Tracy Moore, Enid Lee and Chris George are elevating the conversation about race, equity and the quest for systemic change.
A MESSAGE FOR OUR NEWEST ALUMNI

To our Fall Class of 2020 and Spring Class of 2021 graduates:

We know the final year of your degrees wasn’t what you had planned or could ever have expected.

But you pushed through the pandemic pivot – remote learning and ever-changing protocols – to reach a major milestone. You accomplished this despite missing many of the on-campus experiences we know and love.

Western marked your achievements virtually this year, but we look forward to reading your names aloud as you cross the stage in a traditional, in-person convocation ceremony soon.

Until then, be proud of all you have accomplished in these historic times. And know your alma mater and your alumni family numbering more than 328,000 around the world, are proud of you too.
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RESEARCH TARGETS COVID-19 VARIANTS OF CONCERN
Using state-of-the-art imaging capabilities, researchers at Western’s Imaging Pathogens for Knowledge Transmission (imPaKT) Facility are using fluorescent markers attached to the COVID-19 virus in animals to learn how variants of concern grow and hide in the body. This work will help inform how new vaccine derivatives and therapeutics can be used to strengthen our protection against all forms of COVID-19. The imPaKT team is one of a handful in Canada working with the live COVID-19 virus, and their findings will be shared with the Coronavirus Variant Rapid Response Network.

NEW EDI INITIATIVES SUPPORTED WITH $6-MILLION INVESTMENT
Western is investing $6 million to support new equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. “This funding signifies Western’s deep commitment to pursuing meaningful, systemic change as we work together to embed EDI principles into the institutional structure of the university,” said Sarah Pritchard, acting provost and vice-president (academic). Initial funding of $4 million has been earmarked for the recruitment of Black and Indigenous faculty members. A one-time allocation of $1 million will support the EDI Pathways program, which aims to enhance instructors’ skills in inclusive education. With the remaining $1 million in funding, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives will create a library of resources accessible to all faculty, and a new Indigenous curriculum developer role will facilitate the respectful integration of these resources into courses.

WESTERN LAUNCHES NEW CLIMATE CHANGE MAJOR
The climate crisis is one of the most urgent challenges of our lifetime, and one of the biggest concerns for today’s youth. “It’s going to be a big part of their lives because they’ll be the ones responding to it,” said professor James Voogt, chair of the department of geography and environment. “But they’re energized to take action.” A new major at Western, Climate Change and Society, aims to harness that passion. First of its kind in Canada, the program concentrates on the human dimensions of climate change and the associated consequences, challenges and responses. The wide-ranging impact of climate change will be studied across many disciplines, including anthropology, biology, economics, history, philosophy, political science and sociology.

‘PERSEVERANCE’ PAYS OFF
Raymond Francis, PhD’14 (Engineering), is part of the NASA team that successfully landed the Perseverance space rover on Mars earlier this year. “I’ve been very fortunate to work on such exciting projects,” he said. “Even if you operate planetary missions on a daily basis, a Mars landing isn’t an everyday event.” Since its landing, Francis and the other engineers on the science operations team have been directing the rover in its quest to collect rock and soil samples that can be sealed and stored for a possible return to Earth.

$5.5 MILLION GIFT EXPANDS ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
Western students in every faculty can now benefit from entrepreneurial support and education thanks to a visionary gift of $5.5 million from the Pierre L. Morrissette Family Foundation. The gift brings two decades of entrepreneurship research, education and programming created at Ivey Business School to students in all disciplines, and to entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey. The Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship will create a single ecosystem, leadership structure and brand across campus – all under the guidance of a consolidated advisory board. “Entrepreneurship has been very successful at Ivey,” said Pierre Morrissette, MBA’72, LLD’10, executive chairman of Pelmorex Corp. “Now we’re going to take that energy and enthusiasm for entrepreneurship across all faculties, providing an opportunity for students in engineering, in health sciences, in music, to create businesses, to commercialize knowledge and to convert that energy into realizable success.”
Western has moved up into the top 200 of the QS World University Rankings, which assesses institutions based on reputation, teaching, research/scholarship and global outreach. The 2022 rankings, released in June 2021, placed Western 170th worldwide – advancing by 33 spots from its previous position among more than 1,300 universities from 90 countries.

The Times Higher Education’s Impact Rankings, released in April 2021, positioned Western in the top five per cent of more than 1,100 universities from 94 countries and regions, based on their commitment to sustainable development.

honouring the lives of madiha salman and salman afzaal

Madiha Salman was an accomplished engineer, fiercely committed to equality and devoted to her family. She was working towards her PhD in civil engineering, having arrived at Western in 2009 to complete her Master of Engineering Science. Her husband, Salman Afzaal, filled with similar determination to succeed, earned his master’s in health sciences from Western in 2010.

Together, they had come to Canada from Pakistan with hopes of a better future for their family. The entire Western community and all of Canada expressed shock, anger and grief following a hate crime on June 6, 2021 that claimed Madiha’s and Salman’s lives, along with those of their 15-year-old daughter, Yumna, and Afzaal’s 74-year-old mother. Together, they had come to Canada from Pakistan with hopes of a better future for their family. The entire Western community and all of Canada expressed shock, anger and grief following a hate crime on June 6, 2021 that claimed Madiha’s and Salman’s lives, along with those of their 15-year-old daughter, Yumna, and Afzaal’s 74-year-old mother.

A fund raised to honor the memory of Madiha Salman and Salman Afzaal will be divided between two scholarships established at Western.

The Madiha Salman Memorial Scholarship in Civil and Environmental Engineering is designed to support a female graduate student enrolled in a full-time graduate program in a civil and environmental engineering course of study.

The Salman Afzaal Memorial Scholarship in Physical Therapy is awarded to a female graduate student enrolled in a doctoral or master’s program in physical therapy.

creating more work experiences for students

Western has joined The Business + Higher Education Roundtable (BHER), a national consortium of business, university, college and polytechnic partners aiming to create more work experience opportunities for young Canadians. President Alan Shepard will serve as the university’s representative on BHER.

“Students have been profoundly impacted by the loss of job opportunities and work-integrated learning placements throughout this pandemic,” said Dave McKay, MBA’92, LLD’19, president and CEO of RBC and chair of BHER. “In response, we have an historic opportunity in front of us to take a more progressive approach to lifelong learning and keep reinventing our higher-education system – better linking workplaces and classrooms.”

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Alan Shepard met with Kris Dundas, BA’94, MA’95, to discuss the strategic plan and what it means for the university. Following months of consultation, Western has released its new strategic plan, Towards Western at 150. President Alan Shepard sat down with Kris Dundas, BA’94, MA’95, to discuss the plan and what it means for the university.

In the midst of, and now coming out of, a pandemic – why was this the right time to create a new strategic plan? There was a pent-up hunger to think about Western’s future, and there was an eagerness not to wait. Although we delayed planning by about six months, there was strong interest in moving ahead and not letting the pandemic distract us from our longer-term vision.

You chaired a 36-person strategic planning steering committee. Why was a group with broad representation like this so important? The committee had a strong balance of students, staff, and faculty, and representation from the Board and Senate, and senior administrators. We wanted a broad-based group that would represent the Western community’s ideas, visions, and concerns. The group was extremely collaborative, and forward looking and we had lots of productive debate.

And when the members of this group conducted the nearly 100 consultations with the larger Western community, the facilitators were from the group we were consulting with. They were from their faculty, they were fellow students – there was a simpatico element to that.

In general, what are your impressions of Western’s research strengths and potential moving forward? We’re a large, complex institution and we have dozens of strengths. We have some that have received a lot of attention historically – areas in which we are still strong. But I want to be careful going forward. We certainly need to make investments right across the board, but to keep all of our areas as strong as they can be, we’re going to need to make some ‘super’ investments in areas where we think we have a chance to really stand out internationally.

It’s also important to have balance. Some of these areas are of great importance today, and some will be critically important for the future. We’re trying to balance between, for example, fundamental research and applied research, between a technology-driven view of the world, and an arts and humanities view of the world, and so forth.

There are many different kinds of contributions that can be made in research, teaching and service to the public good. And they all matter.

There has been a lot of discussion about online teaching and learning during the pandemic. What have we learned that can be applied long term? We’ve learned we can pivot from face-to-face to online. We’ve also learned, that for most of us, online is a supplement and not the primary model for learning.

Online learning will likely emerge more strongly in continuing studies or life-long learning, where people are past traditional university age, perhaps raising families, working full-time or have other circumstances that limit their ability to devote themselves to full-time study or to be in London.

For undergraduates, we’ve learned online work is supplemental to, and not replacing, face-to-face instruction and engagement. Much of what you learn happens in a classroom, but a lot happens in the libraries, labs, studies, with friends, with instructors in their offices or in the hallways. Through-out the pandemic, we have been craving and missing that.

Enriching the student experience is an important part of this plan. What might that look like? The student experience at Western is already strong and, of course, our hope is that we protect what’s great about it and continue to build on it. The new strategic plan calls for new investments in career advising and development, and in experiential learning opportunities. These experiences are meaningful and we know students deeply value them.

“We found a strong interest in social justice, broadly, and in developing a strong institutional focus on combating structural inequities in our society and in university education, specifically.” – Alan Shepard

The notion that Western is still a face-to-face, residentially intensive university means we need to continue to invest in the physical structures of the university to support the student experience. For example, we’re building a new fieldhouse, where students can run and play soccer in the winter months.

The plan also calls for new investments in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). That includes access for marginalized groups and first-generation students – those who may not come from privileged backgrounds and who, historically, might not have considered coming to Western.

That leads nicely to the second theme of the plan, which is about people, community and culture. You mentioned EDI – what did the committee hear from the community on this specifically?

We’ve heard the Western community is ready for – and I would say demands – greater institutional attention to EDI. We also heard about demands for greater attention to sustainability, which might seem at first blush to be unrelated. But it’s actually quite related because it’s all about social justice.

We found a strong interest in social justice, broadly, and in developing a strong institutional focus on combating structural inequities in our society and in university education, specifically.
All universities need innovation.

A bold future together

The third theme area is about Western’s place in the world. There are strong commitments to London and region in the plan. In a global world, why are local connections so important?

The previous strategic plan called for internationalization and a lot of progress was made on that front. Western went from roughly two per cent international students to 14 per cent today. That’s important because all universities with great impact are magnets for students to come from around the world.

This plan calls for a renewal of that emphasis on internationalization, with a goal of achieving a 20 per cent target for international students. What’s important about this is that you create a blend of domestic students and international students who learn from each other, who might represent different economic systems, different religious faiths, different ways of seeing the world, different languages. They’re all coming together to build their own lives, but also to help build Canada and the world.

At the same time, it’s critical to remember that Western operates in a particular place – London, Ontario – and that we want to do public good locally as well as nationally. The community has a huge amount to offer us, and we have a lot to offer as well.

During the strategic plan consultations, the committee heard a lot about innovation. Why is innovation important to Western?

All universities need innovation.

