New Faculty Add Depth to School

Four new faculty bring a wealth of teaching and research experience to the School of Communication.

The school hired the faculty to fill positions vacated through the retirements of Dr. Dennis Fus and Paula Hazelttig and the departures of Susan Schnase and Dr. Hollis Glaser.

The new faculty are:

**Abbie Farrens, MA** -- Farrens will serve as the director of forensics for the school and will also teach public speaking. She received her master's degree from Kansas State University in May and graduated with a BA from UNO in 2004. As a member of the UNO forensics team, Farrens served as the group’s president in 2003 and 2004 and won numerous awards at state and regional forensics tournaments. Farrens has made presentations at conferences of the Central State Communication Association and the National Communication Association. She is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

**Shannon Holland, Ph.D.** -- Holland received her doctorate in August from the University of Georgia. While there she served as an assistant debate coach, a position she also held at Wichita State University, where she received her MA degree in 2002. She has presented at numerous national academic conferences. Much of her research has focused on gender issues in the military and on political speech. Holland, an assistant professor, will teach argumentation and debate and rhetorical theory and criticism.

**Lynnette Leonard, Ph.D.** -- Leonard, who received her doctorate in August from the University of Kansas, has co-edited a book, *Basic Course Survival Guide* (Pearson Custom Publishing, 2005). For two years she was a lecturer at Oklahoma State University and after that she served as a visiting instructor at Central Michigan University. She has presented papers and been on panels at numerous national and regional academic conferences. Her research has encompassed such areas as the history of rhetoric, women’s rhetorical theory and practice and new technology. Leonard, an assistant professor, will teach public speaking, interviewing and persuasion.

**Paige Toller, Ph.D.** -- Toller received her doctorate in May from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research interests

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Alumni Support is Important

The relationship between students and faculty members often continues long after graduation, and we are always happy to hear from former students. Professors like to think that we have provided important knowledge and guidance, which helps those with a university degree advance in careers and as members of society.

We celebrate the accomplishments of alumni each year at the School of Communication's annual Awards Banquet. This past April, we had a magical evening at the Scott Conference Center. Among those recognized were Reg Chapman of WNBC-TV in New York, Wendy Townley at Cox Communications and retired faculty member Dr. Warren Francke. We also honored Sue Saxenmeyer for her distinguished career and her commitment to service in Texas. The Community Service Award is consistent with our interests on campus. Service-learning has become an important development at UNO in recent years – increasingly we expect our graduates will not only make a good living in a great career, but also that they will serve their communities and be a positive force for the greater good.

In Omaha, we benefit from having so many active and loyal Communication alums – many regularly assist our students and student groups. For example, it is common for a current student doing an internship to encounter or even be mentored and supervised by alumni. These are special bonds that enrich the educational experience. Student groups, such as PRSSA and SPJ, also benefit from the talents of alumni who serve as guest speakers or volunteers.

Our student groups also benefit from their ability to travel. This semester, our SPJ chapter took a group to the national conference in Chicago. Our PRSSA chapter will take a large group to the national conference in Salt Lake City to: (1) receive their first place National Organ Donor Awareness Award for the second time in three years; and (2) make a presentation as one of the elite chapters in the nation on how to do it – selected for this honor for the second straight year!

Travel, of course, costs much more than our state dollars provide, so fundraising is necessary. In recent years, our PRSSA chapter has realized that there is a limit to how many bake sales and other fundraisers can be done to support its activities.

We need your help. Enclosed you will find a “UNO School of Communication Excellence Fund” card and envelope. I would like you to consider making a modest $10 donation and to note “Founders Club.” Everyone answering the call will be listed in our next edition of CommUNO as members of the School of Communication Founders Club.

Each year, we will ask members to increase their donation by just one dollar. If even half of us on the mailing list respond, we will be able to send twice as many students to important regional and national meetings in the coming year. It is one way that you can directly help current students to obtain a rich educational experience. Likewise, it is a nice way to say “thank you.” And, thank you for everything our friends and alumni do to advance the School of Communication. Please call or email us because we love to hear your news.

School of Communication Grad Speaks at Commencement

Darcy Aspen Wild, an Omaha native, presented the student commencement address “The Beauty of Diversity” during UNO’s 2006 August commencement at the Civic Auditorium.

The Regents Scholar was named Outstanding Speech Student and received a Bachelor of Arts in Communication with an emphasis in Speech Communication.

