



Universitas



April 8, 2013

"...ONLINE NEWSLETTER FROM THE PITTSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES"

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Dean



By Karl Kunkel

The Spring 2013 Semester is in full swing on campus at Pittsburg State University. I'm pleased to welcome you to another edition of *Universitas*, the electronic newsletter of the College of Arts and Sciences. Once again this is an exciting time for both the University as well as the College. We recently made the decision to change the newsletter format from a Web-based platform to PDF. I believe you will find this new format much easier to navigate, read, and download.

(Continued on page 2)

Hello, Mali!

Steve Harmon, Associate Professor of History at Pittsburg State University, is the go-to-guy for those interested in Islamism in North Africa. He has been interviewed in the Los Angeles Times and has taken part in a panel on the French Intervention in Mali that can be found online at this [site](#). Recently, Dr. Harmon had the opportunity to continue his research.

"PSU granted me a sabbatical leave for the fall semester of 2012," said Harmon. "I used it to do field research in Mali for a book I am working on."

Harmon was approached by Ashgate Publishing to write a book, which has the working title *Terrorism and Insurgency in North and West Africa*.

"My friends, family, and colleagues expressed concern for my safety [during

(Continued on page 8)

What's Inside:

- 100 years of Nursing, p. 3
- Pitt PR, p. 4
- Chuck Harper, p. 5
- Dating Violence, p. 5
- Telegrams, p. 6
- De Grave gets the Lead Out, p. 7
- Kiwis and Hobbits, p. 13



February 1 was an extremely exciting day on our campus as we officially broke ground on construction for the new Center for the Arts. This building, costing more than \$30 million, was funded through private gifts along with our students generously voting to use fees for this facility. The coming Center for the Arts will become a cultural icon for this region as well as a cutting-edge performance facility for students and faculty in art, theatre, and music. This Center provides the Pittsburg State community with a venue for nationally and internationally known speakers and performances, including concerts and theatrical productions. The entire university is abuzz with excitement as the landscape at the corner of Homer and Ford streets is being transformed and construction begins. [Click here](#) to read more about the ground breaking event on our campus and see a brief video.



In the College, plans are moving forward to initiate a new academic program in Polymer Chemistry funded through the Kansas State Legislature and Gov. Sam Brownback. This program includes degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels linking the [Kansas Polymer Research](#)

[Center](#) with the Chemistry Department in Arts and Sciences and the Plastics Engineering Technology program in the College of Technology. Since the publication of our last newsletter, we hired two new polymer chemists, Dr. Ram-Krishna Gupta and Dr. Santimukul Santra, and we currently are conducting searches for two additional faculty. Dr. Gupta began working at Pittsburg State in January 2013 while Dr. Santra joins us in April. These faculty are working to develop curriculum, design labs, and begin research programs. This new initiative provides a unique degree program in this region for students leading to significant careers. Further, the research conducted through our liaison with the Kansas Polymer Research Center has significant economic development implications for both Kansas and the region.



On a sad note, the College lost a long-time faculty member this past December when [Ms. Judith Shaw](#) passed away. Ms. Shaw taught history courses at Pittsburg State since 1959 and remained an active

faculty member until just before her passing. She touched many, many students' lives, making a profound impact on Pittsburg State University, and will be remembered fondly.



Also, Dr. Michael Kelley will be retiring at the end of the current Spring 2013 Semester. Following nearly 25 years on the faculty at the University of Central Arkansas, Dr. Kelly came to Pittsburg State in 2001 first as Department Chair in Social Sciences and then Chair of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences. He made significant contributions to the Department, the Arts and Science Leadership Team, and our University. I want to thank Dr. Kelley for his many contributions and dedicated service to students and faculty, and wish him well in retirement.

(Continued on page 12)



One Century of Cecilia Waggoner

The first Chair of the Department of Nursing, Mrs. Cecilia Waggoner became 100 years old on January 3, 2013. To mark this day, as they had for her 80th, 85th, and 90th birthday celebrations, members of the Department of Nursing, both active and retired, along with members of the Kansas State Nurses Association, met at Jim's Steak House.

"Ms. Cecilia G. Waggoner served as a registered nurse and was active in nursing and nursing education for more than 50 years," says Cheryl Giefer, University Professor of Nursing and President of the Kansas State Nurses Association.