We’ve started a new program in data strategy and a certificate and degree programming in data analytics is emerging. That’s just one example. As the world changes, Western needs to change with it and, when we can, be leaders in that change.

Interdisciplinary academic programs are especially appealing to our students. We have a new climate change program that integrates science, social science and the humanities, an ideal example of interdisciplinary work in which a student could study in four or five different departments. Not 20 courses in a single discipline, but much more kaleidoscopic, personalized programs of study where students can put together their own programs that dovetail with their academic interests and their sense of the future for themselves and for the world.

The more you get people invested in their own education and making those choices, the more meaningful their experience and engagement will be.

Alumni contributed to the strategic planning consultation process – what role do they play in helping Western achieve the goals in the plan?

Alumni bring with them their education, their skill set, their experiences, but also the sense of the reputation of the institution. After they complete their degree, they continue to be part of our ecosystem. As that ecosystem gets stronger and stronger, and alumni are more nationally and internationally engaged, everybody wins. It’s good for alumni to have Western be strong; it’s good for Western to have our alumni be strong.

Our alumni have gone on to great careers, and commitments of volunteer roles and leadership in many different arenas. There’s a circularity to that system in which their achievements and their successes help build Western and Western helps build the next generation of alumni citizens.

Are there any other important aspects of the plan that you wish to touch on?

I want to talk about entrepreneurship. We want innovation in curricula and degree programs, but we also need change outside the curriculum.

Not only will we make new investments in career advising and getting people ready for life beyond university, but also, we will teach them some interesting ways of seeing the world around entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship. As a university we want to serve the public good – our students are eager to do the same when they graduate.

In the end, what will it take to ensure this plan is successful?

This plan reflects not only what the Western community told us was important to them, but I also think it anticipates where postsecondary education is headed. At the end of the day it will be the students, faculty, staff and alumni that have made Western a special place to learn and work that will make all the difference. We need everyone to embrace the plan. To bring their ideas, their intellect, their creativity and an open mind. As a collective, if we can harness all that energy, we will be successful.
Tracy Moore, Enid Lee and Chris George are elevating the conversation about race, equity and the quest for systemic change

When video of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police surfaced on news channels and social media sites in May 2020, it sparked something advocates against anti-Black racism say they had not seen before.

“Having talked about this for 33 years... it was the first time I had heard so many specific reference to systemic racism, and that part of the conversation changed,” said long-time anti-racism educator Enid Lee, BA’74 (Brescia). “People often talk about racism as an episode, but the visual experience caused people to see this is not just a one-off thing, but that it has deep roots in the way in which society is structured historically.”

On June 14, 2021, Lee joined fellow alumni Tracy Moore, MA’00, daytime television host, and Chris George, BA’01, portfolio manager, Hockey Diversity Alliance advisor and BlackNorth Initiative chair, for a discussion moderated by Idil Mussa, MA’13, producer with CBC Radio’s World Report.

Now based in Santa Cruz, Calif., Lee is an internationally renowned consultant on equitable education.

“I think I’ve heard the terms ‘systemic racism’ or ‘structural racism’ more since George Floyd than I’ve heard in the 35 years prior to that. Those terms led me to say, ‘Okay, we’re finally going deep now,’” she said.

Real conversations around racism began to take centre stage as well, says Moore, who hosts the popular lifestyle television show Cityline, and has made it a personal mission to elevate diversity and equity on camera and off.

“I’ve been speaking about race and gender forever, but there was never really a platform to talk about it. What I found was the conversations I was having in private, with my husband or my Black girlfriends, I was now being asked to have in public spaces and very white spaces,” Moore said.

This change of climate around racial equity is also happening in sectors that have traditionally been white-dominated. There is now a “resounding understanding” around systemic racism that was never there before, said George, a former professional hockey player, NHL draft pick and Western Mustang (1998-2000) who is now a portfolio manager at Scotia Wealth Management.

“I believe the global pandemic that inadvertently forced people to be grounded and more connected, albeit virtually, has also allowed them to draw on some fundamental emotions, like empathy. ‘We certainly are in a moment where people are trying to better understand our situation, and then literally asking what they can do to help. I’m optimistic that our community seems to be more connected than ever’, said George, whose family of Jamaican origin immigrated to Canada in the late 60s.

Following are excerpts from the panel discussion on how these alumni navigate challenges around racial equity, ultimately becoming influential figures in their own industries and elevating the conversation around systemic racism and diversity.

The Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.
Having this conversation with other Western alumni makes me wish I could go my year there all over again, but with support. I wonder what that would feel like?

IM: Many media organizations are working toward being more inclusive. I’m part of the CBC, and I know we’re doing a lot of work in that area. Media companies in this country traditionally have not done a good job of representing Canada’s diversity. What do you think needs to happen to make real, lasting change?

TM: We need more sponsorship opportunities, and we need to go way past mentoring. Mentoring is great, but now we need to pull that person up and say, “I see good things in you. I’m going to get you to position of power.” I need to know that the interns or receptionists, or people who are coming up in the ranks also have a place where they can be seen, and that’s not above them. From family, I learned to be unapologetic about being Black and having other Black people with me.

I have seen some differences in the direction and way we do things at Rogers. Our president, Jordan Banks, BA’90, is a really good champion and is hell-bent on making these changes, and I put a lot of stock in him. I’ve seen my input actually help change the trajectory of certain things we’ve done over the past year, but what I say to the leaders is that I’m in a very visible position of power. I need to know that the interns or receptionists, or people who are coming in the ranks also have a place where people will listen to them and they can contribute.

IM: Do you feel a sense of responsibility, as a Black woman with this huge platform, to speak out against systemic racism?

TM: I take great responsibility in what I say. I think there are a lot of people in the spotlight who say, “I’m not a role model, stop looking at me. It doesn’t matter if I want to be one or not.” People are looking to see how I act and what I say. As part of a marginalized community, there is added weight in how we’re perceived because, unfortunately, whatever we do is going to be sort of emblematic of the race for some reason. I don’t want to disappoint anyone, so I absolutely take responsibility for the things I say and for making change. It’s the whole reason I got into journalism.

I was supposed to be a news reporter, so how did I end up on a lifestyle show? That was never the plan. I was supposed to be in war-torn areas, talking about populations that needed help and were underserved—and here I am talking about stilettos and sofas. But what I realized is that even in this lifestyle space, a lot of change can happen. There are a lot of people watching and listening. Even outside of my job, volunteerism has always been a very big part of my life—making sure I’m a good sort of role model. I’m speaking to kids, or immigrant populations that need my help. That happens off camera all the time, and has since I was in high school. I take the role very seriously and I’m okay with that. It’s not going to be forever. I’ll be on air for a while and then I’ll be off air and I’ll be the work I do off air that really counts. Right now, I’m just using this opportunity to the best of my ability.

A lesson in history

Idi Mussa: You have been fighting against anti-Black racism for decades and when you are changing the status quo, people always want to push back against that. Has that become easier now, or is it still the same for you?

Enid Lee: I have a slogan: “Expect racism, but do not accept racism.” Expect it. So I don’t have to wonder, “Why is this happening?” I understand it’s structural and systemic. Racism impacts every part of our organizations, our procedures, even those “token” arrangements such as our information and communication systems. I know we have got to work on those. In some ways it has felt easier because more people seem to understand that now. The regret is that it had to come to this. I understand the challenge, but I’m glad more people are talking about it. You are doing good work if there is pushback; that’s what I say in my sessions.

IM: After nearly 30 years advocating and pursuing anti-racist education, what have the biggest learnings been for you and how have they shaped your approach to education?

EL: Let me go back to Western. We had something there known as the ‘Black table’. Many Black students used to have lunch at that table and there we had community. Students at ‘the Black table’ were from everywhere, Caribbean, West Africa… From that community came a lot of help; help just navigating Western, which as you can imagine, in the 70s was pretty white. For instance, when some of us got student jobs at D.B. Weldon Library, we would help each other from the “Black table” find jobs there.

Another source of my learning were the activities that had taken place at Sir George Williams University, now Concordia, the year before I arrived at Western. Students were protesting the university administration’s decision regarding a complaint of racism. The spirit of student anti-racist activism was part of my education around racism.

In addition, I came from Antigua, a small Caribbean island, with godparents and parents who were both educators under a colonial government. My mother was very clear where white people stood—and that was not above her. From family, I learned to be unapologetic about being Black and having other Black people with me.

Family history, community activism, study and writing about anti-racism had an impact on my work as the first race relations supervisor in the former North York Board of Education in 1985. Part of my responsibility involved working with others to implement the policy for Affirmative Action for Racial Minorities, as it was called then. There was a significant difference between the number of white people who worked at that Toronto school board and the number of people of all other racial groups combined. In fact, only about six per cent of the staff at that district were people of colour. At that time, the district was saying, “Yes, we want people of diverse backgrounds. That helped me do the work. When I looked around the table, I thought, ‘Yes, that was coming through the door, what could you say?’ Are they here just because they are Black? No! They are here because they are excellent! And we have missed out on getting them before.”

IM: One of the goals of Western’s new strategic plan is to create a more equitable and inclusive culture. What advice do you have for the university in achieving this?

EL: Unless we have a historical perspective, we are not going to go as deep as we should. Western needs to look at its historic record. Philippe Ruchton, a psychology professor in the 80s whose research focused on race and intelligence, comes to mind. Know the historical roots of racism within your own institution, so that you will know what needs to be dug up, addressed or turned around.

The point of history is not to shame and to defeat; it is to expose, so we can correct, and put emphasis and energy and resources in the right areas.

“Expect racism, but do not accept racism.”

– Enid Lee

Another component is having a culturally responsive methodology of teaching. The experiences in any plans. Many times policies don’t take into account students with a wide range. That human experience beyond the grades is important. What is your experience as a student of whatever racial identity? Does your life matter to you and at this institution?

Other essential elements are structures to ensure that the work is done. People write policies, and they must be followed up by questions, like “Where are the resources?” What is the report card that Western is going to put out? Which students will benefit

A renowned anti-racism advocate, Enid Lee, BA’74, has been fighting for racial equity for more than 30 years. The consultant, author and international expert on equitable education was celebrated in the 2016 edition of 100 Accomplished Black Canadian Women, a publication that aims to inspire Black women and girls.
from this?” We knew it’s not going to be done in one fell swoop and that the change is often not permanent. It must constantly be refurbished. Yes, the climate is less racist, the access is greater, and the hiring reflects the rich racial diversity of humanity and all its talent. It means you are ready for the next level. These are always my words to those who say they want to change systems. And then there are the students, that invaluable resource that every institution has to draw on – the young people who are there with their fantastic social media. When I think of what we didn’t have in the 70s, and what you have now, I think of maximizing these tools for equity, also knowing they can be weaponized and used in the service of racism. Look at how we can make the most of the new tools for bringing humankind together, disseminating ideas, and transforming our world for justice, joy and generosity. It’s an exciting time to be alive.