Darcy Draper recently married Communication alumnus Drew Wild “in a barefoot, sunset beach ceremony on an island off the coast of Florida." Darcy is interested in pursuing a career in public relations, training or event planning. Darcy graduated summa cum laude in the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media.
New Dean Takes the Reins of CCFAM

Gail F. Baker, the dean of CCFAM, began her leadership of the college in July. Dean Baker is an award-winning teacher and scholar.

Dr. Baker brings a unique combination of administrative and academic accomplishments to the position. She has the skills and experience to develop this exciting new college.

"Dr. Baker is a dynamic leader with extensive mass media experience," said UNO School of Communication Director Jeremy Lipschultz. "She truly understands the vision of the new college."

The UNO College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media (CCFAM) was formed July 1, 2005. CCFAM consists of the UNO School of Communication; four academic departments: Art and Art History, Music, Theatre and the Writer’s Workshop; KVNO Classical 90.7 FM; and UNO Television.

Dr. Baker received her Ph.D. in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1991, her M.S. in marketing communications from Roosevelt University in 1980, and her B.S. in journalism from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in 1976. She joins UNO from the University of Florida where she has held numerous positions since 1995. Prior to her arrival, she held academic and administrative positions at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Dr. Baker is accredited in the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) where she is also a member of the College of Fellows. She has published on cross-cultural communications, ethnic public relations, reputation management, and advertising and marketing. Dr. Baker has also won awards for excellence in teaching and scholarship.

"I am extremely excited and honored to be joining UNO and the Omaha community. This college is uniquely positioned to advance the university’s metropolitan mission. I look forward to working with the outstanding individuals who comprise and support CCFAM," Dr. Baker said.

Hollins Brings Skills, Energy to School

There’s a new face at the front desk in the School of Communication. Tawanna Hollins joined the staff in July as an administrative assistant. She replaced Christina Thew, who accepted a position in the UNO Department of Psychology.

Hollins is a graduate of Blackburn Senior High School in Omaha. She previously worked for a family-owned auto sales company in Omaha.

She has two children, an 11-year-old son and six-year-old daughter, and enjoys reading and spending time with her family.

Communication Faculty Receive Honors

Two faculty in the School of Communication received honors last spring for their accomplishments in the classroom.

Dr. Karen Dwyer received the University of Nebraska’s Outstanding Teaching and Instructional Creativity Award, and Dr. Sherrie Wilson won the Alumni Teaching Award.

Dwyer directs the UNO School of Communication’s Speech Center and is nationally recognized for her research on public speaking anxiety. Wilson heads the school’s media writing and internship programs.

Two School Faculty Promoted

The School of Communication promoted two faculty members who have taught at the school for the past few years as instructors.

Dr. Cynthia Robinson-Moore and Professor Ana Cruz are now assistant professors. Robinson-Moore received her Ph.D. in December. The title of her dissertation was “A Critical Interpretive Analysis of Cultural Identity and Cultural Domination: Communicating Black Female Beauty.”

Cruz is near completion of her doctoral degree. Her dissertation focuses on family privacy, family communication, and culture. She is investigating the influence of culture on family communication and satisfaction when parental intrusion occurs. Her major areas of research are family, culture, and organizational communication.

Robinson-Moore teaches cross-cultural communication, interpersonal communication and a special topics course on race, ethnicity and identity, among other courses. Cruz teaches interpersonal communication, intercultural communication and interviewing.
Retired Faculty Reflect on Life at and After UNO

The School of Communication asked five retired speech and journalism faculty to update their former students on what they’ve been doing since leaving UNO and to recall their years on campus. Those five are Duane Aschenbrenner, Dr. Hugh Cowdin, Dr. Warren Francke, Joe McCartney and Dr. Mary Williamson.

Duane Aschenbrenner

As I sit and think about UNO, my fondest memories have to do with my years as Director of Forensics.

Some of the highlights of each year were as follows:

The first weekend in October we would host the annual Kick Off Forensics Tournament. This was a huge undertaking and several times it was listed among the top 10 tournaments in the nation in terms of number of participants, colleges and states represented.

--In November we always went to the Bradley University Tournament. I never think of that tournament without thinking of competing on the day John F. Kennedy was shot.

December would bring the University of Arkansas tournament on the first weekend of the month and the University of Southern California at the end of the month.