Soon after graduating from Mount Carmel School of Nursing in 1932, she began her career as a private duty nurse and instructor in health and home nursing. After serving as an instructor in three different schools, Ms. Waggoner was chosen by Pittsburg State University to develop and implement the BSN program in 1970.

Many years of planning—which involved the University, Mt. Carmel Medical Center, and the

community—preceded the establishment of the baccalaureate nursing program at PSU. Waggoner was instrumental in leading these efforts.

Under Waggoner's direction, the BSN program at Pittsburg State University was approved by the Kansas State Board of Nursing in the spring of 1971 and the first class graduated in May 1973. She followed this by leading the effort—successfully—for NLN accreditation. Not only did Mrs. Waggoner lead all aspects of BSN curricular development, she hired the faculty and mentored the new faculty in choosing their specialties and obtaining the appropriate education. Examples of her guidance include Dr. Sharon Bowling who became a mental health nursing specialist and Dr. Mary Carol Pomatto became an expert in the field of maternal-child health. Throughout her career, she served as mentor to many nurses in Southeast Kansas.

In 1974, while she was chair, federal grant monies for constructing a new nursing education building were approved and matching funds of \$400,000 were donated by the McPherson family to be used for construction of McPherson Hall. The building, which now houses the Department of Nursing, was completed during the summer of 1977.

After her retirement in 1979, Waggoner remained active, serving as a nursing education consultant and instructor for continuing education classes from 1980-1987 and as a Nursing Education Consultant for the Kansas State Board of Nursing. In the early 1990's she served on the Master's Task Force which developed the MSN program at PSU.

"She's spent a lifetime as a nurse and nurse educator and has exemplified leadership excellence," says Giefer. "She was an integral part of the transformation of nursing from the vocational to the professional level in Southeast Kansas. Because of her efforts, including serving as an excellent mentor, many nurses and nurse educators have continued to serve our profession of nursing."



From left to right: Melissa Nichols, Katie George, Michael Saldivar, Alyssa York, Kirsten Burke

ANOTHER SWEEP FOR PITT PR

For a second year in a row, Pittsburg State University students made a strong showing at the Oklahoma State Speech Theater Communication Association (OSTCA) 3rd Annual PR Competition in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Five students from the Public Relations and Advertising Club of the Department of Communication at Pittsburg State University competed in the OSTCA sponsored PR Competition on September 8, 2012 claiming 1st, 2nd and 3rd titles.

"Our students from Pittsburg State were well dressed and well prepared. They showed up at the competition ready to lead their various groups and did so with a level of professionalism that is indicative of this institution," said Josh Letner, instructor in the Department of Communication.

Rogers State, Oklahoma Christian, and Emporia State were among several universities and colleges throughout the 4-state region who sent students to develop and create a PR plan for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization of Oklahoma. Intercollegiate teams were assigned by conference directors and PSU students were present in all three top categories.

"The best part of going to Oklahoma was learning about the client DAV," said Michael Saldivar, a sophomore in communication, from Edwardsville, KS. "By working with the DAV, I realized this is truly what I want to do with my life."

Melissa Nichols, a junior in communication from Tulsa, OK, said she initially went because she thought this would be a great real-world experience. "The OSTCA competition was valuable because it reassured me that I was in the right field, and now I feel more confident."

"Whenever you see your students placing in top categories of state-level competitions it is exciting," Alicia Mason, assistant professor in the Department of Communication said. "When they do it successively, it is a testament to the quality and integrity of our program at Pittsburg State."

This isn't about me

"I don't want people to feel sorry for me," said Chuck Harper. "This isn't about me."

Chuck Harper is a 45-year-old Fort Scott man who graduated with a Social Work degree from Pittsburg State in December. He had both of his legs amputated before his last year of college.

What it is about, according to Harper, is determination, faith and attitude.

"I could have just rolled over and said 'I quit,' and that's what would have happened," he said. "Just because of something that is dealt to you doesn't mean you have to give up and quit. I've got a lot of things left I want to accomplish."

One of those things was to walk on those titanium legs across the stage on graduation night to pick up his diploma. It was a 56-foot journey that he said was 25 years in the making.

