

BADGERS IN BANGKOK

The university's first international alumni conference, hosted by WAA's Thai chapter, proved that the UW ties that bind extend around the globe.

BY MICHAEL PENN MA'97

Eighteen thousand UW-Madison alumni — close to 5 percent of the entire alumni community — live and work outside the United States, proving that some people will go to great lengths to get away from Madison winters.

Yet many of these graduates also go to great lengths to stay close to their alma mater. These are the people who huddle in the middle of the night to watch Badger football games, or who have cases of Wisconsin bratwurst and cheese airmailed over oceans, just to recall the inimitable flavors of the Badger state.

The support and desire of this group of far-flung alumni led the Wisconsin Alumni Association to initiate what it hopes will be a new tradition: an overseas conference for UW-Madison's international alumni.

Nearly two hundred Badgers attended the first of these events, the Asia 2000 conference, held in November in Bangkok, Thailand. WAA joined with the chancellor's office, the UW Foundation, and two UW-Madison centers for international research — the Center for International Business Education Research and the Center for World Affairs and the Global Economy — to assemble a schedule of seminars and discussions of particular interest to international alumni.

The focus of the three-day event was on global partnerships, highlighting the ways that UW-Madison can continue to have a positive effect on the economies and social well-being of Asia and the world.



As if the savory tastes of Thailand and the companionship of fellow Badgers weren't enough, attendees of the Asia 2000 conference were treated to an evening of exotic Thai culture. Above, classical dancers enact musical tales from Thai folklore. During the daytime hours, guests attended seminars on topics such as the role of universities in economic development.

Close to twenty deans, professors, and administrators, led by former Chancellor David Ward MS'62, PhD'63, journeyed to Thailand to participate in the sessions and update attendees on the university's international commitment. The university contingent also added some new partners along the way, signing agreements with several Thai universities to work together on research problems and student exchanges. These initiatives are part of the fast-growing Asian Partnership Initiative that Ward helped to create on a previous trip to Thailand (see sidebar).

WAA hopes to convene another conference in Europe during 2003. If it's anything like Asia 2000, Paula Bonner MS'78, WAA's executive director and CEO, will be happy. "The conference showed the progress we've made in reaching and serving international alumni," says Bonner. "We're thrilled that WAA was able to play a key role in bringing about many new business, academic, and personal connections as a result of Asia 2000." And if there were

any doubts that these types of connections are mutually beneficial for alumni and the university, they were quickly laid to rest within hours of the guests' arrival.

One goal of the Bangkok conference, says Kim Santiago '88, WAA's director of international relations, was to create "an opportunity for open, frank discussion" among alumni and guests. The attendees, coming from throughout Asia and as far away as Norway, were happy to comply, contributing to lively question-and-answer sessions and lunch-table deliberations of such issues as the Asian financial crisis and the role of universities in regional economic development.

Those heavy topics were intermingled with forays into the rich cultural treats of the host nation, including tours of royal palaces and demonstrations of Thai cooking. Bangkok, the wondrous city of temples, rich aromas, and legendary hospitality, became the tinder for the spark of new friendships and the rekindling of old ones.

For example, Conchita Poncini MS'64, originally from the Philippines

and now living in Switzerland, was invited to Asia 2000 to speak about her work as a coordinator with the International Federation of University Women. But it was an e-mail from her old roommate, Geeta Dethe MS'63, that sealed her decision to come. Dethe, who runs a health-care communications firm in New Delhi, India, reunited with Poncini in Bangkok after a span of twenty years apart.

When they shared a house where Vilas Hall now stands, the two women often debated social and political issues, and, from the looks of things in Bangkok, their long recess from one another hadn't changed a thing. "We had come a few days early to see the sights," Dethe said in Bangkok. "But it's been like this every day, yakking away."

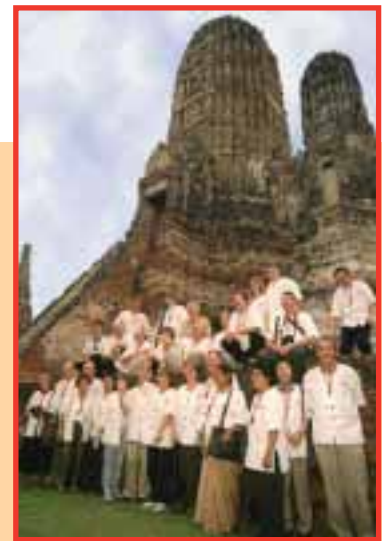
The leaders of WAA's Thailand chapter, who helped put together the conference, relished the opportunity to show off their home. To cap off the conference, they organized a dramatic field trip, carting the whole attendance on an hour-long journey north of Bangkok to Ayutthaya, Thailand's ancient capital.

For nearly five centuries, Ayutthaya was the epicenter of the Siamese

kingdom, an entity so powerful and wealthy that its many temples and stupas were encrusted in gold and jewels. Ayutthaya was Asia's beacon of freedom and power until the eighteenth century, when it was overrun by Burmese armies. Now the city's center is dominated by hulking ruins, a solemn reminder of the glory of days gone by.

The Badger armies came on three police-escorted buses and were received with a much warmer welcome than were the Burmese marauders. The Thai hosts had arranged an outdoor feast on ancient temple grounds, where the guests were surrounded by a living museum of Thai art and culture. Ceremonial dancers acted out mythical tales; elephants paraded; young men forged knives over hot fires; cooks fried plantains in giant skillets. It was a sensory smorgasbord, which ended only when performers replicated a Thai farewell ceremony by releasing paper balloons into the air.

Throughout the whole extravagant demonstration, loudspeakers filled the air with a Thai singer's version of the classic tune of good tidings, "Auld Lang Syne." To be sure, old acquaintances were not forgotten on this night. 🍷



PARTNERS ANEW

Working in Asia is nothing new for UW-Madison, which has been teaming up with Asian colleagues for half a century. Asia's emergence as an economic powerhouse, however, is a more recent phenomenon — one that has led the university to solidify its Asian partnerships.

In 1996, UW-Madison joined a group of universities in Thailand and China to create the Asian Partnership Initiative (API), a network of agreements that allowed for cooperative efforts between East and West. Already, the effort has fostered dozens of new research projects and student exchanges, including notable work to improve Asian agriculture and meet its environmental challenges.

About three hundred people attended sessions of the Asia 2000 conference devoted to API, which is jointly administered by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the Division of International Studies. Co-directors Kenneth Shapiro and Michael Hinden presented some of API's ongoing work, and announced new agreements with Thai universities that will expand the opportunities for Thai and UW students to take their studies abroad.

Shapiro says the trip was fruitful, noting that the agreements made in Bangkok this past fall are already leading to new collaborations. The API Web site is: www.cals.wisc.edu/intag/programs/api/html.



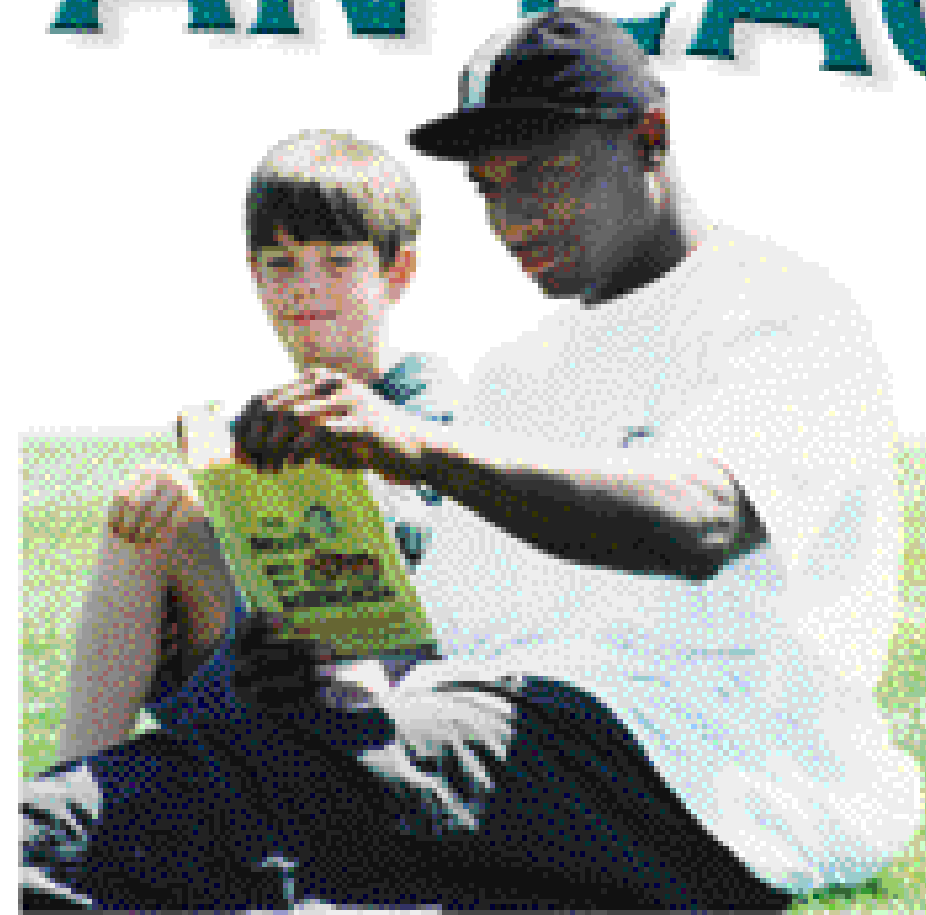
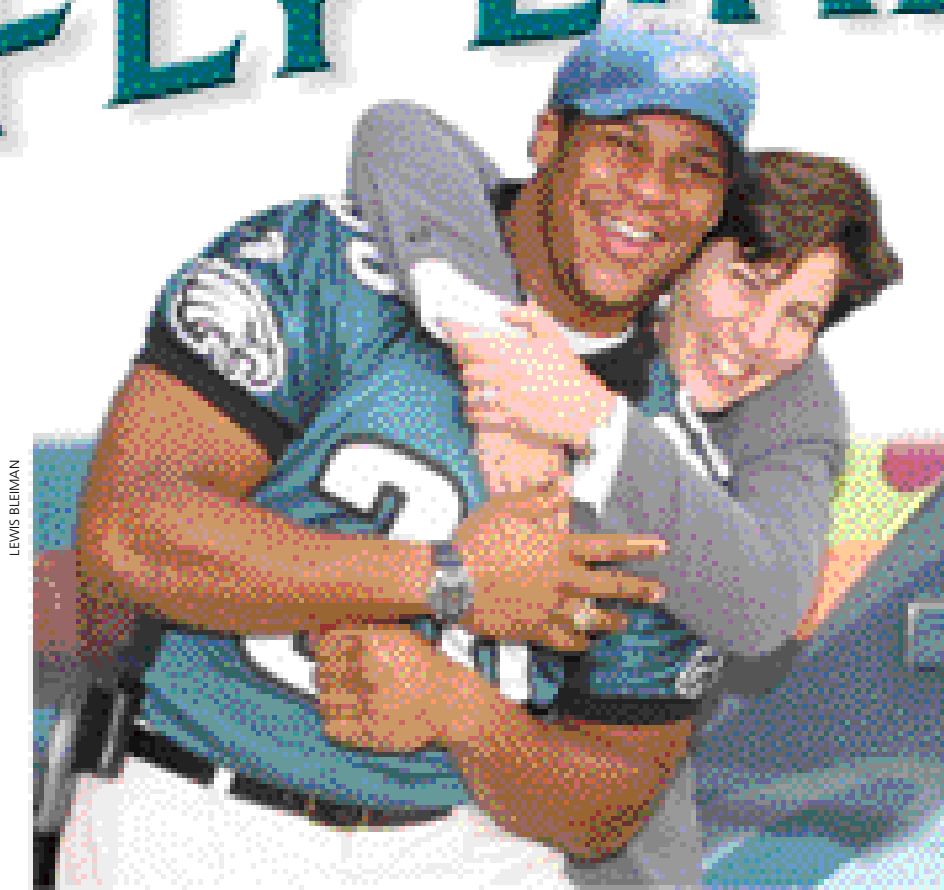
One of the folk customs replicated for the UW crowd was the parade and release into the water of an elaborately festooned raft, part of an annual harvest festival. Participants toured Thailand's ancient capital Ayutthaya (above, right) prior to the gala farewell dinner.

WANDEE RUJINAT (2)

A group of ex-Badgers is using the celebrity and wealth of pro football to help Philadelphia's neediest children.

