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Champs again!

Men's team brings home national title trophy for second straight year

Senior Tyler Nading scored a game-high 20 points and senior Sean Wallis added 16 points as the men's basketball team repeated as NCAA Division III national champions with a 61-52 victory over Richard Stockton College at the Salem Civic Center in Salem, Va. 

The win was the Bears' 13th straight postseason victory. WUSTL is now the fourth NCAA Division III team to repeat as national champions, joining North Park University (1978-80), University of Wisconsin-Platteville (1998-99) and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (2004-05).

"As you have found out all year long with this team, we find ways to win," Coach Mark Edwards said. "It's a dream come true," Wallis said. "To be able to go out there and play the way I did the whole tournament is something I am really proud of." Wallis was named the most outstanding player of the tournament after averaging 15.5 points and 7.5 assists per game in two games over the weekends. 

Wallis, who was named a second-team All-American by D1hoops.com following the game, finished his record-breaking season with 253 assists. He also broke J.J. Siepierski's (1993-96) all-time WUSTL assists record with 566.

Nading shot 9-of-11 from the field as he finished his four-year WUSTL career third in scoring with 1,552 points.

"My teammates did a great job finding me tonight," Nading said. "This is the best way to go out as a senior. This year's team had a completely new identity, and I am so happy for all of our teammates." 

Wallis had seven points and six assists to lead the Bears in the first half as WUSTL shot 46.2 percent (17-of-37) from the field. The defense was the story in the first half as the Bears held Richard Stockton without a field goal for 9:54 in the first half.

"It's a dream come true," Wallis said. "To be able to go out there and play the way I did the whole tournament is something I am really proud of." WUSTL won 20 of its past 21 games of the season to finish with the study's lead author and principal investigator, Gerald Andriole, M.D., professor of surgery. 

But it's too soon, he said, to make broad screening recommendations for all men based on the study's initial findings. 

"So far, only a minority of men enrolled in the PLCO study have died, so it may be premature to make generalizations about the ultimate results of the trial," he said. "We don't have enough data yet about the youngest men in the study — those in their 50s — and it may be that over time, we will, in fact, see a benefit from screening." 

Nearly 6,400 men are enrolled in the study at the School of Medicine. Robert Grubb III, M.D., assistant professor of surgery, is a collaborator and the study's second author.

The PLCO trial began in 1992 with funding from the study's lead author and principal investigator, Gerald Andriole, M.D., professor of surgery. 

By Caroline Arbanas

The prostate cancer screening tests that have become an annual ritual for many men don't appear to reduce deaths from the disease among those with a limited life expectancy, according to early results of a major U.S. study involving 76,000 men.

Results from the Prostate, Lung, Colorectal and Ovarian (PLCO) Cancer Screening Trial show that six annual screenings of prostate tumors but not fewer deaths from the disease. The study, led by School of Medicine researchers and conducted at 10 sites, appeared March 26 in the New England Journal of Medicine.

"The most important message is that for men with a life expectancy of seven to 10 years or less, it is probably not necessary to be screened for prostate cancer," said the study's lead author and principal investigator, Gerald Andriole, M.D., professor of surgery.

BY TONY FITZPATRICK

In the summer of 2008, it became everyday to fill up a gas tank when gasoline prices hit close to 84 per gallon. Transportation by road or air consumes fuel, which not only increases our dependence on foreign imports but also is a source of greenhouse gas emissions that impact climate and global warming.

A mechanical engineer at WUSTL is developing techniques that will lessen monetary pain at the pump by reducing the drag of airplanes, cars and trucks. Drag is an aerodynamic force that is the result of resistance a body encounters when it moves in a liquid or gaseous medium such as air. Reduction in drag means less fuel would be required to overcome the fluid resistance encountered by the moving vehicle.

Working with undergraduate and graduate students, K. Agarwal, Ph.D., the William Palm Professor of Engineering, has successfully demonstrated that the drag of airplane wings and cars and trucks can be reduced by employing active flow control (AFC) technology.

The idea behind AFC is to deploy actuators on the surface of vehicles to modify the flow in a way that the overall resistance is reduced. Using computational fluid dynamics software, Agarwal found that the actuators modify the flow, which results in drag reduction, which in turn reduces the fuel amount needed.

