Inside Update

2 Birgit Wasmuth Chosen as new Director
3 Around Kedzie
4 Enrollment Numbers Up
5 Tom Roesler named Communications and Events Coordinator
6 Shannon Krueger
7 ASAF
8 From the Cover-Travis Hasler shares Peace Corps experience
10 Barb Dasanto- The new teacher in town
11 Nanci Muturi- Helping with the fight against obesity
12 Kansas City Royals’ announcer Steve Physioc brings it home
14 McPherson Sentinel led by K-State Alumni
15 Alumni Updates
16 David Chartrand’s story of mixing music and writing

From The Cover

25th Anniversary

Oct. 24, marks the 25th anniversary of the naming of the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications. We hope you’ll mark your calendars and spend the day celebrating with us. The Huck Boyd Lecture and the Great Plains Radio History Symposium will highlight the day as well as recognition of the Miller family’s phenomenal commitment to journalism and to our past, present and future.

To view a timeline of Miller School history from 1874 to 2013 visit our website at www.update.jmc.com

Travis Hasler, graduate student, poses in front of an elephant during his Peace Corps trip in Uganda. Hasler spent over two years in the program, finding himself, and his wife, Sami.
Thank You, Lou

Interim Director, Lou Benjamin, steps down

Last year, Lou Benjamin made the transition from teacher and researcher to interim director. It was a year of challenges, faculty searches, upcoming accreditation preparation and unprecedented growth.

“Stepping in, and doing what Lou has been doing this past year is not an easy thing,” Steve Smethers, Associate Director for Undergraduate Education, said.

“Here you are, all of a sudden confronted with and all the many things the director of the school has to do. Lou has been a teacher and a researcher, and to come into an administrative track like that takes some getting used to, and before you know it’s over because it only lasted a year. She’s done a remarkable job.”

Benjamin was able to accomplish a number of tasks in addition to overseeing the overall management of the Miller School.

“Dr. Benjamin didn’t just react as you might expect an interim director to behave, but she was proactive,” Marlene Franke, administrative officer said. “She set aside her personal professional projects and worked with faculty and staff to move the department forward. With our accreditation visit coming up she has worked with faculty to gather information for the report to be prepared this summer for the accrediting team.”

Benjamin is responsible for what goes on behind-the-scenes, which at times may have been daunting, but staff members say she has risen to the occasion.

“Lou always comes to work with a positive attitude and is easy to work with,” Jenny Robertson, senior administrative assistant said. “I can go to her with questions or problems, and she’s always glad to help. I think she has done a lot of great things to move the Miller School in the right direction, and hopefully she will continue to have a positive impact on the school in other ways now that she is stepping down.”

“I appreciated the fact Dr. Benjamin was so open professionally and personally,” Cassie Hall, Senior Administrative Assistant said. “I appreciate her dedication and service.”

Students have noticed Benjamin’s hard work as well.

“Dr. Lou’s service to the Miller school has been so valuable,” Carly Dickter student worker, said. “She has prepared us for a graceful transition and has provided great leadership along the way.”

Benjamin has supported faculty members and their ventures. “She’s a very good communicator, with faculty and students, and especially as interim director she’s taken charge,” Gloria Freeland said. “She helped see the Think Tank through with Andy Nelson, and the new equipment we have in our labs.”

She has also supported bringing back diverse student organizations.

“She has done a wonderful job. She values diversity and when I approached her with the idea of creating a student organization that would promote diversity at K-State, she was very supportive,” Sam Mwangi said. “In fact, bought us pizza to make sure we had a good turnout. Now Diverse Mass Communicators is a student organization up and running.

“Her open door policy, I have found remarkable. I have always felt welcome to go in and discuss anything. To me that’s awesome.”

Although a temporary tenure, faculty members said Benjamin embraced the job with full focus.

“Lou has been a very dedicated interim director, although she knew that her position would not be long term, she literally gave it her all,” Kim Baltrip said. “She performed in every way to the upmost and fulfilling her responsibilities like any director would. Her accomplishments since beginning her tenure have truly been felt.”

From all the staff and faculty of the Miller School, Thank you for your hard work.

A special thanks to the MC Photo Journalism Class for contributing pictures.

From left: Shelby Stous, Ellen Ochampaugh, Sarah Lefere, Rob Havard, Lewys Canton, Chelsea Stover, Cathy Doll, Erica Schmille, Katie Thies, and Jacob Canady. Photo by Andy Nelson.
New Leadership
In Kedzie

Brigit Wassmuth named new director

Adam Suderman

As the Miller School approaches its re-accreditation year, Birgit Wassmuth, Ph.D., will guide the process as the newly appointed director of the school.

“K-State’s journalism and mass communications program has a long, rich history,” Wassmuth said. “As I understand it, the university first offered courses in printing in about 1875, and the focus on journalism education is known for being one of the first in the nation. I’m proud to join K-State, especially at this exciting time with the university’s 150th anniversary events in full swing and the ongoing 25th anniversary of the naming of the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications.”

Wassmuth comes to K-State with an international background that stretches worldwide. She is completing her seventh year as Professor of Communications at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Ga.

After her on-campus interview in February, Wassmuth said she felt very comfortable with the university and the opportunity available.

“I have to admit I felt really, really good during the interview,” Wassmuth said. “It was a very positive experience. We had meaningful conversations. Whether it was the students, faculty or university administration, we felt comfortable at every level.”

Steve Smathers, associate director for the undergraduate program in the school, served on the search committee for the new director.

Smathers said Wassmuth’s vision separated her from the rest of the field.

“T think she brings a very positive vision,” Smathers said. “I think she understands what K-State can be and what it takes to get us there. She is a good fundraiser. She is a good administrator and she has very, very positive leadership qualities.”

Wassmuth will replace Louise Benjamin who served one year as the interim director.

Benjamin said Wassmuth’s experience across the board will benefit all associated with the school.

“I’m just very excited,” Benjamin said. “I think she’s going to bring so much to this program. She’ll be able to help us build the whole school, the program and just advance everything that we’ve been trying to do over the last four years I’ve been here and before that, too.”

Wassmuth has worked with Benjamin and other K-State faculty members in the past.

The new director corresponded with Benjamin and Barbara DeSanto, Ph.D through the Journalism and Mass Communication Leadership Institute of Diversity program.

“I became a master teacher in this program and I was a presenter for the faculty who were going through the program to become leaders,” Wassmuth said. “We will have three JILID fellows on the faculty and the staff at the school. It’s quite a distinction and honor to have that many people.”

Wassmuth also worked with former school director Angela Powers on the strategic planning team for the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications.

Wassmuth said establishing the reputation of the school is high on her priority list.