Right: Sarah Martinez-Helfman has tackled the task of helping needy kids, drawing on the charisma of Eagles role models such as running back Cecil Martin. Far right: Cornerback Troy Vincent reads a book with a boy involved in the team's literacy program.

FLY LIKE AN EAGLE



"Feed the babies who don't have enough to eat

Shoe the children with no shoes on their feet

House the people living in the street

Oh, oh, there's a solution."

Lyrics © 1976 by Steve Miller x'67, "Fly Like An Eagle"; printed by permission of Linda Komorsky.

By Susan Lampert Smith '82

Philadelphia Eagles running back Cecil Martin '99 can barely see daylight. He's got a guy on his arm, someone else on his hip, and one circling his leg. They all want a piece of him.

Then — wham! — he's down on his knee, laughing and teasing. His attackers aren't Giants; they're more like Lilliputians. The little kids are crowded into an overheated community center to visit with Santa (Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb) and to get autographs and books from Martin.

They'll take those books home past the razor wire and dilapidated buildings

that mark one of the grim neighborhoods of North Philadelphia. The ebullient Martin, who loves to talk to kids about the virtues of hard work and study, may be seeing little visions of his own Christmases past. As a youngster, he lived in a housing project on the south side of Chicago, and his family had its share of tough times.

When Sarah Martinez-Helfman '87, MS'89 sees the kids leaving with their Berenstain Bears books, she knows those books will likely be the only ones in their homes.

"In a low-income home, there's an average of 0.6 books, and that includes the phone book," says Martinez-

Helfman. The lack of books means they won't start school ready to learn reading — and that means they are likely to join the 45 percent of area children who can't read by fourth grade. And so begins another cascade of misfortune.

"Some states use a formula of the number of children not reading by fourth grade to help plan for future prison beds," says Martinez-Helfman, as she pilots her car along a street lined with burned-out buildings and broken-down cars. "If you can't read, your options aren't good."

Martinez-Helfman is the executive director of the Eagles Youth Partnership, one of the most innovative sports

philanthropy programs in the country. Several former-Badgers-turned-Eagles have joined her efforts to give the children of the Philadelphia area a better chance. Besides Martin, the team includes Troy Vincent x'92, now a Pro Bowl cornerback for the Eagles, and quarterback coach Brad Childress, who left the Badgers for pro football in 1999.

"The whole idea is to leverage the celebrity cachet of a sports team to help kids," says Martinez-Helfman. "We have kids who are forging signatures to get eye exams, kids who will do anything to be in our reading program. That's the value of a sports team."

To follow Sarah Martinez-Helfman, you have to be in good shape. Her commute goes up the concrete ramps, past empty concession stands, and out into the cavernous Veterans Stadium, then up more steeply, past the battered blue seats that have held generations of the National Football League's toughest fans. Sometimes the elevator in the aging, city-owned stadium works, but not today.

Finally, she pops through a door and into the offices of the Philadelphia Eagles. Elsewhere, coaches are plotting the Eagles' return to the NFL playoffs. Martinez-Helfman is working on her

own game plan: using the team to get services to the city's neediest kids.

Since team owner Jeffrey Lurie started the Eagles Youth Partnership in 1996, it has given free eye exams (and glasses, if necessary) to five thousand needy children, put books in the hands of thousands more, and through volunteering and incentives, helped raise reading scores at some of the area's most impoverished schools. Martinez-Helfman has been at the helm since the beginning.

"Sports philanthropy is in its infancy," she says. "We're held up as a national model."

People who knew Martinez-Helfman in the 1980s when she lived in Madison

couldn't have predicted she'd wind up working for a professional football team. Her interests were women's studies, literature, and playing her guitar for dollars on State Street. She counseled rape victims and troubled teens. And in her nine years on campus, she went to exactly one Badger football game.

But she calls this her dream job, part of a vision of her life's work that she began forming while she was a student in Madison.

"It doesn't matter to me whether I'm working at Tellurian, at the Rape Crisis Center [both in Madison], or on international development," she says. "It's all about leaving the world better than I found it."

For her, college was a time to find her true nature: she joined the Integrated Liberal Studies program, following her brother, David Helfman '78. She wound up counseling other students, leading campus tours for prospective students and their families, and working the summer orientation sessions for incoming freshmen. In Madison, she also struggled with her sexual orientation and ultimately came out as a lesbian. She has been with her life partner, Marcia Martinez-Helfman, for five years, and is co-mom to Marcia's son, Nicolas.

When she left Madison in 1989, she moved to England, where she advised a philanthropist who wanted to fund non-profit ventures. The work took her to Northern Ireland, and to Russia and other former Communist countries, just as the wall between East and West was crumbling. She is still sworn not to reveal the identity of the person funding the projects.

"People in Ireland thought I worked for the CIA, people in England thought I worked for the IRA," she says of those times. "That work taught me to be really strategic: What is the vision? How do you make a difference without pouring your money down a hole?"

Martinez-Helfman returned to the United States after Bill Clinton was elected, working in Washington for Americorps, Clinton's volunteer pro-

gram. That work largely stalled in 1994, with the election of a hostile Congress.

Around that time, she heard there were new football team owners in Philadelphia who wanted to start a meaningful charity and were looking for an executive director. Martinez-Helfman wasn't sure she was interested, but after meeting with owners Jeffrey and Christina Lurie, she was hooked.

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And as she got to know the Philadelphia area, she saw that help was needed there, too.

"There are places with no running water where kids live in deep poverty," she says. "For all the time I spent in Russia and Africa, I've seen the same Third-World conditions in my own town."

The idea wasn't to raise money for a single disease or charity, but to give the team and its players a way to make a difference. Martinez-Helfman says that recent recruiting strategies by head coach Andy Reid (formerly of the Green Bay Packers) haven't just helped the team on the field.

"Coach Reid has hand-picked people who [he believes] have a lot of character," she says. "For the Eagles Youth Partnership, it's had an impact."

If you were recruiting on character alone, both Troy Vincent and Cecil

Martin would go in the top round of the draft. Both have received the prestigious Ed Block Courage Award for the player who exemplifies sportsmanship and courage. Vincent won in 1995 when he was a Miami Dolphin; Martin won in 2000, his second year with the Eagles.

"I've had better athletes," says John Riehle, Martin's coach at Evanston (Illinois) High School. "But we've never had a young man with the character, work ethic, loyalty, and attitude of Cecil Martin."

Brad Childress, former Badger offensive coordinator, still gets a smile when he talks about recruiting Martin to come to Wisconsin. The coaches — trying to penetrate the pile of recruiting mail sent to top recruits — penned handwritten notes to elite athletes. Martin is the only one who ever wrote back.

"I got this note from him saying, 'When you think recruiting, think Cecil Martin!' Childress says, with a bemused grin. "I thought, 'He must not be any good.'"

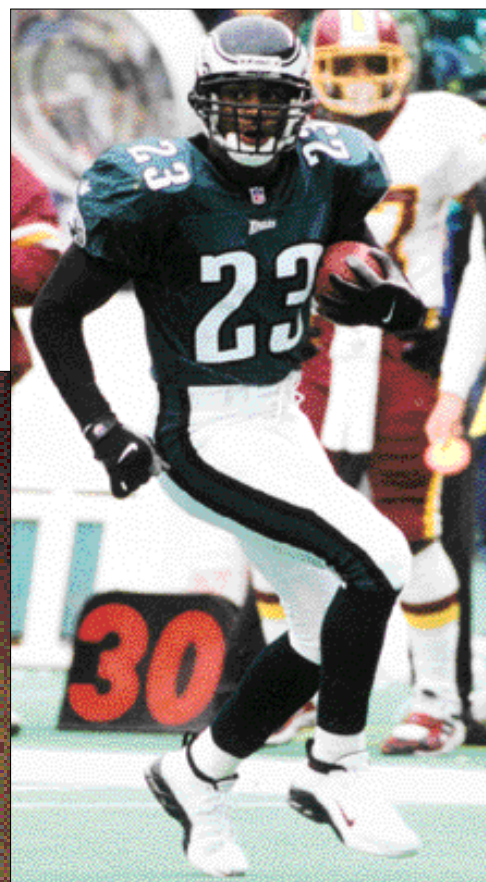
But Martin *was* good, and he was recruited by UCLA, Iowa, and other schools. He chose Wisconsin because of the beauty of the campus and the family feeling of the team. "I liked that the older guys were looking out for the younger ones," he says.

Family has always been a priority for Martin, who lists his mom, Diana, as his hero. During his senior year of high school, the family had some bad luck, and lived for a time in a homeless shelter. By the time Barry Alvarez and the rest of the coaches arrived for the recruiting visit, Martin and his mom had moved to a tiny apartment, and his four nieces (then aged one, two, three, and four) had moved in, too.

Childress remembers the visit because there wasn't any furniture. The four little girls watched TV from a mattress while friends hustled to find enough lawn chairs so the coaches could sit. He also remembers Martin's attitude: "He was so proud of his family."

Martin brought that attitude to Wisconsin, where Coach Alvarez soon

Troy Vincent (right and playing with children, below) not only gets involved with the Eagles Youth Partnership (EYP) programs — he helps to fund them. This year, he agreed to donate \$1,000 to EYP for each interception made by the Eagles secondary. In addition to distributing books in needy neighborhoods and recruiting volunteers to tutor children in reading, EYP sponsors an Eye Mobile that delivers free eye exams, glasses, and other treatment to kids who wouldn't otherwise have care. And once a year, team players and staff turn out to transform vacant lots in tough areas into spiffy new playgrounds.



DAVE GRANTONIC

dubbed him the “Mayor of Madison.” He couldn’t walk down State Street without people yelling, “Hey, Cease! How ya doing?”

“Everybody was either his friend, or wanted to be his friend,” says Andy Baggot, who covers Badger football for the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

On campus, Martin participated in a program that sent players to the UW Children’s Hospital on the Fridays before games to meet kids and cheer them up. But soon he decided to improve the plan.

“We only went during the season, but kids are sick in the hospital all year, so I

rounded up some guys to go in the summer, too,” he says matter-of-factly.

Martin studied hard in school, working with tutors to earn a bachelor’s degree in communications with a certificate in business. He worked hard on the field, too, opening holes for Heisman Trophy winner Ron Dayne, and

captaining the team that won the 1999 Rose Bowl. Martin fondly recalls the pep rally before the Rose Bowl, when he revved up thirty thousand shrieking fans at the ABC Plaza in Los Angeles.

"That was my cheese speech — I gave a lot of speeches that year," he says, grinning. "I told them we'd come to the Rose Bowl 100,000 strong, and that they'd still be smelling cheese for the next five Rose Bowls."

Martin is still giving speeches, but now they're to kids. He tells his story and emphasizes how hard work and good attitude will pay off for them, too.

"Cecil will go out and read with kids, and tell them about his life and the importance of reading," says Martinez-Helfman. "He talks about giving 100 percent, and he's got an energy and a charisma about him. Everything he does is just a joy."

Joy is infectious, whether you're walking with Martin on Madison's State Street or Philadelphia's Broad Street. Before he heads into Philly's tough-looking Barratt Middle School to talk with kids, Martin looks down the street and spots the towers of the city's financial district. He still can't believe he's here, playing professional football.

"Look at that," he shouts, "Philadelphia! The City of Brotherly Love. Can you feel the *love*?"

If Martin is the exuberant rookie, Troy Vincent is the elder statesman. Cornerback Vincent has completed his ninth season in the NFL, and his fifth back home in the Philadelphia metro area. He's the first of Barry Alvarez's recruits to make the Pro Bowl, but his off-field accomplishments are equally impressive.

"Troy has a sense of leadership and respect from teammates that's unequalled," says Martinez-Helfman. "Part of it is being a veteran, but it's also that he's just so solid, such a good man."

Vincent, twenty-nine, married, and the father of three, has started a number of off-field businesses, ranging from



LEWIS BLEMANN

Cecil Martin had already earned a reputation for his tireless community service when he was a UW-Madison student. Here he poses with young friend Nafese Crawford at an EYP party.

construction and financial consulting firms to a pro motorcycle racing team. He's well on his way to his goal of amassing a \$100-million net worth.

He's also big on giving back. The list of charities Vincent funds runs close to two pages. His Troy Vincent Foundation offers college scholarships at public high schools in the Philadelphia and Trenton areas, trains young adults who have been involved in the legal system, and has built weight rooms for both of the high schools he attended. With a list running to about thirty charities, Vincent is like Santa in a green-and-white uniform.