If ever there was a time for writing a new page in our society, a time to address anti-Black or anti-racism policies, it’s now. It’s an exciting time to be a part of the process that helps place the Black North Initiative on a more permanent footing. It’s a part of the process that helps place the Black North Initiative at its front and center, its heart. It’s a part of the process that helps place the Black North Initiative, and the others, in the front and center. It’s a part of the process that helps place the Black North Initiative in the boardrooms, in the boardrooms today? Do you still feel the urgency? I do. I’m 45 and I built a valuable business. I do a great job for my clients and I work at a great company. We’re not going anywhere, right? But when we’re not in the news anymore, we’re still going to be in the boardrooms figuring this out. I think that’s what’s happening now, and I’m optimistic we’re laying the foundations for sustainable change.

IM: In the public and private sector, there hasn’t ever really been a problem recruiting Black people. The problem has always been a lack of advancement opportunities, and that they’re not occupying decision-making roles. How are you finding boardrooms today? Do you still feel like the only one?

CG: I am one of the only ones, yes. But the Black North Initiative is certainly a large and very organized group. More than 500 companies have signed a pledge, part of which is about reaching hiring targets. There’s more than 300 volunteers like myself...and now we get in the room and help them achieve these targets. We’re also deliberately going into the universities and bringing a part of the process that helps place them. And we’re being welcomed into that process. The fruits of our labour will be that next generation.

“A movement, not a moment.”
– Chris George

Cover story: Speaking truth

Idil Mussa: You occupy spaces that are known to lack diversity – the NHL and financial services. Tell me about the reception you’ve received in addressing anti-Black racism or racial equality.

CG: I grew up playing hockey. I’ve typically been the only Black hockey player on my team, never mind the league. I’ve been on Bay Street for almost 20 years – 10 at BMO and nine at Scotiabank. Throughout the entire time I’ve been the only Black guy in my office, so it’s certainly been a unique journey. I just got my work done, kept my head down and hit my targets.

But over the last year, it’s been a little bit different. I’m at a place in my career and life where I now have a voice, connections and the strength to dig deeper, and to use my voice to hopefully help the generation that’s coming behind us. There’s just so much talent in our community and our allies are starting to understand that diversity is strength. We really need to capture this moment and bring that to the table.

IM: What was your experience like as a Black hockey player and how did it shape your advocacy around encouraging diversity in a sport that’s very, very white?

CG: Hockey literally is a white sport: it’s 97 per cent white and 75 per cent non-American. It’s a global sport that is not connected to the Black American experience, specifically.

Last summer, nine current NHL players started a group called the Hockey Diversity Alliance and I joined them as an advisor. Later that summer, the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks walked out in protest of the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin. The NHL was slower to respond: it took them a few days to walk out. The Hockey Diversity Alliance was guiding and advising the players on what they should say and how they should act. Again, remember you’re guiding all white, mostly non-American players. When they did walk out, I just kept sitting on a Zoom call in my office. It was a very proud moment for us, as we were asked as an authority for help. I may be optimistic by nature, but I feel like we have this moment where we have the fundamental empathy that’s required, we’re organized and we have talents. We also have people like Enid [Lee]. We can finally give her the platform, resources and support to execute what she’s been working on her whole life.

IM: Hockey has been undergoing a bit of a racial reckoning, and you’ve been pivotal in that. The NHL has announced initiatives to combat racism and boost inclusion, but just this past season Edmonton Oilers defenseman Ethan Bear, who’s Indigenous, received racist messages on social media following a series-ending loss to the Winnipeg Jets. Are NHL initiatives enough to stamp out this kind of racism?

CG: Sometimes progress isn’t in a straight line. We have to realize we’re making certain sectors feel uncomfortable, and they’re enabled and empowered on social media in the same ways. I think we have to be stronger than ever as we prepare for this potential backlash, as we’ve seen recently with the horrific act against Muslims in London [Ont].

I myself experienced racism in London. I was coming home after a game one night and a biker gang came up to me, hurled the N-word at me, knocked me out with brass knuckles and kicked me unconscious. It was an extremely blatant racist act. I was a 20-year-old man at the time. Fortunately, people carried me to the hospital, where I got eight stitches in my head. Looking back at it now as a 45-year-old, I remember feeling almost guilty. It was like I didn’t want people to know what had happened. I didn’t want to be that Black guy who was getting in trouble. I didn’t want to get kicked off the team. At the time, I was happy we were able to keep it quiet and that I didn’t get punished. I literally did nothing wrong, except I was Black in the wrong spot.

Right now, as much as you probably pick up a tone from me that I’m optimistic, that we’re organized and we have these allies – we still have to realize change is not received by everyone. We need to be really vigilant with how strong and connected we are. It’s a movement, not a moment.

The next leg is going to be more behind-the-scenes, the really hard work. When we’re no longer the top news story, that’s the real grassroots stuff.

The Black North Initiative: Led by the Canadian Council of Business Leaders Against Anti-Black Systemic Racism, the Black North Initiative (BNI) is on a mission to end anti-Black systemic racism by utilizing a business-first mindset. Western has joined the BNI, with President Alan Shepard representing the university on the education committee.

To combat racism and boost inclusion, the BNI has announced initiatives. The Hockey Diversity Alliance and I joined them as an advisor. Later that summer, the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks walked out in protest of the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin. The NHL was slower to respond: it took them a few days to walk out. The Hockey Diversity Alliance was guiding and advising the players on what they should say and how they should act. Again, remember you’re guiding all white, mostly non-American players. When they did walk out, I just kept sitting on a Zoom call in my office. It was a very proud moment for us, as we were asked as an authority for help. I may be optimistic by nature, but I feel like we have this moment where we have the fundamental empathy that’s required, we’re organized and we have talents. We also have people like Enid [Lee]. We can finally give her the platform, resources and support to execute what she’s been working on her whole life.

IM: We knew the importance of building trust and I joined them as an advisor. Later that summer, the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks walked out in protest of the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin. The NHL was slower to respond: it took them a few days to walk out. The Hockey Diversity Alliance was guiding and advising the players on what they should say and how they should act. Again, remember you’re guiding all white, mostly non-American players. When they did walk out, I just kept sitting on a Zoom call in my office. It was a very proud moment for us, as we were asked as an authority for help. I may be optimistic by nature, but I feel like we have this moment where we have the fundamental empathy that’s required, we’re organized and we have talents. We also have people like Enid [Lee]. We can finally give her the platform, resources and support to execute what she’s been working on her whole life.

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I am one of the only ones, yes. But the Black North Initiative is certainly a large and very organized group. More than 500 companies have signed a pledge, part of which is about reaching hiring targets. There’s more than 300 volunteers like myself... and now we get in the room and help them achieve these targets. We’re also deliberately going into the universities and bringing a part of the process that helps place them. And we’re being welcomed into that process. The fruits of our labour will be that next generation.
Western is undergoing a transformation

By Debora Van Brenk, BA’86, MA’87

From a net-zero energy space for budding entrepreneurs, to an Indigenous solstice lounge and bright new wellness centre, Western’s building plans are helping transform campus into a more sustainable, inclusive place. More than 300 capital projects are scheduled for this year.

Some “small” projects pack a big visual punch – replacing the track and turf at TD Stadium, for example – while other upgrades, such as replacing chillers at the Imaging Pathogens for Knowledge Translation (ImPaKT) Facility, provide crucial behind-the-scenes improvements. The signature project, and the largest of the year, will be the start of construction on a new Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre – a building as remarkable for its sustainable design as for its role in bringing people, business and ideas together.

It will be Western’s first net-zero energy building (total energy generated will be equal to or more than the energy it consumes) and will feature small and large interior spaces where students, faculty and staff can turn ideas into innovative businesses.

Visitors to campus will also notice a “massive transformation” of outdoor pathways, gathering areas and natural spaces – part of Western’s Open Space strategy. Campus will also be more bike- and pedestrian-friendly.

“We want to be ready for the next century; to be good stewards of this beautiful campus – and to do that, we have to make strategic investments,” said Lynn Logan, vice-president (operations and finance). Overall, capital investments for the coming year will total $153 million, including $55.4 million on new construction and $34.5 million for major renovations.

Among the major builds/rebuilds in progress or newly completed are: retrofits for Thames Hall to create a full-service wellness centre; more collaborative research and study space in the D.B. Weldon Library; a brighter, better student area in Somerville House; planning for a new gathering hub on the east end of campus; repurposing the former Faculty of Education library into an Indigenous learning space; and beautifying open spaces.

Logan said the overarching purpose of each is to support the university’s teaching, learning and research mission, and to improve the student experience now and for the future.

Elizabeth Krische, associate vice-president (facilities management), said, “The projects are all intended to grow, modernize and beautify the amenities we have for students, faculty and staff. We’re repurposing some spaces and building new ones, as we plan for a campus that will serve this generation and generations to come.”

Krische added, “If there’s a predominant theme, inside and out, it’s a focus on more and better open spaces. Even the new and repurposed buildings have lots of natural light and that makes a huge difference.”
Western Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre: A pre-eminent interdisciplinary entrepreneurial space

**Vision:** A place where innovative and collaborative business ideas can germinate and thrive. For use by everyone who has ideas for inventing, making, growing and sharing business ideas.

**Features:** Western’s first net-zero energy building, includes geothermal (ground-source) heat and cooling; green roof; triple-glazed windows; courtyard opens into great hall and event spaces; windows, windows, windows (with birdstrike-prevention measures); generous use of natural light and space; maker and co-working spaces; common lobby on main floor.

**Architects:** Perkins+Will, Cornerstone Architecture

**Space:** 100,000 square feet. Located between Law Building and Western Student Services Building.

**Timing:** Construction summer 2021 to 2022

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Thames Hall: Gym, kinesiology offices and classrooms retrofitted to become wellness centre

**Vision:** Holistic approach to student wellness, activity and well-being with amenities that are welcoming and available to all students.

**Features:** Calming, inclusive spaces with three-storey atrium repurposed from former gym; gathering spaces and rooms bordering on atrium have open walls; private office, clinical, gathering spaces are approachable and accessible.

**Architect:** Tillman Ruth Robinson

**Timing:** Construction completed fall 2021

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D.B. Weldon Library: Major renovation

**Vision:** Update and renew the space to meet current and future learning needs: a place that recognises and enables collaborative, multi-resource learning.

**Features:** New learning commons; updated mechanical and electrical systems; staff room.

**Architects:** Perkins+Will, Cornerstone Architecture

**Timing:** First phase completed fall 2021

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Open spaces: Sustainability and beautification

**Vision:** Builds on Western’s Open Space Strategy to accommodate future growth on campus while making it more friendly to and safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Memorable, welcoming, beautiful, functional, safe and sustainable public spaces that embed stewardship into the landscape.

**Features:** Unified look throughout outdoor studying, gathering, pedestrian spaces; paving stones and benches; new welcome plaza at base of University College Hill; McIntosh plaza and Kent rain garden in front of Physics and Astronomy Building; Oxford Square at north corner of Social Sciences Building; Talbot Music walkway between Music Building and International and Graduate Affairs Building.