Harper graduated from high school and then community college in Fort Scott. When he began working on a bachelor's degree in business at PSU in 1987, he was married and had children, but he hadn't yet found his passion when it came to a career.

"I hadn't found what I wanted to do," he said.

(Continued on Page 9)

Dating Violence

Students who take Kristen Humphrey's Advanced Social Work Practice II class are required to lead a project that will benefit the university and/or community.

"I give them a lot of freedom in deciding what kind of project to do," said Humphrey, an Assistant Professor of Social Work. "I encourage them to choose something that they feel very passionate about because they are going to put so much time and effort into it - it really needs to be something they feel strongly about."

Natalie Rhoton and Julie Lienard, students in the class, chose to raise awareness about dating violence.

"They were concerned about violence in all types of relationships, but decided to focus on dating violence because they felt it was a particularly salient issue for traditional-aged college students," said Humphrey.

According to Humphrey, young people often don't recognize the signs of a potentially abusive relationship.

"In the beginning of a relationship that is rife with red flags, it may be easy to downplay the problematic behavior or even see it as a sign of how much the partner cares about the other person," she said.

For example, at first, it might seem flattering when one's boyfriend gets jealous easily or wants to spend all his time with his new girlfriend. These are, however, things to beware of.

(Continued on page 10)

Finding the Pepper Pot Quintet

It's easy to overlook "The Pepper Pot Quintet," the painting hanging in the lobby of the Crawford County Historical Museum.

Even volunteer Mark Dulek, who has a degree in history from PSU and has been assisting curator Denzel Davidson, didn't really notice it for months.

"I had dusted it, but never delved into it," Dulek said. "Then I was painting the place and took everything down. Denzel told me that the painter, Waldo Pierce, was famous."

Curious, Dulek googled the painting title and the artist, and found the fascinating story of Waldo Pierce, who really had been famous, and the moving story of how the painting came to be.

The original "Pepper Pot Quintet" painted by Pierce was used for a 1949 calendar put out as a promotional item by Pepsi Cola.

That calendar picture was a favorite of Cecelia Theis, a popular music teacher at the old Central and Forest Park Elementary Schools, which were later combined to form the present-day Westside Elementary School. She had often performed in a quartet that included her three sisters, Barbara, Frederica and Marguerite, and occasionally they brought in their father, Charles O. Theis, to form a quintet.

Cecelia even cut the picture out of the calendar, mounted it on drawing paper and hung it in her classroom.

Sadly, she died unexpectedly in March of 1951. A committee was formed at Central School, headed by the late Mrs. Dom Piraro, who asked sister Barbara, a teacher at Roosevelt Junior High School, to suggest a suitable picture as a memorial for her sister. It would be paid for, at least in part, by a memorial fund

(Continued on page 11)

Telegrams from Alumni

English: Amy Trowbridge-Yates, a creative writing English Alum, is featured in this video. The url is: http://www.abc15.com/dpp/lifestyle/sonoran_living/s_l_sponsors/Give-the-gift-of-a-message-from-the-heart-this-holiday-season-with-Hallmark

Family and Consumer Sciences: Colby Carr was one of two recipients in Kansas to receive the Greenbuild Scholarship. The Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council awarded Greenbuild scholarships to promote diversity and social equity within the green building industry and the sustainable schools movement. Colby will receive an all-expense-paid trip to the conference and expo in San Francisco. The other recipient was an interior design student from K-State. This is very exciting for Colby and for the interior design area.

HP&SS: A note from Dr. Kris Lawson: "Our history student, Jordan Boyd, continues to impress the folks at the Miners Hall Museum. When he finished his history internship, they found money to hire him on as a part time archivist. He has also been doing work for them in connection with his minor in communication. And he works to get the museum in the news, which is something that they desperately need as the Smithsonian exhibit approaches."

HP&SS: Gates Brown discussed *Finding Balance in the Nuclear Age: President Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis* at the National Archives at Kansas City on Tuesday, October 16, 2012. Gates Brown is a doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas. He received a bachelor's degree in mathematics in 2004 from Pittsburg State University and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

Getting the Lead out: Writing *The Hour of Lead*

In spring of 2011, the editor of a small press (See Sharp Press) contacted Kathy De Grave, Professor of English at Pittsburg State University, and wanted to know if she would be interested in contributing a novel to a new “anarchist sci-fi” series he was starting.