"Generally, when somebody knocks at the door, I say yes, and word gets around," Vincent says. "Everybody who's

looking for donations, they call or write a letter. I don't like to pick and choose among them."

Martinez-Helfman says that Vincent not only says yes — he ups the offer. This year, she asked Vincent if he would be willing to donate \$1,000 to Eagles Youth Partnership for each of his interceptions. He agreed, and increased the donation to cover every interception made by the Eagles secondary. At the end of the regular season, his bill stood at \$16,000, and he says he's happy to pay.

"I've been very fortunate and blessed to play at this level," says Vincent. "You're only as strong as your community. It's so nice to see the difference we can make in someone's life."

The Eagles have quite literally helped Philadelphia see the difference they make. When outside tackle Jermaine Mayberry joined the Eagles in 1996, he told Martinez-Helfman he wanted to help kids avoid his fate. Mayberry is blind in one eye because, as a child, he was never diagnosed with amblyopia, or lazy eye, which can be corrected when children are young, but not after about age nine.

Martinez-Helfman took the ball, coordinating donations from the team, hospitals, eye doctors, and insurance companies to create the Eagles Eye Mobile, a medical van that goes to schools to donate free eye exams, glasses, and other treatment to children who wouldn't otherwise have care.

Mayberry and other Eagles ride the Eye Mobile, using their celebrity to draw in kids who otherwise wouldn't think it was cool to wear glasses. The Eye Mobile has reached more than five thousand kids, and in one stop in mid-December, staff found four children at one school who had undiagnosed amblyopia. For the last game of the 2000 season, Mayberry treated those kids (wearing their new glasses) and their families to a day at the stadium.

But once the Eagles began putting glasses on children, a new problem came into focus. Even with corrected vision, a disturbing number of area youngsters still couldn't read.

Martinez-Helfman worked with reading experts to start the Fourth Down Reading Clubs. The name has a double meaning, she explains. Experts know that children who aren't reading by fourth grade face a lifetime of problems.

"Fourth down is the make-it-or-break-it play in football," she says. "And fourth grade is the make-it-or-break-it grade, when children need to go from learning to read to reading to learn."

The Eagles have invested more than \$1 million in literacy programs. In the summer, the Eye Mobile becomes a Book Mobile that distributes books in needy

neighborhoods. The team gives football posters and other souvenirs as incentives, and it sends staff into the schools to work as volunteers. Even spouses get involved — Brad Childress's wife, Dru, is among those who have been going to the troubled Chester-Upland school district to tutor children.

The efforts led to a dramatic rise in reading scores, said Steve Marrone,

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reading specialist at the district's John E. Wetherill Elementary. He credits Martinez-Helfman for sticking with a project that was frequently stalled by bureaucracy; the Chester-Upland schools have been taken over by the state due to their problems.

"Sarah was passionate and totally committed to the whole project," Marrone says. "She pursued it like I cannot tell you, over every obstacle and barrier. Anybody with lesser heart would have given up long ago."

The program is so successful that the state of Pennsylvania decided to spend \$500,000 to expand it from Wetherill to the rest of the district's schools. It will also move into Philadelphia schools, thanks to another \$465,000 grant from the Eagles Youth Partnership.

Seeing the team make a long-term commitment has made a big impression on the community, Marrone says. "For us to sustain a program for well into our third year is just unheard of around

here," he adds. "The appearance of players [at school] brings it to another whole level. It says to the kids, 'We might be professional football players, but on the other side of our lives, we value what you're doing here.'"


Another place the Eagles Youth Partnership has made a difference for children is in the playgrounds built in tough neighborhoods around Philadelphia. One day a year, the entire team and staff gather to turn a vacant, trash-filled lot into a playground. It seems like magic, but behind it is months of prep work done by Martinez-Helfman.

Embellished by the mosaics of a local artist, last year's playground gleams like a jewel in a poor neighborhood known as the Village of Arts and Humanities. One reason it hasn't been trashed is that local teens were involved in creating the park.

James "Big Man" Maxlon, an adult who lives just a block away, says the pride the neighborhood felt when the Eagles came last June hasn't faded. "You can't gauge the importance of it, even to big kids like me," he says. "It was a level of recognition for the neighborhood we've never had before."

The park isn't quite finished. This spring, Maxlon will supervise a crew that will install concrete footprints of real Philadelphia Eagles, so children can measure their own feet against the players'. Martinez-Helfman asked Troy Vincent if he would donate \$1,000 to the neighborhood to memorialize his own shoe print in the park. In typical Vincent fashion, he overachieved.

"I went back to him a few days later, and he had a list of twelve guys he had rounded up to pay \$1,000 each," she says. "He's quick to say yes and quick to do the right thing."

These Badgers-turned-Eagles are truly helping the children of Philadelphia to walk in the footprints of giants. 

Susan Lampert Smith '82 writes for the *Wisconsin State Journal*. She covered Badger fans at the 1994 and 1999 Rose Bowls and the 2000 NCAA Final Four. She is also a survivor of a bus road trip with the Wisconsin Marching Band.

street person



Sociologist Mitchell Duneier's odyssey on the streets of Greenwich Village taught him about hope, courage, perseverance, and the good grace of making it through the day.

Story and sidebars by Michael Penn MA'97
Photos by Ovie Carter

At 2 a.m. in a diner in the heart of Greenwich Village, Mitchell Duneier orders a grilled cheese sandwich and says to me, "Isn't this great?" It's clear he's not talking about the grilled cheese, but the fact that — even at this hour — the booths are filled and the Village still teems with the inimitable wash of New York City. That whole can't-get-a-table-at-midnight, blue-bloods-and-green-haired-mohawks, give-me-your-huddled-masses of New York is something you only feel by being in New York. And Duneier is no stranger, having spent virtually every semester break for the past seven years in this city, sometimes riding a Greyhound Bus for more than twenty-four hours to get here.

Not quite forty years old, Duneier (pronounced Duh-NEER) is a UW professor of sociology and a researcher of cities. A lot of people have studied cities, but not many the way he has. He's slept on borrowed couches, gone hunting through trash, sold used magazines, and sat outside in the rain. He's nearly been arrested. He's worried about where to urinate. He's spent all night wandering the darkened soul of Greenwich Village in a quest for understanding.

This is life for the mostly homeless men who sell secondhand goods around the Village, whose company Duneier has shared for parts of the past seven years. To better understand them — and to help explain to his students and the world how the poor and downtrodden survive in American cities — he has gotten as close to poor and downtrodden as an upper-middle-class professor can.

Cities have always appealed to Duneier, a native of Long Island who has lived in New York and Chicago during his academic career. He likes to be around people, to listen to them interact and to watch them go about the business of daily life. His sharp powers of observation would have made him an excellent reporter. In fact, as an undergraduate at Northwestern University, he set out to be a journalist, influenced by such chroniclers of urban life as Mike Royko.

But the desire to go deeper eventually led Duneier to sociology, which he studied as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. While living in Hyde Park, he began hanging out at a local restaurant, where he grew fascinated by the banter of the customers, especially a group of elderly African-American men from the neighborhood who were regulars. Their conversations became the basis for Duneier's PhD dissertation, which was published in 1992 as the book *Slim's Table*.

The highly acclaimed book was Duneier's first foray into ethnography, the in-depth study of a particular culture or group. Ethnography involves hours of observation and repeated interviews, which can span months or even years. Duneier took to it immediately. Naturally inquisitive and unfailingly thorough in his research, he was well-suited for the meticulous work.

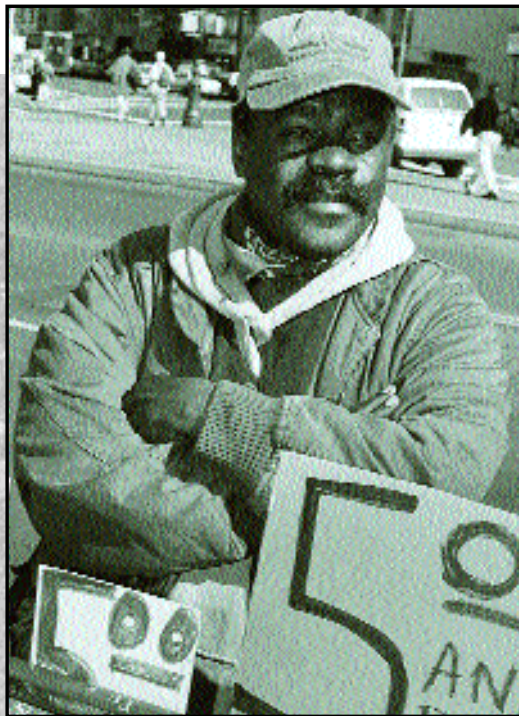
And he was excited by its potential outcome — a deeply detailed picture of a small piece of society that probably had been overlooked by most. "One of the things that ethnography is very good for," he says, "is getting beneath the surface of what one sees just passing by — the behind-the-scenes, the back regions...to see that something that looks very simple has a complex structure to it."

Facing page: Sociology Professor Mitchell Duneier, at one of the tables around Greenwich Village where a community of poor men sell used books and magazines.

Because depth demands time, ethnographic works aren't produced as quickly as Mary Higgins Clark novels. Duneier's second major ethnographic book, *Sidewalk*, didn't appear until last winter. But what an appearance it made.

Sidewalk is the result of Duneier's observations of the street vendors who

don't often share reading lists. It won both the *Los Angeles Times*'s prize for the best current-interest book of 1999 and the sociological community's prestigious C. Wright Mills Award, and it numbers among its fans luminaries such as Spike Lee. The filmmaker, who previously optioned *Slim's Table*, called *Sidewalk* "the most readable work of sociology that I have ever come



hakim

Hakim is a sturdy barrel of a man, a muscular, five-foot-seven-inch African-American in his mid-forties. For more than a decade, he sold books from a table near the intersection of Greenwich and Sixth Avenues, a spot from which he held

court as the Village's informal mayor and streetwise intellectual. Unlike many of the street vendors, Hakim is educated and housed and came to the streets after ejecting himself from what he calls "the formal economy." On the sidewalk, he recommended books to people who didn't feel at home in the Barnes and Noble across the street, and he fulfilled his self-proclaimed role as a "public character."

work, and in some cases live, on the sidewalks around Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street, at the heart of trendy and affluent Greenwich Village. A moving, often heartbreaking tale, the book has accomplished the rare feat of being embraced by both academic and commercial reviewers, communities that

across." There is some talk that it may end up on the big screen.

All of which makes Duneier the newest star in a galaxy of eminent UW sociologists. Wisconsin is almost synonymous with groundbreaking sociology, having produced a long list of top scholars, especially in studies of families

Butterroll, one of the men who seeks sustenance on the sidewalks of Greenwich Village, leans on a brick wall near a subway entrance — a place that he calls his office, where he spends most days panhandling for change. His status as a panhandler puts him on a lower rung of the cultural hierarchy of the streets, beneath others who sell merchandise from tables. But he can usually count on the vendors to pay him for small jobs, such as watching their tables while they run errands or eat. These tasks may only earn him a few dollars, but every bill counts in what is often a day-to-day struggle to have enough money to get by.



and social stratification. Duneier represents a class of young professors helping to diversify the department's strengths — and keep hold on its long-held place atop academic rankings.

"Duneier is something special, a once-in-a-generation talent," says Charles Halaby, the department's chair. "His research already ranks him among the most important American urban ethnographers ever, period." He says *Sidewalk* will be required reading for ethnography students for years.

It already has been a big part of the learning process for Duneier's own students. Since he began his New York research, Duneier has been bringing street vendors to Madison to talk with his classes, which students say puts the stamp of reality on their study of social problems. "Mitch has this insight that very few people have gained, because he is so thorough in his work," says Liza Vadnai '98, who took a research-methods class from Duneier en route to her sociology degree. "He's completely consumed by it."

For proof of obsession, you could look at Duneier's life during the past seven years — it's been a constant hustle

to invest as much time as possible in Greenwich Village.

Sidewalk is the story of the community of mostly African-American vendors who make their living by selling used books, recycled magazines, and other scavenged goods from tables set up around the Village. The men (and one woman) are all poor, many are homeless, and some are addicted to drugs and alcohol. Their presence on the sidewalks, although allowed by New York City ordinances, has been a source of controversy. While the vendors are virtually a Village institution, with many regular customers and supporters, some business owners and residents regard them as a public nuisance.

Duneier spent nearly every summer and semester break on the sidewalks, getting to know the vendors and their business by working alongside them. Later, he recruited Ovie Carter, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer from the *Chicago Tribune* he befriended while working on *Slim's Table*, to document the vendors' lives on film. Duneier's stories and Carter's striking images together create a vivid account of hardship and perseverance.