--In January we would host the International Tournament of Champions in Laredo, Texas. We held it in Laredo because, when studying the January temperatures in the continental United States, we found that Laredo was usually the warmest spot on the dates we held the tournament. This was a tournament designed for the debaters to have some fun along with good competition. To take some of the pressure off the debaters we gave a trophy to each team that competed. It was engraved: Outstanding Debate Team, International Tournament of Champions. This tournament was held at a motel in Laredo and each round one debate was held at the swimming pool.

--In February it was back to California for the Governor’s Cup Invitational Tournament at Sacramento.

--March brought the Nebraska Intercollegiate Forensic Association State Tournament. The goal at this tournament was to get one of our orators to win and qualify for the Interstate Oratorical Association National Tournament.

--April brought the national tournament. We also organized and held the National Novice Individual Events Tournament the first five years it was held.

--The first weekend in May was the Interstate Oratorical Association National Tournament. Students qualified for this tournament by winning their state oratory tournament. For fifteen of the years I was Director of Forensics, I had a student qualify for and attend this tournament. I was the Executive Secretary of this organization for three years.

--After Interstate Oratory was over, we would start planning for the National College Debate Workshop. On one of our debate trips we were talking about high school debate workshops and how so many colleges and universities held summer debate workshops for high school students. As we were discussing this, I decided we should hold a college debate workshop. The more we discussed it, the better we liked the idea. I organized and directed the National College Debate Workshop for 12 years. It was a three-week workshop with the first week held on our campus. We brought in experts knowledgeable about the next year’s debate topic. The last two weeks were at Prince Albert National Park in Canada where students put together their cases and tried them out on each other. I have many great memories of the experiences we had at these workshops. Deborah Smith-Howell attended one of these workshops when she was an undergraduate student.

--Since retiring I am enjoying more fishing. I take at least one trip to Canada each year. Some years I have taken three trips. I also do a lot of fishing in South Dakota. I’m still active as a parliamentarian serving organizations on the local, state, and national levels. Seldom does a week go by but what I get an e-mail or telephone call from some organization explaining some parliamentary problem, asking for my advice or wanting me to make some parliamentary ruling.

These days my activities include, besides fishing, keeping up with the activities of our grandchildren, including attending
their softball, baseball, soccer, basketball and football games, and generally enjoying life. I find that my life is very busy.

Although I have many good memories regarding the forensics program, I also very much enjoyed teaching. I figured I have listened to approximately 125,000 speeches in my capacity as both Director of Forensics and teacher.

I often encounter former students and enjoy visiting with them. It is gratifying when they tell me how much their speech and debate work has helped them in their lives. It gives me a lot of pleasure to know my work has made a difference in students’ lives.

Hugh Cowdin

It’s hard to believe that I’ve been retired for 10 years and that former students like John Prescott are approaching the age of 60.

People often ask, so what do you do in retirement? I’ve never developed a good answer for that because the days are filled with so many different things, and I enjoy, with few exceptions, every one of them. I very much enjoyed my role at UNO – and especially my colleagues and students – but it’s fun to be able to schedule your day the way you wish.

A large part of my days involves meeting with friends for lunch, dinner and various sports and cultural events. You especially learn how important friends are when you lose a spouse; my wife, Julie, died two years ago of lung cancer. Since she was very domestic and did virtually everything around the house, these chores have taken up part of my days as well. Six months ago I had an estate sale, sold my house near Standing Bear Lake, and moved to the Arboretum, a retirement community on 81st and Farnam Drive. It was a great move.

In 1990 Julie and I bought a cabin 13 miles south of Estes Park, CO, and I spend much of each summer out there. Two of our three sons and seven of the 11 grandchildren come out every year; at 8,500 feet it’s a great place for family reunions and it’s only three miles north of that is planning the city’s response to a terrorist or other medical crisis.

Several times a year I travel to Kansas City to see my youngest son, his wife and five grandchildren, and whenever I can I go to Rhode Island to see the other two sons. And last year I took my first trip overseas, to Ireland with Professor Hugh Reilly’s group. That was a trip that I might want to take again.

Shortly after I retired in December 1995 I tutored elementary school students at the Jesuit Middle School in North Omaha for a year and a half. I decided to “retire” from that when the school received a federal grant to hire a full-time person to do what I was doing on a part-time basis. But it was a very gratifying experience. Soon after that, in 2000, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent a prostatectomy. That wasn’t such a gratifying experience, but I’ve been in pretty good shape since then and I’m thankful for that.