“When President Schultz is in an elevator at a conference and he’s asked, what are the three top programs on his campus, I want him to mention the AQ Miller School because of what we’ve accomplished,” Wassmuth said. “This is where we branch out and that’s top of the mind of awareness. If we reach that goal and people connect immediately with that brand, we don’t know where that might take us.”

Upcoming celebrations at the school excite Wassmuth as she seeks to establish roots in the K-State community.
"With the upcoming 25th anniversary of the naming of the school, I hope there will be opportunities available to fund-raise. It's a wonderful opportunity to start my tenure at K-State with these celebrations that are planned. The school has a long line of alums I'm looking forward to meeting and inviting to campus for special events."

As she moves closer to transitioning to Manhattan, Wassmuth said she hopes alumni can become an even bigger part of the school's future.

"Alums have been through the program and they've been here before," Wassmuth said. "I believe in the power of the alumni to help us find and create a program of distinction. Working with them to give them a voice will be very important. Perhaps it'll be more than they've been able to do in the past. Friendship building and alumni relationship building is a logical place to begin fundraising. They're proud to see the fruits of their suggestions and the money they donate to the school. I see fundraising as a win-win situation and it gives alumni a certain connection to the school to build something beyond where it is now."

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**Around Kedzie**

**New Hires**

**Tom Hallaq**

Tom Hallaq is the newest addition to the Journalism Digital Media sequence as assistant professor for the fall. He will move to Manhattan from Pocatello, Idaho, this summer.

"As interest in the position grew and I looked more into the state of Kansas and K-State, I fell in love with the community," Hallaq said. "It made me feel at home."

While unsure of which courses he'll be teaching, Hallaq plans to continue his research in media literacy. He's looking at how university students versus faculty use social media as a learning outlet.

Hallaq received his Bachelor of Arts from Brigham Young University; Masters of Education from Eastern Washington University; and his Doctorate of Education from Idaho State University.

His career started at Walla Walla Washington High School. Hallaq then taught at Salt Lake Community College and most recently Idaho State University.

Hallaq said that he believes there are many ways to learn through a hands' on approach; instead of lectures.

"I enjoy student interactions and want to develop a professional relationship with them," Hallaq said. "I want [students] to feel welcome to come talk with me and be able to work collaboratively together."

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**Save the Date**

Oct. 24, 2013

25th anniversary celebration of Miller School

10:30 a.m. Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media Symposium

Speaker: Jane Marshall

Marshall teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in food writing at Kansas State University.

- Communications coordinator for the College of Human Ecology
- Written history/recipe book "Tea time to Tailgate: 150 Years at the K-State Table."

**Great Plains Radio History Symposium**

(details to be announced)

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**What We've Been Up To**

April 4-5, 2013

Harold Hütt from University of Costa Rica visited campus. While here he met with faculty members to discuss potential exchange between the Miller School and University of Costa Rica.

March 7, 2013

JMC networking night

More than 20 employers connected with 80-85 students in the Student Union. Several students were able to receive internships.

**Gloria Freeland's MC 200 News and Feature Writing**

Students in Freeland's class have spent the semester researching lost towns/communities of Clay County. Stories are being written about Deweyville, Fact, Garfield Center, Green, Hannibal, Industry, Idana, Morgansville, Oak Hill, and Vining.

To find out what else is happening around Kedzie visit our website at www.updatejmc.com
Kedzie’s Getting Crowded

Enrollment continues to increase for the Miller School of Journalism

Maureen Quinn

Now more than ever, technological advances with iPhones, iPads and social media are being used, creating a promising future for students in communications who hope to make lifelong careers out of it. According to Tom Roesler, academic adviser, communication and its channels make the Miller School exciting.

"It is important to communicate to the students that this is an exciting time in history," Roesler said. "There are so many various networks in our industry that there is a great need for people to communicate effectively. It is important to strategically communicate through the minds of students to be the influencers."

With the demand for highly qualified writers experienced in technology, it comes as no surprise that enrollment for the school has increased over the last few years. The year 2010 began with 266 students in the program, and there are now 334 total majors along with 228 pre-majors. This year the Miller School accepted 112 new majors into the program. The number has grown exponentially in just the last three years as the demand for technology rises.

Students like Jennifer Jirovec, junior in public relations, join the program because of enthusiastic faculty such as Roesler. Jirovec joined the program because communications has always been her passion and she enjoys surrounding herself with those of the same enthusiasm.

"I got into public relations because I love building relationships," Jirovec said.

"I love interacting with people and building relationships with them. The Miller School allows me to express my creativity and the teachers and faculty encourage me to pursue that."

Sequences such as public relations and advertising offer a wide range of marketing and writing skills, which can be put to use in numerous areas within the job market.

"A lot of positives are going on in the Miller School," Roesler said. "Increased interest, enthusiasm, and an understanding of the steps the students need to go through for graduation. It has really come together over the last three years, many students making the switch creates a lot of momentum."

Online exams, club announcements, e-mails from professors, there’s an endless list of reasons technology is deemed a necessity versus a luxury. It is crucial to grasp that now is the technology era and communication goes hand in hand with getting information out there for others online to see. Barbara DeSanto, assistant professor in public relations, said that technology is a two-edged sword.

"So many wonderful things can be done with using technology," DeSanto said. "Google hangout instantly gets us in on the conversation. You can put your input in and help guide and add to the conversation. This can be seen as a real plus because you can correct information and add to it on a timely basis. You establish a reputation this way and build trust."

As technology advancements are made, some say that the journalism industry is dying, because it has become more acceptable to surf the Internet and Twitter for news versus opening the paper. Roesler says it doesn’t mean that the realm of journalism and communication is no longer needed.

"There are myths out there that the JMC industry is dying," Roesler said. "We see that there is more of an opportunity than ever. In reality there is an error with the content delivery system, the old-fashioned newspaper, nightly news. We’re seeing it decline but not in content. There is more content than ever. The
delivery system is changing, but really the industry is thriving. Communication is better; skills and the ability to communicate is better.”

With news alerts sent to smart phones and tablets, blogs and statuses refreshed religiously, now is the most crucial time to become involved with journalism and mass communication.

“In the communication realm it’s experience,” Roesler said. “Whatever you’re learning now won’t be the same in three or four years. You want to be a lifelong learner in the system you use to communicate, but to develop skills you need hands-on experience. Experience outside the classroom. That’s what employers want to see; what you’ve done. Get out and do things, build your portfolio, the more you put on there the better.”

Seats are filling up in Kedzie with increased enrollment. Students get in groups during class to discuss lecture material. Photo by Rob Havard.

Roesler Forges a New Trail
Roesler moves up to a position created just for him
Sydney Sewell

Roesler, the Academic Adviser for the Miller School since 2010, is also a 1999 graduate of the Miller School and received his MBA from K-State in 2004.