But in true Duneier fashion, *Sidewalk* goes deeper, penetrating the men's lives to uncover a complex society of rules, hierarchies, and formalized roles, which, for people who might just dismiss the vendors as homeless opportunists, may be startling, and perhaps inspiring.

One *New York Times* reviewer said the book, "like a pair of reading glasses, makes the blur of what is close turn sharp." In an interesting testament to the book's multilayered messages, *Fortune's* read on *Sidewalk* was that "running a microbusiness, even at curbside, can yield both self-esteem and cash."

The common theme is that the street culture that most people simply walk by and ignore is real culture. Duneier found the "behind-the-scenes" right where you can almost trip over it.

But just as remarkable as the final product is the process, the making of a book that would not have gotten past page one without Duneier's patient efforts to gain the vendors' trust. That took not just days or months, but years. And it might never have happened if Hakim Hasan hadn't owned a Rolodex.

In 1994, Duneier was a law student at New York University, living in an apartment not far from where the street vendors set up their tables. He passed them often on his way to classes, but he never stopped to ponder the merchandise or the lives of the sellers. "I lived there for many years without thinking about them at all," he says now.

One of the tables Duneier walked by was operated by Hakim Hasan, who had attended college and worked as a legal proofreader before he "went into exile" on the streets. He wasn't homeless, as some of the street vendors are, and as many who saw him no doubt assumed.

Duneier was one of those people. That's why he was taken aback when Hasan asked him one day, "Why don't you give me your address and telephone number for my Rolodex?"

Hasan dealt in "black books," volumes geared to an African-American audience. Duneier had caught a glimpse of his own book, *Slim's Table*, on Hasan's table and asked him where he had gotten it. (Duneier later admits that he was wondering if it was stolen.)

"I have my sources," Hasan told him. "Do you have some interest in this book?"

"Well, I wrote it," Duneier responded. That's when Hasan asked for a business card, and Duneier's perception of street vendors was spun like the wheel of a Rolodex.

Duneier, who was becoming disenchanted by law school anyway, came up the idea to get to know Hasan and observe activities at his table, something that might make a fitting sequel to *Slim's Table*. Indeed, two years later, when he sold the manuscript to New York publisher Farrar, Straus & Giroux, he titled it *Hakim's Table*.

But then he threw it away.

Hasan had been skeptical at first about allowing himself to be observed. He says most African-American people instinctively are suspicious of whites who want to "tell their stories." In the hard-scrabble business of survival, "there's no basis for you to trust anyone," he says. He doubted that Duneier could do

justice to the experience of an African-American book vendor and his clients.

But Duneier won him over after a series of lunches, during which the two forged a relationship. Hasan consented to let Duneier hang around his table and make observations, which became the basis for the manuscript. When it was ready for printing, he sent a copy to Hasan, who responded with a long memo, detailing what he thought were shortcomings in Duneier's analysis.

Hasan didn't hear from Duneier for two days. He imagined that he'd overstepped his bounds. But when the two did talk, Duneier agreed with the criticisms, and told his publisher he wanted

to start his research from scratch.

"I started to realize that what I was learning by participating and observing was taking me so far beyond the level that I had in the manuscript," he says.

By now Duneier was a junior faculty member at UW-Madison. Ditching two years of research wasn't easy, he says, "especially when you're going up for tenure." But his next idea was even bolder. Instead of just watching, Duneier volunteered to work in the community of vendors, learning the routines of their lives by actually living them himself. Despite his worries about safety and the possible disruption that Duneier might cause, Hasan agreed to help, and the

PhD sociologist signed on for a summer as an assistant to



mudrick

One of Mudrick's jobs is to "lay shit out," as the vendors call it — to arrange the variously collected magazines on the tables in a way that attracts customers. As I watch him, I learn the science of it. Fashion magazines and glossy travel publications go up front. An issue of *Architectural Digest* — a sure seller — is prominently featured.

Mudrick, who sometimes is called Slim or High-Roller and who introduced himself to me as Charles, doesn't have his own table, but he can make a few dollars doing these odd jobs for vendors. He sometimes works as a handyman for local apartment buildings, which, he says, gives him enough money to get by. "I'm happy," he says. "I've come a long way from being where I was at."



alice

Born in the Philippines, Alice is the only woman who regularly sells on the sidewalks. She often watches her grandchildren at her table while her

daughter is at work. The family lives in New Jersey, but neither Alice nor her daughter earns enough to afford child care. That hasn't stopped some people from chastising her for supposedly raising her kids on the streets. A few passersby have upbraided Alice for the way she scolds her grandchildren. "Being out here — it's an exposure," she says. "You're exposed all the time." Every domestic routine is played out on a public stage.

one of the vendors who sold magazines and other printed matter from a table on Sixth Avenue.

Wandering around Greenwich Village with Duneier on a summer day after *Sidewalk* was published, I try to imagine the khaki-and-button-down-clad professor staking a claim on Sixth Avenue to peddle old copies of *Playboy* and *Vanity Fair*. It is early afternoon, and several vendors are setting up their tables. Portable stereos are flipped on to fill the air with hip-hop rhythms, a subtle tug on passersby to linger.

Duneier obviously knows everybody. He stops to chat with most of the vendors — Alice, Ishmael, Mudrick,

Grady, Keith — and they all have friendly words for "the professor." Ishmael, one of the magazine sellers, says, "Yeah, he's part of us. He's like our brother."

Duneier's first few days on the sidewalks were hardly so chummy. "We didn't really know who he was," Ishmael says. "Maybe, we thought, he was a spy. Maybe he was out here to get something." Duneier himself wasn't sure what he was in for. He didn't have a research grant and was spending most nights on a former roommate's couch. He showed up at the vendor's table that first day wearing his usual professorial clothes, deciding it was better to be real than to try to blend in.

That was an important decision. Duneier would earn the vendors' trust and learn their culture by being exactly who he was.

"Mitch is a different kind of person. He was probably born to be a sociologist," says Hasan, who gave up vending in April 1999 and found a job with Manhattan's Audrey Cohen College on the recommendation of a professor he met while on the sidewalk. Hasan has recently helped develop a new Urban Institute at the college, which has brought Duneier and other researchers together to discuss city problems. "[Duneier] has all the instincts of a sociologist, and a very good one. One of those instincts is the ability to listen," says Hasan.

Determined to allow the vendors to tell their own stories, Duneier invested in an expensive digital recorder, which he stored in a crate under the table, and let it run.

As he grew to know the vendors' society, he learned that the community divided into fairly rigid hierarchies, with book vendors, who often received donations of books from people around the neighborhood, at the top. Next came magazine vendors, who usually sought their merchandise from the recycling boxes left outside apartment buildings. At the bottom were those who did odd jobs, including watching over tables while the regular vendors went to get food or to scavenge for products to sell.

He also learned the survival instincts necessary to do business under the tight constraints of the New York City laws related to sidewalk vendors. Once seen as an effective way to minimize panhandling, the laws have been narrowed in recent years, creating additional contingencies for the sellers.

Tables must now be within accepted boundaries — away from intersections and store entrances, for example — and no merchandise can be left unattended. Because of that provision, and because they compete for a limited number of choice spaces, the vendors must figure out how to keep their tables occupied at



The tables that line the streets of Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village are hubs of activity, especially in late afternoons and evenings when the sidewalks are full of residents coming home from work. At night, as people head toward the Village's many restaurants and bars, the atmosphere around the tables at times becomes free-wheeling, filling the air with talk and loud music. Most of the vendors say that they enjoy working on the sidewalks; they enjoy seeing people and engaging them in conversations — although not all of the people who pass by feel so at ease. For all the tables' reliable customers, many more hurry by with averted eyes.

all times. To ensure that they don't lose their places or that the police don't haul away their possessions, some of the vendors sleep next to their tables in folding chairs.

The experiences Duneier was collecting on Sixth Avenue were data for his sociological analysis, but he hadn't made up his mind exactly *what* he was learning about American cities by working on the street. Echoing in the background was Hasan's labeling himself a "public character," a reference to an earlier study of American urban life, also centered on Greenwich Village.

Jane Jacobs, a respected sociologist who lived in the Village, defined "public characters" in her 1961 classic book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, as critical elements to happy urban life.

Public characters were people who kept vigil on the neighborhood — shopkeepers, stoop-sitting retirees, mail carriers. They were communal parents in a way, the "eyes and ears on the street," as Jacobs called them. The fact that they were out there, and would notice and report any irregularities, helped people feel safe in what otherwise might be a dangerous place to live.

Duneier, who as an urban researcher knows Jacobs's work well, began to see his work as an update of her analysis. In 1961, she drew Greenwich Village as a picture of an urban idyll, where the "eyes and ears on the street" made her neighborhood comfortable. But New York, like most cities, has undergone dramatic demographic shifts in the past forty years, and the Village now has racial and

socioeconomic mixes that weren't there when Jacobs made her observations. "The sidewalk life that she was writing about...most of the people who were walking around here were very similar to one another. They were similar in race and similar in class," he says.

Sidewalk is really a study of "different eyes and ears," Duneier says. Vendors such as Hasan serve many of the roles that Jacobs envisioned. Duneier witnessed many times when vendors helped lost tourists, watched over deliveries that came when shopkeepers were away, and discouraged or reported crime on the sidewalks. In the new era of urban living, though, city sidewalks have become sort of a demilitarized zone for the clash between races and classes. The dominant contemporary theory in cities like New



ishmael

Ishmael has deep brown, sympathetic eyes and a wise smile. He also lays claim to one of the choicest spots on Sixth Avenue, right in front of the Barnes and Noble. His portable stereo, which he keeps beside his chair, is one of his most prized possessions. "Music attracts the customers," he says.

"Just like when you go in a store, and you're going to buy one thing. You hear music playing and start to look around, and you come out of that store broke." Like most of the vendors, Ishmael worries that the police will come and throw his stuff in the trash, which is why he rarely leaves his table.

York is that bad sidewalk aesthetics — the mere appearance of social or physical disorder — can lead to crime.

That model of management is based on an idea known as the "broken-windows theory," so called because it posits that a broken window that remains unfixed will encourage additional vandalism and lawlessness. The theory is driving efforts in many cities to clean up graffiti and littering.

But in some cities, the theory has taken on a human component, which implicates the men on Sixth Avenue. Because some of the vendors are homeless, they at times sleep in view of passersby. Occasionally, they urinate on building corners, the subject of a

Duneier chapter entitled, "When You Gotta Go..." A few of them panhandle or try to engage women in unwelcome conversations. All of these behaviors are deemed by some to be forms of "social broken windows."

Duneier has problems with that logic, since it reduces people to physical disturbances. In his book, he offers several counterpoints to the broken-windows theory, noting that while the men may appear disorderly, they participate in a well-organized, public business and often act to eliminate the crimes that people fear they will bring on.

The best argument, though, may be the delicate humanity that radiates through each of *Sidewalk's* subjects.

Duneier portrays the vendors not as heroes or victims, but as human, with the whole spectrum of strengths and frailties. One of the book's most poignant characters is Ron, whom Duneier worked with at the vendor's table. Ron's addiction to crack cocaine made him unreliable as a worker and potentially dangerous. He would occasionally ask Duneier or one of the other vendors to hold some of his money, an indication that he was about to spend the rest on crack and didn't want to waste his entire earnings while high. In another part of the book, photographer Carter captures a touching portrait of Ron taking care of his elderly aunt.

It's through characters like Ron that you see Duneier's desire to be completely honest with his readers. Few sociologists actually disclose the names of their subjects or the places where they did their research. Duneier chose the more unconventional journalistic approach, he says, partly to increase his own accountability.

"There are a tremendous number of details in a book like this that are absolutely fundamental to any sense of 'getting it right,' " he says. "I think that when you know that many readers will be seeing the actual space and making their own decisions, the pressure on you to get those details right is very high."

On the day that I spent with Duneier in Greenwich Village, he was momentarily distracted by a pair of shoes he saw on a vendor's table. They were Italian leather — the kind of shoes you'd expect to see in a Fifth Avenue boutique, not a Sixth Avenue sidewalk — and on sale for ten dollars. "My students always want to know where I get my shoes," Duneier says. "They don't believe me when I tell them I bought them on the sidewalk." The only problem was what to do with the ones he was wearing.

Thinking quickly, he slipped off his shoes and set them on the table to sell. It's that kind of spontaneity that has won Duneier plenty of friends on Sixth Avenue.