“Sci fi? Anarchist?” De Grave said. “I told him I would have to ponder that. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how freeing such a venue could be. Science fiction can open doors to metaphor and the unconscious that straight realism can’t.”

At that time anarchy, or at least the urge toward a populist vision of society, was in the air, with Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring. De Grave was taking a year’s leave of absence to work on her fiction, she decided that this might be a direction to go.

“I told the editor that I would give it a try.”

The result is the novel *The Hour of Lead*—written with input from her husband Earl Lee, also a writer and a member of the faculty at PSU.

“Earl and I had written a version of this novel years ago,” said De Grave. “But that novel never seemed to coalesce. What made the difference this time is that I decided to move the time period from 1984 to 2039. Instead of a novel about the past, it would be a novel about the future.”

De Grave had been reading about the emergent technologies that within a couple of decades will be standard fare, so that summer she plunged into this kind of study.

“Nanobots and Internet implants, Artificial Intelligence and superconductors,” she said. “I wanted to get the future world right. At the same time, I was reading Noam Chomsky on local activism, books on climate change and sustainability, and a wonderful discussion on how local economies can reverse some of the most damaging effects of our huge cities and an ever-growing world population.”

Although the novel is set in the future, the driving force for the two main characters is the past. Weylan Collins believes it was his fault that his mother died in

a tornado that hit his home in 2011. His wife, Pandora, believes that her mother wished she’d never been born. Both Weylan and Pandora have to deal with their pasts in order to function in their present, which is thirty years in our future.

“The science fiction mode allowed me to play with these interlacing time-lines by creating universe shifts,” said De Grave. “Weylan combines the new (nanotechnology) with the ancient (psychedelic mushrooms) to help him remember what happened on that tragic day when he was four, but in doing so, he steps into the multiverse. Yes, things change, but each time his mistakes in the present remain for him to face again.”

De Grave used her year off to study astrophysics (Pandora is an astronomer), psychology (Weylan’s field), guns, recipes from Fiji and Iceland, Nuahtl, flowers, robots, computers, mushrooms, and weather.

“The tornado in Joplin haunted me,” said De Grave, “and became a central figure in the novel—Pandora and Weylan, two lives destroyed by an uncontrollable past. I also used the year to write and write and rewrite. My deadline was January, and then March, and then July. The book grew to 420 manuscript pages. And all the way along, my writing group held me accountable for every word. I did my best to live up to their expectations even as I let Weylan and his dystopias take me on a wild ride.”

The Hour of Lead is about the power of memory and about taking action. In a world where people too often stand passively by, Weylan and Pandora decide to act.

the sabbatical], “ he said. This was because the northern half of Mali was occupied by Islamist militias and the capital, Bamako, where Harmon stayed, was in the throes of a bona fide political crisis.

“They’d endured a coup d’état in March of last year and were still under murky extra-constitutional rule,” he said. “My friends on the ground in Mali assured me, however, that life was going on more or less as usual and people were going about their business, and the capital, at least, would be safe for me.”



This assessment proved accurate, we are pleased to say.

Harmon’s research use two principal methodologies: personal interviews and retrieval of (French language) newspaper and journal articles.

“But most importantly,” according to Harmon, “I gained insights, the kind that can only be acquired in the field.”

According to Harmon, everyone he talked to — interviewees, friends and acquaintances, and strangers — was in agreement that Mali should remain whole.

“[It was felt] that the Islamists, universally seen as hypocrites and thugs, should be driven out, and that some form of constitutional rule should be restored,” he said. “It was clear, however, that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the ousted political class.”

Those ousted were the democratically elected leaders who had been overthrown this past spring by elements of the army. The perception was, according to Harmon, that the ministers, judges, and mayors were corrupt, that they had stolen money, development aid, tax revenues, and customs duties, including, famously, AIDS prevention funds donated by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS. Most Malians feel the corruption only worsened under the democracy compared to the military dictatorship that preceded it.

(Continued from page 8)

One might ask what living there was like during these challenging times.