As a baby born three months prematurely in 1930, my survival was considered something of a medical miracle back in Milwaukee because I weighed all of two and one-half pounds at birth and wasn’t expected to live for 75 minutes, much less 75 years. In an incubator for 100 days, fed with an eyedropper, people laying odds and so on. So, again, I’m thankful – why, I might be around long enough to see Green Bay Packer quarterback Brett Favre actually retire. Or maybe not.

Warren Francke

(The following is a transcript of Dr. Francke’s speech in accepting the School of Communication’s Lifetime Achievement Award.)

My involvement in journalism goes back to when I was five years old. My grandfather lived in our...
back bedroom and he wore a long beard and rarely came out of his room. One day my 10-year-old sister and I were engaged in a very spirited discussion. Grandfather stuck his head out and his gruff voice rumbled, “Long-legged bitch, squibbling midget.” I immediately put his words in quotation marks. I could have paraphrased it, but “tall girl and noisy little boy” would not be as memorable.

To this day I still squibble and scribble. I first wrote for a newspaper called the Pierce Street Parrot in seventh grade. I first performed on the air as the father of Hansel and Gretel in eighth grade. I last did a TV commentary several years ago. I last wrote for a newspaper and magazine this week, and polished up my history of the Omaha Community Playhouse. I added a line at the end: “A good time was had by all.”

I’m starting to identify with an old printer in Deadwood, South Dakota. He couldn’t hear my questions when I interviewed him. He kept saying, “Did I tell you about the time I danced with Calamity Jane?” I said, “No, tell me,” and he said, “Well, I did.” There were no details like when Wild Bill Hickock complained that Jane had “an unladylike aroma.” So did I tell you about the time I slept on the roof of the Elmwood Park Pavilion? Well, I did.

I’ll spare you more stories and spend the time thanking the many who made my career rewarding. Some will remember a redhead by the name of Don Lee. When he retired from the Omaha World-Herald he told of praying each morning as he walked up the stairs of the building. As the years passed, Don said, his prayers became more and more prayers of gratitude. When I entered my high school hall of fame, I thanked my Spanish teacher who said I wouldn’t amount to anything if I didn’t learn to work harder. She said it was too easy for me and I had to get over that. I thanked the basketball coach who set a good example.

I went to work at the World-Herald and learned from [editor] Fred Ware to make a story sing. I learned from [sports reporter] Maurice Shadle how to stop the music when I had to squeeze an exciting basketball or football game into two paragraphs. My favorite UNO teacher was Ralph Wardle in the English Department, and I was thrilled to win the Ralph Wardle Professorship the first time that was given. It meant a lot to me and it meant a lot to some of my old colleagues. I was a boy poet then who made my living as a journalist. I became an old professor who let the boy poet out to play now and then with words. I won’t try to thank by name the many students and colleagues who made my 35 years here so rewarding. They paved the way to a retirement so rich and rewarding that I don’t miss teaching at all.

Bob Reilly was my writing buddy and I miss him every time I sit at my computer, a machine that

Bob shunned. You may think that Reilly is no longer close by, but he recently helped me sell three stories on Dick Holland to three different publications. I don’t think Dick would have bothered with me if I hadn’t been an old friend of Bob Reilly’s.

I wish all of you the great pleasure of working with someone as congenial and supportive as Hugh Cowdin. I could name so many others. It was great to work some place with people like Del Weber, Jack Newton and the people who succeeded them. I’m proud to have played a part in hiring people like Deb Smith-Howell, Karen Dwyer, Jeremy Lipschultz, Sherrie Wilson and others. I think I was on every search committee that hired just about every faculty member. They allowed me to leave the university and go into retirement with a strong feeling that the program was in good hands, and that’s a good feeling to have.

There’s a special place in my heart for so many former students, especially those who pay me to write stories. Thanks to my dog Ike and my wife, Carol. Carol makes me want to revise a Jack Nicholson line: Thanks to her I not only want to be a better person, but I succeed now and then with her help.

I owe thanks to people like the late Steve Murphy, news director at WOWT, and others like Frank Lane of the Council Bluffs Nonpareil and Paul Williams of the Sun Newspapers. It has been a blessing for me to experience great moments, to meet interesting people and to write about them. I love teaching, but when I got old and that faded a bit, my love for writing remained. I did my most satisfying story two years ago at the age of 67. It was the story of a man whose great success grew from his character and his faith. He wants to be remembered as a master
encourager, as an ordinary man with an extraordinary God. He had just won a national championship then and has won two more since. You know him as [UNO Wrestling] Coach Mike Denney, the teacher who turned out more than 60 wrestling coaches. May your work bring you such rewards.

years I became head of public relations and advertising, which was a grand experience. I even had some of my former students as employees. When the railroad offered early retirement and a special arrangement on handling some of its business, I formed a new company, The McCartney Group Inc., which lasted for the next ten years and, thanks to my excellent partners, was a success and a fun place to be.