As of April 29, he became the Communications and Events Coordinator for the College of Arts & Sciences at K-State. The thing that had the biggest impact on Roesler’s career was being a student assistant in the K-State Sports Information Office for three years. Through that he was able to make the connection to ESPN.

Roesler said he is most proud of helping establish the Wabash CannonBall, K-State’s only black-tie gala for alumni in the Kansas City area. It has become a successful event and Roesler said he is fortunate to have been in on the ground floor as it got started.

Roesler’s true purpose in life is what he calls the “long term investment in the individual.” So, being an academic adviser has been truly special for him.

“To have the opportunity to help students try to find their way through college has been one of the highlights of my career and something I will always carry with me,” said Roesler.

He advises students to engage in what they are doing.

“I see so many students (and I was guilty of it too) who ‘sleep walk’ through college. Parties, social life, video games, Aggieville, etc. are the focus. As a result, we’re not as engaged in what’s going on in the world around us and miss out on opportunities to learn, grow and engage in important things,” said Roesler. “Be hungry. Work hard. Focus. If you do that, your dreams are within reach.”

The Communications and Events Coordinator for the College of Arts & Sciences is a new position, so he will be “forging a new trail” and exact job responsibilities will take shape as they move forward. Some of the major things Roesler will be working on will be to develop a strategic communications plan for the college, including social media, website and printed pieces. He’ll also coordinate events associated with the college, including donor events, Open House, graduation and others.

Roesler helping a student find her way through college by explaining the complexities of enrollment. Photo by Mengyi Wang.
An increase of 112 new majors this year — the most the Miller School has seen in 10 years — resulted in a need to have adjunct faculty cover some classes. For one adjunct, coming back to teach at her alma mater has been a dream fulfilled.

Shannon Krueger has been part of K-State her whole life. As a high school student who was heavily involved with Future Farmers of America and 4H, she came to campus for a number of activities. When it came time to head off to college, K-State was the obvious choice.

"I loved the campus. I ended up studying agriculture communications and journalism, which basically is similar to a print journalism degree and a public relations degree, and then we specialize in agriculture classes," Krueger said. "I got a minor in agriculture economics and graduated in 2003."

After graduation Krueger went to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to get her master's in ag leadership, but after a semester she transferred back to K-State.

"I wanted to work in rural development, which is what my master's was specializing in," Krueger said. "The faculty member who taught those four classes had just semi-retired and was starting to only teach one class every other semester. It was going to take forever to get all four done and frankly, I was ready to come home and get married."

While Krueger finished her master's, she also worked with the K-State Alumni Association and the Department of Communications, which she said is essentially a public relations agency for the Alumni Association.

"We handled the website and the student recruitment pieces, as well as e-newsletters," Krueger said. "After working with the Alumni Association, I moved onto Pacific West for awhile and then Briggs Auto, where I did a lot of marketing and PR work. It was fun because I got to take something from a concept to a campaign and work with the corporate partnership side of things. It was cool to connect the business sector to the alumni, university and athletic departments."

After three years working with Briggs Auto, and a year working with the Department of Agriculture Economics as a communications coordinator, Krueger transitioned into freelancing.

"I've been around crops and livestock my whole life," Krueger said. "It's not for everyone, but there's something special about it for me and it's such a big part of our economy so it's cool to work with a lot of clients who work in that sector. As a freelancer, I do media relations, event planning and social media for a group called Agvocacy."

Krueger said part of her job is clarifying the state of the farming industry.

"There's a misconception that there aren't family farms. There's still 98% of them. It's really cool working with the farm community. They're evangelists for agriculture. It's cool to apply all the things I have learned as a PR professional and help them relate to consumers and not talk down to them and not make them feel their concerns aren't valid. It's an open conversation that goes two ways — we learn from them, and they learn from us."

Two years ago, Krueger received an email from Joye Gordon asking if she would be interested in teaching a class or two for the Miller School.

"I had always mentioned if there was an opportunity to teach I would definitely love to," Krueger said. "They had an opportunity, and I sent my resume over."

Krueger began teaching PR Writing the next fall.

"It was a trial by fire," Krueger said. "It was a great experience and I love working with the students and taking the basis of their knowledge at the beginning and watch it grow throughout the semester and see what they are able to do at the end."

Louise Benjamin, interim director, says
From the Darkroom to the Sun

Sydney Sewell

As a freshman, Christopher Assaf seemed to be the “hot shot” on campus when it came to photography. Assaf landed the cover photo for the first edition of the 1988 Collegian that fall semester. Although Assaf describes his time at Kansas State as humbling, it seems as though he was born with the gift of being able to tell a story through images. A 1992 Miller School graduate, Assaf has had to teach himself new skills to keep up with a vastly changing industry. Although he was a photographer and a photo editor for both the Collegian and the Royal Purple yearbook, K-State did not offer any formal photographic training.

“We learned from each other and from a few alumni helping (with the Collegian and Royal Purple) but that was it,” Assaf said.

Now, as the multimedia editor for the Baltimore Sun, Assaf again finds the need to teach himself new skills. He is responsible for figuring out which stories will make good video stories, trains the photo staff on shooting video and editing the film and edits content for the website. “We’re trying to find golden gems,” Assaf said, “but it isn’t solely focused on the number of views, it’s also the stories we think people should hear.”

Assaf also deals with social media. “There is not black and white media anymore. There is so much more grey than there used to be” Assaf said.

He said there will always be some form of everything around in media—some form of Facebook, some form of newspaper. “It may not be what we know today, but there will always be something,” Assaf said.

He said Facebook and Twitter are here and as strong as ever, when many people thought they would fade away as quickly as they appeared.

When he first made the transition from photography to multimedia, Assaf knew little about making a video. He watched tutorials and movies to figure out the basics. Assaf found it challenging because he was expected to get where he’d gotten in photography after 20 years, in only four months.

“You have to adapt, you have to learn,” Assaf said.

Clearly he has. He has won the White House News Photographer Association’s “Eyes of History” award and been recognized for his work by the President three different times, once from George W. Bush and twice from Barack Obama. Yet Assaf’s favorite thing about his career is that he feels he’s been fortunate in getting to meet a lot of people.

“Many in a bad place in their life, (ie. Hurricane Katrina, Virginia Tech campus shooting, Laguna Beach fires) they open up and let me into their private lives,” Assaf said. “At times I wonder if the story I told through my work did their story justice.”

All in all Assaf hopes to make a difference in peoples’ lives or at least make them care about something they didn’t before.

“You must be able to tell a story,” Assaf said, “and not just tell a story but tell it in several different mediums.”

He recommends students have a main focus but then branch out, and gain as much practical experience as possible through internships and freelancing.