**Architect:** Cornerstone Architecture

**Timing:** Consultation on University College hill starts fall 2021

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Somerville House student space: Open indoor space retrofit from hallway beside Lucy’s eatery

**Vision:** Create a new indoor student hub in the heart of campus where people can gather, eat and study.

**Features:** Interior walls to be removed to create large common space, large lounge, three private study rooms; fully accessible space including seating, ramps, washrooms and elevator that provides access to all three floors; including the Great Hall. Lucy’s eatery to be updated and other, more diverse food options to be added.

**Architect:** Cornerstone Architecture

**Timing:** Construction completed fall 2021
that could have been me

Education will pave the way toward meaningful reconciliation

By Christy R. Bressette, BA ’95 (Brescia), BE’96, PhD ’08, vice-provost and associate vice-president, Indigenous Initiatives

A

s an Indigenous woman, I’m often asked for my views on missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report of 2019. This is a complex question, and my response depends very much on who is asking and the context of our discussion. But most often, when I learn the story of another Indigenous woman who went missing or was murdered, I think to myself: That could have been me.

Many years ago, as a young Indigenous woman with two small children, I experienced abandonment upon the breakdown of my marriage. That’s a common enough experience for many in Canada. But what was uncommon was I became homeless due to my marriage. That’s a common enough experience for many in Canada. But what was uncommon was I became homeless due to my marriage. That could have been me. That could have been me.

That could have been me. That could have been me. That could have been me.

I’m sharing this story because it reflects the reality of so many Indigenous people today stuck in an involuntary, intergenerational cycle of trauma and abuse. Yet, there is a solution. As the former chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Justice Murray Sinclair said, “Education is what got us into this mess, and education [or re-education] is what will get us out.”

It took time and resources to implement the malign objectives of Residential Schools, and it will again take time – as well as continued public pressure – to overcome them. But that journey has begun.

“I took time and resources to implement the malign objectives of Residential Schools, and it will again take time – as well as continued public pressure – to overcome them.”

Here, again, I can speak from personal experience. I am commonly known as Christy R. Bressette, but my Spirit Name is Neeta No Kee Kwe (Hard Working Woman). It was given to me by my grandfather, and it was a fortuitous choice. I have indeed worked hard, going from being a homeless mother of two young children to being a vice-provost and associate vice-president at Western. And it was education (a PhD from Western) that got me here – again, fortuitous, since I belong to the Turtle clan, which holds traditional responsibilities for education.

It has been almost 30 years since I first arrived at Western. Back then, I shared many horrible stories with other students about the abuses endured by Indigenous people, and unfortunately those stories continue to be replenished today. But as I think back on family members and friends who have died too early, I know I have done my best to honour them, as well as my grandfather, who gave me my name. Since my graduation, I’ve remained faithful to my people and clan responsibilities, and I have worked hard as an educator, secure in the knowledge that it is indeed education that will get us out of this.

It is now 2021, and I’ve come full circle. I am back on campus, leading the Office of Indigenous Initiatives with a mandate to promote the work of reconciliation through Western’s new strategic plan and its Indigenous strategic plan. Watching the thousands of people across the country who donned orange shirts in solidarity with Indigenous peoples this past Canada Day, I allowed myself a measure of optimism. I now believe we can achieve a reconciliation that is grounded in truth. And I can also believe something else equally inspiring – namely that some young Indigenous woman graduating from Western, now or in the future, will be able to look at me and think, Thirty years from now, that could be me.
How bats in the basement could save lives during the next viral outbreak

By Sharon Oosthoek

Three storeys below the Royal Ontario Museum, a couple of freezers full of bat tissues just might hold the key to keeping the next pandemic at bay. They are the reason Western virologist Ryan Troyer has a standing date every Friday morning at precisely 9 a.m. with the ROM’s assistant curator of mammalogy, Burton Lim.

“Yes, I’m driving into Toronto every Friday to collect frozen bat tissues,” says Troyer. “We really know how to have a good time.”

In the past two decades there have been three major coronavirus outbreaks in humans – all likely related to viruses found in bats. The first was severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, then came the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2012 and now SARS-CoV-2, the cause of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Because humans are increasingly encroaching on wildlife habitats, experts predict more opportunities for animal-to-human virus transmission and more outbreaks.

Even though the current pandemic means there’s a lot of red tape with working with bat tissues, Troyer and his team are committed to getting all the special permissions and following all the biological safety protocols. By sequencing and studying bat coronaviruses that jump to humans, the team might just make the difference between a localized outbreak and a pandemic.

Friday mornings, Lim leads Troyer and his students down into the museum’s sub-basement. Screened for COVID-19, physically distanced, masked and gloved, they carry with them spreadsheets detailing the provenance of each precious sample, most of which Lim collected himself during research trips to Southeast Asia and China.

Lim and his colleagues have been collecting and freezing mammal tissues in liquid nitrogen since the late 1980s, in order to study taxonomy and genomics. The ROM’s frozen bat tissue collection is one of the best in the world, containing nearly 15,000 specimens representing 15 of 21 families, 120 of 220 genera, and 400 of 1,400 species from 30 countries.

“When I told Ryan they were frozen in liquid nitrogen, his eyes popped open,” recalls Lim. That’s because unlike traditional preservatives such as ethanol, liquid nitrogen allows the specimens to flash freeze at -196°C, which halts the natural degradation of RNA and DNA. With the genetic material intact, scientists can better isolate and identify it.

“We know SARS likely originated in bats and spread to other animals, where they evolved and became better at getting into mammals, including humans,” says Barr. “We want to identify those viruses that have the ability to get inside human cells because once inside, they start to study our viral defences and evolve ways to hide from it and become a ‘smarter’ virus. The SARS-CoV-2 variants that are currently emerging around the world are a good example of how the virus has adapted to get into our cells better and how it has found a new way to hide from our immune system.”

The team will then isolate the spike RNA from each transmissible coronavirus and use it to generate a seed vaccine. The goal is to create a bank of spike vaccines in much the same way today’s COVID-19 vaccines were produced. “We are developing a resource we can go to next year, or in 10 or 20 years, when the next outbreak occurs,” says Barr.

“It takes them most of the day to collect 200 samples, which they drive back to London in carefully packed cardboard boxes. Once they deliver the boxes to Western’s state-of-the-art Imaging Pathogens for Knowledge Translation (ImPaKT) Facility, Troyer and his colleague Stephen Barr – also virologist at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry – study the samples to see which contain coronaviruses.

“Barr and Troyer also look for viruses in bat droppings donated by bat biologists from around the world, including Brock Fenton, a world-renowned bat biologist, professor emeritus in Western’s Faculty of Science, and research associate at the ROM. The Western team has so far found dozens of types of coronaviruses in the bat tissues and droppings, most of which have already been identified. They are not even halfway through scanning samples and expect to find many more.

Recently, they have developed high-throughput methods for safely determining which spike proteins can enter human cells. These methods only involve the spike proteins, not live infectious coronaviruses, which not only speeds up the screening process, but also eliminates any risk of infection. “We can then pull out the closest-matched seed vaccine for rapid expansion.”

Barr estimates Western’s bank of seed vaccines could hasten vaccine development by as much as six months, which could save untold lives.

“We’re never going to prevent all transmissions of disease from animals to humans,” says Troyer. “But we need to prevent them from going from a limited scale outbreak to a pandemic.”

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Burton Lim, ROM assistant curator of mammalogy, examines bat specimens from part of an extensive collection that makes this one of the largest in the world. (PHOTO BY JOSHUA SEE, ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM)
By Tom Spears

Back in the late 1980s, a young Western science student kept thinking his buddies in engineering had more interesting homework than he did. So, Kai Jarosch switched into chemical engineering for his third year. We should be glad he did. Jarosch, BV’92, MA’95, PhD’20, and his team at Corning Inc. in New York State designed one of the key processes for the production of the small-but-mighty vials required to hold precious COVID-19 vaccines – hundreds of millions of glass vials that can withstand the stresses of hot sterilization, frozen storage and fast movement along a production line. There’s no point having vaccines if you can’t keep them safe.

Jarosch’s work on the product, known as Corning® Valor® Glass, was done as senior chemical process engineer and manager of the chemical process design group at Corning. Even at home he loves making new concepts work, according to his wife, Judy. He likes to tinker, and once built a tiny steam engine just to see how it worked, she said. Corning has been making glass stronger since it created PYREX® oven-proof dishes in 1915. The company sold the PYREX® consumer product line, but today, some of Corning’s most well-known products include Corning® Gorilla® Glass and mobile display components. Vials, said Jarosch, are a growing market for Corning.

Ordinary glass has been used for pharmaceuticals for more than a century, but it’s not ideal, Jarosch explains. Glass is very strong if it is in perfect condition, but tiny imperfections on the surface can lead it to break down and shed tiny flakes of glass into the contents, called delamination, potentially damaging the medication.

Valor Glass eliminates glass delamination in pharmaceutical vials. Sodium-borate evaporation is not possible. As a result, Valor Glass containers have a uniform, chemically durable drug-contacting surface.

Ordinary glass can also develop microscopic cracks that allow air to come in, letting oxygen react with the drug and making it less effective. Valor Glass is inherently strong and damage-resistant, making it better able to withstand extreme events during pharmaceutical processing.

There’s also a risk of breakage at the pharmaceutical factory when batches of vials are filled and sealed, because vials inevitably bump together. “The breaking of vials during filling is a place where you lose production time,” Jarosch said.

A single broken vial means workers have to shut down the high-speed line, remove all the vials, clean up and start over – at a time when pharma companies are trying to turn out vaccine doses by the millions. To strengthen Valor Glass, Corning immerses it in a bath of molten salt solution. Potassium ions (electronically charged particles) in the solution migrate into the glass surface, replacing the smaller sodium ions originally in the glass. As the glass cools, the larger potassium ions compress the glass together, creating a compressive stress layer that forms a tough surface.

It is essentially like trying to fit a size 10 foot in a size nine shoe, creating stress in the glass surface that actually strengthens it, so the vials can jostle safely.

Valor also has a coating that lets vials slip past each other without sticking during production. “Valor Glass’s exterior coating and chemical strengthening enables smoother filling operations by reducing glass-related interventions, enabling lines to run at much higher speeds with improved yields,” said Jarosch.

Another benefit of Valor Glass is that it can withstand intense heat during sterilization and extreme cold temperatures during deep-freeze storage.

Corning started work on Valor Glass about a decade ago, long before any thought of the current pandemic, which gave the company a head start. “Our hard work and the need linked up perfectly,” said Jarosch. “We were ready to meet demand even in the face of a global vial shortage.

His work today has roots back at Western. Born in London, where his father was studying biology that fall, said Judy, the couple's daughter, Ada, is entering her second year of biology this fall.

By Tom Spears

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“WE WERE READY TO MEET DEMAND, EVEN IN THE FACE OF A GLOBAL VIAL SHORTAGE.”