"The most promising actuators are the so-called synthetic jet or oscillatory jet actuators, which are embedded in the surface of the body (an airplane wing, for example) and essentially perform injection and suction of the fluid from the surface in a periodic manner," Agarwal said.

The transonic drag of an airplane wing can be reduced by 12 percent to 15 percent with the incorporation of actuators — about 20-30 percent optimally on the surface of the wing. 

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Schiele receives Dean's Medal from University Libraries

Shahid K. Baker, vice chancellor for scholarship re-sources and dean of University Libraries, presented the 2009 Dean's Medal to James E. Schiele, a member of the libraries' National Council and WUSTL alumnus, March 10 at a ceremony in Holmes Lounge.

In 2006, Schiele and his wife, Joan, donated the James E. and Joan Singer Schiele Print Collection, a group of rare prints that Schiele assembled over the years. The couple provides a living gift of scholarship to WUSTL, and the collection is one of the nation's finest collections of prints from the 15th to 19th centuries.

Schiele is a native of St. Louis and earned a bachelor's degree in engineering and director of the Clean Coal Consortium; and Edward S. Macias, Ph.D., provost, engineering and director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, a past trustee of the National Urban and Alcoholic Beverage Company.

He graduated from the University of San Francisco with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in education. Schiele was a member of the first graduating class at the University of San Francisco in 1971.

The Interfaith Youth Core (Iyc) is a national organization that seeks to provide training and support to students and faculty of all faiths who want to become more effective in working alongside one another, to help us discover other things we have in common. After the labor, there are 18 fellows from various religious backgrounds at universities around the nation, including Amherst College, Northwestern University and the University of Michigan.

T he annual Faces of Hope, sponsored by the Gephart Institute for Public Service, will be held at 4 p.m. April 2 in Wiltz Hall. A reception will follow.

Faces of Hope, a University-wide celebration of civic engagement and community service, will feature a poster session with displays from student groups, service-learning courses, community classes, and faculty and staff initiatives.

"Attendees will be amazed and inspired by the depth and breadth of community involvement represented," said Robi Battista, program director of the Gephart Institute. "This unique gathering gives us a chance to recognize high-lights of the past year as well as reaffirm the University's commitment to community service."

Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton and former chairman and chief executive officer of Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Schiele is a native of St. Louis and earned a bachelor's degree in history in Arts & Sciences in 1952 and a master's degree in liberal arts in 1959, both from Saint Louis University. He served as director of the Gephart Institute from 1989 to 2004, during which time the Institute grew from one to 24 programs.

Schiele served as chairman and CEO of St. Louis Screw & Bolt Co. from 1965-1999, when he sold the company. He remains a consultant for the company. He also served as chairman of the Schiele Foundation, which supports education and the arts in St. Louis and the region.

School of Engineering and Public Policy. He also serves on the International Advisory Council for Asia, and the Executive Committee of the United Nations World Food Program. He is a life trustee of the Saint Louis Art Museum and the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

For more information, e-mail Sanyu.Srinath@wustl.edu.
Bacteria that cause urinary tract infections (UTIs) make tools for stealing from their host that they’ve evolved from the same bacteria found in the gut, researchers at the School of Medicine and the University of Washington have found. These tools, compounds called siderophores, allow the bad bacteria to steal iron from their hosts, making it easier for the bacteria to survive and reproduce. The researchers also provide a potential way to target the bad strains of bacteria for eradication without adversely affecting the good strains, researchers report in a study published online Feb. 20 by PLoS Pathogens.

“When we treat an infection with antibiotics, it’s like dropping a bomb — nearly everything gets wiped out, whether it’s helpful or harmful,” said senior author Jeff Henderson, M.D., Ph.D., professor of orthopaedics in medicine. “We like to find ways to target the bad bacteria and leave the good bacteria alone, and these siderophores are exactly in that direction.”

UTIs are one of the most common infections, causing around $1.6 billion in medical expenses every year in the United States. Half of all women will experience a UTI at some point in their lives, and recurrent UTIs affect about 40 percent of these patients. Scientists say 90 percent of all UTIs are caused by a single bacterium, Escherichia coli (E. coli). E. coli that causes UTIs may come from the human gut, where several strains of the bacteria reside. Scientists think some of those strains help their human hosts by digging assistance and blocking other infectious organisms. To study how friendly and infection-causing E. coli strains differ, Henderson and colleagues at the Center for Women’s Infectious Disease Research at WUSTL used a new approach called metabolomics, which analyzes all the chemicals produced by a cell, including bacterial growth signals, toxins and waste products.