Assaf celebrates at the White House when he receives his award.

Photo courtesy of Chris Assaf
Finding Meaning

Michael Boeck

Eight thousand two hundred twenty-five point seven miles is the distance from Uganda to Manhattan and 8,225.7 miles is the distance it took Travis Hasler, a graduate student in public relations with an emphasis in health communications, to find his calling, his passion and the love of his life.

Hasler came to Kansas State for his undergraduate degree. After graduating in 2006, he moved to Denver.

"I did the typical undergrad who doesn't know what he wants to do," Hasler said. "I lived in downtown Denver with four of my friends from college for two years. I was working in sales, and I didn't know what direction I was going. I ended up moving back to my hometown in Lawrence, going to work for my father's business in construction management."

By 2008, Hasler was burned out working construction management and needed a change in his life to find clarity and purpose.

"I was just worried I was going to all of a sudden wake up and be 60 years old and not have done what I wanted to do with my life," Hasler said.

Hasler started researching and exploring the option of joining the Peace Corps.

"Peace Corps was something that I had briefly looked into while I was an undergrad, but didn't really explore that hard," Hasler said.

He began the process by looking at the Peace Corps website, then talking with recruiters.

"It was a year-long application process, a hard, arduous process," Hasler said.

Hasler passed the first step in the Peace Corps process, the step that determines whether you are somebody the Peace Corps would consider. The second step required passing a physical examination. Hasler proved qualified. The next was letting the Peace Corps know in order what three destinations you wanted to pursue. Hasler committed working in Asia, South America, and Africa. After the intense evaluation, hopeful volunteers are left to wait for months to receive their call letting them know if they made the cut.

When the time came for Hasler to accept his assignment, there was no offer, there was no position.

Hasler was determined to prove himself, and decided to do the only logical thing, call the Peace Corps office.

"The cut-off date came and went, and I didn't get my invitation to serve," Hasler said. "So I started calling.

"I fought all the way until I got to the country desk in Africa."

It took me five or six phone calls. The representative said "Looks like we don't have a place for you. She asked me why I felt I deserved to be in the program as a volunteer."

That prompted an hour-and-a-half impromptu interview, while on a vacation with his father in the middle of a golf course parking lot.

"I just convinced her and that's what you have to do to show you're good enough and qualified to get one of these select spots in order to serve your country as a volunteer," Hasler said.

And convince her he did.

In August of 2009, Hasler was assigned to work in Uganda for the next two years.

Hasler arrived in Uganda, which is similar in size to Kansas, where the Peace Corps farmed him out to a small, local organization, which received funding from an AIDS organization in the United Kingdom, called the Tear Fund. The organization involved HIV education for the returning child soldiers.

"While in Uganda, I was one of the first Peace Corps volunteers allowed back into that area, after the Joseph Kony conflict," Hasler said. "I ended up spending two years working with the returning child soldiers from that conflict. I was also working with families who had lost children and other family members that were lost during the Twenty-Five Year War that was going on there. It was a unique experience working with the returnees from that conflict."

Hasler adapted to the Ugandan culture, living with the locals, sharing a bathing area, which involved bucket baths, and living with cockroaches and chickens. Internet and electricity were a luxury he was able to come by three days out of the week if he was lucky.

"The average temperature was 100 to 105 degrees every day, and it was a hot, dry, and place. It's pretty amazing though, living and eating like the locals," Hasler said.

"I was 190 pounds when I got over there, and when I came back I was 158 pounds, which has been my lightest weight. It was just fresh meat, and fresh vegetables," said Hasler.

Initially, it was hard for his digestive system to be accustomed to the Uganda food. And although many of his colleagues struggled with the acclimation, Hasler assimilated pretty well.
“I just had a desire to be in that environment,” Hasler said. “Maybe the hardest problem was we’re not used to our food not being refrigerated, but instead hanging on hooks outside all day in the open air with the flies and the heat. Digestive issues when you first get over there may be hardest because your digestive system isn’t used to it, but you get used to it.”

Peace Corps was a chance to hit the restart button on his life, leading him to be open to all types of experiences.

A year into his service, fate would take Hasler on a safari with 10 other Peace Corps volunteers, and find one of the greatest experiences on his journey to discovering himself.

His wife, Sami

Whereas Hasler joined the Peace Corps on a whim, Sami Hasler, Travis’ wife from Eugene, Ore., knew she wanted to be part of the Peace Corps since she was a little girl.

“The Peace Corps was something I always wanted to do after I graduated,” Sami said. “I was engaged prior to the Peace Corps, and I feel once you experience the Peace Corps you change as a person.”

Before going into the Peace Corps, however, Sami didn’t have a clear picture.

“I just knew I wanted an adventure,” Sami said. “I wanted to go somewhere I wasn’t expecting. I’m very committed to what I do, I kinda knew where I was heading and going to Peace Corps was the first time I didn’t and that was refreshing.”

As a registered nurse, Sami joined the Peace Corps and ended up in the same training class as Travis, but neither were aware a chance to go on a safari would end up giving life a new perspective.

Travis and Sami were reintroduced on the safari, where they realized they had many commonalities. Travis loves Nike, and Sami happened to be from Nike Town. They learned they shared the same interests and not just superficial things.

“We could make each other laugh easily,” Sami said. “We play off each other’s sense of humor really well.”

Both were optimistic of their experience they were given in Uganda.

The only difficulty they experienced was the full day’s ride by bus between each other.

“She lived four hours from the capital by bus, which is the kind of bus you would see from a movie, with chickens and goats,” Travis said. “And from the capital to where I lived it was another nine hours.”

Travis and Sami ended up spending every night on the phone with each other for three or four hours from there on out.

“We built a relationship by phone, and it was great because you got to know the core of the person,” Sami said.

As Travis’ fateful experience in Uganda was coming to an end, he realized his experience in Africa led him to his life’s calling.

“I wanted to work in the non-profit sector in health communication,” Travis said.

Travis decided to pursue graduate school back at K-State, and through many emails with the help of Steve Smothers, Travis joined the graduate program.

“He was awesome and responded immediately,” Travis said. “He walked me through the entire process.”

Hasler came back to the States, 13 days before graduate classes started. After being out of the country for two years, he made the transition to grad school life almost immediately.

Smothers says Travis has brought a calming effect to the grad program.

“His honesty and low-key approach to things has been a nice effect on our graduate student population,” Smothers said. “He understands there are tougher things in life than going to class. So Travis brings a certain maturity to our program that I really, really like.

“He sees things from a different perspective than a lot of his colleagues. He has a real understanding of his job and goes the extra-mile. And I really appreciate that about him.”

Travis brought a different perspective to many of his peers, too.