“Despite the troubles that Malians were suffering, I was well received, both professionally and by my friends and colleagues,” said Harmon. “I stayed with a family in a modest Bamako neighborhood. I traveled freely about town and through the countryside, though avoiding the occupied north, of course.”

Harmon attended weddings, baptisms, and a funeral, and partook of the Eid al-Kebir festival, where every householder slaughters a ram.

“I ate wonderful Malian food, listened to happily infectious African pop music, and observed people in the streets, markets, and cafes.”

Most still had the same bounce in their step that he remembered from earlier visits and the same bright, colorful clothing. Despite a depressed economy on top of the privations that are the regular lot of most ordinary Africans, they still want to know how you are and how you are enjoying your stay in Mali, and if they can they help you.

“To visit Mali, as always, is to bear witness to the resiliency of the human spirit,” he said.

(Continued from page 5)

He quit school and devoted himself to his family and full-time employment — first in the restaurant business, then customer service and sales at a printing company, and finally in insurance.

He and his wife, Connie, raised four daughters and began serving as foster parents. They found it rewarding, and after many hours of training and approval, they currently count two adopted children, two foster children and three children for whom they are the custodial parents among their household.

Harper’s first health scare would surface in 2009, when pains in his arm and fingers — which eventually turned purple — landed him for a week of testing at what now is Mercy Hospital in Joplin, MO. He was diagnosed with Raynaud’s, a disease in which smaller arteries that

supply blood to the skin narrow, limiting blood circulation and causing discoloration of the fingers and toes.

Harper eventually rebounded, but life changed again drastically for him and his family in June 2010 when he was laid off.

He began his pursuit of a bachelor’s degree in PSU’s social work program in January 2011.

“I had always wanted to go back to school,” he said. “It seemed like another chance.”

But his health problems began to recur. And eventually it came to a crisis.

His wife rushed him to the emergency room at Mercy Hospital in Fort Scott, and the next morning a helicopter flew him to the University of Kansas Medical Center.

After 45 days in the hospital followed by rehabilitation, he said he made a decision to not just walk again, but to finish what he had started: his college degree.

It was a daunting challenge. He had no job, no insurance and medical bills totaling \$500,000.

One of his instructors, Kristen Humphrey in the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences, said Harper’s positive attitude throughout his ordeal was inspirational.

“He has been such an inspiration and role model to his fellow social work students,” Humphrey said.

“His grades and attendance have been excellent. He has a positive attitude and never complains.”

When Harper returned to school last August, he was in a wheelchair, but he told his classmates and instructors that he would be walking by the end of the semester. And he was.

“After my wounds healed, I used a walker, and then eventually a cane, and then in finals week last December I made it a goal to walk into class without any aids,” he said. “I felt pretty proud.”

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

He finished up his college education with a 3.49 grade-point average overall, with a 4.0 in his social work discipline. Harper already has a job with TFI Family Services, a nonprofit agency that provides foster care and adoption services throughout Kansas. After licensure he will become a case manager.

“I also am offering my support to others who might go through an amputation,” he said. “I want them to know the challenges that lie ahead, but also that they can do it, as long as they are determined and have the right attitude.”

(This was taken from a story by Andra Bryan Stefanoni the Joplin Globe.)

Natalie Rhoton and Julie Lienard are now in their final semester which includes a 480 hour practicum placement.

“I am proud of the work they did, and I am very confident in their future success,” said Humphrey.



(Continued from page 5)

“Natalie and Julie hoped that raising awareness about dating violence will help young people to avoid problem relationships or to get out of them right away when the red flags start showing up,” said Humphrey.

They were also able to highlight the problem of human trafficking, an issue that people often associate with other countries.

“We were very happy that Dorothy Stuckey Halley agreed to speak on campus,” said Humphrey. Ms. Halley works for the KS Attorney General's office and used to teach in PSU's social work program. She is a long-time expert on domestic violence and in recent years has spent a lot of time on the issue of human trafficking.

“Julie and Natalie did a great job organizing and carrying out the project,” said Humphrey. “They had a nice turnout at Dorothy's lecture and at the march through campus and Gorilla Village.”



(Continued from page 6)

collected by the children.