KAI JAROSCH
Opiyo Oloya leads Western’s equity work

Renowned social justice and human rights advocate named university’s first associate vice-president of equity, diversity and inclusion

By Debora Van Brenk, BA ’86, MA ’87

Opiyo Oloya – an award-winning school board administrator who came to Canada as a political refugee from Uganda – joined Western as its first associate vice-president of equity, diversity and inclusion (AVP, EDI) on August 30, 2021.

An integral member of Western’s senior leadership team, Oloya will help lead, manage, direct and evaluate EDI values and initiatives at the university. He will work closely with diverse groups across campus to promote social justice and human rights.

“I’m really happy to be joining the Western family and to use my skills and lived experience to bring people together as part of a really strong team working towards the common goal of EDI,” said Oloya, who holds a PhD in education and will report directly to president Alan Shepard.

“There is much good to build on at Western, and I’ve come to help build relationships among a wide range of stakeholders, and his track record of successfully leading complex change in the education system have earned him an outstanding reputation in his field,” Shepard said. “We’re truly delighted to welcome him here.”

Shepard added that Oloya’s role comes at a critical time, as Western focuses on social justice, sustainability, and combating structural inequities in society and in university education.

“People in the Western community and beyond have told us they’re eager for greater institutional attention to EDI, and the appointment of Dr. Oloya to this role is part of our ongoing commitment to action,” Shepard said.

Running towards education

Oloya has never taken education for granted.

Growing up in a small farming village in northern Uganda, he would rise before dawn each day to run the six-kilometre path to school – trotting past herds of antelope and troops of monkeys – pausing only to sidestep black mamba snakes, drink at a stream or pluck fruit from nearby trees.

“I’d arrive at school and snap a piece of stick from the bushes and we’d go and write in the sand, and that’s how we learned our alphabets in Luo and English. It was the most natural place anybody could grow without worrying about a lot of things,” he recalled.

When the political scenery was less idyllic as military officer Idi Amin seized power in 1971 and began a despotic eight-year rule. After Amin was overthrown and exiled, Oloya and fellow student leaders at Makerere University in Kampala went village to village to promote democracy and human rights. Their activism attracted the new government’s ire, forcing student leaders to flee for their lives.

Oloya hid under the bed at a professor’s house, then crossed to the Canadian high commission in Nairobi. He made his way to the Canadian high commission in Nairobi. He was subsequently appointed as the school board’s interim associate director.

Oloya authored Child to Solidar, an analysis of how children abducted in northern Uganda by warlord Joseph Kony became soldiers in Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army.

At York University, where he earned his PhD in 2010, Oloya was subsequently awarded an honorary doctorate of law (LLD honoris causa) for his social justice, international philanthropy and education work.

Bringing people together

As a leader in EDI, Oloya says it’s always been his priority to create a culture of being open to others.

“The best way forward, in my lived experience and knowledge, is to listen and see the common meeting place where we will achieve our goals together.”

Oloya is well-qualified to advance EDI at Western, according to Western’s former president of International Resources for Education of African Deaf and Blind Children, which provided scholarships for advanced teacher education and sponsorships for deaf and blind children to attend school.

Author and advocate

After realizing a void in community events celebrating Black Canadians, Oloya was one of the founders and promoters of Toronto’s Afrifest, North America’s largest celebration of African music and culture. In 1991, Oloya approached the University of Toronto’s community radio station and founded a long-running African music and cultural show called Karibuni, which means “welcome” in Swahili.

He is an advisor on the African Union Mission to Somalia in efforts to restore peace to that country, and is the founder and former president of International Resources for Education of African Deaf and Blind Children, which provided scholarships for advanced teacher education and sponsorships for deaf and blind children to attend school.

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Western’s new EDI advisory council – formed to provide guidance on anti-racism, accessibility and EDI policies – will advise and support Oloya in his new role.

He will also work closely with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, Student Experience and Equity and Human Rights Services, along with a wide range of other groups at Western.

Western will lead the new EDI action network – a group of more than 60 representatives from academic and administrative units across campus – and various university governance bodies and task forces.

The creation of the AVP, EDI role is part of Western’s commitment in response to the final report of the Anti-Racism Working Group. In June 2021, the university announced an investment of $6 million to support new EDI initiatives, including $4 million to support the recruitment of Black and Indigenous faculty members.
Fair’s fair
Alumnae lead Ontario’s Pay Equity Office at a critical point in its history

By Pat Morden, BA’77

When Kadies Ward was a child, her mother and father were ministers at a church in northern Ontario. The church elders told her father it wasn’t appropriate for a woman to deliver sermon. Ward’s mother responded by creating and delivering a six-part sermon series on women’s leadership in the Bible. Although Ward, BA’77, MAV’15, was too young to understand what was happening then, she certainly does now. As the Ontario government’s pay equity commissioner, she brings her commitment to feminism and her formidable skills and experience to ensure that women’s work is valued fairly.

Eventually Ward settled in Ukraine, where she worked on Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy, focusing on empowering women and girls to enhance peace and prosperity. She witnessed Ukraine’s Euromaidan revolution and the invasion of Crimea. “It was a challenging time,” she said. “Ukraine was experiencing a high percentage of internally displaced women, many of them single mothers, and put a big focus on supporting them and getting them into the economy.”

Ready to return to North America after five years abroad, Ward completed an MBA at the Kelley School of Management in Illinois and started working in Ontario’s pay equity office in August 2020. Like Ward, McCloskey has feminist roots reaching back into her family.

“I had some really strong examples, people who led by example and called out injustice where they saw it,” McCloskey said.

At Western, she served as vice-president of education with the University Students’ Council, president of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and president of the Women’s Issues Network. After working in provincial and federal constituency offices and with the Ontario Association of Food Banks, she taught in South Korea and China for several years with her husband. When their first child was born, they returned to Canada and McCloskey began her career with the provincial government. She joined the pay equity office in January 2021.

Ayumi Bailly was inspired by a David Suzuki lecture to study for a BA in geography at Western, then went on to do a master’s in environmental studies at the University of Waterloo.

“My career has been driven by two things,” Bailly said. “I wanted to make a difference in the world around me, and I said ‘yes’ to every opportunity that came my way.”

As commissioner, Ward is at arm’s length from the legislature, ensuring the office is independent of political influence.

Since its founding, the Pay Equity Office has developed a complex methodology to analyze companies’ compensation data, identify equity gaps and, if necessary, mandate changes. Ward said that most companies, when faced with clear evidence of inequity, choose to redress the balance voluntarily. In the last 18 years, the gendered pay gap in Ontario has decreased from 22 per cent to 12 per cent. That means, of course, that women are still paid 88 cents for every dollar male workers receive.

As commissioner, Ward is at arm’s length from the legislature and compliance side of the issue, and focuses on outreach, often with other jurisdictions interested in learning from Ontario’s experience.

The office recently worked with the Czech Republic’s Ministry of Labour and Social affairs, and has ongoing relationships with the International Labour Organization, the United Nations, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, among others.

“Women may not see the value in staying in or returning to the workforce because they’re not compensated fairly,” said Ward. “And that’s dangerous because there’s ample evidence demonstrating that gender diversity is an important asset for every organization.”

Ward noted that nearly two-thirds of the pay equity gap remains unexplained. “Some of it is due to factors like the gendered impact of child and elder care, total work experience and field of study,” she said. “But there are other factors – stereotyping, differences in wage expectations and negotiations, gendered roles in work – that clearly contribute.”

Calls for a just recovery from COVID-19 are creating new urgency around the issue. But justice is not the only argument.

“We’re trying to build awareness that pay equity is good for everyone,” said McCloskey.

Research shows that companies who work to achieve gender equity see gains in productivity and profit. There is also evidence to suggest that narrowing the gender wage gap tends to raise men’s incomes as well.

At the same time, the office is drawing attention to the supports that are vital to women’s participation in the workforce, such as access to training and child care.

“Until we take a very broad view of the social and economic drivers of wage inequity, we’re still going to have a long way to go,” said McCloskey.

“Until we take a very broad view of the social and economic drivers of wage inequity, we’re still going to have a long way to go.” — Erin McCloskey

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When Kadie Ward was a child, her mother and father were ministers at a church in northern Ontario. The church elders told her father it wasn’t appropriate for a woman to deliver sermon. Ward’s mother responded by creating and delivering a six-part sermon series on women’s leadership in the Bible. Although Ward, BA’77, MAV’15, was too young to understand what was happening then, she certainly does now. As the Ontario government’s pay equity commissioner, she brings her commitment to feminism and her formidable skills and experience to ensure that women’s work is valued fairly.

Eventually Ward settled in Ukraine, where she worked on Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy, focusing on empowering women and girls to enhance peace and prosperity. She witnessed Ukraine’s Euromaidan revolution and the invasion of Crimea. “It was a challenging time,” she said. "Ukraine was experiencing a high percentage of internally displaced women, many of them single mothers, and put a big focus on supporting them and getting them into the economy.”

Ready to return to North America after five years abroad, Ward completed an MBA at the Kelley School of Management in Illinois and started working in Ontario’s pay equity office in August 2020. Like Ward, McCloskey has feminist roots reaching back into her family.

“I had some really strong examples, people who led by example and called out injustice where they saw it,” McCloskey said.

At Western, she served as vice-president of education with the University Students’ Council, president of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and president of the Women’s Issues Network. After working in provincial and federal constituency offices and with the Ontario Association of Food Banks, she taught in South Korea and China for several years with her husband. When their first child was born, they returned to Canada and McCloskey began her career with the provincial government. She joined the pay equity office in January 2021.

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Building a more inclusive economy

At the helm of the Bank of Canada, Tiff Macklem is helping shape Canada’s economic policy

By Debora Van Brenk, BA ’86, MA ’87

You may have learned somewhere that the study of economics is about deciphering production and consumption, supply and demand, profits and markets, exports, imports, scarcity, spending, numbers and trends, and more numbers. But Canada’s top banker says those definitions fall far short.

“Ultimately, economics is about understanding people,” says Tiff Macklem, governor of the Bank of Canada, which is charged with setting monetary policy to keep Canadian inflation low and stable, and fostering a healthy financial system.

Understanding not just people’s buying behaviour, but also the intangibles: what they need and want; and how their perceptions, experiences and communities shape them. It’s a perspective shaped in large measure at Western, where Macklem earned his master’s degree in economics, intending to learn how.

And since Macklem’s appointment to the top post at the Bank of Canada in May 2020, understanding the human condition has proven to be an essential tool — almost as significant as computer-guided economic modelling — in navigating the nation’s economic recovery from a global pandemic.

WE CAN SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS

Macklem grew up in the Westmount neighbourhood of Montreal, a city that did not only aspire to be world-class; it had a long track record of international clout. Aglow with pride in its new Metro subway and the success of Expo 67, Montreal was Canada’s commercial and financial powerhouse. And since Macklem’s appointment to the top post at the Bank of Canada, it has a long track record of international clout.

“Ultimately, economics is about understanding people.”

For a long time, economics had focused on the demand side: consumption, investment and exports. But Western research added nuance to the other side of the equation: supply, productivity and labour-market participation.

Although more difficult to measure — “productivity is sort of an amorphous concept,” he notes — it’s the supply side that determines long-run prosperity in the commodities-intensive Canadian economy.