Some of the tables' customers say that there isn't a better source for cheap books in New York. That's often true, since many of the books have come from the collections of well-read, intellectual Village residents. On a good day, a book vendor might make several sales in an hour and finish the day with a profit of a hundred dollars or more. On a bad day — when it rains, for example — hours may pass with little activity at the tables, meaning that vendors must budget their daily earnings wisely.

The myth about researchers is that once their observations are finished, they're immediately off to another locale. And while Duneier is engaged in new ethnographic projects now, he hasn't abandoned the vendor community. Says Hasan, who has become close friends with Duneier, "Whereas most social scientists would pull up, take the tape recorders, and never be heard from again, [the vendors] still see him on a regular basis. Everyone has his phone number." When Duneier is in Madison, he periodically calls the front desk of a hotel near the sidewalks and asks the desk manager to get one of the vendors to come to the phone, so that he can stay current on the affairs there. He has arranged legal assistance for some of the men who run into problems with police, and he has even looked into having carts made so that they could more easily store their possessions.

Duneier says he is sharing revenues from the book with the street vendors, and he often arranges for one of the people from the book to appear with him on panels or interviews. Former student Liza Vadni, who now works in Manhattan with a neighborhood crisis center, went to one such lecture in New York.


"He gets such respect from those guys because he has never treated them as *subjects*," she says.

Such close relationships are the residuals of Duneier's unique participant-observer style. He's bound to feel closer connections to the vendors, given that he's shared their experiences. But he says his involvement doesn't compromise his ability to take a scholarly view. Indeed, he thinks his way is more honest. "The mistake in ethnographic work is to believe that you don't have a presence, and that you don't have emotions," he says.

Those emotions come through in one of the book's most dramatic scenes, when Duneier sets up a vendor's table in bold defiance of direct police orders on Christmas in 1996. Earlier in the day, the police had demanded that Ishmael shut down his table, despite there being no prohibition on selling on Christmas. It had been a bad week for Ishmael already; only a few days before, police had seized all his possessions and thrown them away during a crackdown apparently aimed at illegal vendors who were putting their goods directly on the ground (a violation of law).

Carrying a copy of the ordinances that allow for street vending, Duneier set

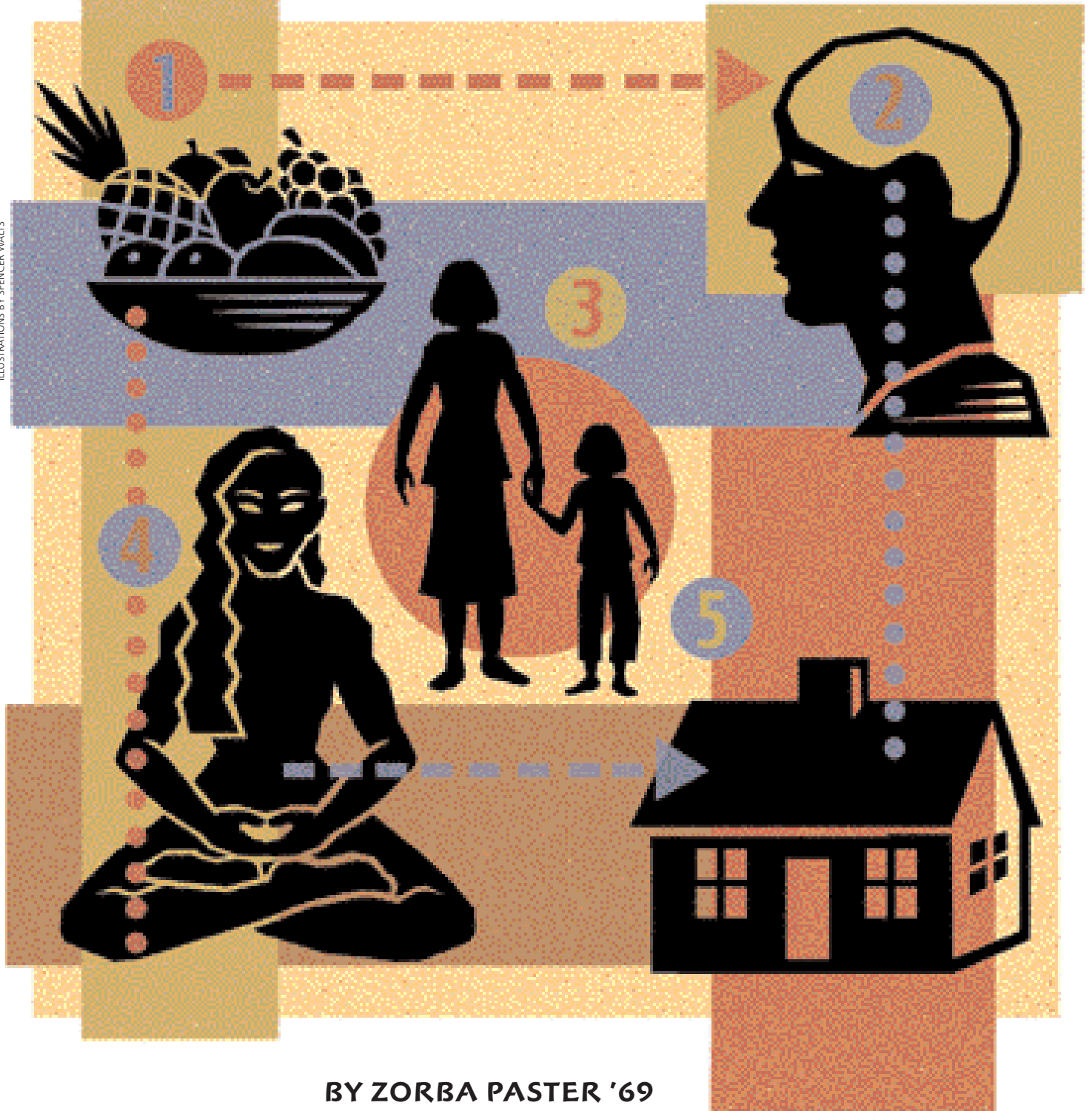
up his table in the exact spot where Ishmael had been. When police returned and tried to shut him down, he grew defiant, asserting his legal right to be there. A police officer told Duneier that he would take him to jail if he continued to "cop an attitude." At one point, the officer grabbed the copy of the law from Duneier and, gesturing with it, said, "This — listen to me — this means nothing to me right now." After a second officer arrived, the incident ended with Duneier's table intact.

The episode yields deep insight into police authority and the liberties they sometimes take to maintain order on the streets. But at its base, Duneier's decision to get involved was "intuitive," he says. He is, after all, a human being. And on that day, with the holiday making the heart of New York City a cold and lonely frontier, he was just another human being trying to make sense of the world. 

Michael Penn is an associate editor of *On Wisconsin*. Photographs for this story are courtesy of Ovie Carter, who collaborated with Mitchell Duneier in the publication of *Sidewalk*. Carter, a veteran photographer for the *Chicago Tribune*, is highly regarded for his documentation of life in the inner city and is known as one of the best photographers of urban subjects working today. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1975.

Rx for a Long Life

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SPENCER WALT'S



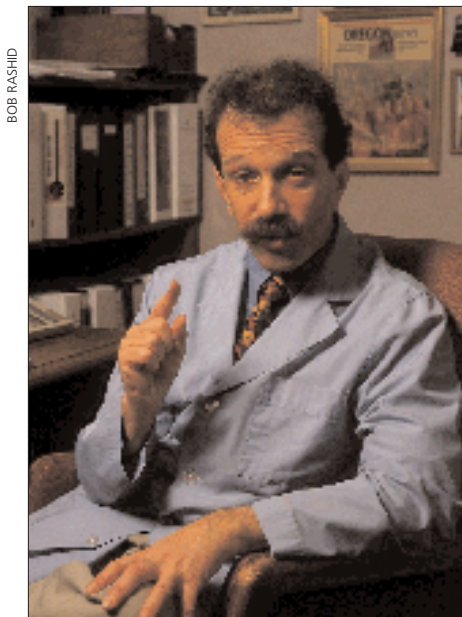
BY ZORBA PASTER '69

When it comes to **longevity**, Dr. Zorba Paster '69 wants you to give as much consideration to your **social milieu** as you do to **exercise** and **eating right**.

If you listen to public radio, you probably know him as the doctor with the distinctive voice who always ends his commentary over the airwaves with a buoyant "Stay well!" His radio show, "Zorba Paster on Your Health," is distributed nationally by Public Radio International. Or you may have caught Zorba Paster '69 dispensing medical wisdom on Madison's WISC-TV Channel 3, delivering his tireless advice on everything from cataracts to carpal tunnel syndrome in his trademark chatty style.

Paster, who grew up in an ethnic Jewish neighborhood in Chicago where his family has lived for three generations, also has a family practice in Oregon, Wisconsin, and teaches in the Department of Family Medicine at the UW Medical School. After visiting and falling in love with the Memorial Union Terrace, he transferred to Wisconsin from the University of Illinois and graduated in psychology. He stayed on to work in the lab of his mentor, zoology professor Bob Auerbach, and decided that he could combine a love for science and people by becoming a physician.

Some fifteen years ago, Monika Petkus '73 of Wisconsin Public Radio, whom Paster knew from his Chicago days, invited him to do an interview on a morning show, and the good doctor's public persona was born. "It's incredibly powerful to reach 50,000 to 100,000 people with a public health message," he says. "My thought is that you have to make medical information fun and interesting — what I would call infotainment."



BOB RASHID

"Stay well!" admonishes Zorba Paster in his signature airwaves farewell.

Some time ago, Paster became intrigued by the concept of longevity. Wisconsin, he says, tops the charts for obesity, but it's also nearly as high when it comes to longevity. He conjectured that it is because Wisconsinites share certain traits. "We have balance," he notes. "We work hard.

During the last century, physicians, researchers, and scientists have devoted thousands of pages and billions of dollars to the topic of longevity. Through public health measures, such as improved sanitation and wholesome foods and the introduction of antibiotics, we have gained more life span in the last one hundred years than we did in the preceding five thousand. The question is, how do we take advantage of these additional years?

For the most part, medical advice has focused only on the body: slash your cholesterol, reduce your weight, exercise, stop smoking. And research now echoes

We play hard. We have a strong social network that translates into quality and quantity."

Those ideas led to *The Longevity Code — Your Personal Prescription for a Longer, Sweeter Life*, a book that stresses the social aspects of longevity. Published last month by Clarkson Potter (New York), it has a foreword by none other than the Dalai Lama, whom Paster has gotten to know through his longtime involvement with a local Buddhist community in Oregon. "Certainly, I attribute the good health I enjoy to a generally calm and peaceful mind," writes the spiritual leader in the foreword.

Paster says it's a myth that we'll all end our lives in nursing homes, adding that only 1.5 percent of the over-seventy-five population is institutionalized. Every year since 1985, he says, there has been a consistent 1 percent to 2 percent drop in the number of disabled seniors.

Below, Paster summarizes some of his ideas about how to add years to our lives and make them more worthwhile.

mom's injunction: "Eat your fruits and vegetables." While these measures are important contributors to longevity — and they are *very* important — there's much more.

We rarely think of our social sphere as being an important longevity booster. Yet the data are irrefutable. People who are married live longer. When one spouse dies, the other is at an increased risk for death. However, this risk is mitigated if he or she has a strong social network. When friends and family support you, it's easier to handle life's stressors.

These data are reconfirmed when we look at breast cancer victims. Several

pivotal studies by Richard Davidson at the UW-Madison Department of Psychology show that women with terminal metastatic breast cancer live months longer if they have a strong social support network.

We don't know precisely why. But that doesn't mean that we can't take steps now to nourish our social links. This might mean making up with that relative who shunned you, talking to the co-worker whom you don't get along with, or nourishing that love relationship with a homemade, candlelight dinner.

Have you considered how much you like your job, whether you have a good relationship with your parents and children, what sort of friendships you have, whether you're depressed or happy, angry or delighted, abusive or kind-hearted? And though we would all agree that these factors count indisputably in quality of life, they contribute to longevity, too. Happy, satisfied people with strong social relationships live longer, regardless of their risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and cancer. There is good science to support this.

Good health is not merely the absence of disease. It is composed, I suggest, of five interrelated spheres of wellness: physical, mental, family and social, spiritual, and material. To achieve a fulfilling and vivacious life, you must find balance and good health in all five spheres.