“Working with Travis is a lot of fun,” said Carmen Brown, a graduate student in public relations. “He is very humorous, but is also a very hard worker. He brings a lot of perspective and he’s a caring person. Since he was in the Peace Corps, he is more culturally-rounded, which is great. Travis is one of those guy’s that will do anything for you.”

While Travis was embarking on graduate school in Manhattan, Sami had her obligation to the Peace Corps to fulfill. When October finally came, she had a decision to make.

“I took a chance and ended up here,” Sami said. “A month later he proposed, just like I hoped he would.”

Sami admits making the move to Manhattan was quite a culture shock at first.

“It is much like the Peace Corps where you go on this adventure to a place you have never been before,” Sami said.

Although Travis knew for awhile Sami was the person he hoped to marry, her willingness to move to Manhattan solidified his decision.

“I knew that if she was willing to move to Manhattan and take that chance, she was worth marrying,” Travis said.

In May, Travis hopes to receive his Master’s and move to Kansas City where Sami hopes to get accepted into KU Med School.

“I hope one day I can go back to work for the Peace Corps, on the state side in recruiting or marketing,” Travis said.

“Somewhere in that capacity would be my dream job. It’s a very competitive job, so we’ll see. I’m just testing the waters and Sami and I are really flexible where we go. Hopefully, we will go somewhere with plenty of opportunities.

“We don’t have it figured out, but I think we are putting ourselves in the right position to have it figured out.”

Travis accepted the challenge to dream big, and distinguish himself.

“Africa wasn’t my first choice, but I wouldn’t change it for anything,” Hasler said. “It’s the most beautiful, magical place ever.”

The place Hasler found meaning-8,225.7 miles away.
Barb DeSanto sits at her desk in Kedzie Hall wearing the same warm, welcoming smile as she did on the first day of classes and talks about the profession she loves.

She proudly turns her computer screen to show her two smiling grandchildren, Leo and Aurora; her son Christopher’s children who live in Topeka. “They’re my babies,” she says, relieved to be so much closer to her grandchildren.

The walls of her corner office are lined with pictures and K-State memorabilia, a bookshelf filled with dozens of books, including the one she co-wrote with her longtime friend Danny Moss titled, Public Relations: A Managerial Perspective which was 10 years in the making. DeSanto conveys pride when she discusses her career of more than 30 years in public relations. It’s difficult to imagine there was a time when she wasn’t sure what she wanted to do.

Growing up in St. Wendel, Minn., DeSanto attended St. Cloud State University to study history and geography.

“I really did not have any idea what I wanted to do,” DeSanto recalls. “I dropped in and dropped out. I was doing all the work in the jobs that I had and everybody else was getting all the credit. It was then I went back to school and finished my degree.”

It was at St. Cloud where she enrolled in Intro to Mass Communications with Professor Norlem, a former Marine Corps drill sergeant, who sparked her interest in journalism.

“I was editor for a community newspaper in Minnesota and had the chance to get to know the community,” DeSanto said. “There was lots of hard news which I really liked. I was very interested in how communities work, how they spend money, how they exist. My history and geography background really helped because I understood the role of a newspaper in a community, how important it is for communities to have that forum to make their own decisions—a place for their citizens to express their opinion.”

After receiving her degree in journalism from St. Cloud, DeSanto worked in tourism development for Lee County in southwestern Florida in the early 1980s. There she promoted Ft. Myers and Sanibel Island as tourist destinations to promote the travel industry with the state of Florida.

“After two and a half years, I was promoted as the first ever public information officer,” she said, “Lee county was undergoing tremendous change, thousands moving in each week… a lot of groups at odds with one another and the county government needed a voice. I was in charge of media relations, working with the people in-house to understand media roles and why the county should work with the media.”

After working in the travel industry for five years, DeSanto went back to school and get her Masters with the intent of going into teaching.

“In my line of work, I was already educating people, how to put together a strategy and a plan,” DeSanto recalls. “I love teaching. I love when the students get that ‘Aha!’ moment, when I can help them discover where their talents lie.”

Prior to joining the Miller School, DeSanto was the program director and administrator for the University of Maryville in St. Louis. Wanting to get back into the teaching ranks, a job opportunity presented itself at K-State.

“I’ve known Dr. Smethers for 20 years,” she said. “We worked on the same dissertation committee at Oklahoma State University where I received my Doctorate.”

Already familiar with Manhattan because of the “many tailgates” she attended with Smethers, and because she and her husband already wanted to retire in Kansas to be closer to their grandchildren. DeSanto applied for the position. Within a month she was hired. DeSanto has definite plans for her time at K-State.

“My goal is that next spring break I am able to send some of my students to England to work with my good friend Danny Moss, and he can send his students to some of my Kansas City connections for the week.”

DeSanto isn’t all work and no play as she may appear. She and her husband, Dr. John, have visited numerous countries all over the world including Germany, Scotland and Australia. Her most frequent trips are to visit her good friend Danny Moss in England once a year.

DeSanto said she always has the highest expectations for her students and teaches them that giving up is not an option. She wants to help them find their talent and not sell themselves short.

“When I tell my students to try things, get involved here or attend this, I really want you to do it. You all have different talents, and experience, I can see where you could be effective and happy. What I don’t want is not trying something and shutting it down. I want you to do as Nike says and “just do it”, that’s a big thing with me.”
A $5 million grant may reveal communication as being an effective tool in preventing overweight and obesity.

Nancy Muturi, associate professor, brings the communication expertise into the project.

"It’s a five-year project," Muturi said. "It is a collaboration of people with expertise in nutrition and us in communication."

Yijing Li, a K-State graduate student working on a Ph.D in Public Health agrees the mix is a good one.

"For Dr. Muturi, her aspect is how to communicate with people," Li said. "Whereas for us, we work more on the nutrition part."

Muturi’s focus will be on understanding the target groups and figure out how to communicate with them in the most effective way.

"We are not experts on nutrition or physical activity," Muturi said, "but we all have something to contribute when it comes to influencing behavior change. They (public health) have information about healthy eating and healthy foods, and the project brings the communication people in terms of engaging communities and engaging children. For example, if you are working with the young adults, which is really our target group, you would have to understand them and the research component of the project will focus on understanding the best way to communicate with them -- where they like to get their information from, understand how they communicate and the most effective way of communicating with that particular group."

Joseph Rodgers, graduate student in Muturi’s Health Communications class, is researching how TV advertisements affect children’s behavior leading to obesity.

"I’m working with two other guys from public health," Rodgers said. "And we are doing research on how TV advertisements target children and why, when you were a kid, going to McDonald’s was a big deal, so we are in the stages of that."

Researchers are currently in the beginning phases, and are trying to find which communities they will work with.

"We are trying to identify the low income and ethnic communities," Li said, "because their obesity rate and their overweight rate is pretty high compared with all the other communities."