Macklem joined the Bank of Canada for a year after graduating with his master’s. He then returned to Western to begin his doctorate a year later.

Partway through the doctorate degree, he married and moved to a Western-owned mature-student apartment. “This was our first place together, our own place. So while sometimes (studying) was a burden on my personal life, it was a special time.”

Then there was the connection among fellow economics scholars: “The wonderful thing about doing your PhD is you’re immersed in this almost family. You speak this unique language among yourselves and you’re thinking about the same stuff, and you have vibrant debates,” he recalls.

But it also made them seek solutions outside the department.

“My impression as a teenager was that everybody was angry, there were a lot of strikes, and everybody felt ripped off from inflation and unemployment. It was just a very turbulent time.”

As young Macklem read his newspapers, it seemed to him that the country’s woes were incomprehensible, and probably unavoidable, feature of the landscape.

But after he started university — he went to Queen’s planning to major in geography — he discovered economics.

“At what I learned in undergrad was these things didn’t just arrive from outer space; they were created by us … and we can solve these problems.”

He came to Western, which he calls Canada’s powerhouse in economic studies, intending to learn how.

FAMILY AND ALMOST FAMILY

Macklem was impressed and intimidated by his classmates’ focus and intensity.

Professors David Laidlaw and Michael Parkin — macro-economists whose research had already made a mark on global monetary policy — were an enduring inspiration and influence.

“There were the very senior faculty members who’ve been real leaders in their field and in monetary economics. And then there are all these young faculty members who were bringing in new ways of looking at things and new types of models.

“We were soaking up new ideas … discovered after a while, yeah, I was actually not bad at this stuff.”

Ultimately, economics is about understanding people.”

RISING CAREER

After earning his PhD, Macklem rejoined the Bank of Canada and took on increasingly senior roles there. He became one of the go-to economists charged with working out the central bank’s new inflation targets (Canada was only the second country, after New Zealand, to announce inflationary targets), and he helped guide the economy through the worldwide recession of the late 2000s.

He then served with the federal Department of Finance for four years before becoming senior deputy governor and chief operating officer of the Bank of Canada.

In 2014, Macklem left civil service to become dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Appointed governor of the Bank of Canada in May 2020, Macklem still hadn’t met most of his staff in person a year later.

“There’s so much ingenuity out there. People are figuring out how to work in ways that I never imagined and that does give you some optimism for the future.”

PANDEMIC LESSONS

The global pandemic has led to some pondering about the human element and the experiences of people in Canada — with or without a pandemic.

“You’re not just like anything we’ve experienced previously in our careers. That forces you to really go back to your fundamental training and use everything you’ve got. But it also forces you to go out and get diverse perspectives … to get input from a broader range of people coming at it with different lenses.”

And for an economist, it also meant identifying gaps in the human equation and examining who has been left out of the recovery.

“Some Canadians are feeling [this] much more acutely than others, because the impact of this has been uneven across different parts of society. So you can’t just look at everything at the macro level, you’ve got to understand the perceptions and experiences of different parts of the economy, different people in the economy.”

This, he says, is the sharpest and most unequal economic cycle of our times.

During a recent address to students at Atlantic Canada universities, Macklem noted the importance of building a diverse workforce and providing equitable workplaces.

“A more inclusive economy is a bigger economy, a more prosperous economy with more room to grow without creating inflationary pressures,” he told the students.

KEEPING CONNECTIONS

As the pandemic wound down to something manageable, Macklem found an unexpected benefit of all the virtual connections necessitated by COVID: renewed connections to fellow economics alumni from Western. “It’s like reconnecting” email that started with a few names has now evolved into a comprehensive list of almost the whole class, he says.

“We’ve been having fun remembering over email. I have so many happy memories of Western.”
Quinn Rockliff was never one to pick up a pencil or paintbrush to process her feelings—until she came to Western.

Examining events involving consent and assault through a critical lens inspired her to draw her naked body repeatedly, reclaiming a part of herself once stripped away. She also uncovered her artistic talent, launching a career as an interdisciplinary artist well before her convocation.

“I arrived at Western with one idea about who I was and what I wanted, and left as a completely different human,” said Rockliff, BA ’17.

Courses in feminist theory and media studies challenged her thinking, uprooting past hurts and violations.

“It was an overwhelming and big experience to unpack all these interactions, learning about consent culture and how it fit with my coming of age,” she said. “Rather than talking about it, or whatever people do to cope, I just began drawing myself again and again.”

At first, Rockliff unconsciously drew the idealized female form, before embracing and sketching the body that was uniquely hers. She spent most of her free time in second-year in her dorm room drawing, with professor Atle Kjosen’s third-year alternative media project pushing her to explore her craft more fully.

“I painted nude portraits of myself and other women I knew to make a book where you could flip through and unveil their pages. It explored notions of consent and empowerment through self-representation. After that, I started to take my art seriously.”

Her studies also challenged her use of social media, with her posts shifting as she shared her art and raw truths about her lived experiences.

“It was terrifying because I went from having my social currency of wanting the attention of men and being validated online by my peers, to someone posting drawings of myself naked and talking about feminism, toxic masculinity and consent culture,” she said.

Although she lost a few followers and friends through her fresh approach, she found her voice and a wide community of support.

“I started having conversations with other young women about the things we were experiencing, the expectations placed upon us, and how the impossible double standards of being desirable—but not giving too much of yourself away—was a game we would never win. It was just so fun to admit and reject wholeheartedly,” she said.

She also began selling her work online, attracting more followers and fans; among them, a representative from Rethink Breast Cancer asking Rockliff to design t-shirts for an education and awareness campaign aimed at young women, in collaboration with clothing chain H&M.

“To have an organization and big company wanting my depiction of the body was a really validating moment for me,” Rockliff said, though she admits to suffering from imposter syndrome, despite having also worked with other national brands, including Knix and Mary Young.

To combat those doubts, Rockliff took advantage of time during lockdown to hone and expand her craft.

“Because I was so successful early on doing commissions for people and selling prints, I never really took the time to create a body of work for myself. The pandemic has caused me to slow down and do that,” she said.

Now her practice includes painting on silk, with her signature single-line technique the foundation of her work.

“The single-line drawing evolved as a need to abstract my body from my expectation of perfection, and to look like people I didn’t look like,” Rockliff said. “As I started drawing myself more and more, using it as meditation to work through things, I needed a quick way to get myself, my body, down on paper. The best way to do that was to do it quickly and not lift my pen from the paper.”

She continues to create new pathways to represent who she is by drawing herself every day.

“It’s a great way to ground myself and be present with my body—how it’s changing, and also finding new parts to explore and appreciate.”

By Keri Ferguson
One idea that changed the world

Insulin pioneer sparked continuum of research on diabetes management, and optimism for cure

By Debra Van Buren

In the middle of a sleepless night on Oct. 31, 1920, Dr. Frederick Banting scribbled this note about diabetes patients with insulin. (THOMAS PISHER / BANTING HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO)

In middle of a sleepless night on Oct. 31, 1920, Dr. Frederick Banting scribbled this note about diabetes patients with insulin. (THOMAS PISHER / BANTING HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO)

By Debra Van Buren

Diabetes. Lure of pancreatic ducts of dog. Keep dogs alive till acini degenerate leaving islets. Try to isolate the internal secretion of this. Then probably I can sell insulin.

This year, the world celebrates the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin— an idea incubated at Western and hatched in an upstairs bedroom of Banting’s medical office in London, Ont.

There have been many strides in treating diabetes since then, said Dr. Rob Hegele, a leading international endocrinologist and distinguished university professor of medicine and biochemistry at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

But there was really one event that set everything else in motion, Hegele said. “It’s almost a mythological story.”

Hegele and Grant Malman, BA’91, curator of the Banting House National Historic Site of Canada, are co-authors of a paper that firmly positions Western as the birthplace of insulin.

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Dr. Rob Hegele

The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology

“Banting hypothesizes that insulin has the power to break up the ‘diabetus’ problem.”

Banting was not alone. He had Banting was not alone. He had

The Banting House flame, marking the place where Dr. Frederick Banting first ignited hope for a cure for diabetes, will continue to burn until there’s a cure.

Dr. Irene Hramiak

Dr. Irene Hramiak

A genetic key to a solution

Hramiak said. “Maybe in five years we can have more definitive answers,” Hegele said.

“In her long career, she has found there are no quick answers.”

Among them is Dr. Irene Hramiak, professor of medicine and international endocrinologist and distinguished university professor of medicine and biochemistry at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry. And among many distinctions, she received the American Diabetes Association’s Charles H. Best Award for distinguished service in 1993.

She has led or co-led more than 50 clinical research trials for people with diabetes. Hramiak draws a straight line between her research and the important work undertaken decades ago by London doctors John Dupré and N. Wilson Rodger, part of an international team that conducted the Krebvocative trial to understand microvascular complications— specifically eye damage — in people with diabetes. It led to the decades-long Diabetes Control and Complications Trial, which examined causes and solutions to complications in people with Type 1 insulin-dependent diabetes.

“This was the beginning of what we consider randomized control trials in diabetes treatment,” Hramiak said.

She is examining the benefits of changing the traditional approach to treating people newly diagnosed with diabetes.

Ordinarily, doctors will prescribe lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise, until the disease progresses and additional medications need to be added— ultimately to the point where the patient needs insulin.

But several of Hramiak’s trials examine whether it’s possible to “re-set” the pancreas from the beginning— to prevent the progression to more medications— by starting with an intensive course of insulin and medications, in addition to conventional lifestyle changes.

“We’re seeing if it is cause a remission – we can call it a cure – in people who are newly diagnosed.”

In her long career, she has found there are no quick answers.

“The work is collaborative and cumulative, and even trials that don’t meet their hoped-for results are a kind of success.”

“Have you to keep asking the questions and keep doing the work. It’s bit-by-bit, step-by-step, and everybody adds his piece to the puzzle.”

Genetic keys to a solution

Hramiak, like many, is among the leaders in diabetes research and treatment. She treats more than 2,000 patients in his lipid clinic, and has written or co-authored 800 research papers that have been cited more than 35,000 times.

Lipid levels (fatty compounds such as high cholesterol that can lead to early heart disease and stroke) are often a “package deal” with diabetes, noted Hegele, who is also director of the London Regional Genomics Centre at Robarts Research Institute.

Consensus is emerging that the Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes classifications may be too narrow; he said, and there may be five or more subtypes along a genetic spectrum.

Until now, figuring out what treatment or combinations of treatments will work best with a patient has often been a matter of trial and error, Hegele said.

His work in genetic analysis, though, could unlock some doors to treatment.

For a small subset of diabetics, the disease is a result of one genetic “misprint,” he said.

“But we’re also learning that, rather than a single misprint on a single gene, a greater percentage of people will have a variety of misprints on a variety of genes.”

“Individually, each one of these changes may not be enough to make the person diabetic — but cumulatively, there are enough misprints that they’re acting as a team, as if the patient has inherited a single large-effect gene variant that puts them at risk.”

