslie D. Manning Archives*



*Below right:* This photo, taken after the roof was added in 1957, shows an early Zamboni. Mr. Zamboni himself came out annually to service the machine.



## Why did Hank Brauer '74 decide to establish a gift annuity at Taft?

**“It was an elegant way to make a gift to Taft at a time when the school needs our support and, for me, to save for the future—and receive a competitive return.** We have a great deal of trust in the way Taft manages its endowment and finances. With the school’s AA rating, we are confident that this is a good place to put our money.”

—Hank Brauer '74, P'08,'09,'10

- A gift annuity requires a minimum of \$10,000, cash or appreciated securities
- Involves a very simple, two-page agreement—annuity created within one week following receipt of assets
- Great way to bypass immediate capital gains and now, extremely easy to transfer mutual fund shares for this purpose—perhaps time to harvest capital gains?
- No attorney or financial planner needed, though should be consulted before funding an annuity
- No management or investment fee to diminish your payout
- May include a second person
- Extremely generous tax benefits
- Very competitive payout rates far exceeding certificates of deposit rates
- Guaranteed payout for life and rates won't change—great “auto-pilot” retirement strategy
- Variable annuities perfect for younger alumni 50 years of age and up
- Remaining amount in gift annuity benefits Taft and you may direct where it “goes”

For more information or a discussion, contact Paul Parvis, Director of Planned Giving, at [paulparvis@taftschool.org](mailto:paulparvis@taftschool.org) or 860-945-7751. Please also visit our planned giving website for very useful information and calculation tools: [www.taftschool.giftplans.org](http://www.taftschool.giftplans.org)



# Taft BULLETIN

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