Barbara didn't think a portrait would be the thing, since students in coming years would have no memories of Cecelia. Mrs. Piraro suggested a musical subject, and that's when Barbara thought of "The Pepper Pot Quintet." She wrote to several businesses dealing with art, and Marguerite, who taught in Kansas City, walked for miles trying to find a reproduction of the painting. They had no success, and Barbara decided she would try to contact the painter directly.

All she knew was his name, Waldo Pierce, and that he had been born in Bangor, Maine, so she wrote a letter and addressed it to "Waldo Pierce, famous artist, Bangor, Me."

Astoundingly, in a letter dated May 5, 1951, Pierce replied from his home in Searsport, Maine.

"I am sorry about your sister," he wrote, adding that he had no copies of the painting. "I thought if you'd like a watercolor of the quintet I could make you one for whatever the students wanted to give...I really don't care how little in such a good cause...and they'd like to put in something to feel they'd contributed, etc."

It was like Pierce to have a soft spot for children. Married four times, he had five children and was totally devoted to them. Fortunately, he was no starving artist and well able to support such a large family. Born on Dec. 17, 1884, he was the son of a wealthy Maine lumber baron and attended Harvard, where he was a football star.

"In 1915 he joined the American Field Service and drove an ambulance on the French battlefields during World War I," Dulek said. "Pierce was decorated by the French government with the Croix de Guerre for bravery at Verdun."

He was quoted as saying that he never worked a day in his life, but he did paint every day of his life for around 50 years and was sometimes called the "American Renoir." He painted a portrait of his good friend Ernest Hemingway for the 1937 cover of "Time

Magazine," and in 1938 painted two murals for the U.S. Post Office in Troy, N.Y.

Pierce vacationed with Hemingway, but the grumpy author was no fan of the painter's children, and in a 1930s letter compared them to untrained hyenas who never obeyed, destroyed everything and didn't even answer when spoken to.

"He can't leave the children," Hemingway wrote in the letter. "They have a nurse and a housekeeper too, but he is only really happy when trying to paint with one setting fire to his beard and the other rubbing mashed potatoes into his canvasses. That represents fatherhood."

There was quite a correspondence between Pierce and Barbara Theis. Dulek said the museum has copies of the letters and of the envelopes, which Pierce decorated with watercolor sketches, including one of his little daughter Karen practicing piano.

On August 11, 1951, he wrote that the painting was done.

"It's a good gay pic and a typical chamber music scene," he wrote. "I knew all the players and liked to sketch them while they were practicing...I hope you like the pic..it's like the Pepsi Cola one but better to my mind."

Pierce very kindly donated the frame for the painting.

"It's a good heavy one so I'll take care of the insurance express etc...you've had so much patience I don't want to stick you with any extra expense," he wrote.

The painting, for which Pierce was paid \$30, hung for many years in the Westside music room. Dulek said it was donated to the Crawford County Historical Museum around 1997.

"I think it tells a great tale and is a unique artifact," he said. "It's one of the jewels we have out here."

(This story was written by Nikki Patrick of the

(Continued from page 2)

You also will notice this edition of *Universitas* includes several articles describing recent faculty sabbaticals.

Every seven years, tenured faculty are eligible to apply for a sabbatical leave. The application process involves submitting a proposal demonstrating how the faculty member will use the time to pursue a specific important project contributing to the faculty member's professional development, enhancing their courses, or advancing knowledge in their academic discipline. The proposal is reviewed by the Department Chair, Dean, as well as a committee of faculty from across the campus, the University's Provost, and President. Only the most promising projects are selected. Once approved, the faculty member is released from teaching either for a semester or academic year to conduct the work. We are very pleased to have Dr. Casie Hermansson, Dr. Kathleen DeGrave, and Dr. Steve Harmon writing articles in this newsletter describing their sabbatical work and how this experience benefits both their professional scholarship and students in their courses.

For additional updates on the College of Arts and Sciences, I encourage you to regularly visit our [website](#), including the links to our various [department pages](#). Over the past 18 months, the College has put a great deal of effort and resources into developing and updating our online presence. Also, the [Arts and Sciences Facebook](#) page continually is updated with items from both on-

campus and across the country impacting, and often bragging about, the College of Arts and Sciences.

It is special to be a Gorilla!