Creating genetic profiles of diabetes could help clinicians understand which specific genotypes will respond to diet and exercise, and which are more likely to have success with additional interventions.

Like much of the research in the field, it is a work in progress. “Maybe in five years we can have more definitive answers,” Hegele said.

Expanding the knowledge base

For all the advances in medical research in the past century, diabetes still kills more than 1.6 million people each year.

The Banting House flame, marking the place where Dr. Frederick Banting first ignited hope for a cure for diabetes, will continue to burn until there’s a cure.

Hegele is optimistic that hard work and a measure of serendipity will make it happen.

“One hundred years ago, you could learn everything that was known about diabetes at the time from a chapter in a medical textbook. Now it would take several textbooks just to skim the surface.

“We don’t have a cure — that’s the ultimate goal — but we’re in a golden age where there are so many possibilities.”

Dr. Frederick Banting hypothesized that insulin could treat diabetes when injected into the bloodstream.

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Milestones in the quest for a cure

1920: Dr. Frederick Banting hypothesized that insulin could treat diabetes when injected into the bloodstream.

1921: Insulin was discovered by Banting, Dr. Charles Best and professor J.J. Macleod and purified by biochemist James Collip.

1922: First patient is injected with insulin in Toronto.

1923: Banting and Macleod receive the Nobel Prize in Medicine, sharing it with Best and Collip.

1940s: Diabetes is linked to kidney and eye complications.

1944: Standard insulin suspension is developed.

1959: Diabetes is categorized into two distinct types.

1966: First successful pancreas transplant.

1983: Sustained insulin is introduced for human use.

1992: Study: a single gene mutation could be the culprit in some diabetes cases.

1992: Landmark 30-year study, Diabetes Control and Complications Trial, leads to standardized diabetes management.

2000: Multiple genetic markers are identified in Type 2 diabetes, raising prospects for improved treatment.

Next milestone: The cure

Sources: Diabetes Canada, American Diabetes Association

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Artist weaves love of science into tapestries

Former scientist left the lab for the loom and has never looked back

By Keri Ferguson

Martina Celerin has experienced a lot of loss in her life. When she was four, she and her parents fled their Czech homeland as political refugees, leaving loved ones and family behind. “We rolled out as Soviet tanks rolled in,” said Celerin, BSc’88, HBSc’89, PhD’95.

A year later, after they immigrated to Canada, her mother was killed by a drunk driver. While Celerin was studying at Western, her cherished mentor and graduate supervisor, Dave Laudenbach, died right after she gave her dissertation. “That experience was so wonderful for me that subsequently I got an old window frame and a bunch of nails from the basement of my father’s veterinary clinic and I worked myself a loom. I continued weaving through the summer, but that all faded away when I threw myself heavily into university and moving forward with my life.”

I threw myself heavily into university and I was well-organized, sorted and labelled so many materials, and they are so well-organized, sorted and labelled thanks to him. I can put my hands on them immediately. If I didn’t, it would be chaos.”

The idea was I would try it for a year and see if it worked. That was in 2002, and I haven’t looked back. That was in 2002, and I haven’t looked back.”

The former molecular geneticist has been a professional textile artist since leaving her lab at Indiana University and returning to her loom nearly 20 years ago. “We rolled out as Soviet tanks rolled in,” said Celerin, BSc’88, HBSc’89, PhD’95.

“Each of my pieces has an entire story behind it, with special objects helping to tell stories I carry in my heart,” Celerin said. Her work has been featured in solo, group and juried exhibitions across the United States, and she gives lectures, workshops and demonstrations on her craft.

Her love of weaving was born at Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School in London, Ont., where she often won both the art and science awards. When her “forward-thinking art teacher” set up enormous looms in class, Celerin was hooked.

“That experience was so wonderful for me that subsequently I got an old window frame and a bunch of nails from the basement of my father’s veterinary clinic and I worked myself a loom. I continued weaving through the summer, but that all faded away when I threw myself heavily into university and moving forward with my life.”

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“Dave Laudenbach was an amazing person, and taught me more about life, focus and dedication than I can ever express,” Celerin said.

Laudenbach also had a practical influence on how Celerin organizes her home art studio in Bloomington, Ind. “Dave taught me how to label everything I was doing research in his lab. It worked for me in science, and it works for me in art. I have so many materials, and they are so well-organized, sorted and labelled thanks to him. I can put my hands on them immediately. If I didn’t, it would be chaos.”

After Western, Celerin took a postdoc-toral position in the biology department at Indiana University. She had little money to decorate her new apartment, but enough for a hammer and nails, and she once made herself a loom. Weaving discarded scraps of fabric with rattan and even ether-stained cotton plugs from another lab, she created a piece of art that still hangs in her home today.

She weaves her scientific knowledge and a sense of whimsy into almost every piece she creates. In her work Spelling Bees, needle-felted bees made from wool dyed with spent coffee grounds hover on honeycombs made from yellowed pages of her high-school dictionary.

“The bees are absolutely anatomically correct,” Celerin said. “I’m grateful for my undergraduate and graduate education for giving me that attention to detail and those subtleties. That’s what makes a tremendous difference in my art.”

The bees’ wings are made from used dryer sheets and the ends of their antennae from one of her husband’s old guitar strings.

“That’s what I’ve done my entire life; make things out of what’s around me and what gives me joy.”

Spelling Bees: Celerin creates her own canvas by incorporating reclaimed objects and textures.
Living the rancher life
Western-educated, real-life cowboy innovates camp experience at Texas Longhorn Ranch
By Deborra Van Brenk, BA '86, MA '87

Fred Cahill’s morning begins before sunrise when he dons his cowboy hat and boots, gulps two mugs of coffee and heads out to feed the horses. Heads bob to greet him: A palomino with braids in her mane. Two shaggy miniature donkeys named Daisy and Dolly. A dun-coloured mare, a couple of glistening chestnuts with liquid-brown eyes. And Blue, Cahill’s favourite, a muscled roan whose forward ears and swishing tail pronounce her eager to start the day.

Blue works hard and gets along with everybody, Cahill says. Versatile, dependable, sensible, affable. Not flashy, but always finishes a job she starts.

Those same virtues might well apply to Cahill. This is Cahill’s life as a modern cowboy and operator of Texas Longhorn Ranch, and it’s a good one. “It’s not a nine-to-five job – more a five-to-nine job – but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Cahill, BA’81 (Economics), figures he was born to this life, growing up in the countryside 45 minutes west of London in the hamlet of Kerwood, where the ranch stands today. “I’m lucky I had good parents: Grant and Betty Cahill,” he says. “They were just really there as parents and they developed a work ethic in all of us.”

When Cahill was a kid, he would beg to stay up past his regular bedtime on Sunday nights to catch the TV western, Bonanza. He practised cattle-roping skills on anything that moved, and on a lot of things that didn’t.

He loved dawn, when the pasture sparkled with dew. He loved the feeling of a horse under his saddle, the smell of the first cut of hay, the rugged beauty of cattle with horns that stretched as wide as a ranch hand is tall.

But he realized as a teenager, if he intended to make ranching his livelihood as well as his life, he had to attend university.

“You figure out what you love to do – and then you figure out how to make a living at it,” he says.

“I attended Western because I knew I needed an education. I don’t know what possessed me to go there. Nobody in my family had ever gone.

“I worked my butt off at it. I had to work hard, study hard. It was tough. I’m 62 years old and sometimes I still have nightmares about exams. But I know I wouldn’t be here today if not for that education.”

One of his course assignments was creating a business plan for a kids’ summer camp. That project was the academic test of his post-graduate ambition.

He and his family leased (and later purchased) a section of land beside the home farm.

They moved barns from across the county, cleared riding trails along the Sydenham River, planted a stand of white pines, shored up endless fence lines and grew their herd of Texas Longhorn cattle.

They piped water to the cavernous pool, from the oxbow pond that nature had shaped into a giant horseshoe.

Soon, the Texas Longhorn Ranch kids’ camp was up and running – and galloping.

The kids bunked in covered wagons that filled as quickly as they could be built.

Cahill estimates something like 20,000 children went through the place in the summer camp’s 18 years.

He credits some of its early popularity to timing: In the early 1990s, City Slickers, a fish-out-of-water comedy about the exploits of New York friends who find themselves on a cattle drive, hit movie theatres. Then came line dancing and country cattlemen, “Cahill notes with pride.)

Their children and grandchildren share an equally boundless love for the ranch.

Oldest and youngest sons, Stewart and Coulter, manage the livestock operation and excel in roping competitions. (“They’re the best ropers in the country, actually – and they’re just good cattlemen,” Cahill notes with pride.)

Their middle son Greg is chief ambassador and keeps track of daily details large and small. And Gail keeps riding, anywhere and everywhere except into the sunset.

There’s fencing to mend, cattle to tend, a thousand other tasks needing doing but [to him] barely worth mentioning.

He wheels Blue with the merest nudge of his cowboy boot, as man and horse round the cattle into a tight clutch near the treeline.

“You figure out what you love to do and then you figure out how to make a living at it.”

– Fred Cahill

“Parents began dropping hints they craved the kind of rural retreat their children enjoyed so much. It was the idea – suggested glamour camping, ‘glamping’, as a natural evolution. Not a dude ranch and most definitely not a country spa – but something in between.

The Cahills converted covered wagons to upscalelodgings for two. Crisp linens on the beds, a fresh-brewed coffee in the morning before a home-cooked breakfast, and a trail ride or a dip in the pool. Inky sky and bright stars above a campfire’s crackle. No agendas, no deadlines. No suits, no uniforms. A lot of guests work as first responders, says Gail. “This is a place for their mental well being. After all they do and all they’ve experienced, our ranch and our horses are their therapy.

“They go back to real life and they feel they’ve recharged their batteries.”

Business abounds on the working farm but it also exudes the unflappable, genial hospitality of its owners, virtually everyone employed at the ranch, including some Western students and alumni, first arrived as kid campers.

“We’re in the people business. We have to be good listeners,” Cahill emphasizes. “It’s not just about getting stuff done and being productive, so we make sure everybody who works here knows, ‘if anyone comes near you, stand up, shake their hand, look them in the eye and listen to their story.’

Family affair
Cahill is the first to say he’s had a lot of help: from the welcoming folks in the Texas longhorn cattle community; the tourism office of Middlesex County; the St. Clair Conservation Authority; and countless family, friends and ranch guests along the way.

Their children and grandchildren share an equally boundless love for the ranch.

Cahill is big on pragmatic positivity as a tool that can even carry you through some pretty hard stuff.

“If you’ve never experienced working cattle on horseback, it doesn’t get any better than that.

“It’s hard work and it’s fun. You’re not going to get rich, but it’s as rewarding way to live.”

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MAKING HISTORY
AS MARVEL’S
FIRST ASIAN SUPERHERO

By Jeff Renaud

Before landing his breakout role as Jung Kim in the award-winning CBC Television series Kim’s Convenience, Simu Liu, HBA ’11, swung into action doing birthday parties dressed as Spider-Man. But he never removed his mask because he “was Asian and Spider-Man wasn’t Asian.”