Now, I am actually retired but I tell people I’m out of work, which discourages them from asking for money or help on a project.

You asked me to say something intelligent about this business, and here I will quote a former student. John Prescott sent me a thank you note once saying the most important thing he had learned from me is that this profession can be a lot of fun if you just try. I had noticed in some of my classes, the students wrote down the jokes and ignored the lectures. That was probably a good idea.

I do miss some things about teaching, but the most important one is the dozens of different viewpoints from hundreds of students. Most of them wrong, of course, but always amazing.

Mary Williamson

As I begin this letter I think back to the years 1969-70 when, as an ABD graduate student in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia, I was hired at UNO in the Department of Speech and Mass Communication. There were two directors and two departments at that time. Although my background was in advertising, it was also my assignment to teach Speech 101 and Speech Communication in Business and the Professions, as well as Advertising and Broadcasting and Mass Communication. It wasn’t easy.

Those were the days when there were many male bootstrappers at UNO, and they all had to take the dreaded Speech 101. Most of them had never experienced having a female with even a slight semblance of authority over them. I mistakenly thought they were all there to get an education. They expected A grades no matter what they did, and I had many a discussion showing them why they had received the grades they got. I was glad when the two departments merged and I was able to teach courses for which I was prepared by work experience and research on the Ph.D.

Prior to the Ph.D. I had spent 13 years in the advertising agency business with many large retail accounts, the major one being the Nebraska Furniture Mart where I wrote radio and TV copy and did newspaper ads working closely with Mrs. B and the entire Blumkin family. As I came to my dissertation topic, I asked the department chairman what kind of courses
did he need help with and he said Broadcasting. So I wrote a 380-page historical/critical dissertation titled “Commercial Broadcasting’s Search for Excellence.”

The first classes I developed based on my experience and my Ph.D. included Creative Advertising, Advanced Creative Advertising, Introduction to Mass Communication, Political Broadcasting and Issues in Broadcasting. I also taught production classes in radio and television.

During my days of teaching courses I had developed and enjoyed, it was my privilege to have some wonderful students. Carol Shrader was one of them and I knew she had it. RoseAnn Shannon was another. No matter how smart I thought I was in making up tests, it was as though RoseAnn was in my brain while I was doing it. Chuck Hagel was another great student. Highly motivated and very smart. I must mention Colleen Williams too. We lured her away from a Home Ec major into broadcasting and she’s the Los Angeles NBC anchor when last I heard. More recent former students very important at UNO are James Adams and Gary Repair. And other names which may be familiar include Kay Kriss, Dave Webber, Frank Brown and John Beasley.

It was during this teaching period and in my Advanced Creative Advertising class that I became involved with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC), a part of the College of Business Administration. Through NBDC I began having two-person teams of my advertising students work with various clients who needed advertising and marketing help. I was the only faculty member outside of the College of Business Administration to work with NBDC. Students loved the real-world experience they got functioning as account executives with various local businesses.

I eventually became vice president of Nebraska Cable Television, which was the Life/Time company’s local bidder. I did what is known as ascertainment of community needs, calling on various organizations and telling them what our company would do for them in programming. I testified before the City Council in our behalf, but we lost. It was a very political battle and obviously Cox was the winner. I was then appointed by the mayor to two terms on the city’s Cable Advisory Committee. This work was along with my work at UNO.

Soon after Del Weber became chancellor and after my term as president of the Faculty Senate, I was hired as his executive assistant. Shortly into that job Vice Chancellor Otto Bauer asked me to serve as interim dean of the then College of Fine Arts. I did that for over two years. It was a wonderful experience, and I worked with great people. It’s ironic, but one of the things I tried to do as dean back in the early eighties was to bring radio and television over into that college. It seemed to me that it just made sense. So as I said recently to Bob Welk, “now you have the whole department.” I think Dean Gail Baker will do a great job with this new college.