“This allows us to look at the end products of many genes working together,” said senior author Linda Sandell, M.D., Helen L. Stoever Professor of Molecular Microbiology. “We assess what all the various assembly lines are producing and which products disease-causing bacteria prefer to make, such as certain siderophores.”

E. coli bacteria studied in the experiment came from stool and urine samples from recurrent UTI patients treated at the University of Washington. Researchers found that bacteria from urine made more of two siderophores that help bacteria scavenge for iron and fight on their own survival.

There may be multiple ways to take advantage of the infectious bacterial strains’ reliance on siderophores. Researchers will try to block or disrupt the activity of the proteins that make siderophores, but they also may use what Henderson calls “siderophore-engineered bacteria.”

“To steal iron, siderophores have to be sent out from the cell, bind to the iron and then be taken back into the cell,” he said. “If we can design an antibiotic that looks like a siderophore, we might be able to trick only disease-causing bacteria into taking up the drug while leaving other bacteria alone.”

Henderson 

Conference to focus on art, aging

The Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging is hosting the 2009 Friedman Conference April 23 at 3 p.m. in the Center from 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

The conference, titled “In the Wake of Aging: Creativity and Expressiveness,” will feature presentations by internationally recognized speakers and artists who will share insights on how their art has evolved and been enjoyed by the aging process.

Carmen C. Collado, dean of the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts, and Lauren Godwin, president of Vectar Communications, will serve as moderators.

The program is free and open to the public, but reservations are required. To register, visit centeraging.wustl.edu or call 286-2441.

Human genetics subject of symposium

A March 30 symposium will commemorate the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth by bringing together four leading geneticists whose research focuses on defining the DNA changes that distinguish humans from our closest evolutionary relatives, the non-human primates. The symposium, jointly sponsored by the Department of Cell Biology and Physiology, and the Harvey A. Friedman Center, will be held in Moore Auditorium from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The scientists’ work lays the foundation for a more complete understanding of human evolution and the molecular basis of diseases that only affect humans. Richard K. Wilson, Ph.D., director of The Genome Center, will share information gleaned from sequencing human genomes. Evan Eichler, Ph.D., of the University of Washington has uncovered genetic duplications in human DNA that contribute to disorders like autism and schizophrenia. Ajit Varki, M.D., of the University of California, San Diego, investigates the many differences in sugar chemistry between humans and the great apes. Lucy R. O. Obenchain, Ph.D., of the University of Toronto, studies the genetic rearrangements that lead to an inherited syndrome in humans called Williams-Beuren.

No registration is required. For more information, call 362-6950.

Perfect match

Timothy and Molly Tran, both fourth-year medical students, open their letters on Match Day March 19 to learn they both will be residents at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. Timothy will be in anesthesiology, and Molly will be in emergency medicine. Of the 111 students who matched, 26 will do their residencies at Barnes-Jewish Hospital or the School of Medicine, and three will do their residencies at St. Louis Children’s Hospital.

Sandell named Mildred B. Simon Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery

Ideas for the work of Dr. Sandell and for the generosity of the late Mildred B. Simon, whose thoughtful gift has helped to make this important research possible.”

Sandell was installed as the Simon Research Professor by Larry J. Shapiro, M.D., executive vice chancellor for medical affairs and dean of the School of Medicine.

“Mildred Simon was tremendously generous to Washington University,” Shapiro said. “She established multiple professorships and made significant contributions to both faculty recruitment and the creation of endowments.”

Simon’s professorship will help provide financial support to allow Sandell to advance her laboratory studies gene regulation of extracellular matrix proteins and the mechanical properties of the extracellular matrix of the joint. The Simon professorship will also provide financial support to allow Sandell to advance her research on the molecular mechanisms involved in cartilage development and disease.

“We are very fortunate to have a scientist of Linda Sandell’s caliber in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery,” said Richard H. Gelberman, M.D., the Fred C. Reynolds Professor and head of the department. “Our department is able to attract top-flight surgeons with cutting-edge scientists, and both are represented in professors endowed by Mrs. Simon.”