But with great power comes great responsibility, right? The Western alumnus is literally changing the face of superheroes as he joins the Marvel Cinematic Universe this fall as its first Asian superhero. Following a pandemic delay, Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings is set for global release on Sept. 3, 2021 and Liu stars as the titular superhero.


A UNICEF Canada ambassador and powerful voice against anti-Asian racism, Liu is developing a number of TV and film projects with his production company 4:12 Entertainment, specifically for sharing the stories of Asian Americans.
1960s

James Bartleman, B.A.65, LL.D.02, was named an Ambassador of Note for 2020–21 by the Canadian Ambassadors Alumni Association.

Peter Harris, H.B.A.64, was appointed chair of the Ontario Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority.

Sherrill Grace, B.A.65, published her biography on Canadian writer Timothy Findley, TIFF: A Life of Timothy Findley, through Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Douglas A. Morrison, H.B.A.65, retired after 50 years as a university professor and was presented with the University Service Award from Syracuse University and the State University of New York. Prior to teaching, Douglas counselled returning veterans and those fleeing conflict in the Middle East.

Bruce Thorne, B.E.Sc.67, has been volunteering full-time for a variety of organizations, including the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, Canadian Diabetes Association, Canadian Cancer Society, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

1970s

Don Hunter, B.E.Sc.‘70, was appointed the inaugural chair of the United Property Resource Corp., a company established by the United Church of Canada in partnership with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, to build 5,000 affordable housing units across the country over the next 15 years. Many of these new housing units will be built on under-utilized church properties.

Janet Louise Wilson, B.A.73, was a 2021 recipient of the Governor General’s Sovereign’s Medal for Volunteers for her work with Regina Lyric Musical Theatre.

Dave Ryde, B.E.Sc.‘74, retired from his engineering career and moved back to St. Marys, Ont., from the Columbus, OH area with his wife Brenda.


1980s

David Mills, B.A.83, published his comedy novel titled Of Hearts and Livers.

Candace Bloom Bell, M.L.S.‘85, was appointed vice-chair of the Veterans Reference Board at the Royal’s Centre of Excellence for PTSD.


Jim Chung, B.S.E.‘87, DDS‘91, published Discovering Wildlife in Toronto’s Don Valley, the first photographic study of urban wildlife in Toronto presented as a coffee table-style pictorial.
1. Lise Tong, BA’01, currently resides in Hong Kong and is working with gifted children aged 10 to 18.
3. Becky Keast, BA’10, and her partner welcomed their first daughter, Kennedy, in July 2020.
4. Gillian Tessis, BA’95, launched her company, ForLikeMinds.com, which was inspired by her own struggle with severe bipolar 1 disorder. She also recently published a book on mental illness recovery.
5. Noam Franklin, BA’04, received a 2020 Estate award by Crain’s Estate award by Crain’s.
6. Alshaan Kassam, BA’08, became a regional assurance manager at Fusion Systems.
8. Rhoda Meliton-Vanderpol, BA’08, received his first children’s book, Stick to Your Vision: Young Maestro Goes to School, with Canadian hip-hop legend Wes ‘Maestro’ Williams (also known as Maestro Fresh Wes).
2010s

Matt Bertrand. BEng’10, is a project engineer at Sloan Brunwell & Associates Inc. in Barrie, Ont. He was recently named one of Rock to Road magazine’s Top 10 Under 40 award recipients.


2020s

Elif Bayarli. BA’20, began a master of teaching degree at the University of Toronto.

John Fortner. BA’20, accepted a full-time position as a financial services representative at Libro Credit Union.

Maryam Ghafehamani. PhD’20, successfully wrote and defended her thesis. She was the first in her program to do this virtually due to the pandemic.

Madison Kloody. BScN’20, has been working on the frontlines of COVID-19 as a registered nurse in Hamilton, Ont.

Monika Nabizade. BSc’20, was accepted to medical school in Ukraine.

Suneera Rahman. BSc’20, became a lab analyst at SC Johnson and is working on a London-based start-up with some fellow Western alumni.

Parteek kaur Smagh. MEng’20, got engaged.

Tensive Spyksma. MCISc’20, got her first job as a speech-language pathologist.
Suzette Vacianna, MPEd’20, passed away on July 10, 2020, in New Zealand with family by her side.

Nico Waltonbury, BA’20, HBA’20, accepted his offer to join the first class of McCaI MacBain Scholars at McGill University.

IN MEMORIAM
Harold Heft, PhD’04, passed away from an inoperable brain tumour in 2015. Before this, he co-edited a book of non-fiction stories titled A Perfect Offering: Personal Stories of Trauma and Transformation, which was published by Moss Press in Jan. 2021.

Helen Dewar McLean, Dip ’55, passed away on March 21, 2019. She battled Type 1 diabetes for over 60 years and was a recipient of the Diabetes Half Century Award.

Conrad Kristian Odgegaard, BSc’95, MEng’74, passed away on June 30, 2019. He was an elementary school teacher, meteorologist, and later co-founded Grains, Beans and Things, and Street Farm Products.

Barbara Alexandra Coatsworth McElya, BA’05, passed away on Nov. 19, 2019, after a courageous battle with cancer. She leaves behind her husband David and their seven-year-old daughter, Blythe.


Jim Hayhurst St., BA’85, passed away on Feb. 29, 2020, at his farm near Collingwood, Ont.

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After two years of cancer treatment, she was able to celebrate her 40th wedding anniversary in Dec. 2020.

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George Arnold Pearce, MD’55, passed away on Oct. 14, 2020. He served in the Royal Canadian Air Force before starting a career in family medicine.

Greg Greenham, HBA’76, passed away on Oct. 19, 2020, in Toronto, after a 10-year battle with Parkinson’s disease. He owned and operated Greg Greenham Annuity and Insurance Agency for many years and was an accomplished athlete.

Noel Andrew Gallagher, Dip’74, passed away on Oct. 27, 2020, in London, Ont.

James (Jim) Mucklow, MESC’90, passed away on Oct. 29, 2020, in Thunder Bay, Ont. after a four- and-a-half-year battle with cancer. Jim was a professional engineer whose work took him across Canada, which he loved because it meant discovering new places and people.

Lois Farley, BA’51, passed away on Nov. 12, 2020. She spent more than 20 years teaching at various schools in the London and Middlesex area and volunteering in the community, including as the first female director of the Progressive Conservatives of Elgin.

Joe Arvay, LLB’74, passed away on Dec. 7, 2020, in Vancouver, BC. After graduating Western, he went on to earn a LLM from Harvard and taught law for several years at the University of Windsor before becoming a constitutional lawyer with the British Columbia Attorney General. Arvay later left the government for private practice. He was appointed Queen’s Counsel at the age of 38 and was later awarded the Order of Canada.

Walter Bruce Hill, BA’01, passed away on Dec. 11, 2020, in Perth, Australia.

Eileen Hartigan, BA’50, passed away peacefully on Dec. 27, 2020. She loved spending time with family and friends, a good cup of tea, a clever joke, Jane Austen novels, traveling by ship, classic movies and music, and had a great sense of humor.

Zelma Irene Williams Hardy, BA’60, passed away on Jan. 26, 2021, in London, Ont. She was a beloved teacher who spent several years tutoring after retirement.

Laurie Brown, BA’00, passed away on March 18, 2021, after 30 years battling brain tumours that began at age 15. He was a man of deep faith and loved nothing more than spending quality time with family.

Paul Soles, BA’53, passed away on May 6, 2021. Perhaps best known for portraying Hermy the Elf in Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (1964) and Peter Parker in Spiderman (1967), he enjoyed a career that took him all over the world, including to Broadway. He will be remembered as a creative, charming and principled man.

Katie Warfield, BA’01, passed away May 8, 2021, after a courageous battle with cancer. She was a distinguished scholar and beloved faculty member in the Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s department of journalism and communication studies.

Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, LLB’83, passed away peacefully on April 9, 2021. This photo from 1959 shows Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip on campus as part of their Canadian Royal Tour. After entering J.W. Little Memorial Stadium, Prince Philip asked, “If this is the little stadium, where is the big one?” His Royal Highness returned to Western in 1983 for a special Canada Day convocation ceremony, where he received an honorary Doctor of Laws.

Joan Hart, MSC’53, passed away March 16, 2021. She was a clever, funny woman who loved Broadway and was the first female director of the London Community Theatre. She will be remembered as a wonderful teacher and mentor to many students and performers.

George Pierce, MBA’66, passed away on April 26, 2021, in London, Ont. He was a dedicated family man and a successful businessman in the manufacturing sector.

Philippa James, PhD, passed away on May 28, 2021. She was a beloved and respected professor at the University of Windsor, known for her contributions to the field of psychology.

Natalie Persaud, BA’00, passed away on June 2, 2021. She was a talented and dedicated artist who passed away unexpectedly.

Lynda Pistor, BA’80, passed away on June 5, 2021. She was a passionate advocate for women’s rights and social justice.

Lauren55, BA’01, passed away on June 11, 2021. She was a beloved and talented musician who touched many lives with her music.

John Green, BA’55, passed away on June 13, 2021. He was a dedicated family man and a successful businessman in the manufacturing sector.

Colleges and Universities Minister Jill Dunlop lauds research excellence during stop at Western

Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities Minister Jill Dunlop, BSc’97, stopped by her alma mater on July 19 to announce a new investment of $13.7 million for 16 Western research projects through the Ontario Research Fund - Research Excellence (ORF-RE). Here, PhD student Tiana Trampoux (right) shows Dunlop her work developing image-guided treatment for abdominal cancer. Aaron Fenster (left) heads the imaging research lab that just received over $2 million through the ORF-RE.

“Research like this will help to make advancements in medical and cancer diagnoses ... improved diagnostic accuracy and increased patient comfort. And this is only the beginning of tapping into the potential we have at Western and across Ontario to advance innovation and advance 3D testing for personalized medicine,” Dunlop said.

Please note: Class Notes notices, like all portions of the magazine, appear online and the contents may show up during a web search. Publicly available personal information may be collected for the purpose of updating alumni records, as well as for the purpose of recognizing outstanding achievements or distinguished service by alumni in university publications. Western respects your privacy. At any time you have the right to request that your personal information no longer be used. For more information or to make a request about the kinds of communications you would like to receive, please contact Advancement Services at 519-661-4176 or 1-800-420-7519 or email advser@uwo.ca.

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Consider including a gift to Western in your will

The Legacy Gift Planning team is here to help you explore ways to provide for both your loved ones and areas at Western you value, including student awards or the highest priorities of the university.

To learn more, please contact Sheri Cole at 519.661.2111 ext. 88856 or scole5@uwo.ca.
2020 will go down as the year of the great reset. The year we all got back to basics and were reminded of what really matters: family and protecting it. Maybe it’s time to reset the way you protect your family’s health, with Alumni Health & Dental Insurance. It can help cover the cost of things not covered by your government health plan, like prescription drugs, dental care and physiotherapy, while helping your family get the care you want for them.

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