My next interim job out of the chancellor’s office was University Relations Director. I held that job until a permanent person was hired. At that point I chose to take partial retirement and went back briefly to Communication. But I didn’t want to teach again, so I contacted NBDC and it wanted me as a consultant. This was an arrangement facilitated by the deans of Arts and Sciences and Business Administration and the director of NBDC. My last years at UNO were happily spent working with a variety of NBDC clients primarily in advertising and marketing. These clients were always so very appreciative of any help they could get that it made working with them a real pleasure. My colleagues at NBDC were great to work with always.

I retired in 2004 and am currently involved in several volunteer enterprises including serving as ombudsman at the Ambassador Rehabilitation Center, SCORE counselor, Volunteers Assisting Seniors (VAS) and Hearts United for Animals, a no-kill animal shelter near Auburn, NE.

In Memoriam

Robert Wilson (BS, ’81)—Robert W. Wilson, 49, passed away Sept. 30, 2005. A broadcast journalism major at UNO, Wilson worked as a news photographer at KMTV, Omaha, and for the Omaha World-Herald. He also worked as a reporter for KYNN radio, Omaha. At the time of his death, Wilson worked at Fitchburg (MA) State College, where he had been media coordinator. He was also an adjunct faculty member at Clark University and Middlesex Community College.

Wilson was a member of the Board of Directors of Fitchburg Access Television and received awards for his media work from the Association of Professional Administrators, the National Association of Counties and the Nebraska Press Photographers Association.
The UNO School of Communication celebrated the accomplishments of three communication professionals, a UNO dean and a retired faculty member at its 51st annual awards banquet April 27, 2006.

Those individuals received awards in recognition of their career achievements and service to the profession, the university and the community.

The award recipients were:

**Reg Chapman (Alumni Achievement Award)**—Chapman was working as a broadcaster in Omaha long before he received his undergraduate degree in 2000. He was a reporter for KFAB and WOWO radio and for WOWT-TV. After stints as a TV reporter in Sioux City and Dayton, Chapman went to Pittsburgh and WPXI-TV, where he covered the crash of Flight 93 on 9/11 and the rescue of coal miners in Somerset County, PA. He then moved to Minneapolis as a reporter for KSTP and last year joined the news team at WNBC-TV, New York. Chapman won an Edward R. Murrow Award for investigative reporting and has been nominated for several regional Emmy Awards by the National Television Academy.

**Dr. Warren Francke (Lifetime Achievement Award)**—Dr. Francke’s teaching career spanned 35 years and spawned more than one generation of journalists. From his basic reporting course to upper level courses, Francke displayed his passion for journalism and for imbuing students with a sense of responsibility for clear and concise writing. Dr. Francke’s constant reminder, “Show, don’t tell,” still rings in the ears of his former students as an avowal to the importance of using anecdotes and colorful quotes. Throughout his teaching career, he wrote magazine features, newspaper “cover” stories and theater reviews. He also had his own regular spot as a media critic on WOWT-TV. Dr. Francke received his doctorate in mass communication from the University of Minnesota and became a national expert on the history of journalism. Since he retired in 2000, he has written a book on the history of the Dundee Presbyterian Church in Omaha and co-authored a biography of Omaha philanthropists Chuck and Margre Durham. He is currently revising a book on the Omaha Community Playhouse.

**Susan Kruse Saxenmeyer (Alumni Community Service Award)**—Saxenmeyer’s career as a cable TV executive begat another career. While vice president of public affairs at Cox Communications in Texas, the 1970 UNO journalism graduate became involved with the Literacy Council of Tyler (TX), an organization dedicated to teaching adults to read. The problem of illiteracy is acute in Saxenmeyer’s hometown of Tyler and the surrounding areas. About 50 percent of adults there cannot read above the 8th grade level, and about half of those can’t read above the 5th grade level. After her retirement from Cox in 2004, she became president of the Literacy Council and helps the organization raise $200,000 from private individuals and corporate sponsors. With her help and leadership, the annual budget for the nonprofit organization has grown to $1.4 million, while the number of volunteers has swelled to 375, who donated more than 42,000 hours of tutoring in 2005.

**Wendy Townley (Rising Star Alumni Award)**—Townley is known for making an impression early. While in college, she was the youngest editor-in-chief of the UNO student newspaper, The Gateway. Since graduating in 2002, Townley has already garnered several awards for her work in journalism and public relations. As a reporter for the Bellevue Leader, she won three first-place awards from the Nebraska Press Association for her writing. After several years at the newspaper, she launched her career in public relations. She was an account executive at Leslie Kline Lukas and Associates and is now a public affairs specialist at Cox Communications. In her current job, she is in charge of local media relations and writes, edits and designs a monthly internal newsletter. She also manages the Cox Connects Kids program, which donates computers to needy families in the Omaha area. Her PR work is already being recognized.