Sandell was an active philanthropist who was especially generous to the School of Medicine. Born in Newport, Ark., she settled in St. Louis with her husband, Herbert Simon. He was an executive of J. Simon and Sons, a business founded in 1899 by his father, Jacob Simon. Herbert Simon died in 1940 at age 55. Mildred Simon died in 1998 at age 105, leaving a significant bequest to the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Her gift endowed two other professorships: K. Daniel Biers, M.D., chief of cervical spine surgery, is the Mildred B. Simon Distinguished Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, and Lawrence G. Lenke, M.D., co-chief of adult and pediatric spine surgery, is the Jerome J. Golden Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Sandell, the new Simon Research Professor, also is a professor of cell biology and physiology.

Come dancing

Students in the School of Medicine learn ballet dancing from Andrea Osman, assessment and admissions director at Central Institute for the Deaf, at the School of Medicine, through the Ballroom Dance Club in preparation for the annual Med Ball, held March 14 at the Hyatt Regency at the Riverfront. More than 500 students, faculty and staff from the School of Medicine attended the ball.

I am honored and grateful to receive this type of recognition, which I believe helps to recognize the entire research effort in our department,” Sandell said.

“We are fortunate to have many outstanding scientists making important contributions to the understanding of health and disease in bone and connective tissue, and we are responsible for making the development of one of the very best in the United States. I am grateful to be singled out for this honor, but I am just as proud to be a member of such an outstanding team,” Sandell said.
80th annual fashion show caps Saint Louis Fashion Week

By Lia Otten

Fashion is fun, challenging, inspiring and everywhere. It was a Labor Day weekend, and 11 seniors and seven juniors from the Saint Louis University School of Fashion Design & Marketing in the Department of Design & Visual Arts — home to the nation's oldest four-year fashion design program — will present the fruits of their labors in the school's 80th annual Fashion Design Show.

The 23-year-old, fully choreographed, Paris-style extravaganza — which serves as the culminating event of the school's Fall 2014 season — begins at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 27, in the Lustron Place Casino & Hotels.

"This is the second year that the University has been part of Saint Louis Fashion Week," said Leigh Singleton, associate professor and director of the fashion design program. "This collaboration has proved advantageous educationally as well as socially.

"The opportunity to act locally in harmony with this burgeoning fashion event in our own backyard, among schools with fashion design programs, is exciting. Our students learn a particular skill in their academic, but the skill set necessary for promotion, production, exhibition with real deadlines and for professionals is real more than anything else," Singleton said.

The full evening show will be in the very next step: "This is My Africa." Zina Saro-Wiwa, dir. and "Shoot the Moon." Moussa." Cheik Doukoure, dir. Brown Hall, Rm. L006. 935-5478.


"Lost One." Wondessen Deresse, dir. and "Eritrea." Eriq Deronnez, dir. All Saints' College, Portland, Ore. Rm. L006. 935-5478.

"The fully choreographed, Paris-style annual fashion show is run by students of the oldest four-year fashion design program in the nation.

Page, Elia Greens created a spiraling confection of chocolate and satin, and a tulle dress by Margaret Heston was inspired by 1950s pinup Bettie Page. Elia Greens created a spiral confection of chocolate and satin. A tulle dress by Margaret Heston was inspired by 1950s pinup Bettie Page.

Monday, April 7

7 a.m. and Noon and 6 p.m. Central Time Course. "The Life of a Fashion Designer." Rm. L006. 935-5478.


Monday, April 14

7 a.m. and Noon and 6 p.m. Central Time Course. "The Life of a Fashion Designer." Rm. L006. 935-5478.

Film


Concert to showcase post-Stalin Musical

By Cynthia Georges

Stalin's death in 1953 marked the beginning of a cultural and political thaw that gave way to a more open and diverse artistic expression. This period of political and cultural freedom in Soviet society is characterized by the breakdown of Stalin's cultural and political restrictions and the flourishing of a new, more relaxed artistic climate.

A concert that will be held on Monday, March 30, by the Department of Arts & Sciences and the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra's Community Partnership Program, titled "Uprooting Lenigrad, 1961," is the concert is free and open to the public; it is the kickoff of "MTSU Week," the 50th Century Center. University Press is the first to explore this period of musical history in detail.

Celebrated pianist Oli Shulam will perform for "Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion." A composition that is well-known internationally for its interpretations of both modernist and post-modernist repertoire. Shulam has performed with orchestras around the world and with leading conductors such as Nevena Movren, Roger Norrington and Christopher Hogwood.