Karl R. Kunkel, Dean



(Continued from page 4)

The Pittsburg State University Public Relations and Advertising Club members who represented PSU at the OSTCA Competition include: Melissa Nichols (1st place in PR)(Jr., Comm, Tulsa, Okla.), Michael Saldivar (2nd Place in PR)(Soph., Comm., Edwardsville, Kans.), Katie George (3rd Place in PR) (Jr., Comm Graphics, Prescott, Kans.), Alyssa York (Jr., Comm., Pittsburg, Kans.) and Kirsten Burke (Sr., Comm., Pittsburg, Kans.).

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| <p>Kathy De Grave</p> | <p>Steve Harmon</p> | <p>Casie Hermansson</p> |

Kiwis and Hobbits

For her recent sabbatical leave, Dr. Casie Hermansson was invited back to her undergraduate alma mater as a Visiting Fellow. As a result, she spent six months in her native New Zealand, as a researcher in the Massey University School of English and Media Studies, located in the city of Palmerston North, in NZ's lower north island.

"My current research examines adaptations of select children's novels to film," said Hermansson, Professor of English.

At PSU, Hermansson teaches Literature and Film, and will soon offer a Children's Literature course as well. Her previous research on the Bluebeard fairy tale has been published in two academic books. But her fairy tale research also led her to a new field: writing for young readers.

"In the past few years," said Hermansson, "I've published magazine fiction and non-fiction nationally for young readers, a book on the films of Clint Eastwood for high school students, and a fifth grade book on Parental Guidance Ratings for Abdo's Hot Topics in Media series."

This year, she also has seven individual fiction titles coming out this year with Heinemann in their high school literacy library series.

While in NZ, Hermansson presented on her academic research for faculty and PhD students at both Massey University and Auckland University. She also wrote four of the seven books for Heinemann while on leave from PSU. But in addition to the valuable time to dedicate to research and writing, Hermansson reveled in the opportunity to live in her native city for half a year, and to introduce her two children to the local culture.

While there, they enjoyed visiting Hermansson's immediate and extended family, reconnecting with friends and colleagues from Hermansson's time there growing up.

"The kids enjoyed the elaborate aquatic center and its weekly 'Wave Rave' and 'lolly scrambles' (candy) thrown into the pool!" said Hermansson.

Their visit also coincided with the release of Peter Jackson's first film in the Hobbit trilogy and the family took full advantage of the many Lord of the Rings touring and fan opportunities available.

"I took the children to Hobbiton where they saw the new sets for the Hobbit as well as the old sets for *The Lord of the Rings*."

They climbed Mt. Victoria in Wellington—where the ring wraith nearly caught the four hobbits leaving the shire—visited "Isengard," "Rivendell," "Mordor," "Minas Tirith/Helm's Deep," and the Weta Workshop, and stayed in a themed Hobbit hotel with round windows and doors, built into a hill.

The children maintained a blog while traveling (<http://www.twoflyingdragons.blogspot.com>) to show their Pittsburg friends what they were up to, which included bungee jumping and paragliding above Lake Taupo.

(Continued from page 13)

While the trip to New Zealand was wonderful on many levels, Hermansson admits that “Pittsburg is still home,” and the family was happy to reunite at the beginning of PSU’s spring 2013 semester.

“We missed Gil, the cats, the house, and the familiarity of home,” said Hermansson. “I don’t think we could have coped without Skype, and the iPads we got from PSU as part of the Provost’s initiative. We skyped from home to home, and from office to office. It was the next best thing to being together, and the kids got to show their NZ friends some of where they came from too.”

What’s next for the traveling family? Hermansson may have a Fulbright to Finland for Spring 2014.

“I’ve got approval from the American review committees, and am just waiting now to hear back from the prospective host institution. I should find out by spring break.” If Hermansson is approved for a Fulbright, she will teach in Finland from January to May 2013. “The kids are game,” she said. “We’ll need skis this time though...”

- Has there been anything new in your life that you’d like to share?
- Have you heard about anything good one of your old PSU friends has done?
- Do you have any questions about goings on at the PSU College of Arts and Sciences?

If so, contact us by sending an e-mail to bwinters@pittstate.edu. We would be glad to hear from you!



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