From a truly enormous body of information on longevity, I chose seventy-six action steps that I call Longevity Boosters, which can increase and enhance your lifespan. A corresponding list, called Longevity Busters, can detract from a long life. Here's a sampling of Boosters and Busters, organized into the spheres of wellness.

cancer, wearing a bicycle helmet, having a good relationship with your doctor.

Mental: Pursuing lifelong learning, fostering curiosity and enthusiasm, cultivating an optimistic attitude, being actively involved with life, identifying and treating depression.

Social: Having a good marriage or its equivalent, building a strong social network, engaging in good relationships with family and friends, fostering mutual support.

Spiritual: Having a spiritual path; belonging to a group with a religious or spiritual purpose; appreciating art, music, and nature; practicing yoga, tai chi, or meditation; volunteering.

Material: Having a job that challenges you and maintains your interest, having enough money, having adequate job benefits and vacation, funding an IRA, living in a safe neighborhood, feeling validated by doing work that contributes to society, giving financial support to causes you believe in.



Some Longevity Busters include:

Physical: Eating the typical American diet, living the life of a couch potato, drinking while driving or boating, not having your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly, rarely visiting a doctor or dentist, not getting enough sleep.

Mental: Depression, anger, hostility, undue stress, worry, a low self-esteem, difficulty recognizing or expressing your feelings.

Social: Having no significant social ties, an abusive relationship, extreme shyness, a recent divorce, or death of a loved one.

Spiritual: Very little contact with nature, little "still and quiet" time to contemplate or meditate, few or no activities that nourish your soul.

Material: Too much job stress, an under-appreciated job, too much debt, little or no money saved for retirement.

I then gave each one a difficulty rating. For example, it's easy to add more fruits and veggies to your diet, while it's difficult to reduce your fat intake. It's easier to make your house safe with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors than it is to fix some of those broken family relationships or find an occupation that speaks to your soul.

I have readers take an inventory and answer a questionnaire that will help them to decide which boosters are right for them. Then I have them pull all the booster cards that apply to them and order the cards in a logical fashion.

As I was cracking my own personal longevity code, I realized that I wasn't getting enough fruits and veggies, so I added spicy tomato juice to my lunch regime, ate a banana at 4 p.m., and started drinking calcium-fortified orange juice. And when I truthfully looked at my exercise program, I realized winter meant less activity. So I began to take a walk at lunch. Outside activity has the double benefit of nourishing your spiritual sphere. Even winters are beautiful when you're dressed right.

Then I turned my attention to my social sphere. Last Thanksgiving, I traveled to Chicago for some quality family time. I sought out a cousin with whom I had argued years before. We smiled and laughed a bit as we moved on. I now feel joy rather than stress when I ponder his image.

And my material sphere booster was simple. I bought new carbon monoxide detectors and cleared my basement and garage of toxic waste.

Why are the psychosocial aspects of longevity rarely discussed by physicians and researchers? The answer is twofold: First, most doctors are not trained to think in these broad terms. It hasn't been taught and reinforced in medical schools. Second, and more importantly, these factors are difficult to measure and even more difficult to treat. We can take a pill to lower our blood pressure or cholesterol, and we can form a cast to set our broken bones. But modern medicine doesn't offer much for dealing with a broken heart, faulty relationships, job



Some Longevity Boosters include:

Physical: Eating seven servings of fruits and vegetables a day, exercising regularly, maintaining a reasonable weight, using sunscreen, flossing, practicing safe sex, consuming alcohol in moderation, screening for

Good health is not merely the absence of disease. It is composed, I suggest, of **five interrelated spheres of wellness**: physical, mental, family and social, spiritual, and material.

dissatisfaction, or hostility and anger. These are tough to identify and tougher to treat.

Many others think that longevity is in the genes. If your relatives lived a long life, you will, too. But a recent *New England Journal of Medicine* article on twins (more than 90,000 of them) found that when it comes to cancer, genetics plays a minor role: a 25 percent risk in breast cancer, and a 20 percent risk in colon cancer, for example. Environmental factors, some known and others unknown, play the dominant role.

The famed Framingham Heart Study, now in its fifty-third year, showed that while genes are an important factor in whether you will develop hypertension, heart disease or stroke, what carried a lot more weight were your diet, whether you were obese, or whether you smoked.

From the best data I can glean, at most, genes play a 30 to 50 percent role in longevity. It's rather like the card game of bridge. You're dealt a hand (genes), but how you play it decides whether you become a master or not.

Building Blocks of Longevity

Older is a relative term. When you're 20, it's 40; when you're 40, it's 60; and when you're 60, it's certainly 80. But when I look at older people I consider successful, I find that three attributes are almost universally present: They are lifelong learners. They are actively involved. And they have a hopeful outlook.

Lifelong Learning

Education is a crucial prerequisite for longevity, studies have found. Men and women with at least two years of college live ten to fifteen years

longer than high school dropouts. Why? Because learning leads to adaptation, which, from a Darwinian point of view, makes perfect sense. Suppose you read a study showing that swallowing a vitamin E capsule or taking modern jazz dance reduces the incidence of heart disease. Vitamin E keeps your arteries free from cholesterol, while jazz dance is great for your heart and thighs and nourishes the soul. If you're a *learner*, you'll take the data, compare them to other things you know, and make a decision. You'll answer that all-important question, "Is it right for me?"

Active Involvement

Not long ago I attended a guest lecture sponsored by the UW Institute on Aging. The speaker was Dr. Robert Butler, author of *Aging in America* and *Sex after Sixty* and founder of the National Institute on Aging. On the subject of what keeps people going strong through their eighties and nineties or even longer, he noted that the people who live the longest and maintain the most satisfying lives tend to have a sense of purpose. They are driven to do things, to leave their mark, to engage in pursuits they feel passionate about, and to positively influence people's lives.

People with a sense of purpose like being productive and feeling challenged. These qualities are fundamental ingredients in their formula for a fulfilling life. Everywhere they look, they see opportunities to learn, build, and love. They are actively involved in the world around them and convinced that they can make a difference.

A sense of purpose can be aimed at world-changing causes such as combating global warming. It can be used to achieve something extraordinary, such as


becoming a space shuttle astronaut like Senator John Glenn. It can be used to give something back. That warm feeling in your heart, knowing that your hard work may have benefited others, can reduce your stress hormones and may add to your life. Anything that captures your imagination and fuels your desire to stick around and stay healthy for lots of tomorrows will do.

A Hopeful Outlook

Folks who live long, rich lives don't spend much time worrying about failing to accomplish their goals. They assume they'll succeed. And if they falter, they change their project, their goals, or their perspective. What others might call a failure, they consider a temporary setback. There's always something they can do.

People with hopeful outlooks like the idea of adopting healthy habits at midlife and earlier in order to live longer and better in the future. It puts them in the driver's seat, where their confidence in their own abilities and expectation of positive outcomes makes everything seem more manageable, including tasks a pessimist would call impossible. They don't give up hope when unexpected obstacles appear in their path. Even when chronic conditions or terminal illness limit their actual life expectancy, optimists are determined to live as fully as they can and to make the most of every day.

Clearly, attitude counts. Not only have lifelong learning, active involvement, and a hopeful outlook been linked directly to life expectancy, but these factors also greatly influence what we choose to do to lengthen and enrich our lives.

Each of us is the world's greatest living expert on one subject: ourselves. Nobody knows you like you do. And this puts you in the ideal place — here and now — to start making changes today. 

Zorba Paster '69 can be reached by e-mail at zpaster@facstaff.wisc.edu. For more information on longevity, he recommends the book *Why Are Some People Healthy and Others Not?* by Robert Evans, Morris Barer, and Theodore Marmor, published by Aldene De Gruiter, New York, 1994.

Portrait of an Artist . . .

Nothing short of revolutionary in higher education, a UW program is luring faculty such as Gelsomina De Stasio and building new intellectual teams.

BY BRIAN MATTMILLER '86
PHOTOS BY JEFF MILLER

Gelsomina De Stasio might be called a scientist, but that's only the beginning. Yes, she's an esteemed physicist, but in her classroom, she introduces non-majors to the principles of physics through the study of art. And the canvases in her home? She painted them herself.

The talents that she brings to her faculty position allow her to bridge traditional academic disciplines and create new knowledge — the foremost goal of the Strategic Hiring Initiative, a new UW-Madison experiment that is generating enthusiasm across the campus and capturing interest across the nation.

The program is the result of something that could happen in the business world, but had simply never happened in higher education. Faculty were invited to team with their colleagues to propose innovative ways of working, then enter their proposals into a competition. The selected proposals, they were told, would help to shape a bold new direction.



Creating paintings that share a style similar to M.C. Escher's perception-bending images fills reflective time for physics professor Gelsomina De Stasio. This canvas, she explains, features an image of herself on a series of rootless and distorted-reality platforms and stairways.

The opportunity did have one catch: proposals had to build alliances across departments. In a private company, that might mean forging partnerships between creative services and accounting, or reaching out to distribution and marketing, or linking up technology

with human resources. At UW-Madison, it meant blending the expertise of faculty from different disciplines, different departments, even different schools and colleges.

But the rewards would be significant. Not only would winners be

and a Scientist

“Knowledge once gained casts a light beyond its immediate boundaries.”

— JOHN TYNDALL, NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH PHYSICIST

rewarded with a green light to implement their ideas, they'd also get funding for enough new positions to have a real shot at succeeding.

Faculty jumped at the opportunity. In the first year alone, more than one hundred hiring proposals were submitted by interdisciplinary teams involving more than four hundred faculty. Now in its third year, the initiative, known internally as “cluster hiring,” has supported ninety new positions — but that only scratches the surface of its impact. The program represents an approach that is nothing short of revolutionary in the realm of higher education.

Renaissance Scientist

“My ideal scientist is Leonardo da Vinci,” says De Stasio, a native of Rome, Italy. “He could move 360 degrees, be interested in many different disciplines at one time, and excel in all of them.”

Just as Leonardo melded a passion for painting with his expansive mind for invention, De Stasio also covers divergent ground.

The 1999 addition to the physics department belongs to a cluster hiring area called biophotonics. Her group is concerned with the development of new microscopes that peer deeply into the inner workings of cells. De Stasio's own microscope, nicknamed Mephisto, is currently one of the highest-resolution x-ray microscopes in the world.

She spends a lot of her time at the Synchrotron Radiation Center in Stoughton, an underground electron accelerator ring that helps to illuminate some of the invisible forces of nature. De Stasio's quarry is a cure for cancer. Using Mephisto to illuminate cancer cells, De Stasio is examining a new type of cancer therapy that could virtually

eliminate the collateral damage that occurs from chemotherapy or radiation treatment. The therapy involves a nuclear reaction that causes the equivalent of a tiny atomic bomb to detonate inside each cancer cell.

She is collaborating with Minesh Mehta, a UW Medical School radiation therapy expert, to perfect the process.

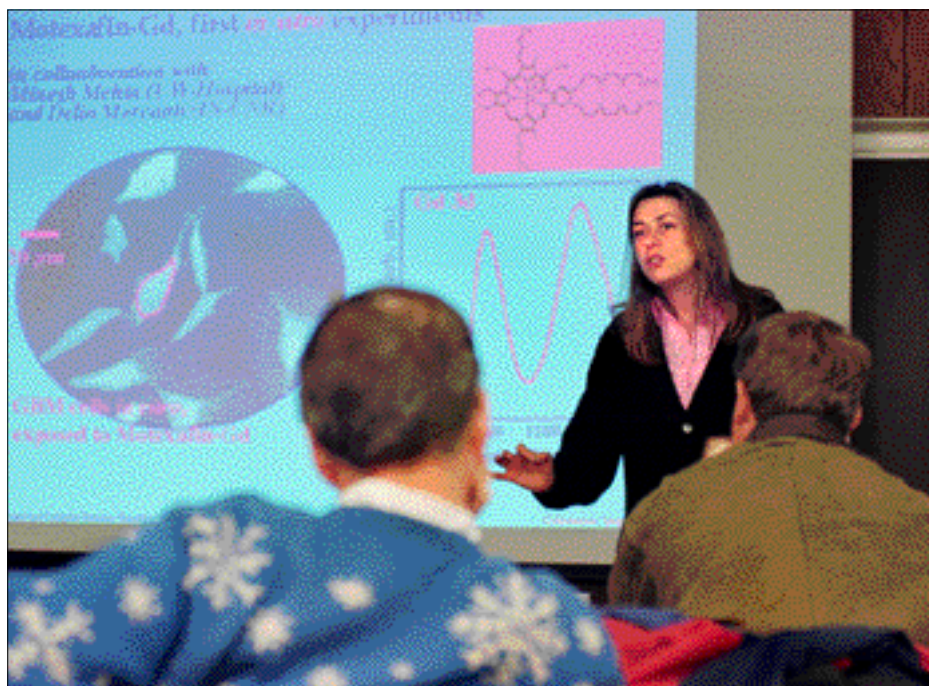
A high-energy personality known by nearly everyone as “Pupa,” De Stasio and her graduate students frequently work around the clock during the three-week windows when her project is online. She's always on the lookout for good twenty-four-hour diners.