Also on stage will be accompanists Johannes Anspach, Marylee Carlin, and professor of music and head of WUSTL's music department; Peter Heindorf and Martin Kennedy, assistant professors of theory and composition. Percussionists are Henry Claude, teacher of applied percussion in the Department of Music, and William James, principal percussion for the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra. Some of the program pieces were presented in a concert in the midst of the thaw, reflecting "the process of simultaneous discovery and rediscovery that characterized the thaw," according to a result of the new era, in which the Soviet government dominated, that dominated, that dominated, that dominated, that dominated.

The concert is one of thirty-five free events throughout the Community Partnership Program of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra presents each year to the St. Louis area. The Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra Community Partnership Program secures generous contributions from The Foundation, Monopolante Fondo, Des Lee Fine Arts Education Collaborative, MetroLife Foundation and the PATF.

For more information, call 355-5566 or e-mail lshulam@arts.wustl.edu.
Danforth University Center celebration begins

T o celebrate the dedication of the William H. and Elizabeth Gray Danforth University Center (DUC) April 17, events have been planned in most days in April leading up to the dedication to generate student, staff and faculty interest.

“We’re very excited to be celebrating the dedication of this gorgeous building,” said Leslie Seren, assistant director for programming/marketing at the Danforth University Center. “We decided to showcase at least one event most days of the month to acknowledge and celebrate how the Washington University community has come to use the DUC and get them excited about what we have to offer and about the building itself.”

The ceremony marking the dedication begins at 3 p.m. Friday, April 17 in the DUC north arcade and features a range of speakers, including Chancellor Emeritus William Danforth.

At conclusion, guests will gather in the center for a ribbon-cutting and reception.

The three-story, 116,000 square-foot facility features dining areas, lounges, meeting rooms and offices for student leaders and student service professional staff. It was designed to be a gathering place not only for students but also for the entire community — faculty, staff, friends, parents, alumni and visitors.

In January, the building received a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council. The LEED rating system is a third-party certification program and a nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of environmentally friendly buildings.

The schedule of events:
April 1: Build a DUCx4, Tisch Commons, noon-2 p.m.
April 2: March Madness Final Four Watch Zone, Fun Commons, noon-2 p.m.
April 3: Lunch, Love of Fun, Room 10, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
April 4: Lunch, Tisch Commons, 3 p.m.; Service Trip, Tisch Commons, 7-8 p.m.
April 8: Student Union Senate Meeting, DUC 276, 9 p.m.
April 9: Chamber Music Seminar at Lindell Lounge, 8 p.m.
April 10: Soapsop, Tisch Commons, noon; Cafeteria, The Caf, 10 p.m.
April 11: Lunch in Multicultural Leadership Roundtable, DUC 233, noon
April 12: Monthly Lunch With Professionals, DUC 248, noon
April 15: Graduate Student Senate Faculty Mentorship Awards, Formal Lounge, 3:40-6 p.m.
April 17: Sweet Candy Stand, north arcade, noon-2 p.m.
April 17: Danforth University Center Dedication Activities.
The events are sponsored by the Alumni and Development Office, Campus Life, Community Service Office, Department of Music in Arts & Sciences, Department of Graduate Students, Student Senate, Locks of Love, Office of Student Activities, Political Science Student Association and Student Union.

For more information on the monthly events, call 935-3964.

Swimmer Beyer wins national championship

Junior Alex Beyer became just the third male swimmer in WUSTL history to win a swimming national championship. He placed first in the 400-yard individual medley (IM) at the 2009 NCAA Division III swimming and diving championships March 19 in Minneapolis.

Beyer’s time of 3:53.43 in the 400 IM final set a new school and NCAA Division III record. Thanks to Beyer’s stand to the side of performances, the men’s team placed seventh overall at the NCAA championships, while the WUSTL women came in 16th place.

Beyer was an All-America honoree in four other events at the four-day meet, earning a pair of runner-up finishes. He was second in the 200-yard breaststroke (1:59.95), second in the 500-yard freestyle (4:22.60), third in the 800-yard freestyle relay (8:06.12) and fourth in the 400-yard freestyle relay (3:06.18), setting a school record in all four events.