The Nebraska chapter of the Public Relations Society of America named her the Newcomer of the Year for 2005, and she serves on the organization’s Board of Directors. She also lends her expertise to the community. She is public relations chair of the Program for Women and Successful Aging and assists with public relations and marketing for Girls Nite Out, an annual fundraiser for Girls Inc. of Omaha.

**Robert Welk (Distinguished Service Award)**—Dean Welk has been an important architect in the physical and academic landscape at UNO. He helped to plan the Weber Fine Arts Building, and chaired the Theatre Department and the University Committee on Research. UNO awarded him the Chancellor’s Medal in 1999 for his service to the campus and he received the Kennedy Center Gold Medallion for his service to the theatre profession. When UNO decided in 2005 to form the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media (of which the School of Communication is a part) from what seemed at the time like disparate academic units, the institution persuaded Welk to come out of retirement to set the new college on course. He served as the first dean of the college, and UNO knew he was the right person for the job. His role in the college’s development cannot be overemphasized. His special gift is the ability to work with faculty and department heads to reach consensus on elements critical to the formulation of a new college—mission, vision, goals, and policies.
Four School of Communication alumni shared insights and experiences with students and faculty during the school's annual Communication Week in April, and they discussed what it takes to advance a career in journalism and public relations.

"You have to be open to strange things and learn how to deal with them as they happen," said Christine Kasel, one of the four alumni and projects director for Carroll Communication.

Kasel and three other distinguished alumni—Reg Chapman of WNBC-TV, New York, Joan Lukas of Omaha public relations firm Leslie Kline Lukas & Associates, and Wendy Townley of Cox Communications—addressed numerous issues, from ethical dilemmas to professional development.

Chapman, a general assignment reporter, said a college degree is only the beginning in the learning process for a communications professional.

"Every day you’re learning," he said. "It’s on-the-job training until you die."

Lukas, co-owner and president of Leslie Kline Lukas & Associates, found that her high school ambition of being a dietitian or a teacher and her previous public relations jobs at ConAgra and Marian High School serve her well in her current career.

"Everything you do points to where you are today," she said. "Since I’ve worked in so many areas, I can handle all these different clients we have."

The four alumni agreed that successful communications professionals must be resilient and ready for any situation that arises. Chapman said he has faced several situations, which tested his mettle as a broadcast journalist. One of those situations was the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001. At the time he was working for WPXI-TV in Pittsburgh. He was one of the first reporters at the crash site.

"The most profound thing was seeing all the FBI agents surrounding the crash site at nightfall," he said. "There was a lot of death and a lot of carnage and they [FBI agents] had to make sure that no animals came from the woods to take body parts away."

Lukas dealt with a situation that was not as traumatic, but just as instructive. While working for ConAgra, she wrote an article for the company newsletter about the ConAgra Foundation’s monetary contributions to food pantries across the state. Although she used spellcheck on her computer, the article was published, stating that the Foundation gave money to "food panties."

"I never lived it down," she said. "I got a hundred cards and emails. To this day I proof everything."

The alumni advised students to take advantage of the learning opportunities in college and to tap into the expertise of their college instructors.

"UNO prepared me to be a storyteller, not just a reporter and not just a fact stacker," Chapman said.

Lukas encouraged students to "follow your gut and take chances. Know that you’re going to do well if you believe in yourself."

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Spend an Evening With the Mavs on Ice

UNO School of Communication Night on the Ice

Saturday, February 3, 2007
UNO vs. Michigan State

Pre – Game Reception and Cash Bar—5:30
Game Time—7:05

$25 game ticket and reception
$15 reception only

Join us for a fun evening with alumni, faculty and friends from the UNO School of Communication.

Please complete the attached registration form by January 15. For additional information contact: Mary Gum, phone 554 – 2520 or email: mgum@mail.unomaha.edu
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include family communication, marital interactions and parental bereavement. She has published articles in the Journal of Applied Communication Research and Sex Roles. She has presented her research at numerous national and regional academic conferences. She received awards for the top student paper in the interpersonal communication division at the Western States Communication Association conference in 2004 and for the top student paper in the family communication division at the National Communication Association conference in 2006. For two years she was a communication instructor at McMurry University, Abilene, TX. Last year, she was awarded the Presidential Fellowship from UNL. Toller, an assistant professor, will teach interpersonal communication and small group communication and leadership.