Identifying the communities and conducting the research may be the most crucial aspect of the project at this point. After the communities are chosen, the researchers must identify the barriers influencing that community’s health.

"Reducing the overweight and obesity rate, that’s what we want to achieve," Li said. "And we try to identify why adolescents don’t like physical activity, so we are going to try to define all the barriers and how to overcome those barriers."

A family’s income is one barrier.

"Take into account socioeconomic factors," Muturi said. "You know when a mother has to work 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., they don’t have time to cook healthy food even though it’s there, because they need to be out making money, and at the same time, healthy foods are expensive."

Environmental factors also play an important role in the overall health of children.

"You might be looking into getting people to be active outside," Muturi said, "but it might be risky, especially these days. Maybe they don’t have a safe environment where they can be physically active."

A culturally diverse America has also added to health factors. Different cultures have different ways of eating and different styles of fixing meals.

"America has become so diverse," Muturi said. "So their dietary habits — the way they see health — it’s all different, and we want to identify those factors and how their eating habits, even cooking and how they prepare foods, differs from other communities."

Communicating with the children and educating them is one of the most important aspects of this project.

"It’s more important today than anytime else in history," Rodgers said. "Because kids are spending so much time in front of a screen and absorb everything when they’re growing up. They don’t know the difference, they don’t understand that this food is going to be bad for them."

Educational level also plays a role in their study.

"There are a lot of people who are not very well educated," Muturi said. "Data shows that about 90 million Americans are not at an education level where they can read and understand health and medical information. That’s an issue because when you are trying to educate people on obesity if they don’t quite understand it, then how do you communicate?"

Understanding who they are talking to will help them relay the message to the children clearly.

"You need to define your audience," Li said. "Muturi’s part is she really knows how to communicate with different groups of people so I think that will really help, because she can help us to define our audience and what strategies we are going to use to communicate."

The grant is still in year one, but Muturi anticipates things will progress by April. By year five they expect to be able to distribute their data analysis and post their best practices online.

"I’m really excited about the project," Muturi said. "And what is even more exciting is our students here in Kedzie Hall, have really been interested in this whole obesity reduction issue, and that’s where we need to start."
Royals announcer, Steve Physioc is...

Bringing It Home

Adam Suderman

Home is where the heart is. An adage that has been alive for generations, became even clearer to Steve Physioc when presented with the opportunity to return to the broadcast booth and dive into his Midwestern roots.

The path hasn’t always been a smooth one for the long-time broadcaster, but he says it was his time in college that helped him realize where and who he needed to be. Academic success was a difficult path for Physioc and he said it was his decision to go to Kansas State in the fall of 1972 that helped him develop his goals.

"I really never had a great deal of success with education until I got to Kansas State," Physioc said. "I just didn’t take it as seriously as I should have.

Forced to step away from academics after his freshman year, Physioc said it was his time away from the university that helped him realize the steps he needed to take to find his major.

“We had some financial difficulties at home,” Physioc said. “I actually took time off and it was a great opportunity. I was just like a bus boy at a restaurant and I did other odd jobs hoping to make enough money to go back to Kansas State. But something happened in that time away from school when I said you know what, ‘You’re not very good at sports but you love sports. Perhaps you could go in another path.’”

Having developed a passion for sports growing up, it wasn’t until arriving at Kansas State that Physioc found how to best turn his passion into a career.

“I love sports,” Physioc said. “I was involved with a lot of sports and Kansas State was one of those wake-up calls that you’re not as good as you think you are and you better start getting an education. I was very fortunate to have a great professor at Kansas State who steered me in the right direction and I discovered my passion there.”

He returned to Manhattan and signed up for the radio and television laboratory class from professor Bob Fidler, a role model for Physioc as he shaped his broadcasting career.

Fidler said an infectious attitude and personality drew students and faculty toward Physioc.

"Some students you gravitate toward and Steve was very easy to talk to and always fun to be around,” Fidler said. "I first knew him as a sophomore and knew him through his final three years and that’s how he was all the time.”

Steve Smothers, associate professor in the Journalism and Digital Media sequence as well as Associate Director for Undergraduate Studies, was a student at the same time as Physioc and said he communicated with everyone he encountered.

“He’s a friendly guy,” Smothers said. "He doesn’t know a stranger and he doesn’t forget names and he doesn’t forget people. He’s just one of the best people I know.”

After enrolling in Fidler’s class, Physioc saw a chance to do play-by-play for local high school football. He jumped at the opportunity and found himself in the broadcast booth for a game between Lucky High School and Wakefield High School just west of Manhattan.

“I fell in love with play-by-play that day and it was because of Bob Fidler and because of Kansas State that I found my passion.”

Developing his future employment path allowed Physioc to achieve greater academic success and gave him the desire to work through his college career.

His relationship with Fidler helped him see what opportunities lay ahead.

"I had a great professor who pushed me and who noticed my enthusiasm,” Physioc said.

The two maintained contact with one another and Fidler guided Physioc to finding more chances to broadcast.

“lf a job came up he’d say, ‘Hey Steve it’s only $5 a game but I can get you a job at KJCK-FM in Junction City doing football and basketball’ and I said absolutely,” Physioc said. "I wasn't as interested in my GPA as I was what could I put on my resume that shows a potential employer that I'm enthusiastic and I'm passionate about the industry and I'm a hard-worker.”

It's work ethic that was clearly communicated to his peers.

“The funny thing about Steve Physioc is when he was a student, he was not the kind of guy who you'd go down to Aggieville with,” Smothers said. “This is a guy who you'd always see doing a ballgame. He did sports all the time. He wanted to be a sportscaster and here at K-State he lived that role.”

Now, after working in massive media markets such as Cincinnati, Oakland, San Francisco and Los Angeles, Physioc has settled in familiar territory at 1 Royal Way in Kansas City, Mo.

“I don't know how many times I'm sitting up in that broadcast booth and it’s almost like I'm a little kid where I'm looking onto the field and go, ‘Wow! This was the team that I loved growing up!’” Physioc said. “There are times when I'm sitting in the broadcast booth and I'm broadcasting with (2007 Ford Frick Award Winner) Donny Matthews and thinking, 'I'm here now. I'm back home and I'm talking about the team that I loved.'”

It might seem too good to be true, but the chance to return home was one Physioc says is very important to him.

“You never know how things will work,”
“You never know how things will work,” Physioc said. “I’m not a person who believes in coincidences, I really believe in divine order. It was amazing how I got this job because after 14 years with the Angels, I was let go and continued to do college football, college basketball, college baseball and some Major League Baseball for TBS. But I really wanted to do a team job.”

Having looked into different possibilities with different organizations, Physioc couldn’t find a home.