After working for a decade splitting time among Madison, Rome, and Lausanne, Switzerland, De Stasio has come to appreciate the comparatively staid faculty life. Her course seems

almost tailor-made for her: Physics in the Arts, a highly visual approach to physics designed for non-majors. Every class she teaches comes with a constellation of PowerPoint slides, which use some of her favorite works of art to illustrate light, perspective, pigment, and other principles.

De Stasio says the strategic hiring approach was ultimately why she chose UW-Madison over another job offer at California's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which wanted her to develop new experiments for future NASA space missions.

“It's a brilliant initiative, especially the interdisciplinary approach,” she says. “The more we progress with science, the more there is to do. Whatever is left will require the cooperation of specialists from different disciplines.”



Faculty attending a noon-hour Chaos and Complex Systems seminar in Chamberlin Hall learn about De Stasio's research, which, in collaboration with a Medical School colleague, is examining a new type of cancer therapy.

Catalyst for Collaboration

The new hiring approach has triggered hundreds of faculty collaborations, leading to knowledge that is wholly original and often counter-intuitive. Most importantly, it helps faculty who are teaching and researching to a way to better anticipate the changing needs of society.

It's being held up as a template for the twenty-first-century university, attracting attention across the country. Donna Shalala, former UW-Madison chancellor and former U.S. secretary of Health and Human Services who is now the president of Miami University, calls it the most exciting experiment taking place in higher education today.

"I think this is going to become part of the culture here," says Chancellor John Wiley MS'65, PhD'68, who, along with former Chancellor David Ward MS'62, PhD'63, is the program's primary architect. "We initiated this from the top down, but it has been sustained from the bottom up. It's the enthusiasm of the faculty that has kept it going."

Susan Friedman, an English and women's studies professor and one of the program's early participants, says it is allowing faculty to venture into uncharted intellectual territory. "Instead of having administrators issue nice ideas about how departments should hire different kinds of people," Friedman says, "there was a carrot there — a big carrot — and that was faculty [positions], a precious commodity on campus."

During the program's first three years, the university has funded thirty-two cluster hiring proposals, usually with three or four positions attached. They build their expertise around an intellectual challenge, a technological opportunity, or an emerging social problem.

The proposals reflect a smorgasbord of academic fields. Of those funded so far, fifteen have their roots in the arts, humanities, or social sciences, while the other seventeen are rooted in the physical or biological sciences.

One new cluster is genomics, which is helping to glean relevance from the



During a break between teaching back-to-back classes, De Stasio looks over questions for an upcoming exam with teaching assistant Evelina Tsoncheva outside Sterling Hall.

billions of bits of DNA code spinning out of sequencing efforts. Other vital new areas include international public affairs and global cultural affairs, both of which have been drastically reshaped by globalization. Another effort centers around nanotechnology, the science of rearranging atoms to construct entirely new materials. Other examples include biotechnology ethics, sustainable land use, energy sources and policy, and the information technology revolution.

The program is adding some new stars to UW-Madison's academic galaxy by attracting people at the pinnacle of their fields. David Schwartz, a professor from New York University who joined the genomics group in 1999, invented a technology called optical mapping that is now the gold standard for genomics research worldwide. And psychology professor Mark Seidenberg, recruited from the University of Southern California, is one of the world's leading scientists exploring the cognitive roots of language.

Linda Greene, associate vice chancellor and the program's coordinator, says that strategic hiring has probably influenced those already on the faculty even more than newcomers. "The very process of competing for the cluster hires brings our faculty together to work across departments [and] across disciplines to envision the ways in which our curriculum and our research can be enriched," she says.

Reloading the Faculty Ranks

UW-Madison's strategic hiring opportunity came on the heels of a decade of attrition in the faculty ranks, Wiley says. Throughout the 1990s, the university simply didn't have the money to replace faculty members who were leaving for retirement or outside offers. From 1988 to 1998, faculty numbers dropped to about 2,100, a loss of 250 faculty.

Ward, who was chancellor at the time, and Wiley, who was serving as provost, recognized that it was imperative to begin rebuilding the faculty to acceptable levels. They set a goal of adding approximately 150 faculty. The question was how. Wiley noted that the faculty losses occurred uniformly across nearly every department on campus. Simply doling out new positions, one per department, seemed like squandering an opportunity.

Departments also tend to perpetuate the status quo by seeking faculty who are approximate clones of the people they replace. "An expert in area A gets replaced by another expert in area A," Wiley says. "That's one of the reasons why universities change so slowly."

"So what we decided to do," Wiley explains, "was throw it wide open to the campus and ask them: if you had three or four new positions for one concentrated

area, what area do you think would be most important to focus on?"

The idea of a campus competition was born, albeit with a modest start. In 1998, the university had funding only for a dozen new positions, and most of those were cobbled together from existing college budgets. But then the idea was given a high-profile break: then Governor Tommy Thompson '63, JD'66 heard about the plan and became an instant fan. Wiley was called to Thompson's office and was allocated eight new positions worth \$1.5 million — right in the middle of a budget biennium — to be focused on booming fields in the biosciences. Now, with twenty new positions and a clear sense of greater public support, the competition got interesting.

Today the program has been extended and will generate as many as 125 new positions, thanks primarily to support from a four-year plan called the Madison Initiative. Strategic hiring was one of four initial funding priorities of the \$97 million initiative, which proposes matching state money with support from

the UW Foundation and the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

The primary attraction, Wiley says, is not just gaining a new faculty position. It is being able to promote a ground swell of new interdisciplinary interests.

"The new positions will represent only about 6 percent of our total faculty," Wiley says, "but this was a way of having a huge multiplier effect."

A Century of Tunneling

None of this crosswiring of disciplines would be possible, of course, had the academic department not emerged a century ago as the dominant structural force behind American higher education.

Clifton Conrad, a UW-Madison professor of higher education, says departments were borrowed from the German university model in the mid-1800s. They represented an entirely new and progressive approach to the university: a place that would provide a core curriculum and a broad range of specialized studies.

Departments would be built around the goal of advancing knowledge for the greater good of society.

Prior to that time, Conrad says, colleges were based on a rigid medieval structure. Their purpose was the training of "Christian gentlemen," with a curriculum rooted in the twin pillars of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and the quadrivium (math, music, geometry, astronomy). Greek and Latin were mandatory, and teaching was entirely based on recitation and memorization. And for exams, students had to suffer a public exhibition, during which they were grilled by the college president, tutors, and other "learned gentlemen."

Students were not entirely thrilled with this suffocating "collegiate way." Conrad references the Harvard rebellion of 1823, a spree of rowdiness that ended in the expulsion of forty-three of the university's seventy students. Interestingly, student literary societies, debate teams, athletic clubs, and other extracurricular pursuits blossomed during this era.

After the Civil War and the Land Grant

Act of 1862, universities began to focus outward, toward meeting the nation's changing needs. Graduate education grew rapidly, and specialized research rose in value. Faculty went from being glorified tutors to "purveyors of disciplinary knowledge," in positions of high esteem. Conrad says this change triggered a period of rigorous "vertical expansion" of knowledge — going deeper and deeper into specialized disciplines — that exists to this day.

Academic departments did great things for education and for the world, Conrad says. They prepared students for an increasingly complicated technical world, and produced rigorous research



It's celebration time for De Stasio, at left, after data suggests a breakthrough in her research at the Synchrotron Radiation Center. She enjoys the moment with Tiziana Parasassi, a colleague from the National Research Council, center, and graduate student Brad Frazer. With its claustrophobic maze of wires and stainless steel chambers, the center is an international destination for hard-core physicists and engineers.

that served as the engine for advancing American society. But in recent decades, as disciplines continued to splinter and subdivide into narrower tunnels of knowledge, many in higher education began to react against all the artificial boundaries departments had created, Conrad notes.

"We created a culture where you could only ask certain kinds of questions and solve certain kinds of problems," he says.

Paul Percy MS'63, PhD'66, dean of the College of Engineering, came to Madison last year from Austin, Texas, where he was the leader of a national electronics consortium called Semi/Sematech. This group works to get America's largest computer semiconductor companies — usually fierce competitors — to reach consensus on technology directions that serve the entire industry.

When he first saw the engineering college's organizational structure, composed of ten self-contained departments, it reminded him of pillars on a nineteenth-century mansion.

He also noticed that much of the most interesting work was happening "between the pillars." There is great excitement in the air over new fields like nanotechnology, a science that aims to use atomic particles like Lego blocks, snapping together materials with astonishing capabilities. Other examples include entrepreneurship, a marriage between technical invention and business acumen, and biomedical engineering, which is creating tools to make surgery simpler and less invasive.

All of these strategic hiring areas, Percy says, more closely develop the types of knowledge and collaborative skills that employers now demand from their work forces. "Employers tell us to educate engineers who can make decisions with incomplete data in the face of major uncertainties," he says. "They

want faster response time and better team-working ability. We need to educate students who can work in the spaces between those boundaries."

Percy adopts a physics metaphor to describe what's happening at UW-Madison today: after a century of the fission of ideas, we're venturing into an era of fusion. "When you go back to the ancient Greeks," he says, "they understood everything in the world. There were four elements of it: air, fire, water, and earth. It was all unified. But as we began to learn more and more, we broke the world apart. But nature doesn't see those boundaries. Now we are fusing the fields back together with a much deeper understanding."

The UW's Fertile Traditions

Greene notes that interdisciplinary approaches didn't suddenly emerge at UW-Madison. There have been many successful examples, dating back to the Institute for Environmental Studies, which formed in the late 1960s and took an integrated approach to finding environmental solutions. The materials science program, of which Wiley was a participant in the 1970s, drew researchers from across the physical sciences to

produce versatile materials for high-tech industries. Women's studies was also based on developing a complete portrait of women's issues across disciplines and throughout cultures around the world.

"The idea of cluster hiring fell on fertile soil here in Madison because of some of our pre-existing traditions," says Greene. "It has been a good time for people to think even more expansively."

One successful example of this expansive thinking is in the arts. Tino Balio, director of the Arts Institute, developed an interdisciplinary visiting artist program that brings in two or three professionals a year. Most arts programs utilize visiting artists, Balio says, but none have them for a full semester, teaching a for-credit class, and requiring them to work across the entire spectrum of the arts. Balio says the program is based in part on student desires for greater ties to their chosen professions.

"We wanted to guarantee students the opportunity to work closely with practicing professionals who will bring exacting professional standards to the classroom," he says.

Stuart Gordon, a film director, writer, and producer whose credits include *Re-Animator* and *Honey, I Shrank the Kid*, took his interdisciplinary charge way beyond lip service. For his course,



Though relatively quiet, De Stasio's hours at home are often spent e-mailing information to research colleagues overseas or preparing PowerPoint presentations for an upcoming class. She's seldom far from her laptop computer, which stores her entire intellectual existence.

Gordon wanted to create a virtual film production unit. He worked the phones to fill his class with students from theater and drama, music, textiles and design, and creative writing, in addition to film students. The resulting group made up most of the talent needed for a real Hollywood film production package.

Friedman, who coordinates Cultural Studies in a Global Context, built a proposal that explores the accelerating movement of people, goods, money, ideas, and cultural expressions around the world, and studies the ways in which cultures clash and blend and dissolve boundaries.

One interesting focus concerns "border studies," which looks at regions of the world during different historical periods — such as the American Southwest, the Ottoman Empire, the Caribbean, or nineteenth-century India — for the ways in which cultures meld into "cultural hybrids." The group also studies the migrations of people around the world and throughout history, whether forced or embraced.

"The idea of studying culture by narrowly focusing in on national borders no longer makes sense in an age of greater global connections," Friedman says.

Friedman was able to attract two rising stars of this new field to campus — Anne McClintock and Robert Nixon, both experts on post-colonial studies — despite an aggressive international competition for their talents. Nixon created a new course that focuses on environmental issues in developing societies, and he is also helping to create a cultural studies major within international studies.

The husband-and-wife team were heavily recruited by Duke University, which is considered to have one of the top — if not *the* top — English programs in the nation. "I met with Duke's department chair in English recently," Friedman says, "and she asked, 'Why did they pick you over us?' She was just astounded. I think [McClintock and Nixon] felt that their work would be valued here."