Freshman Karina Stridh led the women’s team to its 14th-place finish at a five-time All-American. Stridh came in third in the 100-yard backstroke (56.27), fifth in the 100-yard freestyle (50.94), sixth in the 200-yard freestyle relay (23.56), 11th in the 500-yard freestyle (5:17.67) and 14th in the 400-yard freestyle relay.

The men’s team had five other student-athletes earn All-America honors at the meet: senior Kevin Kane, senior Andy Arnette, sophomore Jordan Chan, senior Kelly Kono, junior Jesse Lytton and freshman Sam Stehle. The Bears also had one All-American women’s team.

For more information or to RSVP, call the PAD at 935-5888 or e-mail pad@arts.wustl.edu.

Tracy Davis presents Morrin Lecture

T racy Davis, the Barber Professor of Performing Arts at Northwestern University and president of the American Society for Theatre Research, will present the 2009 Helen Clanton Morrin Lecture at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 1, in DUC 276, DUC 2nd Floor Lounge.

Titled "The Witnesses Protection Program: Making Theatre, Everyday," the talk is free and open to the public and sponsored by the Performing Arts Department (PAD) in Arts & Sciences. A reception will immediately follow in Holmes Lounge, located in Ridgley Hall, immediately adjacent to DUC.

Davis is a specialist in performing arts, theory and research methodology. She edits the Cambridge University Press series "Theatre and Performance Theory" and serves on the boards of numerous journals including "TDR: The Drama Review." Her most recent books are "The Cambridge Guide to Performance Studies."
Economists, legal experts to meet at CRIE conference

By Jennifer Martin

The Center for Research on Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CRIE) at the School of Law will hold its annual conference on "The Economics and Law of Innovation" April 2 and 3 in Anheuser-Busch Hall. The conference will begin at 8:30 a.m. each day, with the key note address at 12:10 in the same hall on Thursday, April 2.

The conference is to stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue and scholarship on innovation.

The conference is organized by the center’s director, Lisa Potts, Jerriann E. Henry Professor of Law, and Danielle Porter, Ph.D., law professor and department head in the department of mechanical engineering.

Proceeds from the event, which includes a $5 road race and a one-kilometer fun run, will benefit the Children’s Hospital and the National Cancer Institute.

For more information or to pre-register, visit news-info.wustl.edu/CRIE/conferences.

CRIE, initially funded by a grant from the Ford and GM Foundations, will soon be re-named the Center for Law, Innovation & Economic Growth.

For the Record

Notables

Obituaries

Hitzeman memorial set for March 29

A memorial service for Herbert H. Hitzeman Jr., senior vice chancellor emeritus, will be held at 3 p.m. Sunday, March 29, in Graham Chapel and will be led by Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton. A reception will follow in Holmes Lounge.

Hitzeman died Jan. 16, 2009. After earning a bachelor of fine arts degree at Washington University in 1953, Hitzeman returned to WUSTL 13 years later as an entry-level development officer in 1966. During his 24 years at WUSTL, Hitzeman spearheaded the University’s development, alumni and public affairs programs.

At the time of his retirement in 1990, Hitzeman headed one of the most successful fund-raising programs in the country. Under his leadership, the University raised $377 million in cash and more than $1.5 billion in capital campaigns. He died at the age of 77.

For more information, contact Assistant Dean Melissa Oehlmann in the University’s Office of Development at 935-9133 or melissa.oehlmann@wustl.edu.
Poet's perfect profession

Bang's 'impulse to write' leads to national literary honors

Mary Jo Bang was born one of the top literary honors in the country — the National Book Critics Circle (NBCC) Award in poetry — an impressive addition to her numerous other national awards for poetry. Yet Bang was nearly 48 years old before a career in writing and teaching poetry came into focus and she enrolled in a master of fine arts program at Columbia University in New York.

Until then, she had a notion that someday she would have the “luxury of time” to be a writer. Her love of reading and writing started early while growing up in St. Louis.

“I was an avid reader as a child — books were my friends,” Bang says, indicating that she reads voraciously even now — whether it’s Lilo or Brontë.

“Writing is a critical part of my life,” Bang says. “When you love reading, you learn. Oh, I would like to do that. I would like to tell a story!”

And it was through writing that Bang first found some solace from her grief following the June 2004 death of her 57-year-old son, Michael Donner Van Hook.

“Someday I'll find time!

In high school, she was on an advanced English literature track in college, she didn’t take any writing classes.