School Initiates New Student Organization

The UNO School of Communication has received one of the newest chapters of Kappa Tau Alpha, the national journalism honor society. The School’s application was overwhelmingly approved in April by a vote of all KTA chapters. Kappa Tau Alpha is the seventh oldest honor society. It was founded in 1910 at the University of Missouri.

The society honors students in the broadcasting and journalism majors, including public relations and advertising.

KTA honors the best mass communication students in the School. To be nominated for membership, students must be in the top 10 percent of their class and have completed at least five semesters of work in the degree. They must also have at least a 3.0 GPA in their mass communication courses.

Dr. Chris Allen wrote the application to receive a chapter and is the faculty adviser. The first induction ceremony is scheduled for October 25, during a morning breakfast.

Alumni Updates

Jen Agnew (BS, ’05)—Earlier this year, Jen began working for Metropolitan Community College as an assistant to the vice president of external and government relations. Much of her job entails public relations activities, including developing press kits and writing news releases.

Ken Archer (BS, 1996)—Ken, an executive television producer in Florida, received a Gold Aurora Award and a Telly Award for a documentary series, “Faces of Freedom—America’s Airborne Heroes.” Ken wrote: “Nothing gives you a better sense of accomplishment and satisfaction like watching a three-month project you produced air and receive such positive feedback.” Ken produces for VNN, a central Florida TV news organization. Ken has been with VNN since 2000 and has served as sports director, assistant news director and the main anchor. Before joining VNN, he was a sports anchor at KHAS-TV, Hastings, and worked as a reporter at KMTV, Omaha.

Lisa Asmussen (BS, ’05)—In February, Lisa accepted a position with the Mid-America Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Lisa bears the title of Exploring Executive. She works with local businesses and organizations that offer career exploration opportunities for teenagers.

Jodi (Booke) Baker (BS, ’98)—Jodi is a freelance reporter for Fox 6 TV in San Diego. Before moving to San Diego, she was a reporter for KMTV, Omaha. She and husband, Dave, have a one-year-old son, Kellen.

Jon and Bridget (Weide) Brooks (both BS, ’96)—Jon and Bridget celebrated their 10th year in business. They own and operate Image Building Communications in Omaha. The Brookses also manage a UNO hockey fan website (www.mavpuck.com) and arrange bus trips for fans to away games.

John Fey (BS, ’77)—John is in his 18th year as a reporter for the Omaha World-Herald.

Kathy Galle, (BS, ’80)—Kathy was promoted from training information specialist to education coordinator at The Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha. She will be in charge of program development for the Medical Center’s Health Information Management Department.

Kristin (Grady) Gilger (BA, ’95)—Kristin lives in Phoenix, AZ, and says she still follows the advice of one of her former UNO teachers, Dr. Warren Francke. “He’s a talented journalist, inspiring mentor and memorable teacher,” she wrote.

Bob Hladik, Sr. (BS, ’70, MS, ’72)—Bob currently teaches at Iowa Western Community College (Council Bluffs, IA) and

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Metropolitan Community College (Omaha). He spent 25 years as a teacher and principal in Omaha-area schools and served as executive director of the Christ Child Society. He is also a licensed insurance professional.

Josh Krohn (BGS, 2004)—Josh manages KUHB-FM, a public radio station in St. Paul, Alaska. Under his leadership, the station is building a new air studio, news booth and production room. Josh has also started a news department at the station. “Folks love hearing themselves, and their kids, on the air,” he wrote.

Sarah May (BS, ’97)—Sarah is an instructor at the Learning Center at the Ford Transmission Plant in Cincinnati. She is a writing tutor and a book and audio buyer for the Center’s lending library. She also volunteers at a no-kill animal shelter, called Save the Animals Foundation.

Christopher Potts (BS, ’99)—Christopher continues to reap awards for his news photography. He won an Emmy Award for Best Editing and another Emmy for Best Photography. Potts is a news photographer for KVVU, Fox 5 News, Las Vegas.

Jessica Rial, (BA, ’05)—After serving an internship at the Jane Goodall Institute in Arlington, VA, Jessica joined The Washington Center in Washington, D.C., where she is program coordinator for academic affairs. The Washington Center offers classes and internships for college students in areas such as communication and political science.

Wendy Townley (BS, ’02)—Wendy is a public affairs specialist for Cox Communications, Omaha. Previously she worked at the Omaha public relations firm of Leslie Kline Lukas & Associates.