Over the Long Term

After five years and at least 125 new positions, the strategic hiring program will have placed a significant stamp on the faculty. But there are already signs that the program will have life beyond the campus-level round of hiring.

Paul DeLuca, associate dean of the UW-Madison Medical School, says that the school is pursuing plans to take a cluster hiring approach around some clear, high-level priorities for its future. One likely area of concentration will be in hiring people versed in the tools of genomics to diagnose and treat diseases, an area expected to produce the major advances of the next century.

"I've never subscribed to the idea of chasing new fields," DeLuca says. "I prefer to think about where we want to be in five years, regardless of everyone else."

Engineering Dean Percy also has plans to follow a cluster-hiring model at the college level. To better serve some of these emerging fields, an Engineering Centers building, slated for completion in 2002, will have wings devoted to

nanotechnology, biomedical engineering, and student-based programs that promote technical innovation.

However, higher education historian Conrad looks to the program's future and sees a need for caution. Strategic hiring derives some of its energy from another national trend toward "the entrepreneurial university," driven by knowledge and research that generates the most grant income and has the biggest payoff in the marketplace.

Conrad cites the popular book *Bobos in Paradise*, which chronicles a generation of intellectuals who seem to value summer homes and BMWs as much as ideas. To date, the cluster hiring program has supported innovative ideas across the university, but it needs to remain vigilant about advancing the university's core liberal arts tradition, he says. That includes programs such as mathematics, history, the arts, education, and library sciences.

"I think the challenge is to keep our soul in the face of this," Conrad says. "We can use this entrepreneurial climate to secure new resources in areas like the biosciences, engineering, and business. But we need to be mindful about the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, so we don't dismiss fields of study that are really important to our soul and our teaching."

Wiley believes that many of the cluster areas already funded will continue to grow and thrive, while others may not withstand the test of time. Yet the general goal of bridging disciplines is likely to spread throughout higher education.

"It took one hundred years for the disciplines to form," Wiley told faculty during a symposium on the hiring program, "and disciplines gave us wonderful tools for tunneling very deeply into topics. But given the knowledge explosion, we're going to need to develop new ways of acquiring and organizing and disseminating knowledge. We're not quite sure what that's going to look like, but we will be on the cutting edge." ■



Following her Physics in the Arts class, De Stasio talks with student Katie Hanson. In the foreground is one of her classroom props — a Rotorelief disk, which was created by artist Marcel Duchamp to demonstrate the concept of optical illusion. When turned at a certain speed, the disk gives the impression of depth.

Brian Mattmiller '86 writes about science and technology at UW-Madison, where there's a cool research story behind nearly every door.

Over the Rainbow with Meinhardt Raabe



This University of Wisconsin grad's journey led him all the way to Oz and back again, riding in the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile.

By Clennon King

Meinhardt Raabe '37 has always kept up with what's current. At the moment, he's awed by the nineteen-year-old college dropout who's on the cover of the *Time* magazine he's holding — an odd thing for a man whose own fifteen minutes of fame have lasted more than sixty years. Raabe (pronounced Robby) is the Munchkin coroner who announces that the Wicked Witch of the East is “not only merely dead, but really most sincerely dead” in the 1939 MGM movie classic *The Wizard of Oz*.

But on this sunny autumn day, the eighty-five-year-old Raabe postpones telling his own story. He wants instead to reflect on “the Napster:” Shawn Fanning, a muscle-bound computer introvert who enabled millions of people to swap

music files without paying a dime to the record industry. It's not the suggestion of music piracy that has Raabe excited. It's the underdog dimension of the story. “Fanning is amazing,” Raabe remarks of this modern-day David who rocked the Goliaths of the music industry.

Raabe might as well be talking about himself. This four-foot-seven-inch man, whose height remained below four feet until age thirty, has always tried to turn deficits into assets. And that, he says, is how he's been able to thrive in a world obsessed with size.

Raised on a dairy farm near Watertown, Wisconsin, Raabe was the son of first-generation German-Americans. His parents were of normal height, as was his sister, and they were convinced Raabe

would start growing, too, until doctors discovered that his pituitary gland was malfunctioning. He is, in clinical terms, a pituitary midget.

Raabe found himself a social outcast. Strangers stared. Children pointed fingers. And adults described him in terms he found insulting. “When they called me *midget* or *dwarf*, I'd say, ‘What kind of animal is that?’ ” But Raabe compensated in the classroom, graduating from high school near the top of his class. Though a gifted student, he had no money to pay for college, so he did what came naturally to a farm boy: he raised hens and rabbits for local butchers and used the profits to put himself through his first year of school. (He began at the former Northwestern College in Watertown,

After the *The Wizard of Oz* hit the theaters, Raabe's work for the Oscar Mayer company took a promotional turn. The meat purveyor cut a deal that allowed its Wienermobile to lead film tours throughout the Midwest, and Raabe rode inside, dressed as Little Oscar the Chef.



Raabe

had a strong command of

and later transferred to the UW.)

Raabe's was a lonely existence, but at the end of his freshman year, a new opportunity arrived, this one offering a sense of belonging he'd never known. A family friend who'd just returned from the Chicago World's Fair told Raabe's parents about the Midget Village he'd seen there. An eager Raabe coaxed his parents to take him to the fair, and the trip changed his outlook forever.

"For the first time, I was seeing little people like me raising families and being successful, [people] who had traveled all over the world," says Raabe. "And I said to myself, I can do it, too."

For four summers in the mid-1930s, between semesters at college, Raabe worked at fairs in Chicago, Texas, San Diego, and Cleveland. He ran pony rides, played in midget bands, and lured crowds to sideshows as a barker. But after graduation, even with a degree in accounting, Raabe found landing a professional job challenging.

"The men hiring would say, 'You don't belong here. You belong in the circus,'" Raabe remembers. But when he interviewed with the Oscar Mayer foods company, his experience was different. Although employers at Oscar Mayer may have had their prejudices, he says, his combination of skills and experiences were, in their eyes, a winning hand.

German and was familiar with raising and slaughtering livestock, and his summers at the fairs had given him a knack for luring in customers. Oscar Mayer wanted the business of German butchers in the Midwest, and Raabe had what it took to land those accounts.

Then, after a year on the job, Raabe heard that MGM was looking to cast a number of little people in a new film starring Judy Garland. He asked for time off so that he could audition, but Oscar Mayer was reluctant to let him go.

"They said, 'What's the matter? Don't you like your job?'" Raabe explains. "I said I liked it just fine. But I also told them that if they couldn't allow me time off, then Oscar Mayer probably wasn't the place for me." The company eventually granted him a two-month leave in the fall of 1938.

Raabe joined 124 other little people trying out at MGM's sound stage in Culver City, California, and all 124 received roles. The sunup-to-sundown production schedule was grueling, and his Hollywood experiences weren't terribly glamorous. The way in which he received his cameo speaking role, he says, was hardly unusual — he and two other actors read for the role, and the casting director picked him. But he remembers Judy Garland as a "very poised, talented young lady. You got the impression she was as thrilled about working with 124 little people as we were about working with her."

After two months of production, Raabe stuck around California just long enough to take in the Rose Bowl parade before heading back to Oscar Mayer. For the company that had had to think twice about letting Raabe take time off, having him land a speaking role in a major motion picture was a marketing dream come true. Eager to cash in on Raabe's fame, the company cut a deal that allowed its signature Wienermobile to lead the film's promotional tours through the Midwest. And riding inside was Raabe, suited up in culinary whites as Little Oscar the Chef, pitching the film and Oscar Mayer's meat products.

Though the film would eventually become a classic, it was almost a sleeper during its initial release in 1939. *Gone with the Wind*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* all came out in the same year, and competition at the box office was stiff.

Three years after his brush with Hollywood, Raabe was still promoting Oscar Mayer when he met his wife-to-



Raabe and his late wife, Marie, were married for more than fifty years. They met when Meinhardt's sales job took him to Ohio.

be, Marie, in Akron, Ohio. A butcher there told him about a cigarette girl at a local hotel who was a little person like himself.

"Well, you can guess where I was that night," he says.

But any chance of courtship was interrupted. World War II was on, and

the government was rationing gas. Raabe's road trips from his base in Upper Michigan, whether for Oscar Mayer or to visit Marie, were becoming more difficult. He filled the time by earning his pilot's license and served as a ground instructor for the Civil Air Patrol, visiting Marie whenever he could.

Even though Raabe's size prevented him from ever seeing combat, he did become the smallest licensed pilot to fly during wartime, a fact he's proud of even today. "I flew every single-engine plane made at that time, whether on wheels or skis or floats."

Five years would pass before he and Marie finally tied the knot.

Why so long? Raabe says Marie was no starry-eyed girl looking for Prince Charming. She was wise to the ways of the world. She was also a performer, after all — one who had traveled for four years with a Vaudeville midget troupe. She was not easily impressed by Raabe, his movie debut, or, for that matter, his height — she was taller than he was when they first met.

The two began making a life together, first in Minnesota, and then Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. Marie worked in retail with the W. T. Grant discount chain, and Raabe continued to travel as Little Oscar the Chef, doing cooking shows, TV spots, and promotional tours. As *Oz*'s popularity grew, he started traveling to Ozfests nationwide to meet fans and autograph memorabilia. Marie was always at his side.

Then in 1970, while living in Philadelphia, Raabe took mandatory retirement from Oscar Mayer. Barely missing a beat, he enrolled at Drexel University and earned his MBA at night, while by day he taught German in the Philadelphia schools. But eventually the board of education's mandatory retirement policy caught up with him, too.

Then a friend told him about Penney Farms, which was established by J. C. Penney for missionaries and Christian lay people in memory of the department store



Raabe has found time between Ozfests to take gardening courses in Florida, and now he helps his friends with their gardens. "I know the name of every plant in Clay County," he says.

magnate's parents. Raabe and his wife, who'd never had children, went for a visit and liked what they saw. So in 1986, they gave up big city life and headed south.

In Florida, Raabe picked up where he had left off, substitute teaching, doing Ozfests, volunteering, giving motivational speeches, and gaining certification as a master gardener through the Florida Extension Service.

Then, the accident happened.

In October 1998, Raabe was at the wheel of his station wagon, blinded by headlights of oncoming traffic, when he barreled into a car that was waiting to make a left turn ahead of him. Twenty-four hours later, Raabe learned from his own hospital bed that Marie, sitting in the passenger seat, was killed on impact.

Today Raabe shows little physical evidence of the tragic car accident. No limp. No cane. No visible scars. But a deeper emotional loss and hurt remain.

As we sit at the dayroom table, Raabe grows silent when asked about Marie's death. The skin surrounding his eyelids, soft and creased by age, becomes moist.

"What can I say? I miss her dearly." He is silent again.

Penney Farms held a memorial service for Marie, but Raabe buried her in a family plot not far from the Wisconsin farm where he grew up. It is where he also wants to be buried.

These days, he has no other surviving family, aside from his sister, who lives in a

retirement community near his Wisconsin birth home. As for friends, most are at Penney Farms. Remarrying is not in the cards for him, he says, adding that it would be too hard to find someone who could share the trials that come with being a little person. Only Marie was able to do that.

But no pity parties here. Even with Marie gone, Raabe keeps busy, adhering to a strict daily regimen: eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner at Beyer House, the assisted-living complex where he lives; helping friends with their gardens; and making a daily run to the post

office to retrieve fan mail. He gets his exercise by riding an adult-sized tricycle.

He still drives — usually to the Jacksonville airport, so he can fly to autograph sessions nationwide. And he's been on the road a lot lately: Atlantic City for the World's Largest Antique Show; Chesterton, Indiana, site of the largest Ozfest; and Grand Rapids, Minnesota, home of Judy Garland and "Judyfest."

His greatest accomplishment?

The smiles on children's faces, he says. There is a pregnant pause, and then come the tears. "I wouldn't continue to do it if it weren't for their smiles."

Meanwhile, he won't say when he'll hit the road next. "At eighty-five, you learn not to plan too far ahead." But he is weighing an offer to do a five-day "Oz-dyssey"-themed cruise through the Caribbean this spring. The promoter is hoping to have the seven remaining Munchkins host the voyage, but Raabe is mum on whether he'll make the trip. "One day at a time," he smiles.

As we wind up our interview, he returns to what has his attention this day: Napster.

"To think someone so young, with so little, could make it so far," he says.

But then, look who's talking. 🍷

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