Her first husband, had her son Michael and divorced before she earned a bachelor’s degree, so she went on to get another, a master’s degree in 1975, both in sociology from Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

It was the height of the antiwar movement, and Bang was deeply concerned about Vietnam and social justice issues.

After graduation, she moved to Philadelphia, doing antiwar work with a Quaker group for a few years before returning to York in 1976 to enroll in a physician assistant degree program at Saint Louis University. She graduated at the top of her class and started a career in medicine.

In 1978, she married a high school friend, whom also later moved to Evanston, still working as a physician assistant.

Writing was out of the question with a full-time job and two busy boys. But not out of her dreams.

“In the back of my mind, there was this notion that ‘Someday I’ll find time, and I’ll be a writer.’ Bang says, “As you get older, it actually becomes a little odd that you maintain this idea — maybe even a delusion — that it will happen someday.”

Then “someday” came in the mail — a flyer from Northwestern announcing a new program for women, including a class in creative writing. It was in the evening, so her husband could watch the boys.

She sold the class that she was among a group of writers who continued to meet for a few years to hone their skills.

While she enjoyed her writing, a vacation in France sparked a new creative interest and eventu-
ally a new career.

Failed vacation pictures resulting from indecision and a new camera prompted her to enroll in photography courses at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

After her husband’s job transfer to England, she continued to study photography at the Polynesian Center of London, graduating with a bachelor’s degree with distinction in photography in 1989.

“The program was very interested in the relationship of image and text.”

So she began writing poems that somehow played off some photographs I was making, and I would make photographs to play off some text that I was writing. I was going back to writing, but now it was taking the form of poems.

Some of these poems were published in small journals.

Finding her calling

Back in the United States after three years of writing, she knew she didn’t want to return to medicine.

Earning a living as a writer seemed unrealistic, so she turned to photography, hoping to find time to write. As with most small businesses, it became all-consuming.

When she didn’t find commercial photographic success, Bang turned to teaching creative writing to adults in a continuing education program and she found her calling.

Elected to a professor position at Columbia University in Chicago, where she is part of a tradition of teaching creativity for two years and became committed to writing poetry.

After acceptance to Columbia University’s MFA program, Bang had her first book of poems — “Apology for Want” — written and published before she graduated in 1998 with an MA in poetry.

She won the 1996 Bardeman Literature Publishing Prize for best nonfiction book from the collection, and the NBCC cited “Apology for Want” as one of the “Notable Books in 1997.”

Thinking it wouldn’t be fair to turn poetry for Want as was her thesis after so much attention, she decided instead to write a new book of poems.


Bang joined WUSTL’s Department of English in 2000 as an assistant professor following a year as a prestigious Hodder Fellow at Princeton University.

Among the courses she teaches, one is poetry workshops and another is the “Art of Poetry” (or, as she calls it, “poetry’s greatest hit”).

Her other collections are “The Eye Like a Strange Balloon” (2004) and "Elegy," for which she won the NBCC Award as well as the 2005 Alice Faye di Castagnola Award.

In addition, "Elegy" was among The New York Times Book Review’s “100 Notable Books of 2008” and was selected by Publishers Weekly’s "2007 Best Books" list.

"Elegy" is a collection of 64 poems Bang said was inspired by following her son’s death. One of his paintings, “Firing the Neurons,” is the cover artwork.

Writing the book “took me outside of my grief for a moment,” Bang says. “It has become something that I didn’t think we did together, and there’s consolation in that. But it was not just the fact that she was the person whom I would not have been able to write, but there was a presence that comes out of ev-erything that happened because of that book that means that he is still present.”

Poe is a poet who, from book to book, surprises each time, from a reconsideration of the epichoric tradition to questioning the very usefulness of a tradition like elegy, in the wake of very real and immediate loss.

Now is a terrible ongoing and something that they hope will look different, that they will reconsider in the future, that the fun will continue to have thoughts — other people have thoughts — other people will think about — and so it could be compelling and so it could be consoling.

Mary Jo Bang (left) meets with Becca Jensen, a May 2009 MFA in poetry candidate, in her office. "It's been wonderful having Mary Jo as a reader and critic of my writing for the past two years," says Jensen, who had Bang as an adviser for the past year and is in her poetry workshop this year. "She is incredibly supportive and open-minded. I always write with certain voices in my head, readers in my mind ... Mary Jo will remain one of those voices for a long time.”