“In the interim, I had an opportunity with the Atlanta Braves and the Texas Rangers and it didn’t work out,” Physioc said. “I think it didn’t work out because I think I was supposed to get the Kansas City job. Before the 2012 season, the (Royals) president, the broadcast director and also FOX called me up and said, ‘Would you be interested in returning to Kansas City?’ and I said absolutely.”

Fidler believes it’s Physioc’s work ethic that shows who he is as a broadcaster.

“Whether he’s doing the Royals or doing college basketball or football, you’d swear he was living in the locker room,” Fidler said. “He has the stories and he has the statistics.”

As a professor who strived for student achievement, Fidler loves to see his former students find achievement through their careers.

“He’s very excited about his future with the Royals and he’s excited about being back home in Kansas City,” Fidler said. “He’s a Midwest guy and he’s thrilled to be back in KC.”

Entering his second year in the broadcast booth with the Royals, Physioc knows and understands the difficulty of developing a career direction but he says persistence and enthusiasm are crucial.

“I think a lot of young people when they move forward with their careers, what holds them back is fear,” Physioc said. “If they do four things, they’ll find success in this industry and they’re very simple. Be on time, be prepared, be enthusiastic and be easy to work with. If you do those four things, you’ll find success and you’ll also find happiness.”

It’s Physioc’s personality that Fidler says will keep him going through the rest of his career.

“He’s a class act on the air and he’s a good broadcaster,” Fidler said, “but he’s an even better man.”

Steve Physioc is currently in his second season with the Royals. This is his 28th season in Major League Baseball broadcasting.

Photo by Adam Suderman
Changing Things in McPherson

Technology and local benefits help alumni thrive

Adam Suderman

A community of 13,000, McPherson, Kan., has bragging rights over larger cities and metropoles.

Unlike the New Orleans Times-Picayune and the Harrisburg, Pa., Patriot-News, which now publish three days a week, the McPherson Sentinel, publishes five days a week and caters to not only the city, but also the county.

The circulation rate sits at 3,100 papers distributed daily and approximately the same number of readers exists for the online platform. Cristina Janney, a 1995 bachelor’s and 2003 master’s graduate and Chris Swick, originally a broadcast major, have seen the paper evolve.

Although the paper used to carry a Monday-Saturday publication schedule, Janney says the current plan fits the paper and its ability to deliver news to the community.

“I would like it to sit at Tuesday through Saturday,” Janney, managing editor, said. “I’d hope to sustain a daily newspaper here. There is definitely enough news for us to fill that and at least enough demand from our community to warrant that.”

Technology obviously affects publications in different ways and the Sentinel has stayed on track with recent trends. Each reporter is required to operate a Twitter account and the paper also has a Facebook page.

Small town newspapers require plenty of work from smaller staffs, but it doesn’t change the focus.

Janney said fulfilling the needs of the local community through technology remains important for any publication, including her own.

“I think the online edition has an obvious ability to deliver more news faster,” Janney said. “In some instances when we have a breaking news story, we’re at the mercy of our print publications. Now we can report this news to people immediately in our online and mobile editions.”

Through her years as a student, Janney first saw the development of the newspaper in print and online.

“When I was with the Collegian, we had one of the first student online editions in the nation,” Janney said. “A lot of people were looking at what we were doing from all over the country.”

Swick, Sentinel sports editor, joins Janney at the paper.

After leaving a local McPherson radio station, Swick began work at the Sentinel to stay in sports journalism.

Originally taking the radio route through college, Swick made a thorough switch to print when he returned to his home community of McPherson in March 2012.

After first attending Fort Hays State, Swick spent four years at K-State and worked as one of the primary student broadcasters at 91.9, KSDB FM radio.

Swick said an adjustment of society and its way of interacting with one another have caused the media to examine how it delivers news.

“I think overall, it’s really indicative in a shift of culture,” Swick said. “There was a time when you only got your news in the morning and evening editions of the newspaper.”

The sportswriter used the example of the London Riots of 2011. The riots began after police officers killed a 29-year-old Tottenham, London resident named Mark Duggan. It was an issue citizens saw as a dilemma of racial tension and poverty.

“I was seeing live updates with Twitter more than I was with CNN, MSNBC or Fox,” Swick said. “With that kind of media accessibility, especially as the older generations that are used to getting their information at set times, you’re going to see the newspaper industry as a whole really evaluate itself.”

As the go-to-guy for sports, Swick said representing a community that craves sports is an opportunity.

“With a community of around 13,000 people, there is no way you can do your job and not get to know the community and build relationships with the coaches and players,” Swick said. “You can’t do your job without knowing what’s going on. Especially with a smaller town, there is no way you can avoid not being part of it.”

Being his hometown, the emotional ties are even stronger.

“It really is neat to be able to come back home and cover sports,” Swick said. “I grew up with the big names in
McPherson and to be able to come back and cover the next generation of athletes and keeping the tradition of McPherson athletics alive is pretty cool. You can feel the history when you go into the Roundhouse (McPherson High School’s gymnasium). It’s an old, drafty barn but you can feel it. There’s plenty of history in that place."

It’s the principle of locality that has helped Janney settle into her position in the central Kansas town.

“I had opportunities to work at larger newspapers and I actually did correspond work for the Wichita Eagle for awhile,” Janney said. “I really like a smaller community and a smaller newsroom. You’re more of a public servant when you work for a community newspaper. You know the people and you see them on the street everyday and you see them at social events. I really like the connectivity between me and my readers.”

Janney said the views of local news wouldn’t change on any platform. For the Sentinel and McPherson the need for news will always exist.

“I think the basics of what people want out of their local newspaper has remained the same,” Janney said. “I always think there will be a desire for local news. Whether it’s a newspaper, in whatever form, online or print, or on a tablet or phone. There will always be a need for people in a community to connect with one another.”

1960

Gary Vacin – Journalism

Vacin, retired in Arizona, still writes newsletters for community organizations. He worked for the Collegian as sports editor from 1959-60. He also participated in ROTC and after he graduated was an information officer for three years in the Air Force. After serving, he worked at Iowa State and K-State as an extension writer and editor.

He came back to K-State as a Department of Economics extension writer, before becoming the head of Extension Information. Later, he became head of Agriculture Communications at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Vacin left UNL to start his own newspaper, Star City Sports in 1993. After working out of his basement for three years, he sold his newspaper to the Lincoln Journal Star.

Vacin has been an avid pilot since high school and still flies his own plane weekly.

“I’ve flown from California to Maine, and Galveston to Canada,” he said.

1975

Bev Wunder – Journalism and Mass Communications

Friendships she made in college have lasted through the years for Bev Wunder, Topeka. Wunder and a few of her college friends traveled to Phoenix, Ariz., in January to cheer on their alma mater in the Fiesta Bowl. Working now as an Independent Beauty Consultant for Mary Kay, Wunder has a past in journalism. The former Associate Editor of an insurance magazine and PR Director also taught journalism at Topeka High for four years. The school’s yearbook received two national awards which she attributes directly to her time spent working on the Royal Purple.

1987

David Svoboda – News Editorial

Editor of the Collegian in 1986, Svoboda, will always hold the explosion of the Challenger Space Shuttle as the most memorable news he and the staff covered. Svoboda, Production Supervi-

1998

Roy Wenzl – Mass Communications

Wenzl is a reporter for the Wichita Eagle. He was the primary author of the Wichita Eagle’s book “Bind, Torture, Kill, The Inside Story of the Serial Killer Next Door,” published by Harper Collins in 2007. His second book, “The Miracle of Father Kapaun,” was released in March. Two of his serial narratives, “Saving Dad” and “Hope City,” were published in Reader’s Digest. He won the 2010 Burton W. Marvin Kansas News Enterprise Award from the University of Kansas and was the 2010 Great Journalism Contest’s Writer of the Year.

Having provided work for several different platforms, Wenzl says the message is simple for aspiring writers. “Work really hard and hope for the best,” Wenzl said.

2006

Brenna McConaughey – Advertising

McConaughey is the marketing and events coordinator for the athletics office at the University of Syracuse. After graduating from K-State, She attended graduate school at Wichita State University and followed the Shockers in their NIT Championship season serving as director of information for the men’s basketball team.

At Syracuse she works with the “#orangation” Twitter campaign and that has developed into a resource for all sports.

McConaughey says the importance of following up interviews or a meeting with a simple thank-you note is very important.

“Write handwritten thank-you notes,” McConaughey said. “My boss says there is no app for a thank-you note.”

For complete listing of Alumni Updates, visit our website at www.update.jmc.com
Intertwined

A graduate teaching assistant combines journalism writing and music

"Mom told me when I was a kid I was always really quiet in a noisy household," said David Chartrand, his hands moving fluidly through the air while he spoke, conducting his words like a musician. The grey-haired, frazzled-haired man in his early 60's sat comfortably in his busy office, surrounded by grammar and civil war books, pictures and a 12-string guitar.

One of seven children, his quiet nature and seriousness might not be what his readers expect after reading his award-winning humor commentary. In a way, there is a lot about Chartrand that is unexpected.

Chartrand, a graduate teaching assistant, is a serious journalist and accomplished musician. Both of these passions have parallel beginnings.

After graduating from Prairie View High School in 1974, Chartrand came to K-State because it was where his older sister went. Not sure of a major and having skills in math, someone suggested he look into being an architect.

"That made about as much sense then, as it does now, but that's what I started out at," he laughed, "and I knew instantly, that was not me."

After confiding to one of his professors that he hated architecture classes, the professor sat Chartrand down and talked to him about his interests.

"He brought it out of me I was good at writing," Chartrand said. After making the switch to journalism and mass communications, he had found his calling.

"Just right away, I ... It was like the first time I ever heard The Beatles play," he said. "I thought, 'I love this.'"

He attributes finding that love to the
architectural professor.

“It was the patience and the generosity of a good faculty adviser who spent time paying attention to me,” Chartrand said. “If I saw him again, I would tell him, ‘You’ve changed my life.’”

Chartrand worked on the Collegian and the Royal Purple staffs, making his way to editor in chief of the Collegian his senior year.

Chartrand’s journalism career became diverse and rewarding. In 2010 and 2011 he received first place in the category of General Column Writing from the Kansas City Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. Recognition for his commentary writing started with a seasonal piece he sent to The Wall Street Journal in 1992 titled, “A Father’s Letter to Santa.” An editor from the paper called him to say they wanted to run the article on Christmas Eve.

“I was real excited, I told all my friends. You know The Wall Street Journal is like, ‘The Holy Grail,’” he said.

To his dismay, the day before the article was to be published, he received a phone call telling him it had been replaced by an editor’s piece.

“Oh I was....” he said, shuttering, still speechless at the crushing memory.

The following fall, Chartrand received another phone call that would change his career. It had been decided to use the article that had been cut the previous Christmas.


Overtime, Chartrand specialized his material, focusing on education, family and health, particularly mental health.

In 1997, he was approached by a woman whose son had committed suicide. The school he had attended would not allow his recognition when his class graduated. She asked Chartrand to bring light to the case in his column. Chartrand’s investigation of her son’s death and the way it was handled led to him writing about it in his first book, “Heartland.” He is now working on a non-fiction book called, “Angels in the Park,” about the same boy and his friends who were gifted teenagers.

Chartrand will receive his masters degree in mass communications and journalism this spring. His thesis explores how media handles suicide in reporting and mental health issues.

Rewind to 1965 and Chartrand is a quiet sixth grader taking guitar lessons, at his mother’s request, on a beat-up guitar.

“I wasn’t that enthusiastic about it, but I was pretty quiet as a kid,” he said. “My parents would suggest I do something and I would say, ‘OK,’ and do it. I didn’t think much about it.”

It wasn’t until The Beatles invaded the U.S. that Chartrand finally found his spark in music.

“There’s no way to explain the mayhem and the mania that exploded among teenagers at the time. The madness over the music,” he said. “It suddenly occurred to me that having a guitar was cool. And then I decided to take it seriously because I wanted to really learn.”

By seventh grade, Chartrand and a few classmates had formed a band calling themselves, The Guys Next Door. They played popular cover material into the early years of high school.

“I remember many nights in high school staying up in my bedroom, when I’m sure I was supposed to be doing homework, just listening to songs that the band wanted me to do and I needed to figure out the parts.”

By the time Chartrand was in college, music took on a more acoustic sound, something that was appealing to him. “I fell in love with that,” he said. Throughout the years he has played for church groups, at social gatherings and currently is part of a duo called, “Speechless.” The duo primarily plays The Beatles instrumental covers with his guitar and a flute at restaurants in Kansas City.

Chartrand owns nine guitars, each having its own sound, function and style. He claims having a favorite guitar is like a mom and dad having a favorite child, but he admits to liking the first guitar he ever purchased—an acoustic piece made by Martin and Company.

Without a doubt, Chartrand’s interests in writing and music go hand in hand. To him, both are ways for him to overcome his shyness and let his personality be shown. Both fill his life with passion and accomplishments.

“The two are completely intertwined,” he said. “I do both at the same time because I’d never be able to untangle them.”
Update Staff. From top: Linda Puntney, instructor, Morgan Buchholz, Sydney Sewell, Laura Mushrush, Allison Thierman, Maureen Quinn, Michael Boeck and Adam Suderman.